



Heart, Mind, Body Mapping

"[O]ur body is a map where the entire history of our lives can be traced, where every step that we have taken has left its imprint." - Artemisa and Elige

Overview: This activity uses body mapping to identify how fears, tension and stress are affecting our lives, how that relates to systems of oppression and how we can strategize for dealing with them.

Purpose: Women's bodies bear testimony to the "personal is political." Oppression and joy plays out in women's lives - physically, mentally and emotionally. This can affect our health and sense of wellbeing. The body is a symbol and physical manifestation of power, including our experiences of power and negotiations through its structures. The body is also a site of contested ownership, internal tensions, and conflict.

This activity can help to surface and address the centrality of women's bodies to our analysis of oppression - including class, colonialism, patriarchy, sexuality, sex, feminism, reproductive health, HIV and AIDS. By encouraging a deep personal reflection, it enables us to understand the body in relation to systems of oppression and how we can strategize for dealing with them. This activity can be done in two different ways, depending on your goals.

Time Needed: 3 hours (minimum); this process can take up to half a day depending on the group.

Materials:

- Colored markers
- Roll of newsprint or fabric
- Scissors
- Tape

Space: Ensure that you have a good amount of floor space on which to draw the maps. Also protect the privacy of participants and safety of the space.

Credit: JASS SNA with Hope Chigudu





Process:

1. Working in pairs, one person lies down on a piece of paper or fabric, and the other traces her partner's body onto the fabric/paper.
2. Participants fill in the body map based on a set of structured questions from the facilitator. These can be clustered as follows, depending on the amount of time you have and if you want to do a longer or shorter process:
 - a. **Name two or three places** where you feel most stress and tension and what it feels like e.g. migraines, back aches, general unease, etc.
 - b. **List two or three ways** these play out in your moods and behavior.
 - c. **Share a couple of ways** you deal with these problems and the accompanying fear and loneliness – what kind of self-care are you drawing on.

In Plenary:

1. Hang the maps on the wall, and discuss in plenary.
2. Quickly brainstorm places and characteristics – note commonalities and implications for our health, work and wellbeing.
3. Ask for ways it affects moods and behaviors, note commonalities and implications for our health, work and wellbeing.
4. Review self-care strategies and assess their effectiveness – what's missing.

Alternative Method:

This method pushes participants to think deeply about how different parts of their bodies experience pain and pleasure, and to identify the source of that pain/pleasure and begin to unpack how oppression plays out across women's bodies in tangible ways. This process allows participants to identify who "owns" the body. Who or what is responsible for "pain" and "pleasure", the process is as follows.

Process:

- Working in pairs, one person lies down on a piece of paper or fabric, and the other traces her partner's body onto the fabric/paper.
- Participants fill in the body map based on the question – what parts of your body give you pleasure or pain?
- In plenary: Each woman speaks to her own body. Participants are urged to be open and honest, as this process is an important part of developing trust within the group. The discussion can be done in two go-arounds.



- In the first part of sharing their body maps, women talk about the ownership of their bodies, then the parts of their body that give them pain. In the second part, women discuss the parts of their body that give them joy and delight; this is a stage of affirmation.
- At the end of the sharing, the facilitator(s) reiterate the power of the body given that the body carries our experiences. Speak to how the body is central to patriarchy and the desire to control women's bodies, and the need for self-care and processing of experience to reclaim our bodies and wellbeing.
- A second part of the conclusion of the exercise must draw the links between the personal and political, how are women's experiences with their bodies different and *similar*? How can we understand our experiences collectively?

Important Notes for Facilitators:

- Facilitators must be thoughtful and deliberate in convening the space in a way that can "hold" women's diverse, sometimes painful, very personal experiences. This requires sensitivity, trust, confidentiality, and strong facilitation skills. Ideally, body mapping is introduced on the second day of a multi-day training/workshop. This allows time to establish a safe space and build trust and women's individual comfort level within the group.
- Because body mapping can be a very sensitive and intimate methodology, facilitators must take care to ensure confidentiality, including with respect to documentation and knowledge production. This is an important step in establishing trust and eliciting participation.
- Facilitators should make clear and emphasize that participation is optional.
- Facilitators should be prepared to address issues that emerge, for example, experiences of violence or issues related to HIV and AIDS. Importantly, facilitators should be able to refer participants to support networks and other resources, such as counselling centers, medical, police, and legal services as necessary.
- Facilitation can be an intense, emotional draining process. Co-facilitation can help mitigate this challenge and ensure that facilitators are able to remain fully present to effectively support individual and collective reflection and sharing. If participants in the process break down emotionally, take time to support them, for example: bringing in the whole room together to hold hands in solidarity, giving time to comfort.