

## Social Identity Group Categories & Characteristics

Social identity is assigned to individuals based on physical, cultural, linguistics, and/or other characteristics and socially constructed **categories**. Social identity group membership is, at times, obvious and clear and, sometimes, not obvious or clear; often self-claimed and frequently ascribed by others. Below are examples of social identity group categories<sup>1</sup> within a U.S. context (in alphabetical order):

<b>Age</b>	Child, Elderly, Middle-aged adult, Teen, Young adult, etc.
<b>Ability</b>	Disabled, People/Person with disabilities (cognitive, emotional, physical, etc.), Temporarily able-bodied, etc.
<b>Ethnicity</b>	African-American, Chinese, East Indian, Haitian, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Lebanese, Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc.
<b>Gender</b>	Boy, Cisgender, Gender non-conforming, Gender queer, Girl, Man, Transgender, Woman, etc.
<b>Race</b>	Asian, Bi/Multiracial, Black, Latino/a/x, Native American, White, etc.
<b>Religion</b>	Agnostic, Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, etc.
<b>Sex</b>	Female, Intersex, Male, etc.
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Asexual, Bisexual, Gay, Heterosexual, Lesbian, Pansexual, Queer, etc.
<b>Socioeconomics Status (or Class)</b>	Lower, Lower middle, Middle, Upper middle, Upper, etc.

While there are some **characteristics** of social identity that are relevant to consider, it is important to keep in mind that an individual's social identity is shaped by an individual's context—family dynamics, historical factors, and location/positionality within a particular socio/political context as well as social systems of power, oppression, and resistance. Below are some key terms and concepts to understand to grasp the complexity and nuance of social identity characteristics:

**Advantaged/Dominant/Privileged:** A social identity that is valued, considered to be superior, independent, or “normal”; historically advantaged as far as access to resources and social power/control

**Change:** Are social identities fixed throughout our lives? Some are, and some change!

**Choice:** Did we choose our social identities? Yes, and no!

**Disadvantaged/Subordinate/Targeted:** A social identity that is devalued, considered to be inferior, dependent, or “deviant”; historically disadvantaged as far as access to resources and social power/control

**Interconnected:** We experience all social identities; no single social identity describes someone completely!

**Multiple:** We have many, simultaneous social identities!

**Observable:** Can we always see/hear the social identities of others? No!

**Recognition:** Can we recognize all of our own social identities? Some seem “obvious”, and some are “subtle”!

**Relational:** A social identity is beyond difference—it refers to a social hierarchy

**Salience:** Degree to which we experience our life chances and conditions as being influenced by particular social identities

**Significance:** All social identities impact our experiences, whether we are conscious of it or not!

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<sup>1</sup> This list is neither exhaustive nor fixed. For example, other prominent SIG groups include: **Citizenship (or Nationality)**, **Language**, etc.