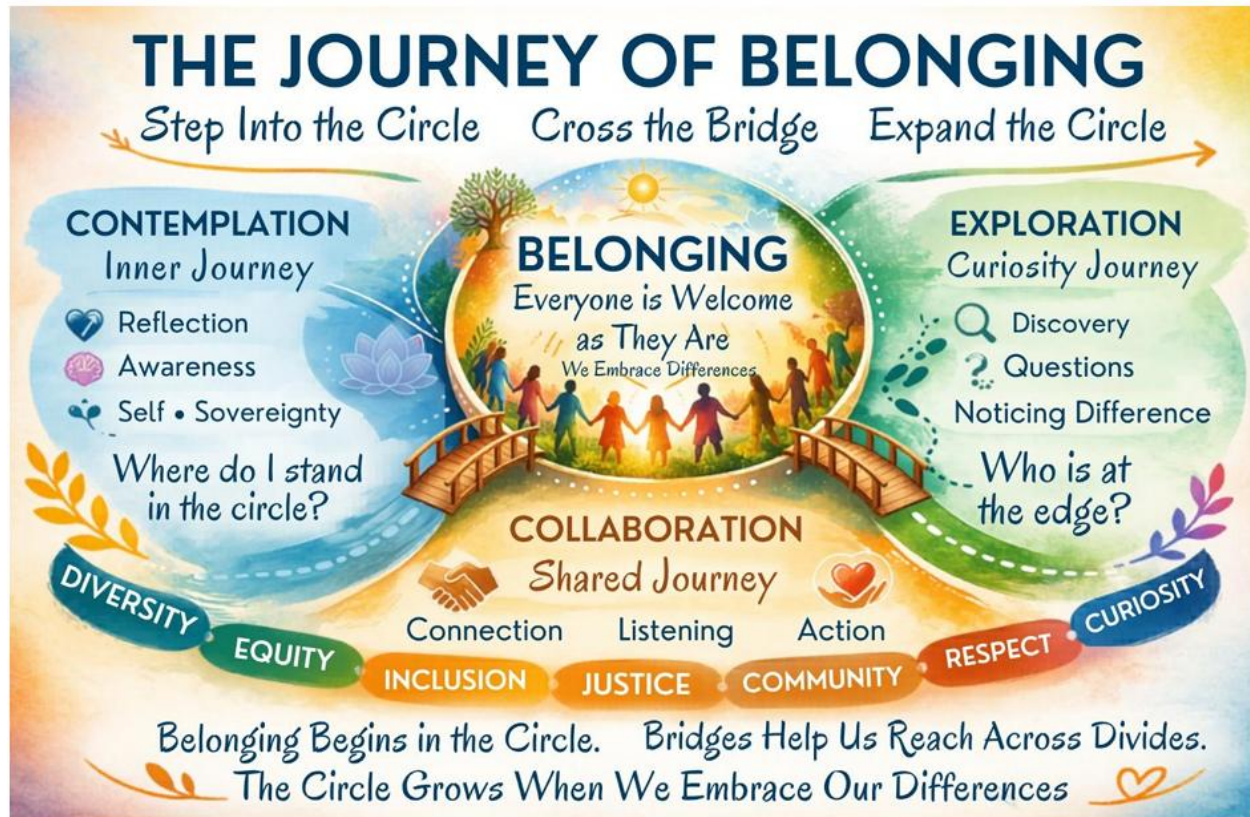




## Week Six Handout

The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Committee of the Centers for Spiritual Living invites you to continue on this Journey of Belonging by exploring the Matrix of Empowerment.

The Matrix of Empowerment invites you to reflect upon identity and recognize that experiences of belonging, access, privilege, and marginalization may differ across aspects of identity and across environments. The Matrix is an individual reflection tool; you are not required to show your markings or disclose any aspect of identity you wish to keep private. You choose what, if anything, you wish to share.

We encourage you to continue to interact with friends you haven't met yet. We invite you to expand your circle and be a conscious ambassador of Belonging.



## **Shared Agreements**

Be as present as you can.

Extend and receive welcome- keep your heart soft to support learning.

Participation is always an invitation- it's never an imposition- you are in charge.

Use "I" statements when sharing- speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.

Honor confidentiality here and beyond- what's shared here stays here; what's learned here may be freely shared.

Accept non-closure- trust the process and accept that we don't control what others receive.

No fixing, saving, advising, or correcting others.

When feelings of discomfort grow – turn to wonder and compassionate inquiry or curiosity.

Set aside judgement to listen to others -and to yourself- more deeply.

