

# Identity, Culture, and Privilege

## Learning Activities



Understanding aspects of identity and culture – both your own and that of others – we can better spot situations when someone is unintentionally shutting down diverse perspectives or when actions are being taken that may be rooted in unconscious bias. Social identities are also often at the root of unequal power or privilege which is why exploring these concepts is foundational in our efforts to build belonging at work and foster a more inclusive culture.

With these activities, you will map your social identity, explore your culture, and reflect on how these intersect with one another to shape your experiences and interactions with others.

**How To Use:** This set of activities have been designed to be an individual learning and reflection experience.

If you are interested in organizing a team conversation around this activity, we recommend using the Team Discussion Guide and Responsibility of Privilege Handout found on the [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion SharePoint](#) page.

## Learning Activities

Each activity designed to take about 30 minutes.

<p><b><a href="#">Activity 1: Social Identity Wheel</a></b> Explore your social identity and reflect on how your identities affect your interactions with others.</p>	<p>page <b>2</b></p>
<p><b><a href="#">Activity 2: Understanding Culture</a></b> Reflect on your culture and your experience with cultural communities.</p>	<p>page <b>4</b></p>
<p><b><a href="#">Activity 3: Reflecting on Privilege</a></b> Examine how your identities may influence the type of privilege you may have in society.</p>	<p>page <b>6</b></p>

**This activity aligns with the Fairview Commitment: Embrace Diversity and Practice Inclusion**

I value the unique perspective of every person and seek to understand differences through curiosity and empathy.

## Activity 1

## Social Identity Wheel

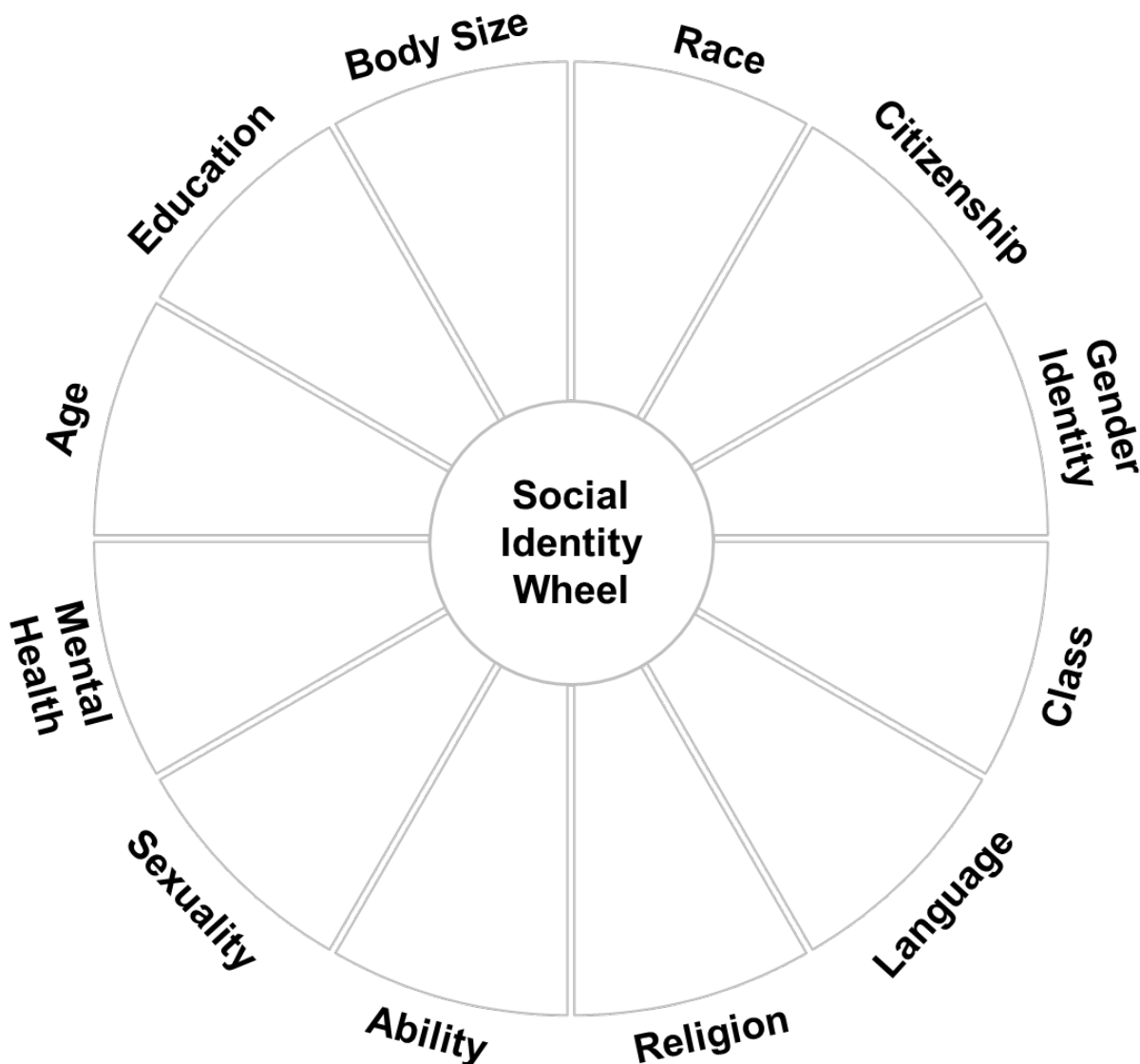
Everyone has a personal and social identity. Identities may include age, gender identity, religious or spiritual affiliation, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, among others.<sup>1</sup> Some identities are things people may seemingly observe (like race or gender identity), while other identities are internalized and are not always easy to perceive (like a disability, socioeconomic status, or education level). Social identity refers to your sense of who you are based on your membership in certain groups.

