

The Little Purple Book

Of the Association for Solidarity among Student Unions



Adopted by the Orientation Congress, May 18-20, 2013
Most recent changes: Congress, October 23rd, 2013

Translation: July 2016

This little purple book serves as a reference for the Mood Watcher and delegations in order to better identify obstacles to proper deliberation as well as domination dynamics which may occur in decision-making bodies, in order to eliminate them and therefore allow a healthy environment for debating.

Table of contents

1. MOOD WATCHER.....	3
2. OBSTACLES TO DIALOGUE.....	3
3. DOMINATION DYNAMICS.....	4
3.1. ELITISM.....	6
4. WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS.....	7
4.1 FEMINIST PRACTICES.....	8

1. MOOD WATCHER

Article 63 of Chapter 5 of the Rules of Order: The Mood Watcher (in French, “le gardien ou la gardienne du senti”) during a Congress seeks to avert relations of domination that may arise during the meeting. This person is elected at the same time as the rest of the Presidium, since he or she is an integral part of it. To ensure that he or she can carry out his or her duties, and when he or she determines it to be in the interest of the Congress, the Mood Watcher has priority to speak, to tackle relations of domination or feelings of unease arising during the meeting.

In order to properly address malaise, delegations may see the Mood Watcher at any moment to express their grievance regarding unpleasant attitudes or terms used by a delegation. The Mood Watcher also ensure that spoken interventions are feminized during speaking turns.

Finally, the Mood Watcher is a means to an end, and ASSÉ has adopted this practice in order to foster healthy debate within Congress and to have a more balanced and lively democracy. This role stems from feminist demands that seek to deconstruct domination dynamics originating from sexism, racism and homophobia.

2. OBSTACLES TO DIALOGUE

In order to ensure healthy debate in decision-making bodies, it’s important to think about one’s own dialogue practices and to be aware of the obstacles that we impose on others.

IMPUGNING MOTIVES

Impugning motives is a fallacy consisting of condemning a person’s or delegation’s actions by attributing them inadmissible and condemnable motives. The faulty nature of this reasoning results from the fact that said motives aren’t demonstrated, or even verifiable.

ABUSIVE GENERALIZATION

This consists of passing judgment or arriving at a general conclusion without ensuring that the sample on hand is sufficiently representative for the conclusions to be valid.

APPEAL TO AUTHORITY

This consists of deeming an assertion to be true because it’s endorsed by a person or a group of persons considered to be authorities.

SINGLE AUTHORITY

This consists of using the dubious or incorrect authority of a person or group of persons in order to support an argument. Again, the authority granted to certain people can play an important role when referenced within debates.

FALSE DILEMMA

This consists of presenting only two possibilities when faced with a choice. Since one is undesirable, the other option inevitably becomes the right choice. We therefore limit the number of possibilities that can be included in the debate so that the better of the two may be adopted by a majority (if not the unanimity) of

delegations.

SLIPPERY SLOPE

This consists of stating that a certain action will inevitably lead to a terrible outcome due to a chain of events which, upon examination, seems doubtful or even impossible. We often hear “If we don’t do this, the consequences will be...”. And these dire consequences for our organization or ongoing struggle would be enough to convince us. But are they justified?

3. DOMINATION DYNAMICS

Domination dynamics are a set of behaviours, either intentional or unintentional, which result in the formation of a hierarchy during interactions. They’re the transposition of hierarchal socialization based on gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation or of any other social category. They aim to establish one person’s authority over their counterpart in order to hinder dialogue and therefore end the debate without having actually allowed all parties to contribute.

Domination dynamics are not always obvious or visible either for the person producing them or the one receiving them. Although they’re experienced differently from person to person, domination dynamics instill a feeling of inferiority, illegitimacy, and unease to the other person. They discourage people from intervening and participating in debates and discussions. Some people will go so far as to remove themselves from their usual spaces, including activist spaces, in order to avoid them.

We tend to see a hierarchy between domination dynamics by considering the more blatant ones to be worse and the more subtle ones to be more trivial. However, no domination dynamic must be neglected or considered to be of lesser importance, or that it’s taken too seriously.

MONOPOLIZING THE MICROPHONE

This consists of speaking too often, for too long and too loudly. During Congress, we notice that in most cases, men take more speaking turns than women during plenaries and debates.

