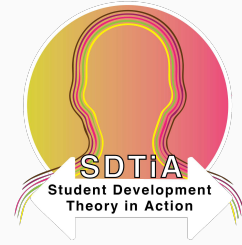


# Social Identity Pie Exercise: Exploring Identity Socialization, Status, and Salience



## Pedagogical Rationale

This teaching method illustrates the significance of educator positionality and the sociopolitical context dimensions of the SDTiA framework. The Social Identity Pie Exercise helps instructors introduce students to crucial identity development concepts that undergird the formal theories included in this book: identity socialization, identity status, and identity salience. Employing this teaching method sets a foundation for students to understand how identity politics shape students' developmental processes in higher education contexts.

## Implementation Strategy

The Social Identity Pie Exercise can be used as a primer activity before the first day of class, completed in class, or assigned as a take-home activity. It may be helpful for some students to complete the exercise at home, where they can reflect and work at their own pace.

## *Instructions*

This exercise is adapted from the [Social Identity Pie Activity](#) created by the Office of Diversity at the University of Connecticut (UCONN). Students begin by making a list of five aspects of their social identity that are most important to them. Next, students draw a circle. They then slice their circle (or “pie”), making each slice proportional to the level of importance that aspect of their identity holds for them.

Once students complete their pie, instructors direct them to complete a five-minute free write in response to one of the following prompts:

- With regard to your largest slice of the pie, describe two experiences in your life that shaped that aspect of your identity (i.e., identity socialization; identity salience).
- Describe an aspect of your identity that most shapes how you show up as a learner (i.e., identity management).
- With regard to your largest slice of the pie, is this the aspect of your identity that others (e.g., peers or students) would perceive as most important to you? (i.e., achieved, ascribed, or assigned identity).
- What aspects of your identity are privileged and/or subordinated within this geographic or educational context? (i.e., identity status; positionality).
- How, if at all, are your intersecting identities (e.g., “Black trans woman” represented as one slice of the pie) reflected in your pie? (i.e., the difference between intersectionality and multiple dimensions of identity).

After students have completed the Social Identity Pie Exercise, invite them to participate in a Think–Pair–Share activity. In the Think–Pair–Share, students partner with another student to share their reflections on the prompt they selected. The instructor then facilitates a class discussion that invites students to:

- Describe their experiences with the assignment.
- Share something they heard during the Think–Pair–Share that resonated with them.
- Broaden their understanding of key identity development concepts, including but limited to identity management, identity salience, identity status, identity socialization.

## Instructional Value

As students think about which parts of their identity feel most important and how those identities are shaped through everyday interactions, they often begin to notice that some aspects of their identity are more immediately visible to others, while other parts are less obvious or easier to keep private. For example, identities such as race or gender are often read right away and can shape how students are treated before they interact with the learning environment. Other identities—such as sexual orientation, religious affiliation, learning differences, or socioeconomic background—may not be visible at all unless a student chooses to share them.

The SDTiA framework recognizes this distinction and encourages educators, in their translation of theory, to attend to how students experience the learning environments they create. When students feel that their identities are recognized and affirmed, they are more likely to engage, take risks, and participate fully. When students feel that parts of who they are are ignored, misunderstood, or unsafe to share, learning conditions in that environment can affect not only how comfortable they feel, but also how well they are able to learn. For educators, this highlights what is at stake: learning conditions matter, and the extent to which they affirm students' identities can directly shape students' growth, engagement, and persistence.

The activity also makes clear that identity status is contextual and closely tied to a person's social location. Identities become minoritized or privileged through institutional norms, policies, and dominant cultural expectations. When students reflect on which identities carry the most weight in shaping how they show up as learners or educators, they often surface how intersecting identities can simultaneously position them within systems of advantage and subordination. This recognition helps instructors introduce the idea that individuals can hold both privileged and minoritized identities at once, depending on their social location (e.g., in the U.S., on campus, or in their hometown).

Instructors are encouraged to revisit this exercise throughout the course to help students make meaning of their positionality and examine how these same identity politics shape the developmental processes of students in higher education contexts.