

Bridging Writerly Identities and Discourse Communities through Personal and Social Identity Wheels¹

Goal: I use this activity to bridge the first two units of ISP100: Writing for University and Beyond. These units focus on writing stories (or literacy narratives) and discourse community analyses, respectively. The activity invites students to recognize the ways in which their identities are informed by their belonging to various discourse communities. Two mapping exercises, punctuated by moments of small-group and full-group discussion, allow them to chart potential pathways for their discourse community analyses essays (one of their main assignments). This activity is also an opportunity for community building in the classroom, and I have found that students enjoy reflecting about themselves and learning about each other as they fill out the handouts and discuss some of their answers with their peers and instructor.

Format: Last semester, I facilitated this as an in-class activity (45min. approx.), as I believe that students benefit from group discussion as they complete their wheels. However, the resource could also be adapted to be used as an at-home brainstorming activity.

Note: After introducing this activity to students, I emphasize two things before we begin:

- 1) They can engage with the questions in wheel to the extent that they feel comfortable.
- 2) They get choose what/how much information they share about themselves when they discuss their answers in small groups and with the whole class.

How I Use the Wheels:

Part I: Personal Identity

- Introduce personal identity wheel and invite students to fill out the handout.
- Small Group Share-Out: Ask students to share a couple of their answers with 1-2 peers.
- Full Group Check-In: What was the easiest category to fill out? What felt more difficult?

Part II: Social Identity

- Introduce the social identity wheel and invite students to fill out the handout. They will likely have questions about the meaning of some categories, and clarification may lead to meaningful discussion about the uses and limitations of these labels.
- Full Group Debrief: With the social identity wheel, discussion revolves around their experiences arriving at answers, rather than the answers themselves. Here are some possible questions for discussion:

¹ This activity and handouts adapt resources originally developed by the Equitable Teaching Initiative at the University of Michigan: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/personal-identity-wheel/>

- How was the process of filling out this wheel different from the personal wheel?
- Which of these categories do you think about most often? Which ones do you think about least often? Which categories would you like to learn more about?
- Which categories have the strongest effect on how you perceive yourself?
- Which categories have the greatest effect on how others perceive you?

Part III: Community

- Take a second look at your personal and social identity wheels. What are some communities relevant to specific aspects of your identity? Write down the names of some of these communities on the wheels' periphery (here, I usually offer examples from my own answers to the wheel handouts).
- Which of these communities fulfill John Swales' criteria² to qualify as a discourse community (e.g.: shared goals, lexis, genres, membership and hierarchy, horizons of expectation, etc.)?
- Full Group Share-Out: What are some of the communities that you might be interested in studying?

² Swales, J. M. (2016). Reflections on the concept of discourse community. *ASp: La Revue Du GERAS*, 69, pp. 7-19.
<https://journals.openedition.org/asp/4774>

Personal Identity Wheel³

A circular diagram titled 'Personal Identity Wheel' consisting of two concentric circles. The space between the circles is divided into six equal segments by radial lines. Each segment is labeled with a category of personal identity, with the text rotated 45 degrees clockwise. Starting from the top and moving clockwise, the labels are: 'A SKILL YOU ARE PROUD OF', 'FAVOURITE MUSIC, MOVIE, OR BOOK', 'YOUR MAJOR/MINOR(S)', 'FAVOURITE FOOD', 'HOBBIES', and 'FAMILY ROLES'. The center of the wheel contains the text 'THREE ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE YOURSELF:' followed by three numbered lines for writing.

A SKILL YOU ARE PROUD OF

FAVOURITE MUSIC, MOVIE, OR BOOK

YOUR MAJOR/MINOR(S)

FAVOURITE FOOD

HOBBIES

FAMILY ROLES

THREE ADJECTIVES TO DESCRIBE YOURSELF:

