

Systemic logic

Materials: Handout: Four Arenas of Power (from Chapter 3: Making Sense of Power)

Step 1: Invisible and systemic power revisited

Briefly refresh people's memory and understanding of invisible and systemic power (from Chapter 3: Making Sense of Power). Discuss the ways that these dimensions of power link with identity and oppression.

Invisible power: beliefs and norms; ways in which we are socialized, conditioned to carry and reproduce ideas and prejudices that are activated in narratives.

Systemic power: logic and 'genetic code' that shapes all relationships, 'operating system', deeply embedded systems of meaning.

Discuss how this logic is reinforced in the laws, policies, and biases of formal decision making (visible power), and in shaping what issues are addressed and who has a voice and influence and is included in important questions (hidden power).

Each of the systems in the House of Multiple Oppressions drives a logic that explains and naturalises inequality and that in fact requires inequity. Each system proposes one set of characteristics or identities as superior and others as inferior. The interactions between them are dynamic.

Step 2: Where gender meets power

Plenary: Introduce the theme and activity.



Small groups: Draw two circles on large pieces of paper, then add the figure of a woman at the centre of each. For each woman, choose four to six aspects of her identity (such as indigenous, LGBTQI+, young) – identities that exist within your context. One of the two women is also an activist. Write all those identities within the lines of her body.

Considering her different identities, list around each circle the various possible conditions that converge to shape and impact her life. These might include:

- Experiences of discrimination (based on racial, ethnic, class, caste, religious, linguistic or other hierarchies)
- Particular gender roles
- Access/lack of access to education
- Exclusion from/inclusion in specific spaces
- Heavy burdens of care
- Economic stability
- Being targeted as an activist
- Sexual violence
- Legacies of colonialism
- Lack of recognition of leadership

By contrast, her identities may also offer her positive experiences of power within and power with. For example, does she have a strong connection with others who share her identity and historical experiences? Does her identity give her a strong sense of who she is, a sense of purpose, and a feeling of belonging? What skills and capacities does she have from her lived experience?

Read out the quote from Dalila on common ground and difference. Ask:

- What are the similarities and differences between the two women? What is different for the activist?
- How do different aspects of identity offer differing levels of privilege and power?
- Are there ways in which each is 'put or kept in her place', and by whom or what, and why?
- For each, where and how is she likely to experience violence? In what part of her life: relationships and the family, in public spaces, within organisations, at work, in religious or community institutions, in courts and law making?
- How do you think each of the women might feel powerful and joyful in her identity?

To close the session, reiterate that one identity is not 'better' or 'worse' than any other. The purpose is to strengthen our political consciousness about how systemic power works in our own and other people's lives, so that we are better able to work across differences and to disrupt the perpetuation of inequity.