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THE RES ED REPORT

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Developing Self-Awareness through Multiple Dimensions of Identity

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For some, the purpose of higher education is job training and/or preparing students for their careers. The greater purpose of higher education, however, is to prepare students for their next phase of life. This certainly includes academic and career pursuits, but should not be limited to such. As you make your way through the TCNJ experience it is our hope that you will learn to explore who you are as a person, develop self-awareness, and engage in critical reflection. In short, we hope you will grow.

One essential concept to developing self-awareness and personal growth is identity. As an academic concept identity has been explored in myriad ways. There are numerous theories that have grown from various theoretical paradigms and perspectives. Identity, as a social construct, is shaped by the forces that surround us. The American Psychological Association defines identity as “an individual’s sense of self defined by (a) a set of physical, psychological, and interpersonal characteristics that is not wholly shared with any other person and (b) a range of affiliations (e.g., ethnicity) and social roles.” Simply put, Identity is how we make meaning of our sense of self.

Susan Jones, Marylu McEwan, and Elisa Abes developed a grounded theory called “Multiple Dimensions of Identity” This theory posits that we all have core characteristics that make up our center. These may be related to personality or core values that we find important. Core values are those that are essential and form the foundation of everything we do. As an exercise, look up a list of value words on the internet. Pick 10 values that you think are important. For example, this could include things like respecting your elders, honesty, family, etc. Once you have a solid list of 10, cut that list in half. Narrow it down to five. Then remove one more. Now you should have a list of

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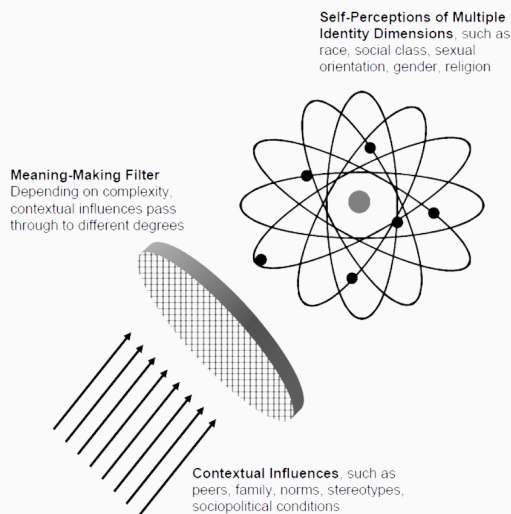


four values. Remove one more. Now you have a list of three values. These can be considered your core values. While the other seven you selected are important, and the fact that they were removed doesn't diminish the role they play in your life, they are not necessarily at the core of who you are as an individual.

Outside of our core characteristics are social identifiers that describe various dimensions of the self. These various dimensions can be visualized as rings revolving around that central core. Much like the way electrons surround an atom's core. While the number of rings is self-defined, one easy way to start is by utilizing "The Big 8 Social Identifiers." These are some commonly accepted ways people can categorize themselves. This is by no means an exhaustive list but it is a good starting point. The Big 8 are typically listed as:

- Ability - Mental and/or physical
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual Orientation
- Socio-Economic Status/Class

Look at the model below. The core values discussed earlier are at the center of the model. Imagine each of the rings around the core as one of the Big 8 identifiers. As an example, one ring may represent spiritual identity and someone may identify being Jewish as the dot on that ring. Notice that the dot on that ring can be positioned further away or closer to the core. When that dot is closer to our center we may be more aware of it, or it may be more present in our mind. When it is further away from the core, it can still have an influence on us although we may not be consciously aware of it. Relating that back to the example of a Jewish person, one's spiritual identity may be more salient to them at different times. For example, during holidays or on the Sabbath, someone's Jewish identity may be very salient, more than at other times of year. That same process can be used for the other social identifiers. Similar to the example of Judaism above, the specifics of your identity may change depending on circumstance. Your racial identity, for example, may be more or less salient depending on whether you are in a room with people who look like you. Think about one of your identities. Are there times when you are more aware of it, than at other times? What are the factors that determine that for you?



“Your mind is like a gold mine, if you dig deep you will find something golden.”

~ Gift Gugu Mona





In addition, each of these rings intersect with each other. As is true in life, no one identity defines who we are at all times. Each of our identities affect each other. This is an example of intersectionality. Intersectionality is the realization that we exist as multifaceted people and that each dimension can only be understood in the context of its relationship to the others. Each dimension, and their relative salience, create the differences between individuals. Intersectionality also recognizes that in some ways our identities may align with majority status for a particular dimension and diverges for others. Areas of relative privilege in one area may come against forms of oppression in others.

