

## 6.12

# The Impact of Social Hierarchies on Me Circle



**PURPOSE** To raise awareness of social hierarchies based on aspects of identity; to recognize the harm caused by those hierarchies; to increase awareness that most people experience both being in privilege and out of privilege in different parts of their lives.

**MATERIALS** Talking piece, centerpiece items, copies of worksheet “Social Identity Wheel,” paper or journals, pencils or pens, bell or sound maker.

**PREPARATION** Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture.

**Welcome to the space of the Circle.**

**MINDFULNESS MOMENT** *Pause, breathe, and listen to the sound.*

**OPENING** See Appendix 2 or create your own.

**INTRODUCE “ROUNDS”** A “round” is a pass of the talking piece around the Circle. The keeper poses a question and, as a participant, usually answers first. The keeper then passes the talking piece to the person to his/her left or right. On the first round, participants are invited to say their name as well as respond to the question. Remember, it is always okay for a participant to pass.

**Remind the group of classroom values and guidelines.**

**CHECK-IN ROUND** *How are you doing? Is there anything particular on your mind that might be important for us to know and that you feel comfortable sharing with the group?*

### MAIN ACTIVITY Exploring One’s Place in the Social Hierarchy and the Feelings that Go with It

**REMINDE PARTICIPANTS** *The core self in everyone is good, wise, and strong, no matter what happens in life. Yet despite this core self in everyone, society creates rankings that value some people more than others for aspects of their identity that are not inherently more valuable. This hierarchy of worthiness gives more power and privilege to those ranked as better or more important. Our society has hierarchies related to several aspects of identity, including skin color, gender, age, sexual orientation, income, and religion.*

Ask participants, in an open dialogue, to identify which groups have privilege or power regarding skin color and which groups lack privilege or power regarding skin color.

Ask them to identify who has privilege or power regarding gender and who does not. Who has privilege or power regarding socio-economic class and who does not?

Distribute the worksheet "Social Identity Wheel." For each section on the wheel, ask participants to decide whether they are ranked high and have privilege in society in that aspect of who they are, or whether they are ranked low and lack privilege in that aspect. Invite them to mark each section with HI or LO to reflect how society ranks them on that dimension of their identity.

Distribute journaling materials and ask participants to journal about the feelings they have when the social hierarchy devalues them.

**ROUND** *Identify an aspect of your life where you are ranked low, and share specific experiences where you have been harmed by being in that position in the social hierarchy.*

**ROUND** *What feelings have you had from the experience of being devalued by society?*

**ROUND** *Identify an aspect of your life where you are the one with privilege (a section you marked HI on the wheel).*

If participants have trouble identifying an area of privilege, ask them whether they have younger brothers and sisters or children over whom they get to exercise authority: this would be a privilege associated with age.

**ROUND** *Are these privileges fair?*

**ROUND** *Share an experience where you didn't like someone because they belonged to a group that is not valued, and then you discovered that the person is someone you really like.*

**ROUND** *Please share any additional thoughts or responses you have to what others have said.*

**CHECK-OUT ROUND** *How do you feel about the Circle today?*

**CLOSING** Choose from Appendix 2 or create your own.

**Thank everyone for participating in the Circle today!**

This activity is adapted from Boyes-Watson and Pranis, *Heart of Hope*, pp. 178–82.





# Social Identity Wheel

Adapted from "Voices of Discovery," Intergroup Relations Center, Arizona State University.



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