



Unpacking Our Social Identities

Adapted from The University of Michigan's Equitable Teaching Program

Social identity groups are based on the physical, social, and mental characteristics of individuals. They are sometimes obvious and clear, sometimes not obvious and unclear, often self-claimed and frequently ascribed by others. For example, racial groupings are often ascribed as well as self-claimed. Government, schools, and employers often ask an individual to claim a racial identity group or simply ascribe one to an individual based on visual perception. Other social identities are personally claimed but not often announced or easily visually ascribed such as sexual orientation, religion, or disability status.

For the purpose of this self-examination, please identify the memberships you claim or those ascribed to you. Below are examples of social identity groupings. Since issues of social identity often are the basis of much social conflict, it is reasonable to expect that even the terms we use to describe them may cause disagreement. So feel free to use your own preferred terms for the material below.

Examples (Feel free to use your own language for your identities.)

Gender: Woman, Man, Transgender, Non-Binary, Gender Non-Conforming, etc.

Sex: Intersex, Female, Male

Race: Asian Pacific Islander, Native American, Latin@, Black, White, Bi/Multiracial, etc

Ethnicity: Irish, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Italian, Mohawk, Jewish, Guatemalan, Lebanese, European-American, etc.

Sexual Orientation: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Heterosexual, Queer, Questioning, etc.

Religion/Spirituality: Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Agnostic, Atheist, Secular, Humanist, etc.

Social Class: Poor, Working Class, Lower-Middle Class, Upper-Middle Class, etc.

Age: Child, Young Adult, Middle-Age Adult, Senior

(Dis)Ability: People with disabilities (cognitive, physical, emotional, etc.), Temporarily able-bodied, Temporarily disabled, etc.

Nation(s) of Origin and/or Citizenship: United States, Nigeria, Korea, Turkey, Argentina, etc.

Tribal or Indigenous Affiliation: Mohawk, Aboriginal, Navajo, Santal, etc.

Body Size: Fat, Larger, Thin, etc.

Feel free to think and/or write about these questions.

1. What identities do you think about most often? Why do you suppose this is the case for you?

2. What identities do you think about least often? Why do you suppose this is the case for you?

3. What identities would you like to learn more about? Why do you suppose this is the case for you?

4. What identities have the strongest effect on how you perceive yourself? Why do you suppose this is the case for you?

5. What identities have the greatest effect on how others perceive you? Why do you suppose this is the case for you?