

WHO AM I IN MY RELATIONSHIP? RAINBOW OF RELATIONSHIPS

This activity was developed by Élan Interculturel and In Touch based on the Identity Exploration activity developed by La Xixa Teatre.



OVERVIEW

This activity invites us to explore the complexity of one of our intimate relationships. Through the activity we'll explore the multitude of roles that we play within a single relationship, and how we personally inhabit each role, attaching to each of them specific emotions, words, gestures, behaviours. We refer to these inhabited and incorporated roles as "identity positions". Some identity positions are more known, accepted, cherished for us, while some others may be less liked, or even despised. The activity helps open up the repertoire of our many identity positions and to observe the dynamics between them.

LEARNING CONTEXT

This activity is designed for a face-to-face setting, but part of it can also be carried out online.

DURATION



120 minutes – depending on the number of participants

PARTICIPANTS



Adaptable for 8 – 20 participants

MATERIALS



A4 paper, coloured pens

OBJECTIVES



- Become aware of the complexity of our relationships, of the multitude of roles and identity positions that we occupy with respect to another person
- Become aware of the power dynamics within the relationships both in terms of socially assigned status to different roles (power over the other), positions and subjective sense of empowerment (power with or within the other and in the relationship)

PREPARATION

The theatre-based parts of the sequence are only recommended for facilitators with some previous experience in theatre / drama games.

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INSTRUCTIONS STEP BY STEP



CREATING THE INVENTORY OF ROLES / POSITIONS IN A RELATIONSHIP

1. Tell participants that the objective of the following activity is to explore how we are and who we are in our intimate relationships. We're going to take a look at a specific relational identity: who we are as a boyfriend, girlfriend, close friend, etc. If possible, invite them to work on a current intimate relationship that they are willing to explore in a deeper way. If the participant does not have a current intimate relationship, it can also be a relationship with a family member.
2. In a first round, take note of the many different (identity) positions that we occupy within this relationship. For instance: supporter / muse / someone to play with / someone to cuddle with / carer, etc. Ask participants to make an inventory of these positions without judging or evaluating them. Participants can draw or write, as they prefer, marking each position.
3. Once the repertoires are created individually, invite participants to share in pairs, giving each other a short guided tour of their inventory.



Alternative thread to step 1

The previous sequence starts with an introspective work (individually identifying the identity positions, writing them down or drawing them) and then in a second step we introduce interactive components. This sequence is based on the assumption that individual self-reflection makes this exploration easier than immediate collaboration, as collaboration would bias the introspection. This assumption however is not always true in all groups, and for some participants accessing the identity positions through interactive image theatre could be more appropriate. For this reason, we offer this alternative thread, starting with the theatre activity.

4. Invite participants to work in pairs, choosing someone they don't know so much, but with whom they feel comfortable working on a quite intimate subject. Give the instructions below for the pairs, telling them the same work will be done for both of them, that the facilitator will tell them when to change roles, and that now they should decide who will start.

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5. “Think of a specific intimate relationship that you will focus on in this activity. In each relationship, we are present in many ways, we fulfil many roles, have many recurrent patterns and behaviour. In this activity we’d like you to explore together the many roles you play within this relationship, the many positions you take up with respect to the other person. To do this exploration, let your body remember the recurrent repeated gestures and positions you have in this relationship. Let your body chose one of these images and hold it. Chose an object that you will use as a measure of distance: position yourself closer or further from the object depending on how far you feel from the person when you have this position. When you have found the right distance, take up the image again. Give it a name. Write it down on a paper as a first identity position. Now let your body remember another posture you have within this relationship and go through the same sequence. Repeat the activity as many times as new identity positions are emerging.”
6. Once the pair has gone through the exploration of the repertoire of one person, they can do the same for the other person. When both are done, they can collect their repertoires, check whether anything was left out or should be added, etc.
7. The final step is the sharing between the partners: first each person has 2 minutes to share how they feel with respect to their repertoire, and whether they have discovered new things.

