

HOW IDENTITY CAN SHAPE OUR LIVES

Oppression
Privilege
Sexual orientation
Gender
Disability
Violence
Coming out
LGBT
Out of the closet
Harassment
HIV

- ✓ 1. For learners to understand how different and interacting elements make up one's identity.
- ✓ 2. For learners to understand how **oppression** and **privilege** relate to identity, gender and **sexuality**.
- ✓ 3. For learners to understand how different factors interact to determine 'double and triple oppressions' of individuals or groups.

1 hour

Identity cards (provided)
Teacher Prompts (provided)

PROCEDURE

PRIOR TO CLASS

- 1 • Photocopy the identity cards (provided).
- A fairly large open space is needed which may necessitate moving furniture, using a hall or going outside.
- A group of about 15-20 participants is ideal; the activity is also suitable for smaller or larger groups.
- For larger classes, it may be best to conduct the exercise outdoors.

IN CLASS

- 2 Explain to the class that this activity is about **oppression** and **privilege**, and that they will be asked to engage with difficult issues.
- 3 Explain that participants will be given an identity card and will have to use their imagination, and also what they know about society, to take on that identity in the game. Tell them that they will be asked to move forward one or two steps when answering a series of questions.
- 4 Tell learners that everyone will be taking the same amount of risk in playing the game. Explain that the identity they are given is not necessarily their own, and that it may include features that they see as unacceptable for moral or religious reasons. Instead of passing a judgement on the identity they are given, learners should try to imagine what it would be like to experience life as a young person with that particular identity. They should think about the problems they might face at home, at school and in their community. If a learner finds it hard to imagine experiences in their own family, school or community, encourage them to think about what the 'new identity' might experience in South Africa generally.
- 5 Hand out identity cards to each participant. Instruct them not to show their cards to others. You may need to help some participants individually if they have questions about their identity card.
- 6 Have participants line up against a wall. This may be easiest to do out of doors or in a hall.
- 7 Read the 'Teacher's Prompts' (provided).
- 8 Read out the questions which pertain to social and economic **privileges**. Those who have traditionally privileged identities move forward, whilst those who are disadvantaged in society stay where they are or move back.
- 9 After reading out all the questions have participants sit in their resulting positions.

- 10 Learners are encouraged to discuss, but let them know that everyone must be respectful, that there should be no interruptions, no judgements or name-calling, and no teasing or making fun of others.
- 11 Ask each learner in turn to read out their identity and discuss what the experience was like for her/him. You are actually debriefing each participant, but others will usually join in the discussion as this process continues. Be sure to have each and every learner discuss what the experience was like for her/him, to ensure that they can make sense of what they experienced.
- 12 After each learner has shared, discuss how **privilege** works and how those with it can be successful, while those without it find themselves falling behind in our society.
- 13 Talk about intersectionality. This is when a person has a number of intersecting identities (e.g. colour, gender and sexual orientation) affecting their situation.
- 14 Discuss the reason this happens in our society. Ask questions like:
 - a. Why are groups oppressed?
 - b. What is the purpose of oppressing a group of people?
 - c. Whose interests does oppression serve?
 - d. Is it acceptable? Legal? Fair? Ethical?
 - e. What can we do to change oppression? How can we do it?
 - f. Who is responsible for what is happening in our society?
 - g. What did we learn from this discussion on privilege and oppression?



TEACHER TIPS

General

This exercise requires learners to think seriously about identity, privilege and oppression. Many of the issues raised may evoke strong personal opinions or religious beliefs with your learners. In order for this to be a meaningful exercise, it is important that everyone is respectful of other opinions and that no-one makes moral judgements the views of others.

It is important that from the beginning, you prepare learners that they will be confronting differing and somewhat contentious opinions related to sensitive topics. Tell learners that they are encouraged to discuss, but that everyone should be respectful. There should be no interruptions, no judgements or name-calling, and no teasing or making fun of others.

It is important to be aware that the controversial and difficult nature of some of the identities discussed may be very personal for some learners. Learners should be allowed to opt out of the exercise or to not share their feelings if they so choose. In such cases discretely ask them to meet with you one-on-one later to debrief. However, as learners are asked to take on an imagined identity or role-play, this should not have any adverse effects, or trigger personal experiences.

Some learners may make negative comments about the assumed identity of others. Remind them that the identity cards are not intended to reflect a participant's own identity, but rather to get them to think about different forms of oppression that people may, and do, face. Remind them that judgement is unacceptable.

Sexual orientation is a controversial topic and some teachers may feel uncomfortable talking about it. As a teacher it is important to create an environment of respect and understanding for all your learners, and that your personal views or religious beliefs do not prevent you from doing this. Remember that discussions about sexual orientation are not about moral judgement, or religious views, but about treating people equally and fairly, and respecting other people's right to engage in mutually consensual relationships of their choice, as afforded to them by the law.

Teaching learners about sexual orientation could help them be more empathetic to other people who they see as 'different'. Remember that young people need accurate information and opportunity to discuss issues which may be difficult for them. They should be encouraged to share their feelings, but reminded that discrimination, hate and violence are always wrong.

