

THE IDENTITY WHEEL

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The identity wheel is a pedagogical tool used to better understand how our social identities influence our daily lives and our relationships with others. The exercise itself is quite simple: a circle divided into social categories (gender identity, sexual orientation, race, social class, etc.) which participants complete with their personal information. They are then invited to explore how, depending on the context and situation, some identities become more important than others - for themselves or in the eyes of others. The identity wheel is also an effective tool to understand how social identities are linked to stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination and what their impacts are in the field of sexual and emotional education. Here we offer a radio adaptation to share personal stories on the microphone.

Duration 1h30

Participants 8 to 15

- Objectives**
- To realise how the different facets of our social identities influence the way we see/express/live sexuality;
 - To understand that identity is flexible, evolving and adapting to different social situations;
 - Introduce the concept of intersectionality, understanding how stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations impact on emotional life and sexuality;
 - To give up the illusion of neutrality: to become aware of one's blind spots and subjectivity.

¹⁷ _ Adaptation de la roue identitaire proposée dans "Voices of Discovery", Intergroup Relations Center, Arizona State University



Material

- Radio studio
- Identity wheels to be filled in individually in A4 or A5 format (1 per participant)
- Identity wheels for the discussions in A3 format or larger (1 per sub-group)
- Pens

Preparation

- Print several copies of the attached identity wheel.
- Write (and/or print) the questions determined by your educational objectives and intervention context. You can also use those in the appendix.

Instructions

Ask the participants what social identity is for them and whether they can define it. Then introduce the concept and explain why it is important to be aware of the role of social identities. For example, you could say:

”Each individual is characterised, in part, by social traits that indicate group or category belonging. These may include: gender, sex, social class, or racial categorisation. The same individual can have several social identities, for example being: ‘cis woman’, ‘French’, ‘black’. There are historically and culturally constructed hierarchies between these different social groups: men have long been considered superior to women/gender minorities, white people superior to non-white people, etc. Thus, social identity can be socially perceived as positive or negative. Your social identities therefore influence the way you behave with others and vice versa.”

① Give each participant a copy of the identity wheel.

Together, read the different social categories:

- Gender identity (men, women, non-binary, trans women, trans men, etc.)
- Racial category, cultural origins (white, Arab, black,



- Jewish, Asian, non-white, racialised, etc.)
- Sexual orientation (homosexual, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, etc.)
- Social class (high, middle, low)
- Religion/spirituality
- Level of education
- Nationality
- Mother tongue
- Legal status
- Family and marital status (partner, married, cohabiting, single, with or without children)
- Health status
- Financial status
- Age

② Check that everyone understands the terms. Then invite participants to fill in the sheet individually. Reassure them that this is their own work and that the sheet will not be shared with others..

③ People mark a "V" next to their visible identities and an "I" next to their invisible identities. They then circle the three identities that are most important to them.

④ Then form groups of 4-6 people. Tell the groups to sit down in a place where they feel comfortable and where the sound is good (ideally you have access to several rooms).

⑤ Distribute a new identity wheel to each group (printed in a larger format and laminated if possible), together with the set of questions prepared beforehand.

⑥ Ask each person to write their first name on a piece of paper to make a small label.

⑦ Someone reads a question. For example: "Which facet of your identity do you think about the least when you are with a partner?"

⑧ All people reflect and place their labels on the corresponding social category on the identity wheel. For example, if the answer is "my skin colour", the person places their first name on "racial category". If the answer is "my social class", they place their first name on the corresponding box. They can also

stay in the middle if they do not want to answer the question. Tell the participants that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions. It is also possible that there are several answers for a specific question, so the first name can be placed at the intersection of several categories.