### Directions

Create your own social identity wheel by filling in each triangle with how you identify. For example, for body size you could write slim, athletic, large, etc., or for age you could write young adult, middle aged, senior, etc.

You can find a list of example identities on [page 8](#) of this resource, including many other identities that are not reflected on the wheel.

If you are viewing this as a pdf, you'll find fillable text boxes in each wedge. If you are using a printed version, feel free to write directly on the wheel. Alternatively, you can also create a list of your identities.



## Reflection Questions

1. Which identities do you think about or feel most often? When are you most aware of these identities?
2. Which identities do you think about or feel least often? Why do you think you aren't aware of them a lot of the time?
3. Which identities have the strongest impact on how you perceive or define yourself? Has this changed throughout your life? If so, how?
4. Which identities have the strongest effect on how others perceive or label you?
5. What did you learn about your identities?

## Activity 2

## Understanding Culture

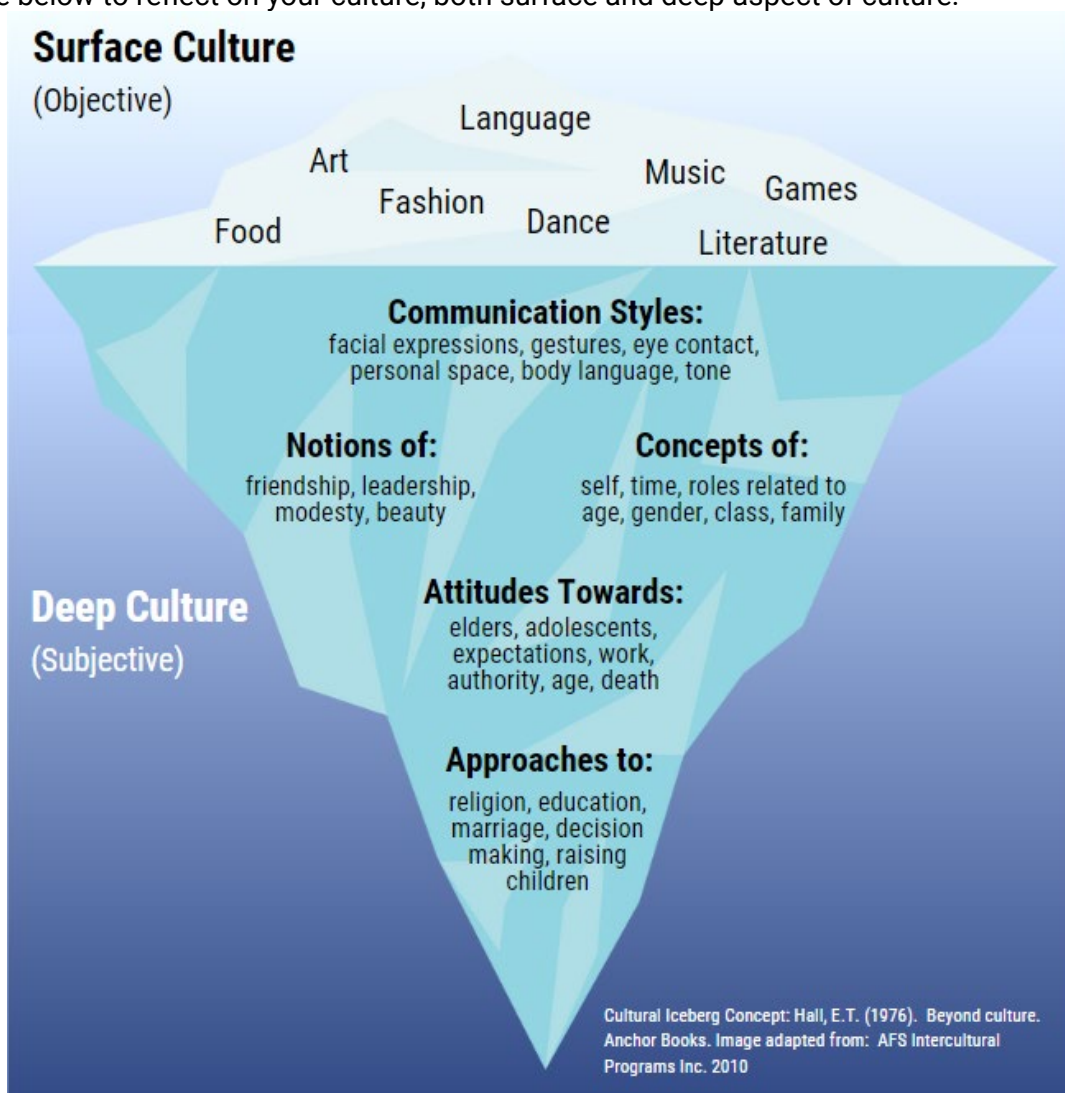
Understanding our own culture and the culture of others can help us have more meaningful interactions with those around us. **Culture** is defined as the characteristics that make up a particular group of people including, but not limited to, religions, political beliefs, languages, attitudes, music, food, socioeconomic status, and behaviors.<sup>2</sup> Cultures vary between groups because they are learned and shaped by the environment.

To help understand aspects of culture, Edward T. Hall (1976) used the metaphor of an iceberg. **The Cultural Iceberg Concept** suggests that about 10% of culture is objective or what we can see above the surface. In contrast, most of culture, about 90%, is hidden below the surface (subjective).<sup>3</sup> Please keep in mind that the cultural iceberg concept is limited with aspects of culture being much more dynamic and complex.

**Dominant culture** refers to the group of cultural values and practices that are predominant in a given society. In society, culture is established and directed by the individuals with the most power.<sup>2</sup> In a culture, a group of people that have the ability to hold power over social institutions and influence the rest of the society's beliefs and actions is considered dominant.

### Directions

Use the image below to reflect on your culture, both surface and deep aspect of culture.