As you lead this activity, remember that there are probably gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning teens in your class. It is important that you make LGBT learners (whether they have 'come out' or not) feel acknowledged and understood. You will not know the sexual orientation of every participant, so be very sure to use inclusive and affirming language. For example, say 'we,' 'all people,' and 'some people,' not 'they' or 'people like them.'

Never ask learners to disclose their sexual orientation.

Making the Link with Gender and Violence

Remind learners that people who are seen as 'different' are often discriminated against and are at increased risk of violence. This exercise shows how a person's vulnerability to violence is complex and is affected by the different aspects of their identity. For example, being a woman, or an LGBT individual, may contribute to an increased risk of experiencing violence. There are many ways in which different women and LGBT individuals experience oppression and violence.

Assessment Ideas

- 1 Have the learners write a reflection about their own intersecting identities (race, class, ability, gender, sexual orientation) and about the ways their identity gives them privileges.
- 2 Share some historical examples of oppression, such as Apartheid and the continuing oppression of LGBT people. Have them research a group of people (or a specific person) and the oppression they suffered. Have them present their findings to the class.



IDENTITY CARDS

18 year old, black disabled female, using a wheel chair.

16 year old female who is a refugee from the DRC. She works at a bakery to help her family. She has been raised catholic. Her mom speaks very little English.

17 year old white female who is living on the street. She is addicted to tik. She has also been beaten up by her dealer recently.

14 year old, Indian South African lesbian high school learner, 'out' only to her best friend.

16 year old gay male who is 'in the closet'. He dates girls and plays sports. He recently met a guy he likes.

19 year old female, who is a training to be a sangoma. She thinks she is attracted to women.

17 year old white heterosexual learner, who is good at cricket.

19 year old white heterosexual female who is in a relationship with an older black man.

15 year old white male who skips school most days and hangs out at the mall. He has started to do drugs.

16 year old, high school learner who is bisexual and deaf. She has a girlfriend at school, but the school does not approve. She uses sign language to communicate.

16 year old white male who lives with his mom. She has drug problems and needs help from him daily. He does all the cooking and cleaning at home.

17 year old white lesbian mom of a young child, living off child support grant and waitressing. She is completing high school by distance education.

16 year old Cape Malay female learner going out with a white male who is not religious. She is a practicing Muslim and her parents do not believe in dating before marriage.

17 year old coloured female with a one-year-old baby, living at home. She is trying to finish her last year at high school.

19 year old female vegetarian, in lesbian relationship. Her parents are supportive of her relationship. Considers herself bisexual.

IDENTITY CARDS

Grade 10 female learner who cares about the environment and hassles others about eating meat.

18 year old heterosexual coloured male who secretly enjoys dressing as a woman occasionally.

19 year old coloured heterosexual female. She is the head of the household, caring for her two younger siblings. Her parents have both passed away.

16 year old male Rasta. He is frequently stopped and searched by the police.

17 year old heterosexual coloured female. She has a relationship with an older man who gives her money. She has recently tested positive for HIV.

16 year old black male. Walks with difficulty because of a taxi accident. Earns money for his single mother and sister by weeding gardens on the weekends.

Grade 12 learner who is transgendered, male to female. Wishes she could wear dresses and make-up to school and use the female washroom, but the school code of conduct does not allow it.

15 year old white heterosexual female who was raised by a lesbian couple.

17 year old black heterosexual female. She is a devout Muslim and wears a headscarf.

16 year old black lesbian learner who has been dating a classmate for 2 months in secret. Her family view homosexuality as going against their Christian beliefs.

16 year old black male who is extremely good at athletics and soccer. He has not told anyone that he is bisexual.

17 year old heterosexual black female who is academically gifted and hopes to be a leader in her church.

TEACHER'S PROMPTS

The following questions can be asked:

1. If you are free to be open about your sexual orientation with those close to you (in other words, you are 'out of the closet' in most situations), take two steps forward.
2. If you can speak openly and easily about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity at school without fear of harassment or negative consequences, take one step forward.
3. If you can expect to use public transport easily and safely, take a step forward.
4. If you can walk by a group of male teenagers without fear of insults or harassment, take a step forward.
5. If there is something about you that would make the police suspicious, or make them treat you differently, take a step back.
6. If you have experienced interpersonal violence or harassment, take two steps back.
7. If you have a lot of caregiving responsibilities at home (e.g. looking after a parent, a child, someone who is sick, other siblings), take two steps back.
8. If you have financial responsibilities or a job that is financially important for you or your family to sustain itself, take a step back.
9. If your preferred way of dressing is in conflict with social ideas of what is normal, take a step back.
10. If it is easy for you to move around at school and participate in physical education (PE), take a step forward.
11. If there are several options for you at the school tuck-shop, when you go out, and at friends' homes without you having to worry about whether or not the food fits your religious or moral rules, take a step forward.
12. If you are comfortable bringing your partner to the school dance, take one step forward.
13. If it would be difficult for you to introduce your partner to your family, take a step back.
14. If you are comfortable holding hands with your partner in public, take two steps forward.
15. If you became HIV positive and people would react by saying that you deserved it, take two steps back.
16. If you can expect to have serious health problems, take a step back.
17. If you can expect to be a religious leader in your community, take a step forward.