LISTENING ONLY TO ONE'S SELF

Hammering an argument without listening to what others have to say is not only a lack of respect, but it’s also a domination dynamic in the sense that others’ arguments wrongfully appear to be less important or less relevant before having even been considered. It’s important to mention that this also applies to delegates who use the Internet and social media, who get up, walk around, whisper, exit the room for whatever reason, and who, above all, don’t listen to the ongoing debate. Or even when delegates who don’t listen to the discussion and then go on to repeat exactly what had just been said at the microphone.

SPEAKING IN « CAPITAL LETTERS »

When debating a given topic, one’s ideas and arguments can sometimes be presented as the only valid ones. Therefore, the speaker presents their opinion in a manner where no response is possible and where the debate is already over. A condescending tone of voice, speaking louder than others, physical attitudes such as inflating one’s chest or crossing their arms, or simply interrupting another speaker in order to prevent them from responding are good examples of domination dynamics.

SEDUCTION DYNAMICS

During breaks, mealtimes or between Congress sittings, some people use seduction in order to push political agendas, which can ultimately lead to an extra vote during deliberations. It's important to remember that debate takes place during the decision-making body's sitting and that caucuses are done within the delegation, not during breaks, meals, or the evening's activities.

ERASING OR SETTING MINORITIES ASIDE

We often hear activists boast how tolerant and inclusive our spaces are. Yet, the mere refusal to recognize that even within our progressive spaces, certain racist, classist, homophobic, sexist, etc., behaviours seems to be a common way of erasing minorities.

The same goes for "Montrealcentrism". We often tend to set aside student associations from outside Montreal (when it comes to organizing Congresses, meetings, actions, protests, etc.). However, it's important to remember that these associations constitute nearly half of ASSÉ's membership and must not be ignored.

SPEAKING FOR OTHERS / REFORMULATING

Some people have difficulty communicating their thoughts, even more so when it comes to speaking in front of a large group of people. To reformulate their interventions amounts to ruining the courage and effort they put into their speaking turn. To reformulate one's speech into a more "appropriate" manner makes speakers uncomfortable, and they'll be less likely to speak again so as to not be corrected again.

BEING OVERLY DIRECTIVE

Some people tend to take on more responsibilities within the Executive Council or committees. This attitude demonstrates a tendency to worry that tasks won't be done on time or in the way that we'd like them to. This attitude demonstrates a lack of trust in others but also, and especially, a domination dynamic where we want everything to be done according to our own standards, despite the fact that there are many ways of doing things and that every method should be considered.

BEING PATERNALISTIC

Paternalism, on one hand, is a desire to control what's going on, but on the other hand, it's adopting an authoritarian and condescending attitude. Infantilizing new people, for example, by saying "You'll definitely need my help to do this task". These attitudes in no way help someone develop confidence in themselves and the ability to believe that they can truly, for example, accomplish this given task.

BEING ON THE DEFENSIVE

This consists of taking any contrary opinion as a personal attack.

AVOIDING EMOTION

This domination dynamic consists of passive resistance, by joking about or intellectualizing what your counterpart says when sharing personal sentiment.

3.1. ELITISM

Elitism can be understood as the voluntary or involuntary imposing of a more experienced activist's point of view onto someone with less experience.

NATIONAL TEAM

First of all, there's the elitism of the national team (composed of the committees and Executive Council). This level, where Congress mandates are applied and where the day to day organizing at ASSÉ takes place, appears to bring together members to whom we attribute a greater level of importance than we should. These members sometimes also act as delegates from their student association and can even endorse both roles (delegate and member of a committee) at the same time, which can be problematic when certain topics are discussed.

EXPERIENCED ACTIVISTS

Being perceived as experienced, after having spent several years organizing at different levels, grants some people an important level of prestige, of having reached a high level of access to certain unreachable Truths. Furthermore, these activists are often in graduate-level programs and have access to historical references and specialized jargon that are far-removed from new delegates' understanding.

STUDENT ASSOCIATIONS

Another form of elitism that's been observed concerns a hierarchy of importance that exists between student associations. We can see that some of them – mostly in Montreal – are held in higher esteem. This appears to result from their previous historical mobilizations which grants them a certain aura of untouchability. It's possible that if one of these associations submits a motion to Congress, we'd tend to take it more seriously and maybe even be more likely to vote for it simply because it was moved by a certain association.

