

Facilitator's Guide

Identity

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THE GAME OF IDENTITY WITH OBJECTS

DEFINITION OF IDENTITY

There are many ways of understanding identity. In one of them we could start by imagining it has two sides, like a coin, or that it works like dialogue or a game, shifting between two poles. On the one hand, identity is **something that is given to us**. We are constantly **positioned** in certain labels that are also in a hierarchical relation to others. Identity cannot exist without hierarchies, we are crossed by power systems that set certain limits for us. Going outside these **limits** is frequently penalized: it implies going through some sort of pain or, at least, an extra management. Positioning yourself might mean losing something, for example, what you were in the past. You lose that image associated with what was once important to you. However, it can also involve a benefit, since identity can be a comfortable place, a place from which you can claim, for example, political demands. This leads us to **the other side of identity**: there are times when one may choose to adopt an identity, either because it gives us a vision of ourselves that we like, or because it allows us to make certain things at a collective level (i.e. with the categories of "woman", "domestic and care worker", or "migrant"). So in identity there also is **also agency and a capacity to transform**. Identity is thus situated between these two poles: the one that is given to us, and the one that we choose to take; the one that limits us, and the one that gives us the possibility of doing certain things. And in this sense it is never static, but is **something that is constantly becoming** and that is built in the everyday, through certain ways of feeling and being in the world.

*Note: This exercise is based on the joint discussions experienced within the PAR group in Barcelona. A narration of this process can be found in the Elaboration section of the Identity concept. This document maps the different ways this notion intersects with the interests of the group. We highly encourage reading the document *Tips for Teaching Identity*, prepared by the Athens node of the project, which includes a complete review of different feminist academic debates in relation to identity, as well as a series of reflections to guide any learning process which intends to address the topic.*

HOW TO PREPARE THE ACTIVITY.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS AND NOTES ON A PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT

This activity entails a group dynamic in which participants are expected to share information about themselves with other people in their group. It aims to make visible a series of power relations that generate inequalities and crystallize them in various categories of identity formations. In the process of this workshop, participants may experience negative feelings when recognizing themselves in one of the opposed poles described by the exercise. Visibilising these structures and the differences and inequalities associated with them may be uncomfortable. Those who are exposed as being in a position of power may experience anger or guilt when recognising themselves in that place. Those who sit in the less favored pole may feel overexposed and, again, reified and reduced to just being inhabitants of a given identity, especially when they do not always to be seen and addressed in this way (see in this sense the discussions that led to the **Eurocentrism** concept).

Facilitators may explain to participants these kinds of feelings may appear during the workshop. Moreover, they should beware of the negative effects it may have on participants and make an effort to create a careful and supportive environment that encourages and validates the expression of these feelings. In any case, it is important to make it clear that each person is free to participate in the workshop to the extent they wish. In this sense, it is advised not to carry out the exercise in an environment where there is not yet a consistent group trust (i.e. first days of class).

Having said so, however, one of the objectives of the workshop is to collectively analyze how discomfort is, if present, a generative space from which to cultivate reflexivity. Feminist scholarly work such as Sara Ahmed's (2010), shows that discomfort may be a productive place from which to think about political action. In this account, we may experience discomfort as a result of acknowledging how we are affected by the very power systems that we want to transform.

A pedagogy of discomfort for White people (Boler, 1999; Boler and Zembydas, 2003) may involve, for example, taking negative feelings experienced by people in a situation of power as an opportunity to raise awareness (Freire, 2000) about their position in these systems of power in order to generate knowledge that contributes to the broader project of social justice. Being asked to empty your pockets and show your ID is something often done by the police when a person is suspected of having committed a crime. In our societies, however, we see how the probability that a person is targeted by the police increases exponentially for migrants, people of color or indigenous people

in settler colonial countries (Parad de Pararme Report, 2018).

Uncomfortable feelings, therefore, are also unevenly distributed in our daily lives. And in this sense, the workshop also proposes to reflect on how the identities that are assigned to us based on these power relations reflect this uneven distribution and inequality. In other words, taking discomfort as a place of pedagogical exploration allows us to ask certain questions, such as: which identities go unnoticed day by day and which others are marked as visible? What identities can afford not to feel uncomfortable? In what situations?