④ Then each person shares why they have chosen to position themselves in a particular category. However, participants are not obliged to express themselves; it is possible to remain silent. Important: remember that this is not about entering into a debate or questioning the feelings of others. Participants are advised not to react to what others are sharing and to listen actively. Reactions, interruptions or comments on identity positioning can create withdrawal, regret for having shared, a feeling of oppression, be a source of stress, etc. However, everyone is encouraged to develop their positions with anecdotes, stories, opinions, etc. if they feel like it.

④④ Once people have understood the principle and feel more comfortable and have been able to answer a few questions, invite them to bring the radio material. They can then choose 3 to 5 questions that they find particularly interesting or write new ones. One person takes the role of a technician to make the recordings.

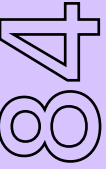
④④ With the microphone in hand, people continue to exchange and explore their social identities. Be careful, however, to ask them to stop using the identity wheel and to stop quoting it on the microphone, as the listeners will no longer have this reference. For example, instead of saying, "I put my label on gender identity", they can instead say, "When I am with a partner, I cannot detach myself from my gender, as I am often reminded of situations of inequality, etc."



Variants

① From the identity wheel, you can propose a cross interview in pairs or triples on these two subjects:

- A specific moment when it was particularly difficult to be associated with one of these categories in their emotional and sexual life.
- A specific moment when they were particularly proud to belong to one of these social categories.
- You can give two personal anecdotes to illustrate your questions so that the participants understand them better.
- In pairs, people record the answers to their questions (3 to 5 minutes maximum). Remind them that the listeners are not familiar with the identity wheel exercise and that it is important that they understand what they are saying without this reference. They should avoid quoting it.
- Then listen as a group.
- The answers to the last two questions can also be written down and put in an anonymous box. Each participant then picks a story and reads it into the microphone.



Tips for facilitators

The activity, inviting the sharing of intimate stories and memories, can make participants feel vulnerable. We advise you to organise groups with common gender, nationality, sexual orientation or any other minority.

Individuals may need a significant degree of trust to disclose certain features of their identity, especially if they are being recorded. More than just 'personal sensitivities', these aspects may be linked to differences in status and power in society. Depending on the context, certain identities may be negatively represented or even stigmatised. It is very important to give sufficient importance to the recognition of these phenomena, by naming power relations, exclusions, and oppressions. Facilitators should also be careful not to victimise members of specific groups.

Debriefing

The identity wheel can be useful in a journalistic context because it highlights the subjectivity of each individual and the blind spots we may have. For example, if I grew up in a very wealthy environment where I never lacked anything, I may not realise how different life is for someone who did not grow up in my circumstances. I have never thought about how my social background has influenced my experience of the world and the way others perceive me. You can ask people if they think neutrality is possible in journalism and how social identities can bias information.

You can ask people if there are any identities they never mentioned during the activity, identities they never think about. Explain that the identity wheel helps to highlight the notion of privilege:

some people never think about certain aspects of their social identities, while others are referred to them daily. For example, a person whose mother tongue is French, in a French context, will never think of his or her language as an aspect of his or her identity or as an obstacle to success. Whereas a non-French speaking migrant may encounter real language issues and even after years in France will still be asked where their accent comes from. Certain facets of social identity therefore give more social status and power to one person than another and those with less power are more likely to realise it.

Explain that these are complex and intertwined issues, as the same person can be privileged in some aspects of their identity and discriminated against in others. For example, as a woman they may experience sexism but enjoy privileges as a white person.

You can ask people if their answers sometimes lie at the intersection of several social identities. This can be used to introduce the concept of intersectionality (see glossary)

It is important to name the inequalities and hierarchies between social groups. At the same time, you can recall that each person is composed of a mixture of a multiplicity of identities that are complex, multiple, evolving and adapting to different contexts. Each person has his or her own background, uniqueness and way of living his or her identity.

Finally, ask the following questions:

How did you feel during this activity?

- Which question was the easiest to answer, which experiences were difficult to share?
- Did the radio influence your answers?
- Were you comfortable talking about identity issues on the microphone?