

- Unusual ideas are welcome: To get a good and long list of ideas, encourage creative responses to a problem.
- Combine and improve ideas: Good ideas can be combined to form a single very good idea.
- The facilitator should be aware that a brainstorm usually starts slowly, picks up speed as ideas are sparking other ideas, and then slows down again.

Wrapping up

After all the ideas are up on the wall, ask if there is anything that people have a question about, or that they disagree with. Open this up for discussion. You don't always need to come to consensus following a brainstorming session. Or you may want to sort out the answers for further discussion.

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River of life – gender lens

Time: 45 minutes minimum, depending on how much time is spent sharing the drawings.

Goal or purpose:

- To explore how gender has shaped and influenced participants lives, and help participants to articulate this.

This version of 'river of Life' focuses on exploring participants' journey to their understanding of gender, but this can be used in a whole host of other ways too, exploring different parts of identity, or as a broader tool for articulating life experience. Adapt the instructions to fit different forms.

Preparation/materials:

Minimum – a piece of paper and pen for each person.

Larger pieces of paper, and a wider range of art materials (paint, coloured pens, glitter, charcoal, glue, coloured paper) can also be helpful.

String and clothes pegs or bulldog clips – set up a 'washing line' across the room to display the final pieces.

How it's done/facilitators notes:

Tell the group something like;

"We're going to explore how gender has been a feature in each of our lives, the influence gender has had, how we have felt, how we have been seen by others, and the impact that this has had on us."

Nonviolence

Gender and nonviolence

Strategy

Education is freedom: popular education

Nonviolent actions

Working in groups

Case studies

Israel: New Profile learns from the experience of others

Training

Power flower
Who has power in a school

Training

We're going to use the example of a river, with all its twists and turns, rapids, gentle sections, waterfalls, and bridges to reflect on this, and we're going to create a picture using the art materials to do that. Use the different features of a river to illustrate how gender has manifested in your life, both positive and negative experiences. Use the exercise to reflect on how your understanding of gender has changed over time."

Give some time – at least 15 minutes – for participants to create their image. Invite a quiet, reflective atmosphere so people can think and express themselves – at this stage, this is an opportunity for individuals to express themselves. Encourage people to find their own space in the room. Some might get distracted by the quality of the art, rather than the quality of reflection – look out for this, and encourage them to 'fill the paper'.

Encourage people to think about their home or family life, their experience at school or work, or in activist groups; what influenced their understanding of gender, and their own gender identity? Has that ever been challenged, or reinforced? Have they ever benefited – or lost out – because of their gender, or how their gender was perceived by others? Have there been any radical shifts in how they understand gender?

After the 15 minutes, or when the group seems to be generally finished, invite those who want to share their illustration to do so, explaining to the group what they have drawn and why. Give plenty of time and space for this, and make it clear that this is the individual's time for sharing, not for questions or comments from the group. If the group is very large, then there may be more benefit in smaller groups sharing with each other, rather than as a large group, and then sharing back to the whole group something they have learned from the experience. If people feel comfortable, hang all of the images on a washing line, or stick them on the walls of the training room, to allow everyone to see everyone else's work.

In whole group discussions – or when introducing the exercise – use open, inclusive language.

When working with gender in a group, it is important that your language reflects the complexity of gender, and doesn't reinforce binary gender constructions, or impose that lens.

If some are struggling with thinking about gender in anything but a fixed, binary way or they have no 'relationship' with their own socially prescribed gender, after introducing the tool as above spend some more time helping these people; avoid long (and potentially heated) discussions about 'whether or not gender is constructed' with the whole group. In this situation, it might be helpful and less challenging to think about how societal understandings of gender have changed historically, (e.g. 'male' and 'female' roles), before bringing this back to the individual's experience.

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