

## Navigating Differences

Thinking about differences can be challenging. Our race and ethnicity combined with our privilege--determined before we are born--affects how we self-identify and how we may be perceived. We may be considered a majority in some contexts and a minority in others. Our racial identity and appearance can influence how we are treated, where we live, opportunities we have, and how we interact with others.

In plain language, someone who is privileged receives a benefit or advantage in society by no choice of their own, such as race, skin color, gender, socioeconomic status, country of origin, language, education, religion, intellect, ability or skill set, sexual orientation, etc. We may become more aware of our race through personal experiences or other events.

Some of our cultural traditions and rituals may be derived from our ethnic backgrounds or we may have adopted and incorporated ones from other people. While race and ethnicity are outside of our control, their influences and impact on our lives are significant.

1. Describe your family's racial and ethnic background. Do you identify with it? Has your perspective on it changed over time? Growing up, what was the racial and ethnic makeup of your neighborhood? Your friend group? How different is it from where you are today?
2. What kind of conversations, attitudes, or events happened in your family and community that affected how you perceived and interacted with different groups of people? Were you comfortable with this perspective? How were differences discussed in your family? How did it feel growing up? How does it feel now?
3. Describe a time you stepped outside of the value system or expectations you were raised with. Or, describe a time you were surprised to witness someone being treated differently.
4. Reflecting upon each stage of your life, what kinds of relationships have you had with people who are different from you? How did your family and others react? What was the impact on you?
5. Have you experienced discrimination in the workplace? In what ways have you been privileged, advantaged, or disadvantaged?
6. Have you or your family members ever relocated, immigrated, migrated or moved temporarily or permanently? Why? How did location affect you or your family in terms of living, employment, health care, community, culture etc.?
7. What family traditions or practices hold meaning for you? In what ways do you celebrate your ethnicity or racial identity? Have you continued any ethnic or cultural customs practiced or valued by your family? Have you chosen to start any of your own?

8. How were your family's values conveyed to you? How do you understand the origin and importance of these? Were these specific to your culture or community? Have your values ever clashed with others?
9. How do you describe yourself? With whom do you identify? How do you present yourself to the world? How do others see or categorize you? How have your identities changed over time or circumstances?
10. Have you experienced or observed when someone's actions do not meet their stated beliefs? What is your reaction when you hear disparaging language or stereotypes against yourself or others?
11. When have you deliberately concealed, unconsciously hidden, or altered your authentic self? Why?
12. In what ways do you consider yourself privileged? What benefits and feelings do you have because of your privileged status? How has this changed over time?
13. Where do you find a sense of belonging, such as communities of faith, politics, identity, sports, etc.? Where did you feel excluded or marginalized? What is rewarding or lacking about your connections? What would you change?
14. Have you been involved or influenced by social justice or political movements? How did this change your life? What changes do you hope to see in yourself and your community during your lifetime?

*Note, this set of prompting questions on the theme of "Navigating Differences" was created in 2021 by a curriculum development group of certified Guided Autobiography instructors.*