

ACTIVITY 1:

Identity and the Power Flower

Every one of us has multiple, nuanced identities. Gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and age, among others, intersect and interact to shape who we are, how we are treated, and what challenges and contradictions we confront.

Set the tone for a safe open discussion. People may experience shame, anger, grief, or guilt when they talk about aspects of their identity. Make it clear that the purpose here is to deepen our understanding together so that we can work more effectively toward justice and mutual liberation.

Materials: Poster-size version of the Power Flower; Handout: Identity and the *Power Flower*; personal notebooks or sheets of paper for each person; markers.

Step 1. Who am I?

Plenary: Introduce the theme and activity. This is the first step in exploring who we are through our various identities, illuminating the ways they shape our lives.

Individually: Each person writes or draws their responses to the questions.

- What were you taught about difference and people different from you?
- What were you taught about your 'place' in social hierarchies?
- How has that affected your life?
- How might what you learned shape your work for social change?
- People can choose to share or not. Either way, their thoughts will inform the activity.

Step 2. How identity has shaped our lives

Plenary: Post a poster-sized copy of the multi-petaled Power Flower on the wall. Invite people to name different categories of identity. These can include: gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, religion, ability/disability, age, education, marital status, and/or location (urban/ suburban/rural). Write labels on most of the petals but leave a few blank so that people can add other categories.

Most of these categories are not binary but instead encompass multiple options (such as male, female, trans, intersex, non-binary) and dimensions (such as gender non-conforming) that add layers of complexity to gender. Everyone navigates multiple forms of identity – some remaining the same, others changing over the course of their life. Emphasise that no identity has more intrinsic worth or value than any other.

Individually: Each person identifies six or seven of their own personal characteristics/ identities in relation to the categories decided by the group and fills in the petals on their handout (or draws their own and Power Flower).

Next, each person writes three words or draws three sketches on a sheet of paper to show:

- A part of your identity that makes you feel strong, safe, or proud.
- A part of your identity that has made you feel less valued, vulnerable, or powerless at times in your life.
- A part of your identity that has in some way shaped your life's purpose.
- These may be three different parts of your identity or the same.

Plenary: Form a circle. Invite each person in turn to hold up their sheet of paper and explain the three parts of their identity, without questions or discussion.

In pairs: Each person finds someone with one matching element. Pairs have ten minutes to share. People may form mixed pairs instead and discuss what they might have in common.

Plenary: Share any reflections or 'aha!' moments. Talking about identity is not an everyday conversation. Ask:

- What was it like to talk about your identities with others? Did you feel any discomfort? What if anything helped you have this conversation?
- What did you learn about identity and difference and how society values or devalues certain identities? How does the experience of identity change in different circumstances?
- Did you gain any insights about your identities and how they shape your experience in specific ways?

Identity is complex. It is not fixed. We are assigned some aspects at birth or by family, other aspects are fixed, changed, or are imposed on us, and some we choose or claim. Depending on the context, identity shapes our experience, access, opportunities, and safety.