

# Exercise: Understanding and communicating about group differences

## Objectives

- To become aware of our group memberships and the ways they affect our experiences, assumptions and perceptions.
- To become aware of how others' group memberships affect their experiences, assumptions and perceptions.
- To explore the similarities and differences between different types of group identities (cultural, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, social, functional, etc.)
- To build skills in talking directly about differences.

## Pre-Class Assignment

In class, we will engage in small group and full class discussions designed to address the four objectives above. Make notes regarding your responses to the six questions below. Your notes may be brief; feel free to use bullet points. You may type or handwrite your notes. **You will turn your notes in at the end of the session.**

Before class, reflect on your experience entering a setting (some aspect of high school, college, an internship, summer job, an extracurricular organization, etc.), and think of a *significant* way in which you were in the **MINORITY** among your peers.

1. What impact did this identity have on *my early behaviors*? Did I make action choices differently than I might have if I had been in the majority?
2. What impact did this identity have on *others' perceptions of me*? What evidence did I have of this? What were the implications/consequences of these perceptions?
3. What impact did this have on *my perceptions of others*? On what evidence did I base these perceptions? What were the implications/consequences of these perceptions?

Then, reflect on your experience entering a setting (some aspect of high school, college, an internship, summer job, an extracurricular organization, etc.), and think of a *significant* way in which you were in the **MAJORITY** among your peers.

4. What impact did this identity have on *my early behaviors*? Did I make action choices differently than I might have if I had been in the majority?
5. What impact did this identity have on *others' perceptions of me*? What evidence did I have of this? What were the implications/consequences of these perceptions?
6. What impact did this have on *my perceptions of others*? On what evidence did I base these perceptions? What were the implications/consequences of these perceptions?

Bring your notes to class. They will serve as the basis of our small and large group discussions, and you will turn them in at the end of the session.

This exercise was developed by Dr. Mary C. Gentile and is used with permission. Gentile is the director of the [Giving Voice to Values Curriculum](#).