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Identity & Context



06 IDENTITY & CONTEXT

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IDENTITY & CONTEXT



ROLE OF MEANINGFUL INTER-GROUP DIALOGUE

Sustained and effective dialogue between distinct groups, in particular between communities of different religions or beliefs, can serve an effective preventative measure, by achieving the alleviation of tensions or suspicion between groups.

A lack of meaningful inter-group communication, and the isolation and insularity of which this is a symptom, is often identified as a significant contributing factor to inter-group tensions, where 'hate speech' is more prevalent, and incitement to violence, hostility or discrimination more likely.

This may be particularly effective in contexts where there is a history of inter-group tensions escalating into incitement of, or actual, incidents of violence and discrimination. However, in order to be effective, dialogue must provide the spaces for a genuine, rather than symbolic, exchange of views, and enable the discussion of differences and disagreements. Dialogue must also be inclusive, allowing for community representation beyond "traditional" leaders and especially bringing the voices of women, girls, youth and displaced/minority communities to the forefront.

Informal exchanges between communities, for example in the context of sports or cultural exchanges, or designed to address practical issues of common concern, can also prove to be important trust- and relationship-building exercises. The impact of inter-group dialogue and communication initiatives can be enhanced where they receive public support from government and policy makers and religious leaders.

Outside the context of formal or informal "dialogues", representative of different communities, in particular religious leaders and other community leaders, should be empowered to speak out in response to intolerance and discrimination. This is particularly important where proponents of intolerance and discrimination portray themselves as representative of, or acting on behalf of, specific communities or interest groups. Religious and community leaders are well placed not only to refute these claims of representation, but also to substantively engage with and challenge an individual's position, and thus offer a persuasive counter-narrative.

Prejudice Awareness

Societies across the globe are comprised of countries with different ethnic, religious or cultural groups and sometimes these groups feel like they do not fit together. This may be due to historical, colonial legacy or more recent events. This leads to tension which in turn may lead to conflicts.

Identity based conflicts are hard to manage as identities are complex. We are often aware of the aspects of our identities that are targeted by a dominant group in society. We are hence predisposed to be prejudiced and hold biases towards groups of people we haven't interacted with beyond a certain level. Our identities are not static, we negotiate them on a daily basis. Our identities as a member of a group can be challenged or threatened at the individual level, in a one - on - one interaction with a member of the dominant group just as easily as the entire group we belong to, can be challenged or threatened at the national or international level.

The reason why we need to learn about identity and be aware of prejudices is to help us manage our differences and emerging conflicts. Being aware of your own identity, understanding what this identity means to you and learning how to accept others' identity are essential components of conflict prevention and significant considerations when managing conflicts.

In the Nature of Prejudice, Gordon Allport (1958) observes that prejudice can be seen as a series of increasingly more serious actions ranging from simple acts of bias to avoidance, exclusion, physical violence and genocide. If we look at examples of genocide in the 20th century, we see how acts of bias can escalate to genocide over just a few years. Observing how bias can escalate reminds us why it is important for individuals to address seemingly harmless acts of bias when they occur.

General Assumptions Regarding Prejudice (Cotton, 1993)

- Prejudice is learned and can be unlearned
- An effective method of addressing prejudice is to focus on the self and then to explore similarities and differences between groups
- People who feel good about themselves do not need to denigrate others
- Facts alone do not lead to improved intergroup relations. This requires education focusing on cooperative learning and critical thinking.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Who am I?

How do you identify yourself?

Who are we?