STEP 2: EXPLORING POWER DYNAMICS

8. The second step is to invite participants to think of the power dynamics: for each position they have identified in STEP 1, they should try to identify to what extent a position is associated with social status, and also to what extent participants themselves feel subjectively empowered in that position. The two may not be necessarily the same. For example, a woman can occupy the “caretaker” position which – depending on the social context – may not have much social recognition, but may be important for her.
9. When done with a small number of participants, you can go around the room, inviting everyone to share. With a large number of participants, you may propose getting into pairs for sharing.
10. As an alternative to verbal sharing, you can use acting. You ask for a volunteer who would like to share her composition. Together, you go together through each position (e.g.: caretaker, muse, confidante, etc.) and for each, ask her to use her body to show an image representing that position. You ask other participants whether someone recognised that position, if so, they can take the place of the participant and stay on the scene. We then continue to have one “sculpture” for each element of the inventory, and we admire them on the stage. Once all images are on the stage, the participant can decide if they want them in that position or if they want to change them. In the next step, invite the volunteer to arrange the sculptures according to subjective empowerment: more empowered positions would come closer to the spectators and less empowered ones would go to the back of the stage. When done, ask them what would change if, instead of subjective empowerment, we would make the arrangement according to social status – that is, an external perspective.

DISCUSSIONS AND DEBRIEFING



You can invite participants if they want to share what they explored/learned about the multiple relations with their partners (how these multiple layers are connected, etc.)

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TIPS AND HINTS



- The task is somewhat abstract, so it may help participants if, before they do the individual work, you show your own inventory in detail. Seeing concrete examples of “positions” makes the concept accessible.
- For the analysis of LOVE and POWER we suggest reading the chapter *Intimacy, interaction and Power* in the Skills for Intimacy book, with special regard for the concept of “power”.
- If you opt for the theatre-based exploration of the repertoires in pairs, it may be useful to give a handout to participants so they can guide their partner. You will find a handout in the annex.

THIS ACTIVITY ONLINE



The first part of the activity, “Creating the inventory of roles / positions in a relationship”, can be carried out online. Invite participants to work on their computers (Powerpoint, Word or Jamboard) or if they work on paper, ask them to take a picture in the end to share with their partners. Besides this, the instructions and the dynamics remain the same.

For the visual exploration of status / power positions, we can play with colours and size. For instance, aspects which have a strong social recognition or which we perceive as subjectively empowering for us can be indicated with bigger Post-its.

Who am I in relation to my partners?

The collage features several images and text boxes:

- Someone to cuddle to:** Image of a dog's face.
- Someone who laughs at his jokes:** Image of a person laughing.
- Someone who takes care of him:** Image of a person feeding a cow.
- Someone he can take care of:** Image of a person feeding a cow.
- Someone he can admire:** Image of a person looking at a woman in a white dress.
- Someone who takes him on adventures:** Image of a person on a boat in a lake.
- Someone to whom he can ventilate, who listens to him:** Image of a chalkboard with the word "PSYCHOLOGIST" written on it.

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THEORY



About the multiplicity of identity positions :

Hermans, H., Kempen, H., Loon, R. 1992. "The Dialogical Self: Beyond Individualism and Rationalism", *American Psychologist*, 47(1):23-33.

The theatre-led exploration follows the steps of an identity-exploration activity developed by La Xixa Teatre.

ANNEX – HANDOUT:

EXPLORATION OF THE REPERTOIRE OF POSITIONS WITHIN A RELATIONSHIP

1. Ask your partner to think of a specific intimate relationship that they feel like exploring in this activity.
2. Once they have identified the relationship, ask your partner to choose an object that will represent the other person (you will use it to set the distance between the two people in the repertoire).
3. Invite your partner to close their eyes and let their body remember one of their recurrent gestures or body positions in this relationship. We'll refer to this as an "image".
4. Ask your partner to move closer or further away from the object, depending on how close or far they feel from the other person when they have this image. Check whether your partner has found a distance that feels right.
5. Ask your partner how they feel when they make this gesture / take this body position.
6. Invite your partner to give this image a name, using the sensory experience of what this image feels like for them. If they need help, you can offer some words that they can choose to use or not.
7. Write down the name – possibly, if you or your partner have a mobile phone, you can also take a photo of the image. This may be useful for your partner later on.
8. When done, ask your partner to let go of this image, and then let their body remember another recurrent gesture / body position that they have in this relationship.
9. Repeat the sequence as many times as there are new images emerging.
10. When all images have been set, let the person have a look from the outside to see if there is any insight or learning from the images and the position they occupy.

