



# The Identity Flower

**Overview:** Exploring a person's multiple characteristics in a group setting helps build personal and collective awareness as well as solidarity with one another. This exploration of the complexities and intersections of people's identities can also help participants see how their differences and commonalities can serve to strengthen alliances and movements.

**Purpose:** The Identity Flower underscores and raises awareness about the ways in which diverse identities coexist within each of us and change throughout our lives from infancy to maturity. It provides us with an introduction to intersectionality and with a dynamic view of personal and collective development. In particular, it highlights some of what we want to bring to our exercise of leadership and alliance building. This activity serves as an introduction and is best used and adapted to accompany a deeper dive into intersectionality and power dynamics as outlined in the Power Flower.

**Time:** 1 hour 45 minutes

**Credit:** Adapted by Mariela Arce and Helen Barrientos for the JASS Mesoamerican course on Strategic Leadership for Indigenous and Rural Women

## Materials and Space Needed:

- Sheets of paper in a variety of colors
- Markers and/or crayons
- Tape or glue
- Flip chart
- Newsprint
- Soft music that invites deep reflection

## Process:

### *Prior to exercise:*

- Draw a flower on a large piece of paper and place it on the wall. Each petal represents one category, which can include: sex, race, ethnic group, class, language, religion, age group, education, ability/disability, location (urban/rural), relationship status (married, divorced, partner, single), sexual orientation, geographic region



**WERISE-TOOLKIT.ORG**





(origin), geographic region (current), etc. The central part of the flower can represent a person's nationality.

***In plenary:***

- Introduce purpose and explain process, highlighting that this is a way to reflect on who we are and what characteristics we draw on in our leadership and movement building. You might mention that sometimes these aspects are called identities, and that we draw on multiple identities in our lives and work.

***Individually:***

- Ask each participant to jot down 6 or 7 of their own personal characteristics/identities, e.g. their gender, age, race/ethnicity, education level, class (socio-economic status), job and position, relationship status (married, divorced, partner, single), location (urban/rural), etc. With these 6 or 7 in mind, ask everyone to draw a big flower with multiple large petals, each representing one of these characteristics/identities of her overall self. As participants consider their petals, ask them to think about how some of these aspects may have changed over the years and how they have developed their identities over time, how they have helped create the person they are today?

*Note: As facilitator, you can opt for one of two versions, depending on time. In the basic version, everyone writes their particular characteristic on a separate petal. In a more creative and complicated version, you can ask people to add to their written description and create a symbol that represents the different aspect and glue it on the respective petal.*

***In plenary:***

- A 'garden or flower show' is held in which the flowers are affixed to the wall. Everyone takes a stroll around the garden to view the flowers.
- While standing, ask participants to explain their flower in terms of: how their flower has changed over the years, what they have done to change it, and how these changes may influence their relationship with others?
- Return to tables, brainstorm what are some of our commonalities and differences? In other words, where do our characteristics intersect and converge and where do they not? Record on flip chart.

***In buzz groups:***

- After completing individual reflections (back at tables), encourage group to think about implications of these on differences and intersections;



- o What are one or two things you learned from this reflection about identity and identities?
- o Keeping the group's differences and commonalities in mind, how might these play out in the movements and alliances we form?
- o What might be the basis for creating alliances with those different than we are?

***In plenary:***

- Invite people to comment on their group discussions, record key ideas on flip chart.
- Wrap up: summarize their important comments and clarify any major misunderstandings, -- and depending on your goals, emphasize and recognize some of the following:
  - o how we change according to our stage of life and how this can change our relationships,
  - o that each petal contributes to who we are as a whole, highlighting the rich diversity of our multiple characteristics/identities, and that these intersections of our identities make up who we are as individuals and are called intersectionality;
  - o that with each petal, comes particular problems and privilege – being a woman triggers sexism; being indigenous or of a certain color triggers racism; being more educated can bring authority, opportunities and greater access to certain kinds of knowledge, etc.
  - o that we gain strengths and collective power from coming together across our differences, and from finding common problems and agendas to tackle
  - o that given our diversities, we will inevitably have different perspectives on some things which lead to creativity but also to potential conflict, hence the importance of learning to deal with conflict constructively.
- Optional follow-up: The attached handout on Intersectionality: A Fun Guide can be used to introduce the concept and build on the above exercise. There is also a good resource: The [Gingerbread Person](#) which explains continuums of gender identity, gender expression, sexual identity and sexuality.

## A SIMPLE INTRODUCTION TO INTERSECTIONALITY

# INTERSECTIONALITY

## a fun guide



Bob is a stripey blue triangle.  
AND SHOULD BE PROUD.



SADLY SOME PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE Bob. Bob  
FACES OPPRESSION FOR BEING A TRIANGLE, &  
FOR HAVING STRIPES.



LUCKILY, THERE ARE LIBERATION GROUPS!  
BUT THEY AREN'T INTERSECTIONAL.

SO THEY  
LOOK LIKE  
THIS



THEY DON'T TALK TO EACH OTHER.  
IN FACT, THEY COMPETE.

BOB CAN'T WORK  
OUT WHERE TO  
GO.



BOB WISHES THAT THE  
TRIANGLES AND STRIPES  
COULD WORK TOGETHER.



INTERSECTIONALITY IS  
THE BELIEF THAT  
OPPRESSIONS ARE  
INTERLINKED AND  
CANNOT BE SOLVED  
ALONE.

OPPRESSIONS ARE NOT ISOLATED.  
**INTERSECTIONALITY NOW!**



**Some questions:**

This graphic by Miriam Dobson provides a quick introduction to basic elements of intersectionality. Bob could be Bob or Roberta and we could ask ourselves what the diagram says to us given who we are. How might it apply to our own lives?

We are proud of our stripes and triangles and different colors and yet...

When have these been denigrated or attacked as in the drawing? – “Down with stripes, God hates triangles” and Blue is never beautiful.

Why can't stripes, triangles and colors come together in common struggles to challenge and change how we are marginalized? When have we debated with others about who is more oppressed? What's this competition all about? What does it do to us?

How do we integrate our many stripes, triangles, and colors into a healthy whole and work together?

What does intersectionality have to do with it? What does it say to us in terms of gender, race, class, age etc. and what's needed to create movements for change across our differences?

*According to an intersectionality perspective, inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences. - Olena Hankivsky*

Diagram from Miriam Dobson.