

Bitesized Belonging: What does “identity” mean and why is it important?

Identity refers to aspects of an individual’s character or personhood. Stated another way, identity is “a set of physical, mental, emotional, social, and interpersonal characteristics unique to you”. Identity is a core concept in DEIB, demonstrated by the encompassing ways in which individuals and communities differ from each other. Identities allow us to relay or define our differences in relationship to others, which allows us to navigate different cultures, experiences, and people with competence and/or fluency.

For example, say an individual who identifies as straight and cisgender decides they want to attend a transgender activism event at a local community center in the hopes of learning how to be a better ally and advocate. It would be important for that individual to understand the ways in which their own experiences differ from the expected majority, in an effort to avoid offending others and accurately represent their desire to help.

Or consider an organization or company with a fairly homogenous population. Should that organization wish to grow its diversity—by whatever measurement they’d elected—it becomes vital for those within the homogenous population to understand their own identity and the historical successes and failures their identity(s) has had in relation to those identity(s) being sought.

Task: Review the following article (7 min. read) and answer the questions. Feel free to share in the chat below!

[Why Identity Matters and How It Shapes Us](#)

- Understanding what identity is and how it shapes our experiences, why is [intersectionality](#) such an important—if complex—aspect to DEIB work?
- While many categories of identification are shared, each of us has a unique combination, concentration, and expression. Take a moment and consider how you self-identity to others—and yourself. How did you list your identities? Is there an order of importance or focus?
- Do different aspects of different parts of your identity manifest stronger at some points and weaker at others? Why?