

## Understanding Our Social Identities

One part of our self-concept is our personal identity, how each of us thinks of himself or herself as a unique human being. Another important part is our social identity, groups that to which we perceive we belong. Group identification or membership influences our outlook and behavior, to the degree that we accept and adhere to the values, beliefs, customs, and actions of a group.

We can also acquire group identities as others, on the basis of appearance or some other attribute, categorize us as members of a group or subgroup (and that attribution may not be correct). A visiting African professor can be seen as African-American, based on the color of his skin. A person with a Hispanic surname can be seen as a foreigner or immigrant, even though her family has lived in the United States for over 400 years.

All of us have multiple identities. The worksheet Understanding our Social Identities can be a useful tool for students to use in coming to grips with what is important to them in terms of their self-concept.

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<b>Identity</b> <i>(Specify in each category how you identify yourself— for example, under “Sexual Identity,” heterosexual, homosexual, etc.)</i>	How important is this identity to you? (1-10, ten is high)	How apparent is this identity to someone who only sees you or does not know you well? (1-10, ten is high)	How highly regarded is this identity by society as a whole? (1-10, ten is high)	Ways in which this identity is positively viewed by society/ aspects of society?	Ways in which this identity is negatively viewed by society/ aspects of society?
Race:					
Ethnicity:					
Social class:					
Gender:					

Sexual identity:					
Ability/Disability (able-bodied, with cerebral palsy, etc.):					
Spirituality/Religion, Membership in faith community:					
Occupation/Proposed occupation:					
Membership in social organization:					
Other:					