**Individual and Society: Identity**

**Each of the following factors influences who we are:**

* Individual choices and passions
* Legacies of values, or mores, inherited from community, family, and other important individuals in our lives
* Labels our society uses to organize and categorize its members [[1]](#footnote-1)

**IDENTITY CHART:** [**Link to Facing History Explanation**](https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-strategies/identity-charts)

**Brainstorm:** *What factors contribute to who you are?*

Activity: Creating an Identity Chart[[2]](#footnote-2)

*Use the following steps to create an identity chart for yourself:*

1. Draw a circle in the middle of a blank piece of paper or page in your journal.
2. Begin with the words or phrases that describe the way you see yourself.
3. Add those words and phrases to your chart.
4. Most people define themselves by using categories important to their culture. They include not only gender, age, and physical characteristics but also ties to a particular religion, class, neighborhood, school, and nation. Consider if any of these characteristics belong on your chart.
5. You may wish to add new categories to your identity chart. How much of your identity do you create and how much of it is determined by things beyond your control? What other factors influence your identity? What can you add that does not fall into any of the categories listed above?
6. How does the way that other people think about you impact your identity? Consider multiple perspectives. Think about these questions as you think about what else to add to your chart:

* What labels would others attach to you?
* Do they see you as a leader or a follower? A conformist or a rebel?
* Are you a peacemaker, a bully, or a bystander?
* How do society’s labels influence the way you see yourself? The kinds of choices you and others make each day? For example, if a person is known as a bully, how likely is he or she to live up to that label?[[3]](#footnote-3)

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Activity: **Pair-Share**

* Find someone in the room you do not know to spend 2 minutes sharing your identity chart. Repeat.

**Guiding Questions for Class Discussion:**

* ***To what extent do we choose the names and labels others use for us?***
* ***What parts of our identities do we choose for ourselves? What parts are chosen for us by others, or by society?[[4]](#footnote-4)***

**Discussion on Stereotypes and Bias**[[5]](#footnote-5)

* Begin this discussion with the class by sharing the following quotation by psychologist Deborah Tannen:

“We all know we are unique individuals, but we tend to see others as representatives of groups. It’s a natural tendency, since we must see the world in patterns in order to make sense of it; we wouldn’t be able to deal with the daily onslaught of people and objects if we couldn’t predict a lot about them and feel that we know who or what they are.”

Activity: Ask students to respond to Tannen in writing/ in their journals.

Do they agree? What is the benefit of seeing the world in patterns and viewing others as representatives of groups? What gets lost when we categorize our experiences in this way? What kinds of stories do we attach to the groups we use to categorize other people? When is it offensive or harmful to see others as representatives of groups?

Ask students to write a working definition for the words *stereotype and bias*.

Discuss these as a class to come to a consensus on their meaning.

1. Adapted from *Facing History and Ourselves Teaching Mockingbird*, p 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Adapted from *Facing History and Ourselves Teaching Mockingbird*](https://www.facinghistory.org/mockingbird) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Teaching Mockingbird, p.27* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [From *Teaching History and Ourselves The Reconstruction Era and the Fragility of Democracy*](https://www.facinghistory.org/reconstruction-era)  [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. From *Facing History and Ourselves Teaching Mockingbird,* pp 24/29 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)