

OPTION 2

Social Justice Exploration and Reflection Questions for Study Groups

AET Disclaimer:

We do not claim to be experts in this work, rather our goal is to accompany you as you embark on this journey of discovery with the members of your study group.

We also encourage you to explore other resources that may support the needs of your members.

Self-exploration and reflection questions:

Which constructs of identity are most important in your own thoughts about who you are? Why are these the most important elements of your identity? See “Big 8 Identities” attachment as a possible resource. (Note to leaders: this is simply intended to get members thinking about the elements of their own identities. For example, members can use different symbols to designate aspects of their own identity that have greater or less impact on their lives.)

- Gender
- Ethnic background
- Race
- Birth order
- Role in family
- Career
- Educational background
- Geographical identity
- Other..... (infinite)

Have you read or watched anything that helped you connect with the idea of privilege in a different way than you previously had? What new insights were revealed?

What areas of privilege have you discovered in your own reflections over this past year? In what ways have you benefited? Can you think of a specific time when privilege has been an obstacle for you in your interactions with others?

How do elements of your own identity impact your interaction with the world around you?

Which intersections of various elements of your identity have been the most difficult, or required more significant intentional effort, to navigate? Can you think of a time when one part of “you” has stepped back (throw back to terminology from the SJ Agreements) in order to benefit from the privilege that comes from another part of your identity? How did that make you feel at the time? Have your feelings changed after having some time to process or reflect?

How do you **feel** about privilege?

Application to our work reflection questions:

How do elements of your own identity impact your interactions with families and students in your practice? How have any new understandings you've gained influenced your work? What does an educational therapy practice that is sensitive to concepts of identity look like? What assumptions about others have you uncovered or learned to question in your work with clients and families? How can you apply these insights to your current and future work with your clients?

Think of a family with whom you've worked in the past. Is there something you wished you would have done differently to be more sensitive to identity differences?

Think of a colleague or group with whom you've worked in the past. Is there something you wished you would have done differently to be more sensitive to constructs of identity?

Guo, W., & Vulchi, P. (2019). Lisa E. In *Tell me who you are: Sharing our stories of race, culture, and identity*. essay, TarcherPerigee.



I'm the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. Even though being Jewish is still considered White, I'm still an *Other* to a lot of people in this country. I remember being at soccer camp, and constantly being yelled at about my horns, about my nose, about my tail. I had never heard that stuff before. Like, "Do your horns• pop the ball? Do you trip on your tail?"

• This stereotype comes from a misreading of the Latin verb *karan*, "sent forth beams" in the Hebrew Bible, which is used to describe Moses. Instead, the phrase was interpreted as *karen*, or "grew horns."

I work in Chicago public schools. I want my students to have a voice, and have a place where they can learn about their agency, as well as the structures that are in place. I want them to learn that it is all a social construct that has been put in place so that people in power keep their power. But there were times when I asked, "Why is it that my inner city, Title 1, free-and-reduced-lunch kids are the only ones that have to learn about social justice? Why are they the only ones that seem to be learning about it?"

A lot of people ask me, "Can't you just relax and have fun?" But the truth is, not always. I have a friend who told me I ruined Disney for the Gender Studies kids because we totally rip it to shreds. My parents took us to Disney World, and it was my worst nightmare. My daughter Bella, who was seven at the time, didn't want to be a princess. They call all the girls "princesses," and she was like, "Um,

you can call me ‘warrior,’ thanks.” And I was like, “I love my feminist.”

She was the first one to point out that Jasmine is only in the Morocco section of Disney World, and Mulan is only in China. Those are the only places where those two princesses exist. They are nowhere else in the theme park. And Bella was like, “What the hell.” She was like, “That, *and* you go to the *Star Wars* ride and they have no Rey stuff? What is this?”

And I was like, “I know. I know you’re angry.” But she was like, “That’s not right, Mom. Mulan is *better* than a princess. She’s basically a queen, and she saved everything, and they’re keeping her in China? Everyone knows Mulan’s from China, but she doesn’t need to just be there, and all the White princesses elsewhere.” So, it doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy pieces of things, but it means I have to teach my kids to look critically at stuff.

To avoid burnout, I have them turn it on and turn it off. It’s really hard, especially when you realize there are people who can’t turn it off. It’s a privilege to turn stuff off, just like it’s a privilege to “not be political.” I also realize that *all women are not the same*. Our feminism cannot be divided by being White and exclusionary. I mean, look at Black Feminist Theory! I use the **Audre Lorde**•• quote all the time: I’m afraid that my children are going to become part of the patriarchy, she’s afraid that her children are going to get shot.

•• The exact quote by Audre Lorde, a Black feminist author, is: “Some problems we share as women, some we do not. You fear your children will grow up to join the patriarchy and testify against you;

we fear our children will be dragged from a car and shot down in the street, and you will turn your backs on the reasons they are dying.”

The more people I can bring in, who can speak for themselves instead of me speaking for them, the better. I don’t want to speak for people, or have the voice of authority. I make a really important point of making sure that my students have their own voice, and bring their own stories in.

To deal with the almost endless complexity of the topic, I make the space for it to be messy, for people to mess up, and to apologize. To be honest, I use myself a lot. I explain to students that I put myself out there for them, because if I’m gonna ask them to struggle to make these distinctions, and to make connections, and talk about stuff, I have to be willing to do it too. I talk about my struggles as a mom, I talk about my struggles as a White person, I talk about my struggles as a Jew, my struggles as a woman. Sometimes, I don’t have emotional space for my six- and my eight-year-old when I get home. You lay yourself bare, and you ask your students to, too.

