

Intimate, private, and public realms of power

Here, we build on the ideas and practice of intersectionality and power analysis. Our experiences of power and identity vary and can even be contradictory in different realms of our lives, from our intimate relationships to the private realm to our public selves. These differences reveal a lot about the logic of systemic power and the force of invisible power – ideas, beliefs, and norms – in all aspects of our lives. Where we might feel confident in our public leadership and activism, we may be more cautious in our families, where challenging norms can create conflict and threaten our deepest relationships. Alternatively, we may feel confident in our personal lives, yet face conflicts and challenges in our organisations and public activism. This framework is important in understanding how change creates both personal and political conflict and helps us feel empathy for and deal with the challenging implications of organising and leadership.¹

Materials: Handout: *Intimate, private, and public realms of power*

Copies of the matrix for each group

Flipchart and markers

Plenary: Share copies of the handout, or show the contents as slides, to introduce the topic.

Small groups: Each group chooses one aspect of identity to work on – such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability, or faith. Each group reads the handout out loud. Using or adapting the matrix, discuss how each identity can be experienced differently in the intimate, private, and public realms of life. Prepare a flipchart or drawing to share in plenary.

Tool 3: [Matrix](#) for intimate, private, and public realms of power

Plenary: Post small groups' flipcharts or drawings around the room or on the virtual space. Each group briefly presents their key points. Facilitate a wrap-up discussion, emphasising these key points:

Dominant belief systems and systemic power establish hierarchies based on gender, race, class, and other identities. All institutions and beliefs are structured around these hierarchies. They assign value and create dynamics of privilege and exclusion that are both deeply personal and structural.

Each of us is shaped by a mix (intersection) of identities, including gender, race/ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality, age, ability, education, and immigration status.

¹ Adapted from Lisa VeneKlasen with Valerie Miller, (2002), *A New Weave of Power, People & Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Practical Action Publishing, and originally conceptualised by Nicaraguan feminist activist and scholar, Malena de Montis.

Challenging the status quo can create conflicts in our organisations and personal lives, and these conflicts impact our wellbeing, leadership and activism. We must consider these tensions in our strategies and their implications for how we lead, work together, and support collective care.

Intersectional analysis and organising are essential in ensuring that we build more inclusive democratic spaces and treat one another with grace. This takes time and courage to deal with the awkward realities of privilege and power as they play out in our lives.

Our identities can also be a source of power, connection, belonging, and liberation – and many social movements have redefined how we see each other. Identity, like all forms of power, is dynamic and context-specific, although systemic power – patriarchy, capitalism, structural racism, and colonialism – continues to define the meaning of aspects of identity as it has over history.