Finally, and although this workshop leaves the possibility to reflect on dimensions and formations of identity very open, we want to emphasize that if the key themes of "race", legal status or nationality do not appear it is important the facilitator brings the discussions in order to reflect collectively on it. The group may then discuss what might indicate the absence or presence of this dimension, as well as what type of inclusions / exclusions would be operating based on this.

HOW TO FACILITATE THE WORKSHOP

First part of the workshop

We start here from the idea of reflexivity, understood as the generation of dialogical spaces in diversity that seek to hail us and interrogate ourselves and our ideas (See Common Conceptualization Process document). The first part seeks to generate a process of reflection on the objects selected by the participants. These should inspire reflections on some of the aspects that cross the participants' identities and to think about how these may be of relevance in different - professional, activist, everyday life - contexts. In other words, the aim is to reflect on the connections between the objects we have chosen and the way in which we perceive ourselves. Do our identities exist in mobile and/or flexible fields, or are these rather more rigid and stable?

Second part of the workshop:

This second part seeks to stimulate reflections on the different relations of power that affect the participants, and on how these function through, and reproduce, hierarchical social categories (or "labels"). The aim is for the participants to generate a collective reflection by observing dissimilar lived experiences in relation to these hierarchies. In the case that all individuals in a group share the same experience, then the question that may arise is "why is this so, and what do all participants have in common?"

GUIDELINES FOR THE FINAL REFLECTIONS

As for **the first part of the workshop**, the aim of sharing the objects that people bring with them is to reflect on the limits and potentialities that the identities we “choose” set for us, and what are the differences and contrasts in comparison with others. The aim is reflecting on the inherent political nature of discussing identity. Taking seriously the feminist motto "the personal is political" may be useful to reflect on how the experiences that we go through have an imprint on us. This may help gain awareness and construct a political stance in relation to our sex-gender, race, class, and bodily ability, among other aspects.

Suggested questions to guide this discussion:

How do we come to identify with the object we choose? What could be happening if we identify with patriotic symbols, or with traditional symbols? What relationship exists between them and memory, history, and/or community? What could be operating if we tend to identify with the nation-state? What does national identity do to us? What are those other things that we give more importance to? (in case it is not national identity) How do they give relative weight to national identity? What part do we choose? Can we always choose? Is there anyone who cannot choose? Who do we think is less likely to choose? To what extent can we choose?

The second part of the workshop seeks to generate reflections to the point that identities are crossed by different categories corresponding to different axes or systems of power that place people in different and unequal social positions. Participants should try to identify some of these categories, such as gender, "race", class, or a person's administrative status. Some of these categories appear as abstract and difficult to grasp. They are reproduced in very subtle ways in everyday relationships, making it difficult to make them visible. Others, such as discrimination resulting from exclusion from citizenship, refers to legal aspects that are easy to identify.

Suggested questions to guide this discussion:

What are these mechanisms that generate different unequal categories? What laws, procedures, or protocols act to exclude certain people and give them different unequal rights? Some examples that might, in this sense, have come up in the shared objects: registration cards, health cards, work permits, passports.

Based on what emerged in both exercises:

In what situations either the identities we choose or the identities we are given carry the most weight? That is, what kind of mobility of these labels, if any, happens, and how, depending on the context, do they place us in different positions of power?

Clues: In some cases, people cannot escape some of the labels imposed on them. In other cases, it may be important to think and reflect on which labels or categories are considered important as they are functional for certain situations or contexts.

General feedback from the whole workshop:

- Structure and experience of the workshop: What comforts or discomforts did the workshop arouse? What would you change or add to the workshop?
- Content: What small steps can we take based on what we have seen to improve the situation? Always consider the context in which this exercise is carried out.

LITERATURE

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FURTHER READING

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For a comprehensive review on the issue of identity in feminist scholarly work, please check the document [Tips for Teaching Identity](#).