All of the aspects of this model that we have discussed so far are internal to the self. It must be recognized, however, that our identities are not shaped independently of the world around us. The demands of others, the physical environment we find ourselves in, the sociopolitical climate in which we exist all affect how we think about ourselves and others. These factors are represented by the arrows coming toward us. What are the conditional factors that affect you most on a daily basis? Are there certain norms in the groups you are involved in? Do you sometimes find your “TCNJ self” is different from your “Home self?” This may be a result of the conditional factors having influence on you.

How we make meaning of those factors is a filter through which those conditions pass. The degree to which information passes through that filter is influenced by the amount of work we have put in to understand ourselves and the world around us. Taking classes on sociology, history, or sciences can influence how we process information thrown at us. Our critical thinking skills may make us more or less skeptical of sources of information we see on television or in the news. Engaging in religious study can have a strong influence on how we make meaning of the world. As another example, how much we place value on getting along with others may be a strong contextual influence. Are you okay having a varying opinion from your friends and others who you see on a daily basis? Do you allow others' opinions to influence your sense of self? That can often have a huge impact, positively or negatively, on our meaning-making filter.

The college years are a time to engage in self-exploration and discovery. There is no time that gives you a greater ability to give conscious attention and critical thought to the factors that make up who you are. This extremely brief primer will hopefully stimulate you to think about your core values/characteristics. How would you articulate your various identities? When and how do those identities intersect? What dimensions are most salient to you and when do you notice them? How are you influenced by others? These are all questions ripe for consideration. We hope that you will take the time to engage in that journey of personal growth.

Group Dialogues: An opportunity to explore identity through mutual understanding

One of the best ways to engage in critical self-reflection and exploration is through deep conversations with peers. This Spring, Residential Education is offering a new opportunity to explore culture and identity through what we are calling **Group Dialogues**.

Earlier this semester you were asked to participate in a one-on-one meeting with your CA. These Dialogues will be similar, only rather than meeting with just your CA, this will also include a small group of 4-6 other members of your residential community.

Dr. Harold Sanders defines Dialogue as “the process of genuine interactions through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn.” In short, it’s a chance to create mutual understanding between the members of the conversation. It is a way to get away from a conversational style that focuses on “winning” or engaging in point/counterpoint debates. We are asking you to articulate thoughts/feelings while simultaneously listening deeply with the goal to understand.

Some example questions may include:

- What do “culture” and “identity” mean to you?
- What experiences have shaped the person you have become?
- How have you taken the time to learn about the culture and worldviews of those with whom you differ?
- Has your awareness of your various identities changed since coming to TCNJ?

We understand that these conversations may be difficult. But it is through the bravery of open sharing and active listening that growth can be achieved.

We hope you will decide to engage in this with your CA and peers when the opportunity is presented later this month.



Who I am, is not the same as What you see

A lot of time and attention on identity may be given to dimensions that others can see. However, many of the most important dimensions of our individual identities may not be visible to others.

Visible

Gender
Expression

Race

Religion
(through clothing, jewellery,
etc.)

Perceived
Socio-
economic
status

Age

Physical
Ability

Attractiveness



Invisible

Gender
Identity

Ability Status

Body image

Actual
Socioeconomic
status

Sexual
Orientation

Life
experiences
(ex: survivor of domestic
violence)

First
Generation



#1of8 Challenge

As mentioned earlier, one way of thinking about identity is through the "Big 8" Social Identifiers:

- Ability - Mental and/or physical
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Race
- Religion
- Sexual Orientation
- Socio-Economic Status/Class

We challenge you to post a picture to Instagram addressing one of your eight identifiers and how/when you became are of your identity in that area. Please use the hashtag **#1of8**

In support of this initiative our professional staff will participate sharing some of their #1of8's. Please see this example from our Wolfe Hall Residence Director, Hannah Yohe:



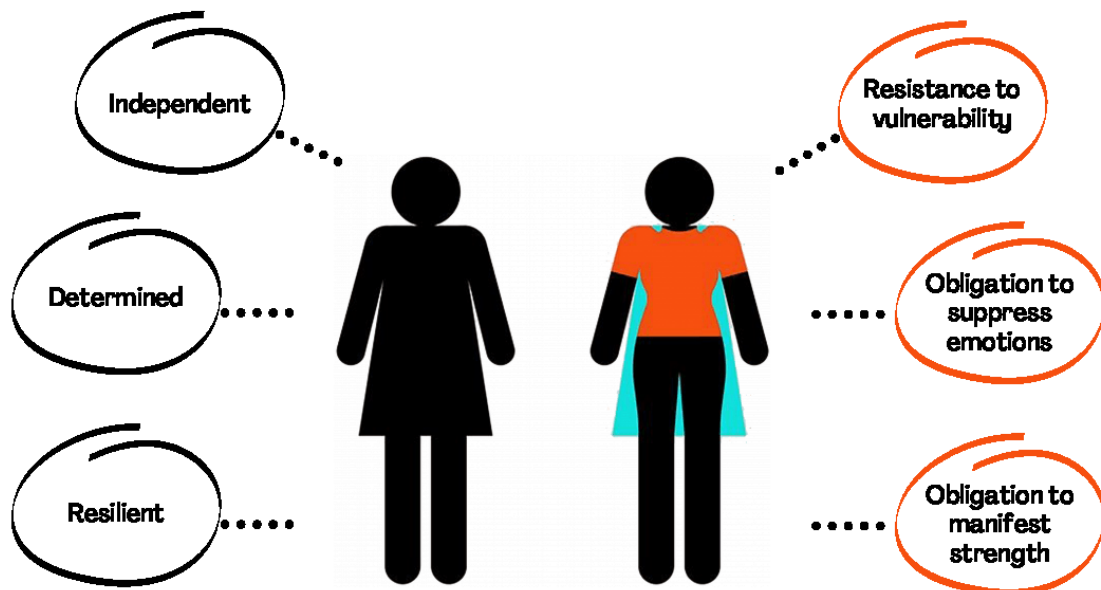
"I identify as an individual with G.A.D. (Generalized anxiety disorder). Mental health is a passion area of mine and I'm proud to highlight that while your mental health can present challenges in day to day life, taking care of yourself is always worth it! Podcasts, music, asmr, and real housewives are a few things that I like to utilize as self care. Remember that therapy is for everyone and is a great resource to combat feelings of anxiety and or depression that you may be feeling while isolated!"



...at what cost?

This Rosie the Riveter poster was a campaign aimed at recruiting female workers during World War II. Women in the workforce was meant to be temporary & they were expected to leave their jobs after the war ended & men came home. The women who did stay in the workforce continued to be paid less than their male peers & were usually demoted. Ultimately, women had enjoyed & even thrived on a taste of financial & personal freedom. The impact of World War II on women changed the workplace forever, & women's roles continued to expand.

<https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter>



What You See

vs.

