In this activity, two players sort cards into piles to indicate whether they think named goods and services are “public” or “private,” then talk about their choices. The activity itself takes only a few minutes, and is essentially a discussion starter for exploration of issues of civil rights, the role of government, and the responsibilities of individuals to their communities. There are no winners or losers, and no points or scoring.
PROCEDURE

MATERIALS

- Two sets of 10 cards each. Each card lists a specific good or service on one side (e.g., safety, food, education) and a few prompts or hints on the other. Cards can be created using index cards. A complete set of cards from the Exploratorium exhibit version of this game is given at the end of this activity for you to cut out and use.

- A large sheet of disposable white paper to be placed on top of a table or desk. This paper will serve as the “game board.”

PREPARATION

Cover the table or desk with the white paper. Use a marker to divide the paper into two equal sides, one for each player. On each side, facing each player, write PUBLIC on the left, GRAY AREA in the middle, and PRIVATE on the right.

On a white/blackboard visible to players and observers, write:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PUBLIC GOOD</th>
<th>PRIVATE GOOD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You can access it even if you don’t pay directly.</td>
<td>You have to pay directly to access it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your use of it does not prevent someone else from using it.</td>
<td>Your use of it prevents someone else from using it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You cannot exclude someone else from using it.</td>
<td>Once it has been used, it cannot be consumed again.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choose two players and give each an identical set of cards.
PROCEDURE (CONT’D)

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask players to sit across from each other and shuffle their cards, keeping the sides with less writing on top. Tell them to go through their cards and place each one in turn into the PUBLIC or PRIVATE area as quickly as possible. They shouldn’t discuss their decisions with each other or spend too much time thinking about their choices; the point is to make these decisions using their gut instincts. If players are unfamiliar with an item, they can find hints or prompts on the back of each card. But if they cannot make a choice about a card within a few seconds, they should place the card in the GRAY AREA.

Then, have the players switch seats and look at the choices made by their partners. Take the cards that they disagreed on and discuss them. Ask each player to state their case as to why the item is either Public or Private. Can one player convince the other to change their decision? What does the class think about players’ choices?

Ask the players and the class about the cards in the GRAY AREA. Why were these tough to categorize?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which items does everyone agree on? If the group cannot reach agreement on the cards, are there any that everyone can agree are either Public or Private? What other items should be included in new versions of this activity?

- Suppose different groups in a society can’t agree on whether an item is Public or Private. How should use, distribution, and access to that item be handled?

- Which two goods or services do you think are most important to society? Why? What social pressures might interfere with how people categorize these goods and services? How do different political parties stand on these items? Explain your reasoning.

- How do the words public and private relate to ideas like sharing? Cooperation? Freeloading? (See Activities 2 and 7.)
VARIATIONS

- Instead of asking two individuals to sort cards, divide the class into two groups of approximately equal size, and ask each group to discuss each card and vote on whether it should be categorized as Public or Private. (This will obviously take longer than a two-person activity.) Does this lead to more or less disagreement than in a two-person activity?

- Create multiple sets of cards and tabletop game boards and have several pairs of students play simultaneously. How do pairs’ choices differ? Are there any items that all pairs agree on? To take this idea a bit further, you could create pairs based on gender, having males play with males and females play with females. If you find differences between how males and females categorized the items, what might that mean?
Print these cards, cut along the dashed lines, and fold in half.

**air**

Not sure? Think about:
- filling tires
- smog checks
- breathing
- air pollution

**water**

Not sure? Think about:
- rainfall
- bottled water
- water fountains
- oceans, rivers, lakes

**nature**

Not sure? Think about:
- property rights
- endangered species
- beautiful views
- overpopulation
Print these cards, cut along the dashed lines, and fold in half.

**internet access**

*Not sure? Think about:*
- health and safety info
- public computer rooms
- students
- creating new websites

**parking**

*Not sure? Think about:*
- street repairs
- public transit
- parking garages
- parking meters

**transportation**

*Not sure? Think about:*
- city buses
- taxicabs
- casual carpools
- owning a car
Not sure? Think about:
• hospitals and clinics
• doctors’ salaries
• medications
• emergency services

Not sure? Think about:
• public libraries
• books and websites
• military secrets
• intellectual property

Not sure? Think about:
• public safety
• repairs and maintenance
• taxes
• light pollution
Not sure? Think about:
• police and firefighter salaries
• food and water testing
• government regulation
• personal responsibility

Not sure? Think about:
• gardens
• restaurants
• basic nutrition
• food banks

Not sure? Think about:
• solar energy
• wind power
• pollution
• charging phones
Print these cards, cut along the dashed lines, and fold in half.

bathrooms

Not sure? Think about:
- privacy
- cleaning crews
- clean streets
- health and safety

education

Not sure? Think about:
- teachers’ salaries
- online courses
- good jobs
- poor people

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