## Matrix of Empowerment

| Aspect            | Empowered               | Intermediate                 | Disempowered                         |
|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Citizenship       | Citizen                 | Documented                   | Undocumented                         |
| Skin Color        | White                   | Different Shades             | Dark                                 |
| Formal Education  | Post-secondary          | High School                  | Elementary                           |
| Ability           | Able-bodied             | Some Disability              | Significant Disability               |
| Sexuality         | Heterosexual            | Gay Men                      | Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual / Pansexual |
| Neurodiversity    | Neurotypical            | Neuro-atypical               | Significantly Neurodivergent         |
| Mental Health     | Robust                  | Mostly Stable                | Vulnerable                           |
| Body Size         | Slim                    | Average                      | Large                                |
| Housing           | Own or Secure Rental    | Sheltered / Housing Insecure | Unhoused                             |
| Wealth            | Rich                    | Middle Class                 | Poor                                 |
| Spoken Language   | Multi-Lingual           | Mono-Lingual                 | Non-Verbal                           |
| Gender            | Cisgender Man           | Cisgender Woman              | Trans / Intersex / Non-binary        |
| Spiritual Beliefs | Dominant Religion       | Spiritual but not Religious  | Agnostic/Atheist                     |
| Age/Generation    | Middle-Age              | Older Adults                 | Young Adults / Youth/Children        |
| Literacy          | Multi-Language Literacy | Single-Language Literacy     | Non-Literate                         |

The purpose of The Matrix of Empowerment is not to rank suffering, assign blame, or determine who is “good” or “bad.” The invitation is to notice.

Identify yourself within each aspect of the Matrix.

On each aspect, circle where you locate your experience among Empowered, Intermediate, or Disempowered.

Notice what stands out.

Notice whether any patterns emerge.

Simply carry this awareness within you rather than trying to resolve or explain it.

*These pages are reprinted from CSL's "**Embodying Our Global Vision Student Guide**" pages 53-55*

### **Defining Inclusion & Othering**

**Inclusion** means everyone is valued for who they are, as they are. It is about people feeling included as whole people, welcomed for all of who they are without being asked to change or hide parts of themselves to fit in. The practice of inclusion is actively engaging, welcoming, inviting, and acknowledging people who haven't been in the circle of power, creation, and choice to be a part of the creation, power, and choice.

In contrast to inclusion, **othering** is a term that encompasses various forms of prejudice and persistent marginalization based on any identifying factors such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, income, or disability. Othering occurs when one group defines who is "in" and who is "out." It is not limited to those with unearned advantages; everyone engages in othering, both consciously and unconsciously.

The goal of DEIJB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Belonging) work is to bring this process into conscious awareness. Awareness creates the opportunity to see others as individuals rather than through distorted identities or superficial stereotypes. In *The Four Pivots*, Shawn Ginwright defines othering as "the tendency to assign negative attributes to groups of people other than your own."<sup>32</sup>

### **Why Do We Other?**

The roots of othering, the process of perceiving or portraying someone as fundamentally different or alien, can be traced both biologically and historically. Biologically, humans evolved in small groups where identifying outsiders could be a survival mechanism, activating in-group favoritism and out-group suspicion. From a young age, we are socialized to differentiate and categorize, we learn our colors and shapes by grouping objects based on characteristics, and one of the first distinctions we make is between family or caregivers and everyone else. We quickly begin to generalize our family as "like me" and those outside as "not like me," a distinction that can escalate into viewing difference as potential danger.

This is reinforced by the brain's powerful pattern-recognition system, which is designed to make rapid judgments for efficiency and safety but can also lead to biased generalizations about others. Historically, these natural tendencies have been amplified by systems such as colonialism, slavery, caste, and racial hierarchies, where dominant groups institutionalized the concept of the "other" to justify exploitation and control. Over time, othering has become embedded in societal structures, shaping how cultures define belonging and enforce exclusion.

Perceiving others as fundamentally different reinforces our sense of safety within our group and often creates a feeling of superiority about our shared beliefs and values. Othering serves as a defense mechanism, protecting our identity, keeping us in our comfort zone, and maintaining a sense of belonging to those who are important to us.

## **Code Switching and Masking: The Hidden Work of Inclusion**

In conversations about inclusion, it's essential to recognize the often-invisible labor many people engage in just to be accepted in spaces that were not created with them in mind. Two common strategies are code switching and masking.

**Code switching** refers to the practice of adjusting one's language, behavior, appearance, or expression to align with the dominant culture. This is often done to gain acceptance, avoid discrimination, or ensure safety. For example, a Black practitioner might adjust their speech or communication style in predominantly white spiritual spaces to align with dominant white, middle-class cultural norms. This kind of code switching reflects the broader systemic pressures that expect marginalized individuals to conform in order to be seen as credible or accepted. Similarly, a queer person might avoid using terms of endearment for their partner or refrain from expressing aspects of their gender identity in order to appear more "neutral" or "non controversial" in spiritual or professional settings.

**Masking** is the act of suppressing or hiding aspects of one's identity, such as neurodivergence, gender expression, or emotional responses, in order to fit in or avoid negative judgment. Someone who is neurodivergent might mask by mimicking social norms that feel unnatural or exhausting, just to be perceived as "normal." A person experiencing depression or grief might mask their emotional pain by overperforming positivity in spiritual spaces that seem to favor "good vibes only," fearing judgment for not appearing spiritually evolved.

While code switching and masking can be adaptive strategies for navigating certain environments, they often come at a personal cost mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. They are signs of systems that ask individuals to shrink or alter themselves in order to belong.

As spiritual individuals and communities committed to inclusion, we are called to create environments where no one feels they must leave parts of themselves at the door. True inclusion asks not for conformity, but for celebration of difference. It invites us to examine not only who is present in our spaces, but also what parts of themselves they feel safe to bring.

**Inclusion means valuing people for who they are, as they are.**