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Background and Objectives

Middlesex by Jeffrey Eugenides tells the story of a Greek-American family living in the Detroit, Michigan area. Many of the characters are living with multiple identities in which internal identities feel incongruous with their obvious, external identities. This experiential activity aims to highlight the way that this experience can impact individuals with multiple identities in the course of interpersonal interactions.

Activity Description

1. The presenters will tape an index card on the forehead (or back, depending on the student's comfort level) of each student. Each index card will be labeled with a particular external identity. Students will then be given 5 minutes to interact with one another on the basis of these external labels. Note: Students will be instructed not to tell other students what their index cards say and to avoid making the external identity explicitly clear in their interaction. As a result, students will get a sense of their social position based on how others treat them, without knowing the specific label they have been given.
2. After the five minutes is up, the presenters will present each student with a second index card. This index card will have a less obvious, more internal identity written on it. The students may read this card, but may not share this second identity with others. Students will then be given an additional 5 minutes to continue their interactions. Note: Some students may receive a second identity that is the same as their first identity, while other students may receive seemingly incongruous identities.
3. At the conclusion of the activity students will discuss their personal experience of the activity. The following questions can be used to facilitate this discussion:
 - a. What was this experience like for you?
 - b. How did the experience of students assigned incongruous identities differ from the experience of students assigned more congruous identities?
 - c. What does this experience have to say about privilege and/or marginalization?
 - d. How might this experience be clinically relevant when working with clients with multiple identities?
 - e. Did this experience have any personal significance for you? Can you think of time when you have had a similar experience?