1. _____

2. _____

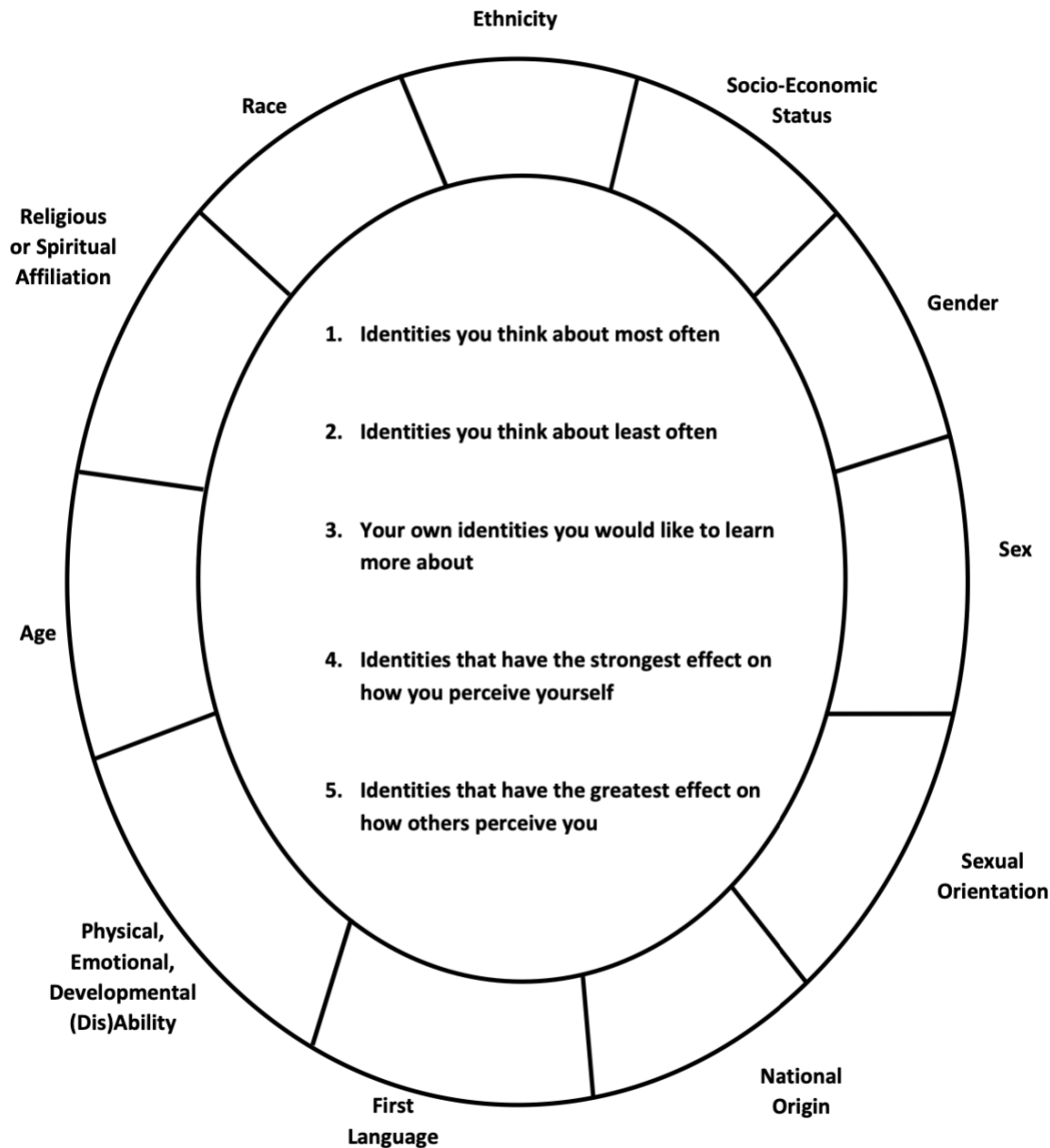
3. _____

³ This is an adaptation of one of the resources developed by the Program on Intergroup Relations and the Spectrum Center, University of Michigan. Original resources available here: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/personal-identity-wheel/>

Social Identity Wheel⁴

Notes:

- The social identity categories in this wheel are non-exhaustive and open to contestation.
- You are in control of how much you want to share and how much to keep private.



⁴ This is an adaptation of one of the resources developed by the Program on Intergroup Relations and the Spectrum Center, University of Michigan. Original resources available here: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/personal-identity-wheel/>