## Reflection Questions

1. How would you define your culture – both surface and deep culture?
2. How is your cultural identity influenced by or related to the dominant culture of where you live?
3. What has been your experience with cultures different from your own? When and how did you first become aware of different cultures?
4. How do aspects of deep culture influence how you interact with others?
5. How might your cultural identity differ from those you work with?

Activity 3

Reflecting on Privilege

We can use the social identity wheel and understanding of culture to explore issues of power and privilege.

**Privilege** is unearned access or advantages granted to specific groups of people because of their membership in a social group.<sup>4</sup> Privilege can be based on a variety of social identities such as race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, ability status, sexuality, age, education level and more.

**Power** exists on personal, interpersonal, and institutional levels, and could look like access to resources, decision making power, or visibility. Our membership within social identity groups (race/gender/age/etc.) influences the type of power we may have in society.<sup>4</sup>

Directions

Reflect on the image below, which has some general examples of identities that might experience more privilege than others. It's important to note that this activity is not meant to judge where you stand, but rather to boost your awareness of where you might be privileged/marginalized in life.

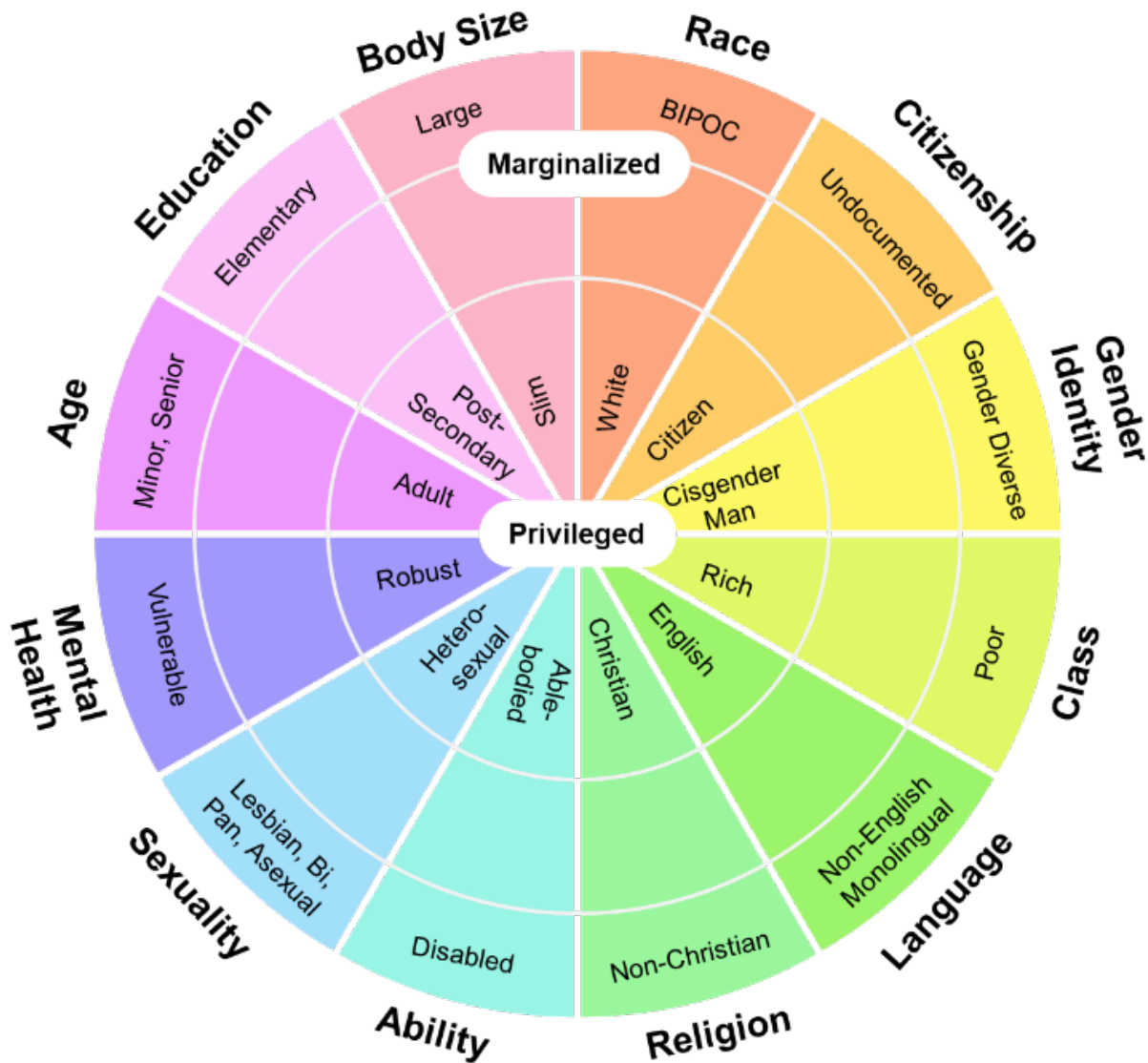


Image adapted from: Duckworth, 2020

## Reflection Questions

1. In which areas are you privileged? Are there areas in which you are not experiencing privileges?
2. Prior to this activity, to what extent were you aware of the areas in which you are privileged/marginalized?
3. How do your identities give or take away power and privilege? What impact does this have on your relationships at work?
4. Thinking about your team; where might your colleagues, direct reports, and leaders reside? What power dynamics might be happening?
5. If you experience privilege, how could you use your social identities to be an ally and advocate for equity?

## Examples of Identities

Examples of different identities to help you fill in your social identity wheel.

### Body Type, Size, Physical Appearance

trim, fat, person of size, thin, in shape, muscular