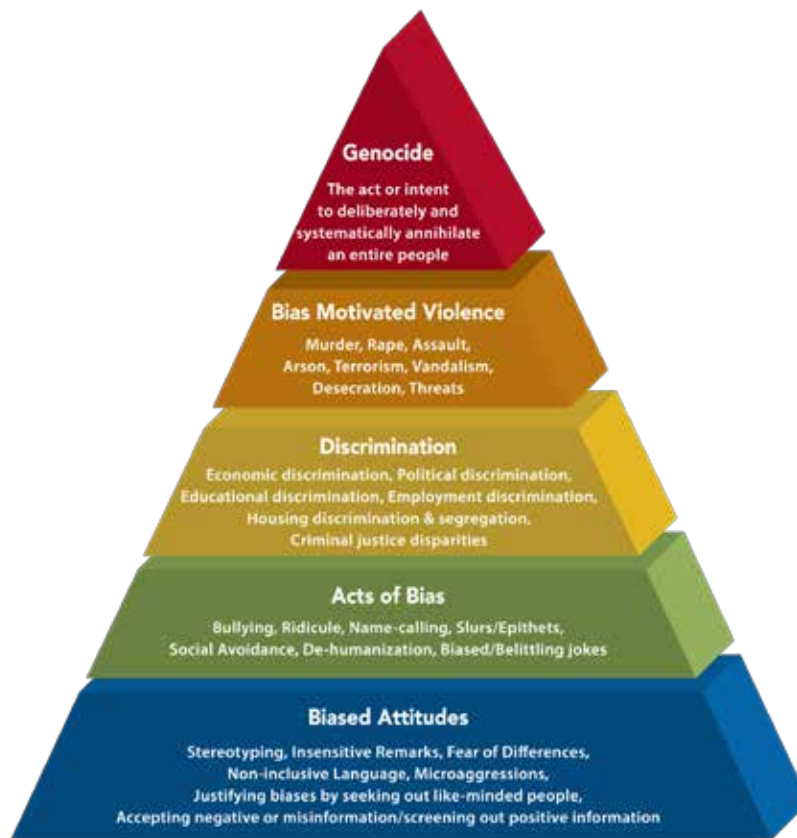
- How would you describe your cultural background and upbringing?
- How do you identify yourself? (age, tribe, race, political, religion, gender?)
- What values and traditions were important to your family and community groups?
- What are the benefits and challenges to identifying with a certain group?
- Examine key aspects of your identity in relation to environment, circumstance & experience
- Layers of identity: Broader perspective vs personal perspective
- Communal/tribe/political/religious/professional identities - blurred across various lines

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PYRAMID OF HATE

The Pyramid shows biased behaviors, growing in complexity from the bottom to the top. Although the behaviors at each level negatively impact individuals and groups, as one moves up the pyramid, the behaviors have more life-threatening consequences. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or “normal,”

it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted. In response to the questions of the world community about where the hate of genocide comes from, the Pyramid of Hate demonstrates that the hate of genocide is built upon the acceptance of behaviors described in the lower levels of the pyramid.



MISTAKEN IDENTITIES PODCAST

British-born, Ghanaian-American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, explores confusions of identity through an examination of four central kinds of identity - creed, country, colour and culture. He argues against a mythical, romantic view of nationhood, saying instead it should rest on a commitment to shared values.

Listen to the programs on the accompanying USB key.

CREED: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07z43ds>

COUNTRY: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07zz5mf>

COLOUR: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b080t63w>

CULTURE: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0811kkj>

BBC Reith Lectures: Mistaken Identities 2016

Philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah



THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Religious leaders have a strong potential to influence the lives and behaviour of those who follow their faith and share their beliefs. When they speak out, their messages can have wide ranging impact. Traditional and Religious leaders have an important role to play by speaking out against hate speech and ethnically motivated violence.

- Spreading messages of peace, tolerance, acceptance and mutual respect and by taking action to reduce tensions between communities.
- Disseminating positive and alternative speech online and offline; ensure that counter and alternative messages are disseminated in local languages, including in local dialects.
- Issuing and circulating reports of religious statements and decrees by religious leaders and authorities denouncing incitement and/or offering alternative messages.
- Organising community level initiatives such as „cultural weeks‘ and form rapid response networks. Disseminate messages in various forms, including through press conferences, press statements, blogs, videos, films, music and visual art.
- Building robust multi-faith social action campaigns to prevent and curb incitement to violence. Ensure campaign leaders are diverse faith actors (women, young people, and people of different professions).
- Disseminate information about activities aimed at alternative narratives.
- Engage youth, including through inter-religious justice-focused initiatives, in tackling injustice in a constructive way.
- Listen to and address the grievances of youths, even when what they say is shocking or controversial.
- Advocate with state institutions and the private sector on the importance of providing youth with economic opportunities and vocational training.
- Identifying and training “youth ambassadors” to become dedicated actors and peer-educators in countering radicalization and violent extremism.



SOCIAL IDENTITY WHEEL

The Social Identity Wheel is an activity that encourages students to identify and reflect on the various ways they identify socially, how those identities become visible or more keenly felt at different times, and how those identities impact the ways others perceive or treat them.

The worksheet prompts students to fill in various social identities (such as race, gender, sex, ability disability, sexual orientation, etc.) and further categorize those identities based on which matter most in their self-perception and which matter most in others' perception of them. The wheels can be used as a prompt for small or large group discussion or reflective writing on identity.

