

ACTIVITY 2:

The continuum of identity, power, and privilege

Materials: One large copy of the Power and Privilege Wheel to display on the wall. One small copy per person.

Step 1: Identity and privilege

Build on the Power Flower by adding another layer. Show how identities intersect with forms of systemic power and are thus afforded differing levels of privilege. This in turn translates into access, voice, choices, resources and power.

Plenary: Read out these two sentences to open a discussion.

- “Our society assigns value and gives greater privilege and power to certain identities than it does to others.”
- “Privilege is, simply put, a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group.”⁶

Brainstorm examples of forms of privilege in your context, defined as “benefits given to people because they are from specific social groups”.

- How are specific identities offered or excluded from power and privilege?
- How do these differences in privilege show up in your context?
- What impact do the differences have on people, communities and organisations?

You may need to clarify the ways in which the benefits of privilege differ from efforts to address past and present inequity such as gender-specific safe spaces or proactive opportunities such as quotas for historically marginalised groups. If these topics are new or unfamiliar, you may want to collectively define the ways that these terms connect identity with power inequities:

White/light skin privilege
 Male privilege
 Heterosexual privilege
 Class privilege

Step 2: The Power and Privilege Wheel

Plenary: Introduce the activity and hand out the Power and Privilege Wheel. Check that everyone understands what the wheel shows. Identities closer to the centre of the wheel are afforded more privilege and value by society than those further out. These may vary according to context but hold true overall.

Post a large graphic of the flower or wheel on the wall and invite everyone to come up and write on it. With bigger groups, brainstorm collectively with a few people writing suggestions on the wheel.

On each petal – for example, gender or ‘race’ – write the socially dominant identity close to the centre, for example male or white. Write the less dominant identities on the outside edge of the petal. There may be various non dominant identities on any petal, such as female, trans, non-conforming on the gender petal.

Individually: On their handout, each person notes for each petal where they identify and how that sits in relationship to the relative degrees of power.

Small groups: In groups of three, discuss these questions, sharing only what feels comfortable.

- Have you ever been aware that aspects of your identity afforded you more or less access, safety, and/ or power in a situation? Have you been excluded, targeted, or discriminated against because of some part of your identity?
- Have any aspects of your identity changed over time? How does your sense of power or privilege change depending on where you are, who you are with, or what you are doing?
- Have you ever felt like you had to hide or leave some part of your identity out? Do you ever change the way you reveal or express your identities depending on the context, and if so, why? (Examples could be your accent, vocabulary, dress code, or openness about your sexuality.)

Plenary: Share any ‘aha!’ moments.

- What was the most important realisation for you?
- What did this add to your understanding of identity and its meaning in your context?
- How did this activity connect your experience of identity with broader systems and structures that shape power and privilege – determining who is valued, who has a voice, who benefits?
- Was there anything that surprised you? Anything that felt uncomfortable? Anything that felt validating?

Going deeper: You may decide that your group would benefit from exploring this further. For instance, a lack of clarity and forthright discussion – about race, ethnicity, class, gender or another aspect – may be blocking the group’s ability to work in politically aligned and coherent ways. If so, you could use or adapt one of the many tools designed to surface deeper awareness about specific types of privilege. Address particular ‘blind spots’ or areas of tension around the privileges afforded to some identities over others, in order to build a shared commitment to dismantling systems of inequity.