



My Multicultural Self

What it is

Youth learn about their own identity and the stereotypes we have, identifying what they consider to be the most important aspects of their own identities by sharing stories about when they were proud to be part of a particular group and when it was especially hurtful to be associated with a particular group. They will challenge stereotypes by developing their own statements and reflecting on where stereotypes come from and how to eliminate them.

Why it matters

This activity highlights the multiple dimensions of our identities. It addresses the relationships between our desires to self-define our identities and the social constructs that label us regardless of how we define ourselves.

The key to this activity is the process of examining one's own identity and the stereotypes associated with that identity, then having one's own stereotypes challenged through others' stories and stereotype challenges. It encourages participants to think about the stereotypes they apply to people and to make a conscious effort to think more deeply about them, eventually eliminating them.

Background

Each person has many intersecting identities, such as their roles in family (e.g., sibling, parent), religion, ethnicity, nationality, age, ability, gender, and level of education. Each of us have identities that are marginalized and identities that grant us privilege, depending on where we are and what we're doing. Often, we experience both at the same time. Individuals may share, emphasize, or de-emphasize certain identities in different spaces, depending on what is accepted or valued there and what they have previously experienced.

Getting started

Time: 30 minutes

Grade level: 6-12

Delivery mode: In person or online

Materials:

- [My Multicultural Self worksheet](#)
- Pencils or pens

Facilitator prep: Facilitators may watch the training video about My Multicultural Self. It may also be helpful to do one for yourself to be prepared to share ideas when needed.

What to do

Introduction (5 minutes)

1. Explain that today, we will explore our own identities and learn about stereotypes that relate to different identities.
2. Ask youth to share what they think stereotypes are.
 - *A stereotype is a widely held, but oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person. It is an expectation that people have about every person of a particular group.*
3. As the facilitator, share a few examples yourself so that youth do not accidentally offend their peers.
 - *Examples: girls like dolls, boys like trucks, Americans are overweight, Asians are good at math, poor people are less intelligent, old people are wise, Black people are good at sports, Christians don't believe in science, boys will be boys, athletes are not smart, goths are not friendly, bikers are scary*
4. Explain that in our activity today, we will explore our own identities more and talk about the stereotypes we have learned.

Activity (15 minutes)

Facilitator note: It can be especially effective if you participate while you facilitate. If you are willing to share your own experiences, participants are more likely to feel open to share their own. Encourage youth to share, but also recognize that comfort and vulnerability take time, especially if youth are meeting for the first time.

5. Pass out copies of the attached [My Multicultural Self worksheet](#) and break youth up into small groups of 2-4.
6. Give instructions:
 - Circles: For the first part of this activity, you will write your name in the center circle of your worksheet. Then, fill in all the other circles with an aspect (part) of your identity you consider to be among the most important in defining yourself. Share with your small group.
 - Examples of aspects: female, athlete, Jewish, brother, educator, 4-H'er, Asian American, middle class, LGBTQ, musician, sibling of a brother with a disability.
 - Questions: After you are done with your circles, talk about the 3 questions and the stereotype statement in your group.
 - You will share stories about when you felt proud to have one of the aspects in your circles as part of your identity. Next, you will share a story about a time it was painful to have one of the aspects of your identity you wrote in a circle.
 - Finally, you will share a stereotype you have heard about one aspect of your identity that fails to describe you accurately by completing the stereotype statement.
 - Example: "I am a Christian, but I am NOT opposed to science."
 - I am a woman, but I do know how to rebuild car engines."
 - Allow 8-10 minutes for 4-H'ers to complete the activity. Remind them with 2 minutes remaining that they must fill in the stereotype sentence.

7. Bring everyone back into the whole group to share and reflect.
8. Stories: Ask the group for reactions to the stories they heard. Ask whether anyone would like to share a story with the group.
9. Stereotype statements: The next step will involve individuals standing up and reading their stereotype statements if they feel comfortable sharing. Encourage youth to share, but recognize they may not have ever shared these personal stereotypes with anyone else. You can simply go around the room or have people randomly stand up and read their statements. Make sure that others are respectful and actively listening since people are being vulnerable by sharing. Start by reading your own statement. This part can be very powerful if you introduce it energetically. It may take a few moments to start the flow of sharing, so allow for silent moments. Remind everyone that they should only share a stereotype that is a part of their experience. After everyone has shared their stereotype statement, say that anyone can share another one. Model by sharing another one about yourself.

