

INTIMATE IDENTITY WHEEL

Activity developed by Élan Interculturel based on the “identity wheel” exercise
(Program on Intergroup Relations and the Spectrum Center, University of Michigan)



OVERVIEW

This activity invites participants to become aware of the impact of social identities in their relational and intimate lives through an adaptation of the “identity wheel” activity in the context of intimacy.

LEARNING CONTEXT

This activity can be done online, offline with social distancing, and offline with physical contact.

DURATION



45 minutes

PARTICIPANTS



6 to 15 participants

MATERIALS



A room wide enough to allow movement
Identity wheel circles printed out
Identity labels printed out on separate A4 papers
The list of questions printed out

OBJECTIVES



- Becoming aware of how different facets of our social identities influence the way we can engage in intimate relations
- Realising that identities are contextual: in some situations, some identities become more prominent than others
- Giving up the illusion of neutrality: some identities are valued more highly than others, while some may be sources of discrimination

PREPARATION

Check whether the “identity wheel” has identity labels that are relevant to you / make sense in your context. Check whether the “intimate spectrum questions” are in accordance with your objectives and context. Feel free to make the adjustments that are necessary. You find an example of the identity wheel in annex. Here is a list of intimate spectrum questions you can use, or that can help you get started:

- What part of your identity do you share most with your best friends? (i.e., identities shared by you and your friends)
- When you go out with your lover, what part of your identity are you most aware of?

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- Which identity makes it difficult to project your romantic relationships into the future? Which one makes it easier to do so?
- What part of your identity do you feel most connected to?
- What part of your identity do you wish you could hide from new acquaintances (if it were possible)?
- What part of your identity do you feel tends to result in you being oppressed in intimate relationships (sexual or emotional relationships, family, friends)?
- What part of your identity do you feel tends to result in you being granted privileges when it comes to intimate relationships (sexual or emotional relationships, family, friends)?
- Is there a part of your identity that makes you feel ashamed when it comes to flirting?
- Which identity do you like to put forward when you want to attract someone?
- Which identity do you see as a disadvantage in attracting someone?
- Are there any parts of your identity, which, if you could get rid of them, would make you feel “more free” to choose a sexual or intimate partner?
- Which parts of your identity do you find “sexy”?
- Which parts of your identity cause you problems? Why?
- Which part of your identity gives you strength?
- Are there any parts of your identity that you really like, but feel they are vulnerable?

INSTRUCTIONS STEP BY STEP



1. **FILLING OUT THE WHEEL** Distribute the “identity wheel” handout to each participant. Ask them to fill it out, adding for each identity category the answer that they feel is true for them.
2. **CREATING THE WHEEL ON THE FLOOR** When the identity wheels are filled out, place the printed out identity category words on the floor, in a circle, so as to recreate the identity wheel in the space.
3. **ANSWERING THE INTIMACY SPECTRUM QUESTIONS** Tell participants you are going to read sentences and that they should answer by positioning themselves near the identity category that they feel is true for themselves. They can also stay in the centre if they do not want to answer the question. Before reading the intimate spectrum questions you can make a test: “What is the identity you think about the most often?” Check if the instructions are clear.
4. After each sentence, once participants have found their answer, you can give them space to share why they chose that particular identity. However, participants have no obligation to speak up.

You can also tell participants that there are no right or wrong answers for the questions. There may also be several answers to a specific question, so they may choose with which identity they wish to answer.

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DISCUSSIONS AND DEBRIEFING



Depending on the make-up of the group, it is possible that the activity will lead to an increased awareness of important differences between participants. Some may be more privileged in different aspects of their identities, and some may be disadvantaged in some aspects of their identities.

It is important to give importance to these inequalities. At the same time, we should also stress that each person has a variety of identities, and no one is reduced to one single identity. What's more, who we are and what we can do is never entirely dictated by the social identities we have, and each identity can be experienced or enacted in many ways. The unique combination of identities that have, combined with our life experiences and our personality always create unique and diverse constellations.

Here you may want to discuss with the group how our relational and dynamic identities and their combination with our life experiences play a role in our intimate relationships. What makes a relation with someone "intimate"? How do our identity elements become more or less important in certain relationships? You can link this exercise back to the Galaxy of Intimacies and the Body Portrait – taking a look at power / sensitivity / vulnerability / sexuality / intimacy and how they are connected to the topics we explore here.

TIPS AND HINTS



It may require a substantial amount of trust and sense of safety for participants to unveil and / or discuss aspects of their identity that are for some reason sensitive to them. Beyond just "personal sensitivities", this can be related to the status or social recognition attached to different identities. Depending on the context, some identities may have a negative, even stigmatized connotation. It is thus very important that we give sufficient importance to the recognition of such phenomena, naming power relations, exclusions and oppressions. We should also be attentive to not victimize members of specific groups. We recommend using an empowerment activity after this sequence.

THIS ACTIVITY ONLINE



To lead the activity online, we suggest working on Jamboard. As a preparation, embed the "identity wheel" image in the Jamboard, create as many slides as the number of questions you wish to ask. For each question, create a slide with the question in the middle of the wheel.

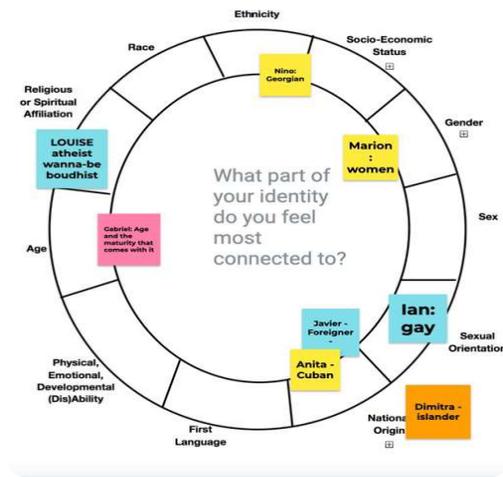
To start the activity, send everyone the identity wheel (by email or in the chat of the interface you use). Participants can copy the image into a ppt file or simply take notes on a piece of paper. Similarly to the offline version, ask participants to write down their own answer for each identity category. This part is not shared.

In the second step, share the Jamboard with participants, making sure that it is shared with the authorization to edit. This way each participant can access the Jamboard slide and modify it. Tell participants that you will read out questions that they will answer with specific aspects of their identities. They can answer with a Post-it, writing on it their name and also the specific answer to that identity category (e.g.: LOUISE – Woman). If participants have not worked with Jamboard before it may be wise to first do a test activity where you invite them to write their name on a Post-it.

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Read out the first question and wait for everyone to place their Post-its. When they are done, ask the group if anyone feels like explaining why they put that particular identity as an answer. Everyone does not need to answer, collect as many answers as feels right, then move to the next question.



THEORY



Adapted for use by the Program on Intergroup Relations and the Spectrum Center, University of Michigan.

Resource hosted by LSA Inclusive Teaching Initiative, University of Michigan (<http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/>).

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ANNEX: IDENTITY WHEEL

Social Identity Wheel

(Adapted from "Voices of Discovery", Intergroup Relations Center, Arizona State University)