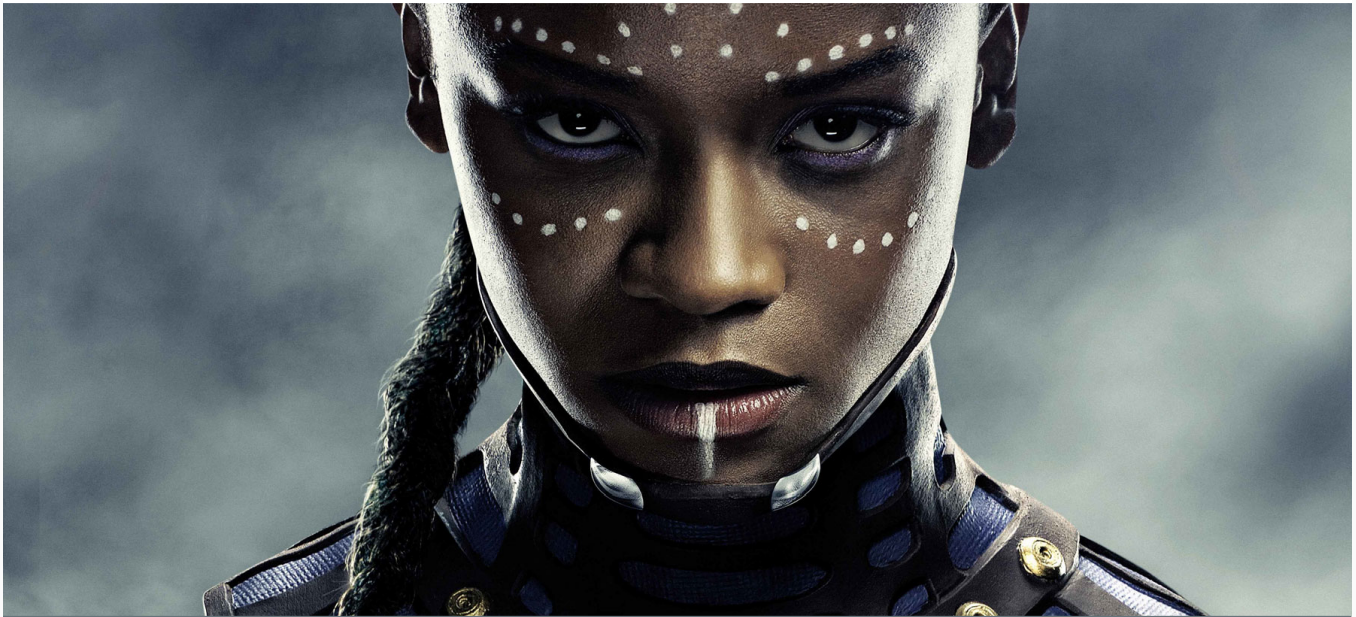
What You Don't See

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

Superwoman Syndrome [coined by Marjorie Hansen Shaevit in 1984] is a range of physical, psychological, and interpersonal stress symptoms experienced by a woman who attempts to perform perfectly in multiple or conflicting roles or goes overboard in one role.



"There's a stereotype that to be a **strong black woman** is to be strong about being black." *- Ayana Mathis*



The stereotype of the "strong black woman" is more than just a cultural trope: Many black women in America report feeling pressured to act like superwomen, projecting themselves as strong, self-sacrificing, and free of emotion to cope with the stress of race- and gender-based discrimination in their daily lives.

Amani M. Allen, Ph.D.



"[Women] talked about every day walking out of their houses and putting on their 'armor' in anticipation of experiencing racial discrimination."

"What they were really describing was this idea of being strong black women and feeling the need to prepare for the racial discrimination they expect on a daily basis; and that preparation and anticipation adds to their overall stress burden."

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_the_strong_black_woman_identity_both_helps_and_hurts



Recommended Viewing

Click links for trailers

ABILITY

- MOVIE - [CRIP CAMP](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: NETFLIX
- SERIES - [LOVE ON THE SPECTRUM](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: NETFLIX

AGE

- MOVIE
 - [BOYHOOD](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: DISNEY+
 - [UP](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: DISNEY+
- SERIES -
 - [MODERN FAMILY](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: HULU, ABC.COM
 - [GRACE & FRANKIE](#)
 - NETFLIX

ETHNICITY / RACE

- MOVIE - [DO THE RIGHT THING](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: HULU
- SERIES - [LITTLE AMERICA](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: APPLETV+

GENDER / SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- MOVIE - [BLUE IS WARMEST COLOR](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: AMAZON PRIME, VUDU, ITUNES
- SERIES -
 - [EUPHORIA](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: HBO
 - [POSE](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: NETFLIX

RELIGION / SPIRITUALITY

- MOVIE - [GOD'S NOT DEAD](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: NETFLIX
- SERIES - [THE GOOD PLACE](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: NETFLIX, YOUTUBE

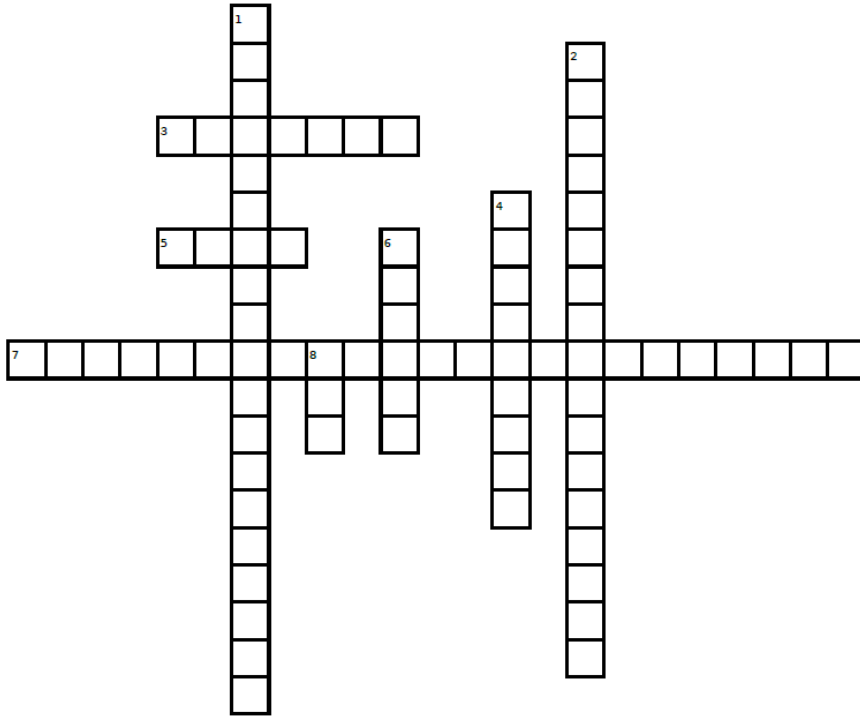
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

