

# IDENTITY MOLECULE

**Time:** 45-60 minutes

**Materials:** “Identity Molecule Part I” and “Identity Molecule Part II” handouts for each participant

**Audience:** Students from 10th grade through college, Adults

This exercise gives participants an opportunity to investigate how a perceived shared identity can in fact contain significant diversity. By articulating all the different aspects of their identities, participants will have an opportunity to consider how each aspect interacts with and shapes their Jewish identity. The activity will also reveal the diversity that exists within the presumed shared “Jewish” identity.

## Part I – Who Am I?

1. Explain to participants that this activity is designed to examine assumptions we might make about relationships between different aspects of identity and Jewish community. You can read the following to them:

“Each of us carries with us different experiences, affinities, and core values that shape how we present ourselves to the world, how we see others, and what we bring to a community. When we are in a community, one particular aspect of our identity – the one we have in common with others in that community – is often central to how we interact. However, the expression of that shared identity is still shaped by our individual experiences and the other aspects of who we are. The diversity that exists within this shared identity can enrich the community and the meaning of its shared core identity, but only if it is visible and celebrated.”

2. Distribute copies of the “Identity Molecule” worksheet to each participant. Explain that the sheet will be a map of their individual identities. In the center of the molecule, participants should write their names. Then, instruct the participants to think about their own identities, the key aspects that make up “who you are.” They should fill in as many of the smaller circles as they can (try for at least four) with other aspects of their personal identities. They can add circles if they need more.

3. Model the activity for participants with your own identity molecule – including identity categories such as gender, ethnicity, education level, etc. Give the participants no more than 10 minutes for this part of the activity.

4. While the participants are filling out their worksheets, draw a large version of the identity molecule on a flip chart or white board. Include several small circles.

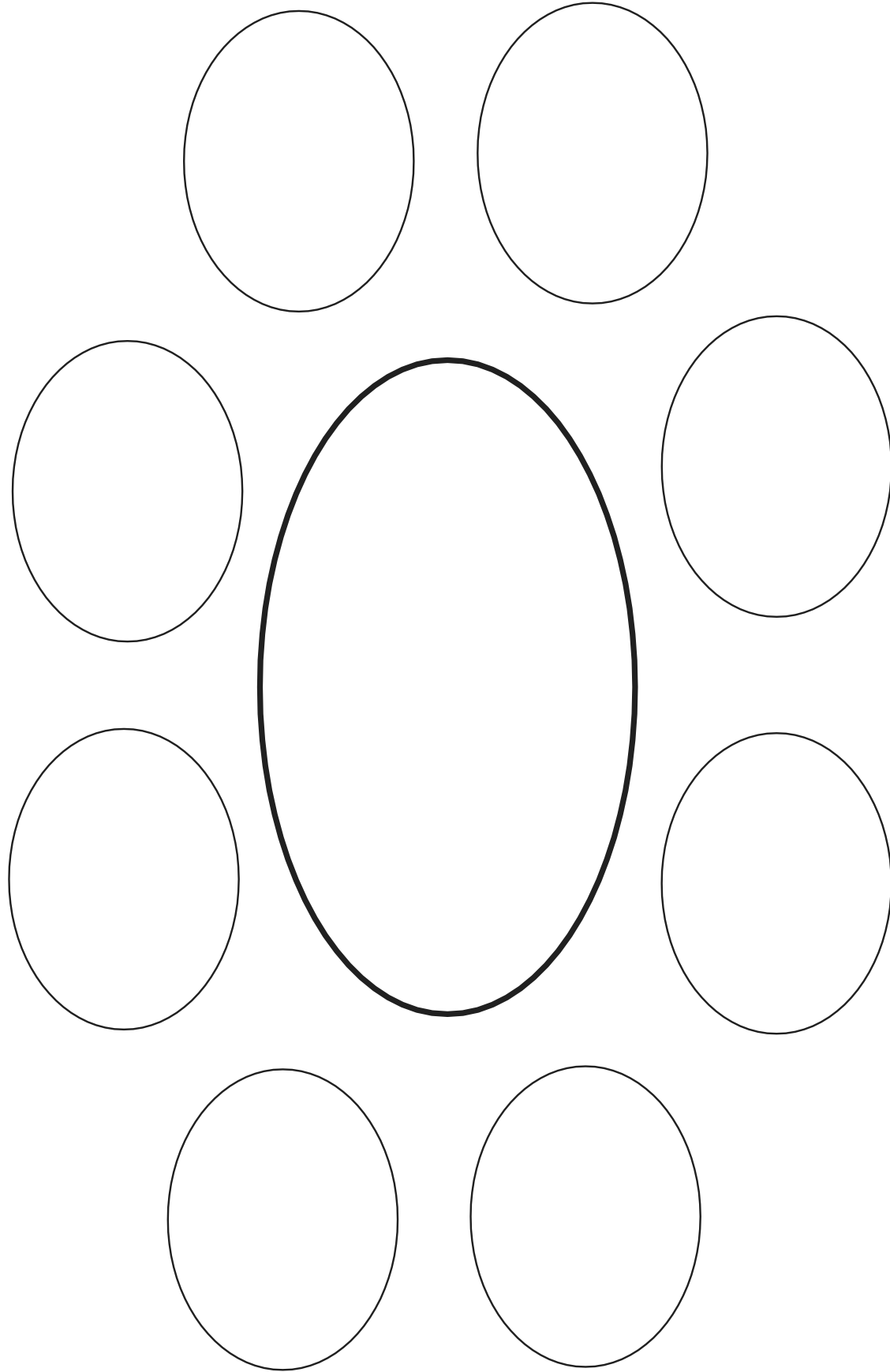
5. Once the participants have completed their “Identity Molecule” worksheets, ask for volunteers to share the different identity categories they added to their molecules. As the participants share their identity categories, add them to the large identity molecule you have created. At the end, you should have a community identity molecule.