Social Identity Wheel (adapted from “Voices of Discovery”)

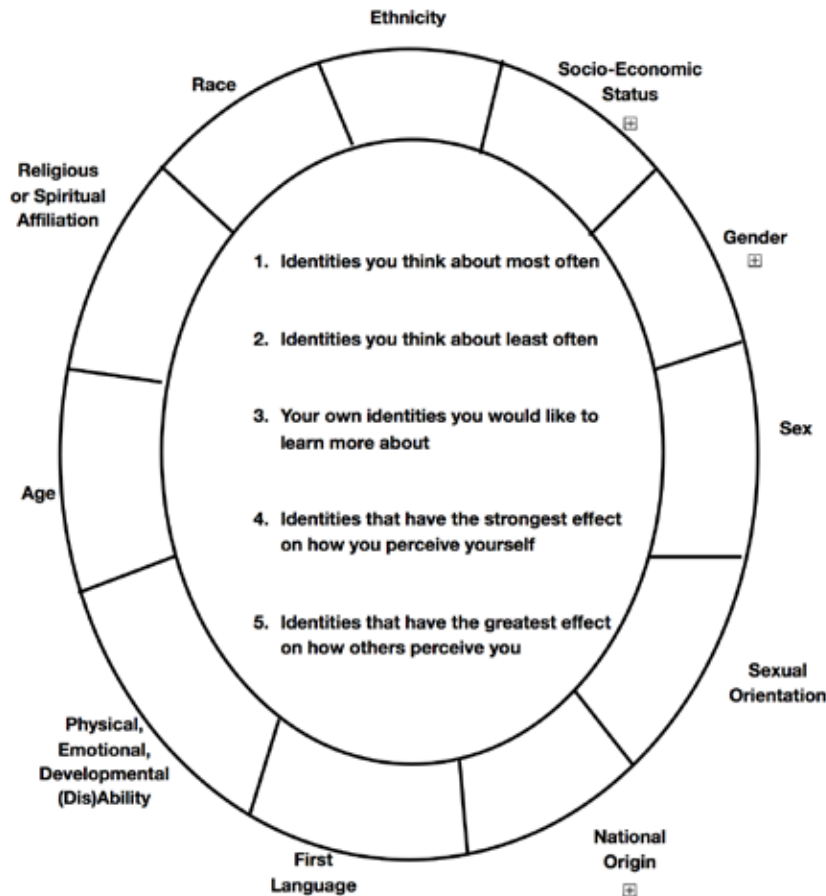
Image description: The chart below features a circle that is separated into 11 sections.

Each section is labeled: (starting at the top and moving clockwise around the circle) ethnicity; socio-economic status; gender; sex; sexual orientation; national origin; first language; physical, emotional,

developmental (dis)ability; age; religious or spiritual affiliation; race.

In the center of the circle, there are five numbered prompts:

1. Identities you think about most often
2. Identities you think about least often
3. Your own identities you would like to know more about
4. Identities that have the strongest effect on how you perceive yourself
5. Identities that have the greatest effect on how others perceive you.



Citations: Adapted for use by the Program on Intergroup Relations and the Spectrum Center, University of Michigan. Resource hosted by LSA Inclusive Teaching Initiative, University of Michigan <http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/>



CYCLE OF SOCIALIZATION

The Cycle of Socialization helps us understand the way in which we are socialized to play certain roles, how we are affected by issues of oppression, and how we help maintain an oppressive system based upon power.

The Cycle is comprised of 3 arrows, 3 circles, and a core center.