Reflection (10 minutes)

10. Reflect on the experience as a group:
 - How do the aspects of your identity that you chose as important differ from the aspects other people use to judge you?
 - Did anybody hear someone challenge a stereotype that you once believed? If so, what?
 - How did it feel to stand up and challenge your stereotype?
 - I heard several moments of laughter. What was that about? (*There is usually some laughter when somebody shares common stereotypes such as "I may be Arab, but I am not a terrorist" or "I may be a teacher, but I do have a social life."*)
 - Where do stereotypes come from? (How are they connected to what people see and learn growing up?)
 - How can we get rid of stereotypes?

Facilitators note: It is important, especially for the final part of the activity when youth are sharing their stereotypes, to allow for silences. People will be hesitant to share initially, but it will pick up once they get going. Allow time at the end for participants to talk more about the stereotype they shared.

Take it further

- Youth may create art pieces to illustrate their multiple identities.
- Youth may write stories or poems to describe their multiple identities. If they are comfortable, they may then share with the group.
- Youth may look up information or talk to their family members to learn more about their background and what influences their identities.



References

This activity is adapted from resources developed by Paul C. Gorski through an Equity Literacy Institute and EdChange project.

Gorski, P. C. (2020). Circles of my multicultural self. Equity Literacy Institute and EdChange.
<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html>

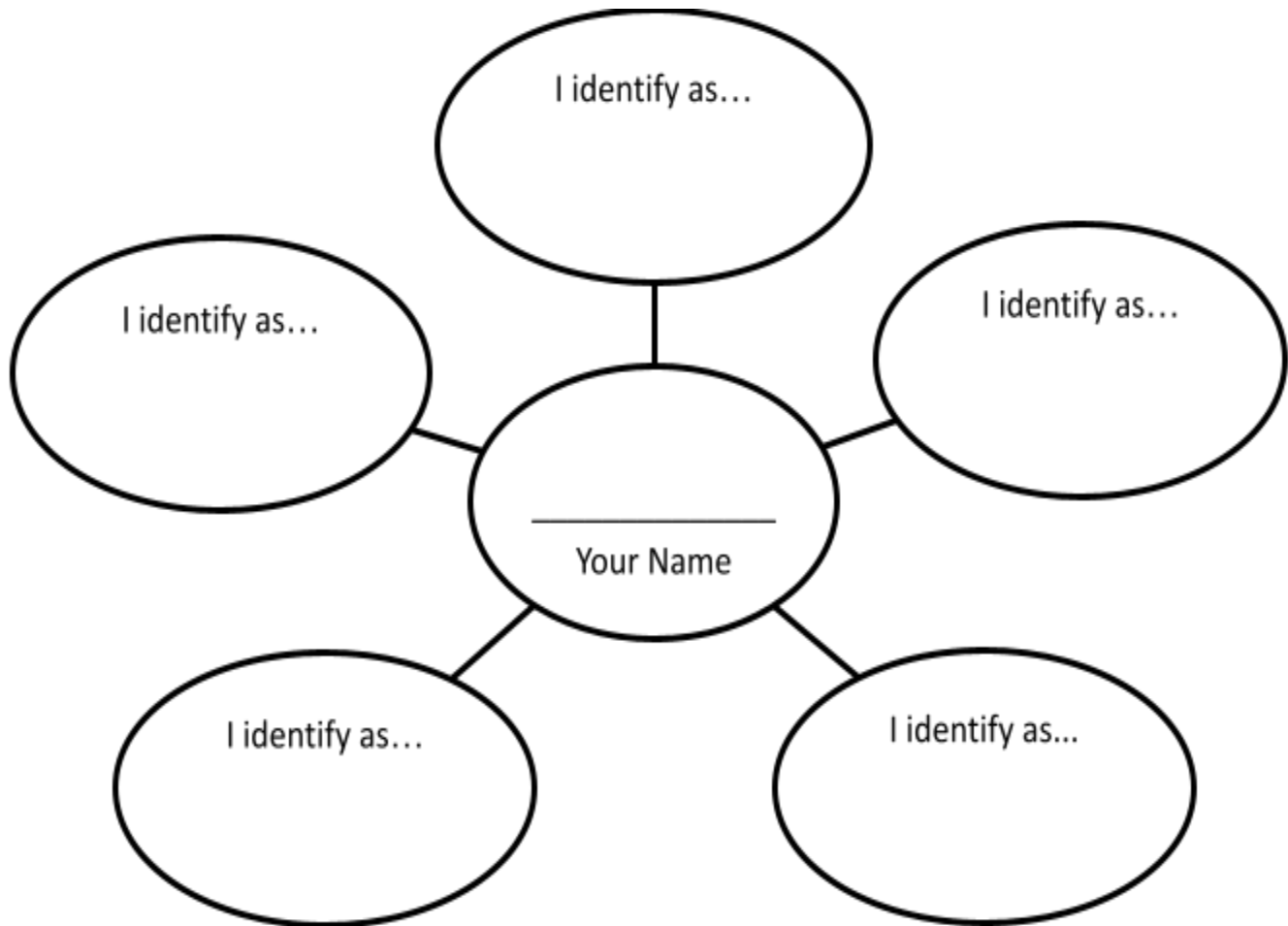
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My Multicultural Self

