



Dealing with Gender Dynamics & Stereotypes in Conflicts: Analysis & Approaches

Overview: Understanding how sexism and patriarchy works deeply on our psyches and affects the way we see and deal with conflicts is crucial to addressing them effectively. It helps us develop both our power and capacity as individuals and as groups to respond to them productively. This understanding also helps us tap into the kinds of self-care we need personally and the solidarity and support that we need in our organizations and movements to deal with conflicts and transform them.

Overall Purpose: We offer several related activities that we have found to help people understand how patriarchy has influenced their attitudes and behaviors in conflict situations. By examining these dynamics and stereotypes, people have the opportunity to consider more effective ways for handling them, including the development of self-care and mutual support systems that help people and organizations face and transform conflict. These activities are best used in a climate where trust has been established.

Note: These two sessions can be used separately or together. They involve several activities and steps that you need to become familiar with.

Time: 3 hours

Credit: Patricia Ardón

Materials needed:

- Ball or scrunched up paper to serve as ball
- Flip chart
- Newsprint
- Power point projector



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Overall Process:

Introduce overall purpose of these two sessions. You might want to include some of the following points:

- *All of our ideas and beliefs about conflict are shaped by strong societal norms that define how women and men should act when dealing with conflict. These beliefs and stereotypes shape our behavior and are especially disempowering for women. It is important to understand these gender dynamics because when we are confronted with conflicts, we can unconsciously revert to internalized stereotypes in our behavior and attitudes. So, it is always crucial to include a gender perspective and analysis when dealing with conflicts and think about: How are these beliefs and stereotypes about gender and conflict affecting my own behavior? Why are the other parties in the conflict acting as they do? What ideas are driving their behaviors? How do power relations operate in a given conflict? How can we support each other to address our conflicts in a way that strengthens our movements?*

SESSION ONE: SEXIST STEREOTYPES AND DYNAMICS

Specific Purpose: Examine how gender stereotypes and sexist beliefs have shaped our responses to conflict -- including what are considered 'proper' attitudes, qualities, and behaviors for men and women when dealing with conflict.

Time: 2 hours

In Plenary

Note: As facilitators, it always helps to work in pairs to share facilitation tasks. It also is useful to have questions written out on flip chart or power point so people can focus better.

- Introduce activity – explain purpose and process.
- Have group form circle and explain game.



- Begin by throwing a small ball to one person and asking: *Faced with conflict, women are _____.* The ball is thrown again, quickly, and the following question is asked: *Faced with conflict, men are _____.* Depending on the scope of the answers you could do another round with similar questions: *Faced with conflict, women do what? They _____.* *Faced with conflict, men do what? They _____.*
- All of the answers are written on separate flip charts so that everybody can see the ideas we tend to have about the qualities, attitudes, and behaviors of men and women when they face conflicts and problems.
- As facilitator you read the responses out loud and encourage the group to analyze the information and its implications:
 - *What do these responses seem to be saying about the attitudes, qualities and behaviors expected from women and men in conflict situations?*

Individually:

Encourage the participants to delve deeper regarding *the origins of these beliefs and behaviors – where do they come from?* The following questions can be useful for that purpose. Ask everyone to respond individually and jot their key ideas on paper. Give them a minute to think about a situation before asking the question. (Alternatively, if you have time, you can have people do role plays to illustrate the following and then debrief their meanings.)

- Think about a time in your childhood when there was a conflict in your family or school or think about your childhood in general.
- What were you told (at home, in school, in the church, etc.) about how women and men should address conflicts?
- How do you think these ideas from childhood onwards with their different expectations have affected the way you – as a woman (or man) – deal with conflicts in your daily life and work?

In plenary:

Ask for responses and write them down on two flip charts, one for men and one for women, then probe deeper:



- What strikes you about these points? What insights do you draw from them?

In small groups of 5 - 6:

Now let's go from the personal to the more general – based on the discussion:

- In conflicts that you are familiar with, how have men and women behaved differently when confronted with conflict?
- Why are they acting the way they are? What roles are they playing? What ideas are driving their behavior?
- How do you think these different approaches and behaviors have facilitated the possibility of reaching constructive, creative solutions and how have they limited the possibilities?

In plenary:

- Ask for responses, record on flip chart. Comment on any key points then pursue a wrap up question.
 - How do you think the things that we were taught from childhood onwards about women's qualities and behaviors in conflict situations affect our ability to organize and bring women together? What are some of our challenges?
- Summarize group reflections and insights from this plenary, clarify any misunderstandings or misconceptions, being sure to emphasize that women and men are formed within a system that makes us believe and internalize certain ideas and stereotypes about ourselves and others. As women we should have certain qualities and act in certain ways when we face conflicts and problems; we should not deviate from the ways that society and the community expect us to act. If we do, we are not good or worthy women. By internalizing these beliefs, we judge ourselves and other women by their standards and thus become our own worst enemies, divided against our individual self and against each other. Understanding these dynamics is a first step in helping us confront these beliefs and behaviors.
- Option: You may want to wrap up this session with the above synthesis and summary or continue and have the group reflect on and discuss the following as a final wrap up:



- The more we can transform our internalized sexist beliefs, behaviors and roles and improve the relationships among us, the more we can build strong movements that can challenge **power over us**.
- You then can synthesize and close and make link to next session.

SESSION TWO:

SELF-CARE AND MUTUAL-CARE IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Specific Purpose: Identify both the challenges and ways that we might take better care of ourselves and support each other in conflicts, especially organizational conflicts.

Time: 1 hour

Process:

In plenary:

Explain purpose and process of this session, stressing the importance of the discussion, for example, *“We know that conflict, whatever the situation can be very difficult to address. Given how we have been socialized, this is especially true for women. When not dealt with constructively, conflict can be destructive and harmful to us personally as well as to our organizations and movements. It can also diminish our strength and capacity to build harmonious relationships and collective power. So a major challenge before us involves developing new ways of supporting ourselves and each other and new ways of approaching conflict that make us more effective and more empowered. Obviously we need to recognize that different kinds of conflicts will require different responses. For the purposes of this exercise, we are talking about conflicts within our organizations and movements. Some of the ideas you generate may apply to other conflict situations as well.”*



In groups of 4 or 5:

With your bodies, create a statue – can be stationary or with moving parts – to reflect ways we can support each other when dealing with conflict, encouraging our **power with** others.

In plenary:

Have groups present their statues, ask audience to identify what they think each group is saying; as facilitator, you or co-facilitator should record the following discussion on flip chart:

- Based on the statues and your experience, what do you see as key to creating mutual support when dealing with organizational conflicts; the **power with** factor? In other words, how can we support each other to address our conflicts in a way that strengthens our movements?
- Thinking about yourself, what is needed for your individual support, for encouraging the **power within** yourself? In other words, how do I take care of myself when I am in organizational conflicts so I can deal with them effectively and creatively? What do I need?

In same groups:

Have people return to same groups and discuss the following questions; each group should record ideas on newsprint:

- What other ways might we use to support one another to address organizational conflicts more constructively? Are there Ideas or examples from other experiences?
- Finally, how can we develop strategies for dealing with our conflicts in ways that strengthen our movements – what do we need to take into consideration?
- If we need more research and information on this? How to obtain it?

In plenary:

- Have people share; record major ideas on flip chart.



- Encourage reflection and discussion; highlight those aspects that make us feel supported and more powerful and confident – those ideas that might become or contribute to self-care or mutual support strategies Tie these reflections together emphasizing the most important elements and how they affect our relationships.
- Invite participants to form a working committee to take the newsprint reports and further develop the ideas into an action plan.