FRIENDSHIPS

We've also observed a form of elitism related to friendships between people in our organization. As we study and organize together, we see that comradery leads to friendships and that these relationships therefore become stronger. These relationships are by no means forbidden, but can create a less than inclusive environment. When several friends find themselves sitting at the same decision-making body (Coordination Council, Congress, etc.), we can see that debates over important topics take place during breaks or among delegations during caucuses (when caucuses must only be used to discuss within one's own delegation). It can therefore be difficult to break these barriers and join a group or delegation, or to feel included during a meeting.

4. WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS

DON'T INTERRUPT

Leaving a few seconds between speaking turns allows us to be certain that the speaker's done talking.

BEING ATTENTIVE AND LISTENING

Communication isn't a unilateral affair, it's dynamic. Communicating doesn't only mean talking and then retreating, it means interacting. Listening attentively is a way of participating.

RECEIVING AND OFFERING SUPPORT

Working to end domination dynamics within a group means that everyone has to get involved, be it those who are behind the dynamics and those who endure them. Mutual aid is fundamental. That way, we make sure that it's not just up to those who endure these domination dynamics to expose them.

STOP SPEAKING IN ANSWERS/SOLUTIONS AND GIVING YOUR OPINION ON EVERYTHING

We can communicate our ideas and opinions in a convincing manner without competing with others. We don't have to give our opinions on every subject or to speak every time we have an idea, especially when we're in a large group.

INTERRUPTING DOMINATION BEHAVIOUR

When we notice a comrade adopting domination behaviour towards someone, it's important to not endorse the domination dynamics unfolding before us. We must identify and discuss them. Recognizing them is the biggest step towards eliminating them.

AVOID TAKING OFFENSE OR BEING IN DENIAL WHEN OUR COMRADES CALL OUT OUR DOMINATION BEHAVIOUR

Certain dynamics are produced involuntarily and it's not necessarily fun to be called out on them. However, domination dynamics result from socialization that is sometimes beyond our control. It's important to recognize them, not only when they're done by others, but also by ourselves.

4.1 FEMINIST PRACTICES

ASSÉ has incorporated feminist practices into its structures which aim to alleviate domination dynamics between men and women. However, it's important to understand why we have these practices.

ALTERNATING SPEAKING TURNS

This measure aims to ensure women's participation in speaking turns during mixed events. We can easily see that men speak much more often and with more confidence during debates. These behaviours result from differential socialization between men and women which, throughout history, has been used to keep women out of public life. Through their socialization, women aren't as comfortable speaking in public. They've always been seen as passive and as objects of seduction. However, they're not some kind of "silent majority". Alternating between men and women during speaking turns is a tool aimed at establishing parity during debates.

FEMINIZATION

Language reflects thought, and we use it to express ourselves. When the French language was developed, the dominant ideology considered women to be naturally inferior to men. Sexism became enshrined in the French language: the male gender overrules the female gender due to men's natural superiority. However, this kind of argument is no longer "valid" for justifying this rule. Why does it still exist? Because they're just words? It so happens to be with words that we express our ideas, and language should represent our shared ideology.

Why speak of feminism if we don't wish to recognize women in the French language? It's often said that feminizing makes a text too heavy. First of all, opposing feminization for esthetic reasons is kind of dubious. Second, studies show that feminization is nothing more than a matter of habit. We get used to reading feminized texts, and when we make the actual effort of feminizing what we write and say, it becomes a norm, and when we read a text that hasn't been feminized, the opposite occurs: we find it strange. This goes to show that feminization serves a purpose and is part of social progress.

NON-MIXED CAUCUSES

In decision-making bodies, debate over feminist issues is often neglected. It's possible that this is due to a lack of female representation in our decision-making bodies, or because men don't feel concerned by these topics. One solution is to come together in a non-mixed working groups. This allows women to collectively think about their condition as women without, for the duration of the caucus, having to deal with their male counterparts' oppressive attitudes. Furthermore, non-mixed caucuses are sometimes essential for discussing difficult topics, such as verbal or sexual assault, which unfortunately can happen, even in our own spaces. Of course, these discussions are brought back to mixed meetings, in order to collectivize the reflections and to make the female condition more visible. We're not talking about coming together for some kind of conspiracy, but rather to put in place the conditions that allow reflection and action.