Instructions

Write your name in the center circle. Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the other circles—an identifier or descriptor that you feel is important in defining you.



1. Share a story about a time you were especially proud to identify with one of the descriptors you used above.
2. Share a story about a time it was especially painful to be identified with one of the aspects of your identity.
3. Name a stereotype associated with one of the groups with which you identify that is not consistent with who you are. Fill in the following sentence:

I am (a/an) _____ but I am NOT (a/an) _____.

For example, if one of my identifiers was "African American," and I thought a stereotype was that all African Americans are athletes, my sentence would be: I am an African American, but I am NOT an athlete.

Video Notes for facilitator

Intercultural Communication video (26:42 min. total): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXwxg-6dUbE>

You will show the video from 17:03-24:42 (about 8 minutes).

This is the general content of the video clip (by time):

- (17:03) 6 dimensions of cultural difference:
- (17:30) Introduction to the video clip highlighting the tensions between a Chinese-American daughter and her Chinese parents
- (18:36-21:35) Video clip of The Joy Luck Club
- (21:35-24:42) Debrief about what happened and the dimensions of cultural difference

What should Rich have done according to Chinese culture?

- Tasted the wine instead of drinking all of it.
- Ate small portions until everyone had some.
- Not bragged that he was a fast learner, especially since he had difficulty with chopsticks.
- Say her cooking was the best (instead of saying it wasn't so bad and trying to improve it with salt). The mom is supposed to insult her own cooking and tell people not to eat it. Then, everyone is supposed to try it and say it's the best they have ever eaten.

How does what happened apply to cultural differences?

- U.S. Culture – Rich
 - Individualism: You take care of yourself. When eating, you get as much food as you need.
 - Low-context culture: You mean what you (verbally) say.
 - Low power distance: Everyone is seen as equal. You don't need others' approval for things.
- Chinese Culture – Waverly
 - Collectivism: You make sure everyone is taken care of by making sure everyone gets some food before you get seconds (or a larger portion).
 - High-context cultures: What you say in words is not always what you mean. What you mean comes from your words, gestures, intonations, where you are, culture/traditions, and such.
 - High power distance: Waverly wanted and needed approval from her mom.

Intercultural Communication discussion worksheet

Directions

Review the information below about intercultural communication. Discuss the questions below as a group and record highlights from your conversation.

Intercultural communication is when we share information with people from different cultures or social groups. This includes people with different religious, social, ethnic, ability, and educational backgrounds. We try to understand how people with different cultural identities act, communicate, and view the world. People who are good at intercultural communication communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts. This takes a lot of practice.

Individualism vs. Collectivism: Individualism is focused on the rights, interests, and preferences of each person. Being independent is very important. Collectivism emphasizes the importance of the community. Interdependence and long-term relationships are more highly valued.

Power Distance: Power distance describes how authority is viewed within families, organizations, and governments. Low power distance cultures prefer equality of status and power between members. Respect or power is earned instead of given simply because of age, education, position, status, or other characteristics. High power distance cultures expect and accept unequal power among members (parent/child, teacher/student, boss). People show respect to a person of authority.

Context: Low and high-context cultures describe the range of how direct the messages exchanged in a culture are and how important contextual cues are in communication. Low-context cultures are more straightforward. You say what you mean. High-context cultures use more body language, nonverbal cues, tone of voice, and overall context. Communication focuses on the underlying context, not just the words.

Questions

1. How do you describe your own culture based on the 3 areas of cultural difference above?
2. What were the cultural differences you saw in the video clip?
3. What is challenging when talking to someone from another culture?
4. What could you do to overcome those challenges and better communicate with others?
5. How could you support other 4-H'ers with intercultural communication?