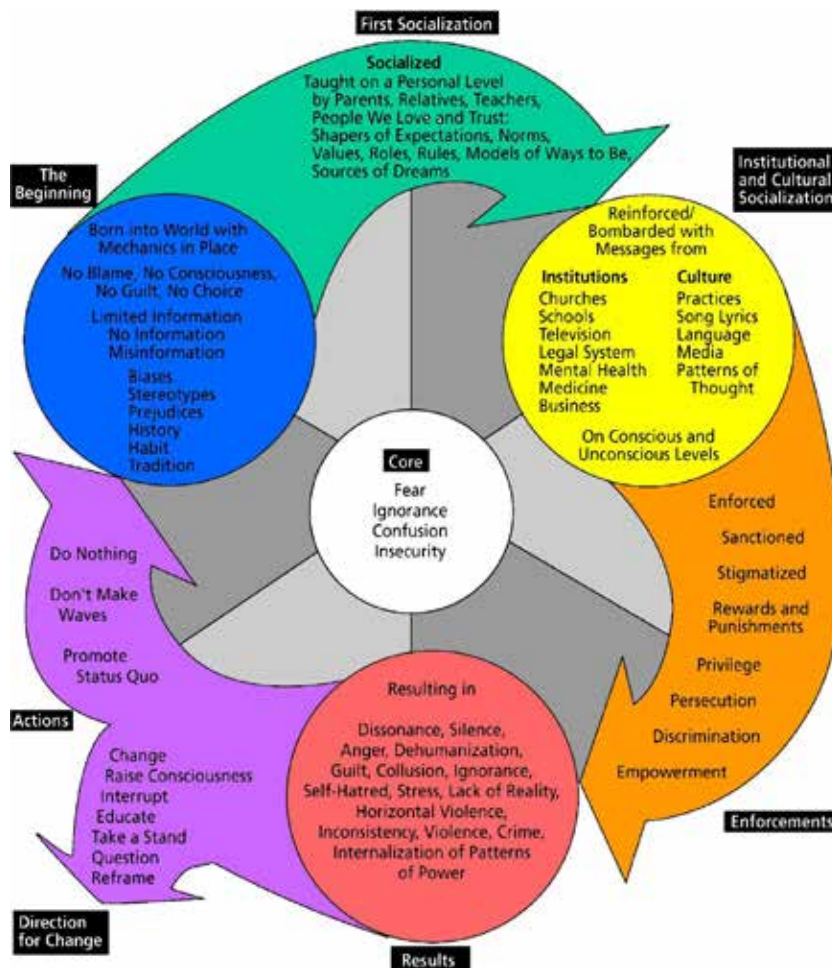


Diagram: Cycle of Socialization, Developed by Bobbie Harro (2008)

Each of these components represents the following:

1. The beginning of the cycle, depicted by the 1st circle, represents the situation into which we were born. We have no control over this. We are also born without bias, assumptions, or questions. We are either “lucky” to be born into a privileged situation or “unlucky” to be born into an underprivileged situation.
2. The 1st arrow represents the fact that our socialization process begins immediately. We are given a pink blanket if we are a girl or a blue one if we are a boy. The rules and norms are already in place and we subtly (and in not so subtly) are made aware of the rewards of conforming and the consequences of rebelling.
3. The second circle represents the institutions that help shape our views and beliefs, and help instill within us prejudice or acceptance.
4. The second arrow represents the way in which the instilling of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors reinforce the cycle of oppression. Behaving differently is not as simple as most of us think. We are rewarded for good behavior – conforming to the norms and standards. By the same token, we are punished for bad behavior – questioning or rebelling against oppressive societal norms.
5. The third circle represents the devastating result upon all of us that this self-perpetuated cycle of oppression produces.
6. The final arrow represents a point at which we all arrive – the results of the cycle. We are forced to make a decision, even if that decision is to do nothing. Doing nothing is the easier choice, especially for those

who benefit from the perpetuation of the cycle: we are all victims of the cycle and we are all hurt by it. Oppression hurts the oppressed and the oppressor.

7. And finally, it is the wheel that turns or enables any cycle. At the center or core of the cycle of socialization are fear, misunderstanding, insecurity, confusion, etc.

This handout offers a diagrammatic representation of how social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and class are constructed and reinforced by socio-cultural interactions and context. It prompts students to reflectively engage with aspects of their own identities and identities they learned about but don't share to consider how their understanding of identities is enforced and how they reinforce or challenge the socio-cultural construction of identities. The activity includes questions for reflection and discussion that will encourage students to recognize the larger social context of identities and how identities are socially constructed and maintained.

The resulting systemic changes in structure, assumptions, philosophy, rules and roles can start with each individual and combine to work through the interrelated components of society, building on each others progress and interpersonal change.

- **Waking up**
- **Getting Ready**
- **Reaching Out**
- **Building connection & community**
- **Coalescing**
- **Creating Change**
- **Maintaining**

Taking each of these areas in turn, draw a diagram with the group showing your perspective on how they relate to the physical and social environment you are living in. Think about what you can do next? Shifting attitudes and cultural norms takes time, even though there will inevitably be setbacks, stay positive, communicate with your networks, and remember to celebrate your achievements!