6. Now have them to consider the following questions in pairs for five minutes:
  - How do the other aspects of your identity interact with your Jewish identity?
  - Based on the other aspects of your identity, what assumptions might you make about others in the Jewish community, e.g. other commonalities you expect to share?
  - How might the assumptions that you make based on your experiences create unintended barriers when interacting with others who are part of – or seeking to be part of – the Jewish community?
  - How might these assumptions shape the model of community and leadership you are offering to others in the community? Colleagues? Jewish youth?
7. Bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to respond to each question.
8. Finally, ask the group to consider the community Identity Molecule they created. Are there other identity categories or groups that might be missing, e.g. sexual orientation, race, class, born Jewish or Jew by choice, Israeli, etc?
9. Now hand out the worksheets for “Identity Molecule Part II.”
10. Break the participants into small groups of three to five participants. If you are working with a large group you can form groups of as many as ten participants.
11. Ask each participant to take five minutes to read the worksheet and fill in the categories of “we” and “they.”
12. In small groups the participants should discuss the questions on the second half of the worksheet. Give participants 10 minutes to discuss in small groups.
13. When facilitating this activity with youth, ask them to think about the different groups they belong to at school, in youth group, in synagogue, and in their families. Ask them to consider where adults fit in the “we” and “they” categories. Does it depend?
14. If you are facilitating this with adults, ask them to consider how the language we use about different categories of people affects our ability to model leadership for Jewish youth.
15. Bring the whole group back together and ask for a volunteer to share the “action steps” their group discussed.
16. Record each action step so that at the end you will create an action plan for the community on recognizing and celebrating diversity.

Adapted from a program developed by Yavilah McCoy

# Identity Molecule

Part I



## **Identity Molecule – Part II**

### **Exploring the Dynamics of Privilege through Relationships and Identity**

Supporting and celebrating the diversity of the experiences and identities that every Jew brings to our community is crucial to creating a Jewish community that supports healthy leadership development and an inclusive culture. Recognizing diversity is the first step towards creating inclusive communities. Using the Identity Molecule, we have been able to tease out the broad range of perspectives that exist in our Jewish community.

The next step in creating inclusive community involves examining the relationships of “us” and “them.” Who is “us” and who is “them”? Does the meaning vary depending on the context? Human nature leads us to seek comfort and familiarity in our interactions with other people and to fall into categories of “us” and “them” despite the best intentions for openness. Take some time to examine your own relationships and notice who has become the “other” in your life by virtue of the relationships you have. Think about different contexts in which large categories of people are either “we/us” or “they/them.” Think about how you use this language in the Jewish community.

Five categories of people you would actively speak of using the term “we”:

Five categories of people you would actively speak of using the term “they”:

Now review each category that you listed separately and answer the following questions:

1. What happens when groups of people are always in the “they” category? In our personal lives? In our community?
2. How does the language we use about different categories of people affect our ability to create inclusive community and model leadership?
3. What actions can we take as members of the Jewish community to recognize and celebrate all members?