

# Exploring Complex Identities within a Social Justice Framework

The grid on page 2 is used to help us think about the complexities of our social identities and how they impact our daily experiences. The first column lists various aspects of identity that are parts of who we are as whole people. The second column lists examples of some groups that are privileged in a U.S. context within the categories listed in column one. The third column lists examples of some groups that, within a U.S. context, are marginalized or experience oppression within the categories listed in column one.

One important thing to understand is that these categories are based on **systems** of privilege and oppression, not on individual experiences. For example, an individual can have pride in their identity as a queer woman of color, or a single parent with a disability, but they are still subject to marginalization within a U.S. context because laws, policies, media, resource distribution, social norms, and other determinants of safety and power are generally set by those who have the most privileged identities.

With this in mind, **please read over the list on page 2 and mark whether you currently belong to a group that is privileged or marginalized within each of the 15 categories.** When you are complete, your list may look like this example:

1 gender	Men	Women, trans, genderqueer, intersex
2 gender identity	Cisgender/Non-Trans	Transgender, genderqueer, gender non-conforming
3 Race	White People	People of Color
4 Age	30s to 50s	Younger or Older
5 Class	Owning Class or Middle Class	Working poor or Working Class
6 Educational Level	College Graduate	High School or Less

Once you have completed page 2, **please answer the reflection questions on page 3.**

	<b><u>GROUPS THAT EXPERIENCE PRIVILEGE IN A U.S. CONTEXT</u></b>	<b><u>GROUPS THAT ARE MARGINALIZED OR OPPRESSED IN A U.S. CONTEXT</u></b>
<b>1. GENDER</b>	MEN	WOMEN; TRANS; GENDERQUEER; INTERSEX
<b>2. GENDER IDENTITY</b>	CISGENDER/NON-TRANS	TRANSGENDER; GENDERQUEER; GENDER NON-CONFORMING
<b>3. RACE</b>	WHITE PEOPLE	PEOPLE OF COLOR
<b>4. SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>	HETEROSEXUAL	GAY; LESBIAN; BISEXUAL; QUEER; QUESTIONING
<b>5. AGE</b>	30S TO EARLY 50S	YOUNGER AND OLDER
<b>6. CLASS</b>	MIDDLE CLASS; OWNING CLASS	WORKING POOR; WORKING CLASS
<b>7. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL</b>	COLLEGE GRADUATE	HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS
<b>8. RELIGION/SPIRITUALITY</b>	CHRISTIAN: PROTESTANT OR CATHOLIC	MUSLIM; JEWISH; BUDDHIST; HINDU; LDS; SIKH; PAGAN; AGNOSTIC; ATHEIST; ETC.
<b>9. NATIONALITY</b>	U.S.-BORN; BORN AS U.S. CITIZEN	BORN OUTSIDE THE U.S.; IMMIGRANT TO U.S.
<b>10. CHILDHOOD FAMILY STRUCTURE</b>	RAISED BY BIOLOGICAL OR ADOPTIVE FAMILY IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT FELT SAFE AND WITHOUT ABUSE	RAISED IN THE FOSTER SYSTEM; RAISED WITH DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, WITH DRUG OR ALCOHOL ABUSE IN THE HOME, AND/OR OTHER HOME EXPERIENCES THAT FELT UNSAFE AND LACKED STABILITY
<b>11. ABILITY/DISABILITY</b>	TEMPORARILY ABLE-BODIED	PEOPLE WITH A PHYSICAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL, OR LEARNING DISABILITY
<b>12. ETHNICITY/CULTURE</b>	WESTERN EUROPEAN	PUERTO RICAN, DINÉ, MEXICAN, NIGERIAN, JEWISH, RUSSIAN, CHINESE, IRANIAN, ETC.
<b>13. SIZE/APPEARANCE</b>	SLENDER; PERCEIVED AS ATTRACTIVE; HANDSOME; BEAUTIFUL; ETC.	OF SIZE; PARTICULARLY TALL OR SHORT; PERCEIVED AS UNATTRACTIVE; ETC.
<b>14. USE OF ENGLISH</b>	“PROPER” ENGLISH	ACCENTED ENGLISH; ANOTHER PRIMARY LANGUAGE
<b>15. MARITAL/PARENTAL STATUS</b>	MARRIED IN A HETEROSEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH OR WITHOUT CHILDREN	DIVORCED; LGBTQ PARENT; DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP; SINGLE PARENT; SINGLE

## Self-Reflection Questions

Take a few minutes to complete the statements below, using the identities you circled on the previous page. You may find that you are a member of the privileged or oppressed/marginalized group in the majority or all of the categories. If so, pay particular attention to your feelings and reactions in noticing that pattern.

1. I am *most* aware of my membership in the \_\_\_\_\_ *privileged* group.
2. I am *least* aware of my membership in the \_\_\_\_\_ *privileged* group.
3. I am *most* aware of my membership in the \_\_\_\_\_ *oppressed/marginalized* group.
4. I am *least* aware of my membership in the \_\_\_\_\_ *oppressed/marginalized* group.
5. Which of your identities do you spend the most time thinking about?
6. What are the most recent memories of noticing your racial identity?
7. What are the earliest memories of noticing your most salient identity (if different from #6)?
8. Which of your identities have the most influence on your own decision making?
9. What emotions were present as you circled identities in the privileged column?
10. What emotions were present as you circled identities in the marginalized column?