- MOVIE - [THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: PRIME VIDEO
- SERIES -
 - [SCHITT'S CREEK](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: NETFLIX
 - [SHAMELESS](#)
 - AVAILABLE ON: NEXFLIX, SHOWTIME





Identity



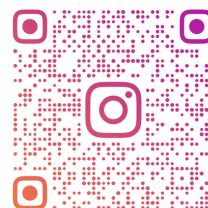
Down:

1. This is commonly conceptualized as one's social standing in society based on income wealth or poverty
2. This identity refers to a person's sexual emotional romantic and or affectional attractions
4. This identity classifies people based on culture common language national origin and beliefs
6. This identity refers to a person's deep seated felt sense of who they are not based on ones anatomy
8. This identity is about how people are categorized based on how old they are

Across:

3. This identity is about the diverse array of differences in physical mental cognitive developmental learning and/or emotional make-up
5. This identity refers to the concept used to classify humans based on perceived physical characteristics.
7. This identity relates to a person's or group's beliefs about the existence of God or gods and/or an identification with a particular faith or set of practices

The answer keys to this crossword and the word find on the following page will be on the ResEd Insta:
@tcnjresedandhousing



TCNJRESEDANDHOUSING





W	Y	T	H	N	Y	C	Z	Y	R	S	W	X	J	E	A	G	E	I	F	L	H	J
X	K	Y	T	I	C	I	N	H	T	E	T	Q	N	D	Y	E	C	A	R	K	I	P
D	G	T	J	S	Z	F	S	L	N	J	E	J	W	A	R	D	J	U	Z	X	T	I
H	R	I	J	F	H	R	U	X	K	Y	H	D	B	F	Z	L	K	A	V	J	P	K
Q	E	L	C	O	W	X	G	S	P	I	R	I	T	U	A	L	I	T	Y	C	X	B
C	E	I	Z	I	L	Q	S	L	M	D	H	I	V	A	P	B	A	W	W	K	P	T
F	A	B	A	F	Y	Z	C	H	U	O	I	B	G	R	N	E	C	X	M	Y	O	O
S	Q	A	F	G	L	N	O	I	T	A	T	N	E	I	R	O	L	A	U	X	E	S
F	D	P	N	T	H	L	P	Y	L	D	L	R	B	U	C	O	Z	F	P	D	U	Z
X	Y	N	F	X	D	B	Q	R	K	A	B	U	J	Y	T	I	T	N	E	D	I	H
X	X	R	V	B	K	E	N	R	S	D	P	Z	Y	R	G	G	G	A	X	A	F	R
S	O	C	I	O	E	C	O	N	O	M	I	C	S	T	A	T	U	S	H	N	T	H
K	E	R	E	D	N	E	G	Q	X	O	W	G	Z	L	Q	F	A	Q	C	S	Z	N
G	F	U	Y	O	S	I	K	W	P	N	E	R	K	V	Y	F	Y	D	X	I	X	S
D	V	Y	W	I	T	G	E	E	N	O	I	G	I	L	E	R	R	R	S	M	Y	O
Q	R	I	N	T	E	R	S	E	C	T	I	O	N	A	L	I	T	Y	B	P	B	Z

Find the following words in the puzzle.
Words are hidden ↑ ↓ → ← and ↘ .

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
SEXUAL ORIENTATION
INTERSECTIONALITY
SPIRITUALITY

ETHNICITY
RELIGION
IDENTITY
ABILITY

GENDER
RACE
AGE