### Citizenship, Immigration Status

U.S. citizen, immigrant, temporary visa, undocumented

### Class, Economic Background

poor, working class, lower-middle class, upper-middle class, upper class

### Religion, Faith, Beliefs, Values, Ideology

Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Agnostic, Atheist, Secular Humanist

### Sexuality, Romantic, Sexual Orientation

Straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pan-attractional, heterosexual, queer, attractionality, questioning

### Age

child, teenager, young adult, middle-age adult, senior, elderly

### Race

Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Latinx, Black, Arab American, white, bi/multiracial

### Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sex

cisgender, woman, man, transgender, post-gender, agender, femme, butch, intersex, non-binary

### Language, First Language

English, ESL, Spanish, Arabic

### Physical Ability, Developmental (Dis)Ability

Able-bodied, disabled, temporarily disabled, visually impaired, blind, deaf, Deaf, hard of hearing

### Mental, Emotional (Dis)Ability

robust, vulnerable, ADHD, PTSD, depression, anxiety, OCD, autistic, substance use disorder

### Education, Literacy

elementary, GED certified, high school grad, graduate degree literate, functionally illiterate

## Some Additional Examples of Identities Not Represented on the Wheel in Activity 1

### Geographic Location

urban, suburban, rural, major city

### Marital + Relationship Status

single, widowed, married, seeing someone, monogamous, polygamous

### Housing Status

homeowner, renter, transitional, housing insecure, unhoused

### Ethnicity, Heritage + Culture

Irish, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Italian, Mohawk, Jewish, Guatemalan, Lebanese, European-American

### Caretaker + Parental Status

parent, mom, dad, aunt, uncle, grandma, grandpa, caretaker

### Nationality + Birthplace

United States, Nigeria, Korea, Turkey, Argentina, Canada

<sup>1</sup> University of Michigan, LSA Inclusive Teaching. <http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/>

<sup>2</sup> McLennon, T. (2021). *1.0 What is Culture?* Pressbooks.

<https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/intercultural/part/main-body/>

<sup>3</sup> Hall, T. E. (1976). *Beyond Culture*

<sup>4</sup> National Association of School Psychologists. (2016). *Understanding Race and Privilege* [handout]. Bethesda, MD: Author.