No matter where you are, your students definitely have some kind of weight—from things like race, gender, sexuality, class—on them. It’s just up to you whether or not you’re tuning into it and helping them understand, deconstruct, and alleviate that weight off of them.

Suárez-Orozco, C., & Lahiri, J. (2008). *Transcultural Identities*. In *Stories of identity: Religion, migration, and belonging in a changing world* (pp. 36–40). essay, Facing History and Ourselves.

Transcultural Identities

“Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen.”

Cultural psychologist Carola Suárez-Orozco writes that for children, “the task of immigration . . . is creating a transcultural identity.” She explains, “These youth must creatively fuse aspects of two or more cultures—the parental tradition and the new culture or cultures. In so doing, they synthesize an identity that does not require them to choose between cultures but incorporates traits of both cultures.”¹

Like many immigrants to Europe, Indian-American author Jhumpa Lahiri has lived in two cultures for most of her life. Balancing her dual identity has not always been easy for her. Despite her rich heritage, while growing up, she never felt completely Indian or American. Only later in life did she accept both of her identities. Lahiri, now a parent, hopes to pass both of her identities on to her children. She explains:

I have lived in the United States for almost 37 years and anticipate growing old in this country. Therefore, with the exception of my first two years in London, “Indian-American” has been a constant way to describe me. Less constant is my relationship to the term. When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case. But my perception as a young girl was that I fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with one another.

At home I followed the customs of my parents, speaking Bengali and eating rice and dal* with my fingers. These ordinary facts seemed part of a secret, utterly alien way of life, and I took pains to hide them from my American friends. For my parents, home was not our house in Rhode Island but Calcutta, where they were raised. I was aware that the things they lived for—the Nazrul songs they listened to on the reel-to-reel, the family they missed, the clothes my mother wore that were not available in any store in any mall—were at once as precious and as worthless as an outmoded currency.

I also entered a world my parents had little knowledge or control of: school, books, music, television, things that seeped in and became a fundamental aspect of who I am. I spoke English without an accent, comprehending the language in a way my parents still do not. And yet there was evidence that I was not entirely American. In addition to my distinguishing name and looks, I did not attend Sunday school, did not know how to ice-skate, and disappeared to India for months at a time. Many of my friends proudly called themselves Irish-American or Italian-American. But they were several generations removed from the frequently humiliating process of immigration, so that the ethnic roots they claimed had descended underground whereas mine were still tangled and green. According to my parents I was not American, nor would I ever be no matter



▲ Author Jhumpa Lahiri and her family

This reading contains excerpts from Jhumpa Lahiri's, "My Two Lives," *Newsweek World News*.

* Dal is an Indian term for all varieties of dried beans, split peas, and lentils.

how hard I tried. I felt doomed by their pronouncement, misunderstood and gradually defiant. In spite of the first lessons of arithmetic, one plus one did not equal two but zero, my conflicting selves always canceling each other out.

... As I approach middle age, one plus one equals two, both in my work and in my daily existence. The traditions on either side of the hyphen dwell in me like siblings, still occasionally sparring, one outshining the other depending on the day. But like siblings they are intimately familiar with one another, forgiving and intertwined. When my husband and I were married five years ago in Calcutta we invited friends who had never been to India, and they came full of enthusiasm for a place I avoided talking about in my childhood, fearful of what people might say. Around non-Indian friends, I no longer feel compelled to hide the fact that I speak another language. I speak Bengali to my children, even though I lack the proficiency to teach them to read or write the language. As a child I sought perfection and so denied myself the claim to any identity. As an adult I accept that a bicultural upbringing is a rich but imperfect thing.

While I am American by virtue of the fact that I was raised in this country, I am Indian thanks to the efforts of two individuals. I feel Indian not because of the time I've spent in India or because of my genetic composition but rather because of my parents' steadfast presence in my life. . . .

I have always believed that I lack the authority my parents bring to being Indian. But as long as they live they protect me from feeling like an impostor. Their passing will mark not only the loss of the people who created me but the loss of a singular way of life, a singular struggle. The immigrant's journey, no matter how ultimately rewarding, is founded on departure and deprivation, but it secures for the subsequent generation

a sense of arrival and advantage. I can see a day coming when my American side, lacking the counterpoint India has until now maintained, begins to gain ascendancy and weight. It is in fiction that I will continue to interpret the term "Indian-American," calculating that shifting equation, whatever answers it may yield.²

Connections

1. What does Suárez-Orozco mean when she says "the task of immigration . . . is creating a transcultural identity"? How was Lahiri able to "fuse" aspects of her Indian identity with her identity as an American?
2. Lahiri writes, "Like many immigrant offspring I felt intense pressure to be two things, loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen." Why is there pressure to choose between her two identities? Do people have to choose one identity?
3. Lahiri talks about the Indian customs she followed at home with her parents. She explains, "These ordinary facts seemed part of a secret, utterly alien way of life, and I took pains to hide them from my American friends. . . . According to my parents I was not American, nor would I ever be no matter how hard I tried . . . one plus one did not equal two but zero, my conflicting selves always canceling each other out." What do you think Lahiri means? Why do you think she felt she had to hide her identity? Are there times when you hide parts of who you are?
4. Lahiri worries she lacks the "authority" to be Indian. Why? What authority does a person need to belong to a group? Who determines which people belong to a group and which people don't belong?