



WHO AM I WHEN THE (SOCIAL) PRICE IS HIGH?

PREP FOR THE SESSION

Overview

Through exploring the value of **authenticity**, particularly how one can **hold onto their own sense of self during polarizing times when asked to “choose a side,”** learners will develop new insights that support their ability to navigate situations where they feel pressure to subscribe to an all or nothing ideology in order to belong.

At-a-Glance:

In a time of heightened **polarization**, we are often asked to subscribe fully with one side or another (democrat or republican, pro-peace or anti-war) but we rarely agree fully with one side or the other. This resource will help learners **explore how to stay authentic to themselves while also seeking belonging and connection in a polarized world.** They will look at a story of how Esther stayed true to herself while hiding her identity, engage in a writing and art project exploring the different sides of themselves, and consider how they can be more authentic when facing mounting pressure to conform.



Time Estimate:
40-60 minutes



Best Uses:

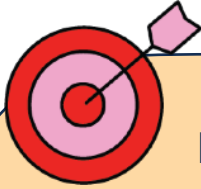
- Best for ages 18 and up, but could work for high schoolers.
- Best for an in-person setting but can be adapted for virtual



Materials Needed:

- Provide writing implements, materials for a collage activity (magazines to cut up, decorative paper, glue, scissors, stickers, construction paper)
- Have collage activity line starters available on printed papers or on a large chart paper.

LET'S GET STARTED



FRAME THE ISSUE

Have you ever said you liked something when you actually didn't? For example maybe you said you liked a tv show, a musician, or even a type of food that you actually did not care for. What was the situation? How did that feel? What, if anything, happened as a result?

We have all likely done something uncomfortable for the sole purpose of wanting to be accepted by others. For example, maybe you wore a uniform that you thought was ugly to fit in with the rest of a team. Or you ate the dinner that your new friend made you even though you really dislike kale.

Now, let's raise the stakes: When, if ever, have you (or a friend/family member) ever felt like you needed to believe a certain thing or support a certain cause as "price for admission" into a group? Or heard a story of someone else being in that position?

5-7 min



30-45
min



EXPLORE THE VALUE: AUTHENTICITY

It's human nature to seek belonging in community with others, and yet it can sometimes feel difficult to find a community where you can be authentic and express all parts of yourself - especially as we are living in polarizing times. So often we feel pressure to pick a side (democrat or republican; feminist or anti-feminist; pro-peace or pro-war; or even pro-drinking-alcohol or against-drinking-alcohol) and feel pressure to conceal everything about ourselves that does not align with that side.

- What's a situation where you have been struggling to be fully yourself, or you feel like you have to hide or suppress a part of yourself? Be as specific as you can be as we'll come back to this situation at the end.

This can be shared in small groups or kept private, but everyone should have a specific situation in mind.



Possible responses:

You want to hang with your friends on the weekend but they have plans to get drunk and you are not into drinking; your new group of friends frequently talk about how much they hate a certain musician, and you haven't figured out how to tell them that you love that musician; you want to join the feminist club at school but it has not been welcoming to supporters of Israel.

- What is the benefit of concealing a part of yourself? What is the cost?



JEWISH WISDOM

In the Book of Esther, the "Megillah" which takes place in ancient Persia, we recount the origins of the Purim holiday. Queen Esther of the Purim story faced a situation where she decided to hide a part of herself. When Esther went to the palace to try out for the position of queen, her cousin Mordechai advised her to keep her Jewish identity hidden because he believed it would make it more likely she would become queen. And she continued hiding her identity even after she became queen.



But hiding her Jewish identity did not mean that Esther gave up her Jewish practices. In fact, she kept kosher secretly, eating only seeds and fruit at the palace. She also assigned herself seven maids, one for each day of the week. That way, the Shabbat maid would not question why she behaved differently on Shabbat!

Then, after she learned from Mordechai about Haman's plot to kill the Jews, she had the courage to tell the king that she was Jewish and that Haman was planning to kill her people. In revealing her Jewish identity, she persuaded the king to stop Haman's plan and save the Jewish people.

You can learn more about Queen Esther [here](#).



Facilitator prompts the group:

- How do you think Esther felt when she was practicing her Judaism in secret? How about when she revealed her Jewish identity?
- What's something that you need to hold onto in order to feel you are being true to yourself?
- How, if at all, might Esther's story inform how you think about that situation in your life where you are struggling to stay true to yourself?



ACTIVITY

We are full of contradictions and polarities. We hold many identities, experiences, interests, aspirations and fears. We sometimes hold two (or more!) contradictory perspectives at once.

Consider a battery - it has two poles that help it to power a machine. If it only had a positive pole or only a negative pole, it would no longer work. So too, we need to attune to the polarities, contradictions, and opposing perspectives within us in order to be authentic to ourselves.

This next activity will invite you to explore the different sides of you. Consider this question: What are the contradictions or polarities I hold within myself?



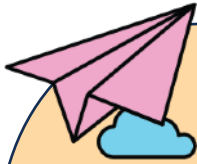
To begin to process what this is, we'll each journal our responses to these prompts:

- I love _____ but I also love _____
- I support _____ but I also support _____
- Sometimes I feel afraid to tell people that I am _____
- I find it challenging to be _____ and _____, because _____
- I have friends who _____ and I also have friends who _____

We're now going to illustrate these contradictions we hold within ourselves on paper. The aim is to be intentional about your illustration. What paper sizes, colors, shapes, tools like scissors or hands for ripping, and so on, can best illustrate what it's like for you to hold these contrasting beliefs/ perspectives within you.

Invite learners to share what they created with one other person, or in a small group.

- Share what choices you made in putting together your collage and why you did so.
- When you look at what you created, what is most essential to who you are? What is less essential/something you would feel comfortable holding back and it would not come at the expense of your authenticity?
- Consider again the situation where you are struggling to be yourself. Which parts of yourself that you depicted have you been able to bring to that situation? Which parts do you feel unable to bring? Why?



REFLECT AND PROMPT ACTION

Our contradictions, while they might feel confusing or challenging, are one of the things that make us who we are, and give us power. Being authentic may mean holding on to these contradictions where possible, but there are also times when you may need to pick a side (voting in an election, affiliating with a specific group.)

Revisit the situation you thought of earlier in the conversation.

- What would it take for you to be authentic in this setting? Can you bring your whole self to that setting, withstanding pressure to conform to all of the perspectives of that group? What would that look like? (remember how Esther stayed connected to her Jewish practices even when she was concealing her identity).
- Is there an upcoming decision you have to make which will force you to choose a side? If so, how does your sense of authenticity guide you in that decision?



Thank everyone for bravely bringing many parts of themselves to the gathering. Share a closing reflection: Like the moon is still whole even when we can only see a sliver, may we honor all the parts and poles of ourselves - even the ones we choose to hold back. May we accept the fullness of our authentic selves wherever we go.

5-7 min

