

# Mapping the Layers of Context

## What is context exactly?

Context is everywhere and in everything, yet we can't see it, so we often miss its effect on us. *Context is the structure that gives rise to the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors exhibited by those operating within that structure.* Everything we think, feel, and do is actually an outgrowth of the systems within which we live and work. The ecology, the socioeconomic structure, the family structures, the community structure, and the work structure all interweave to create overlapping contexts that shape how we live.

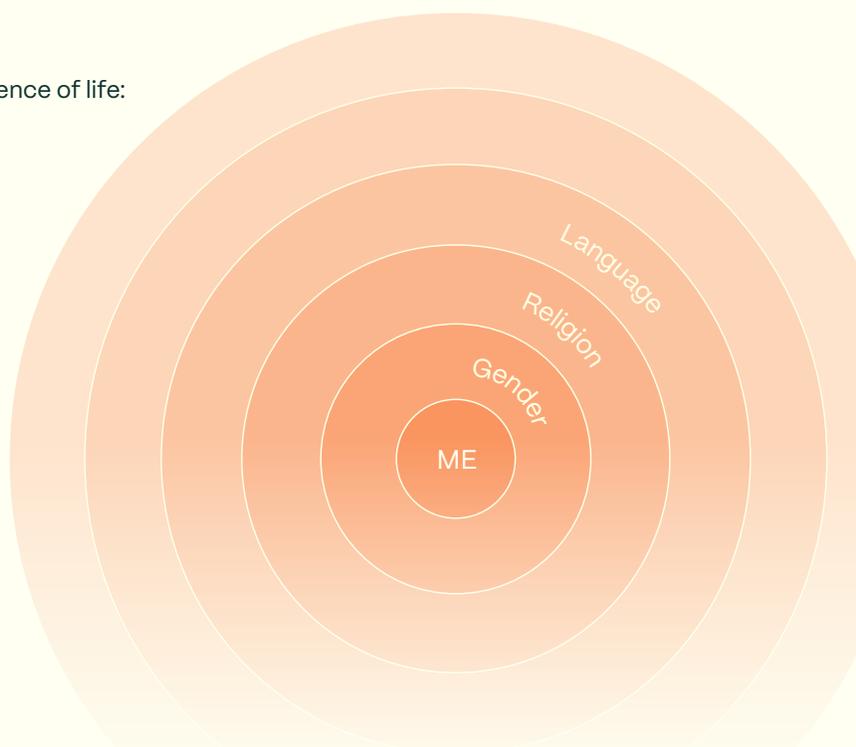
*We are created in multiple contexts.* All of these forces are pressing on us and *shape* us as individuals. We tend to think, in America in particular, that the individual creates his or herself and that we are in charge of "the self." While we do have tremendous power to re-shape, our original shaping was given by many forces, most much larger than "the self."

*It follows that our personal context is the one we can have the most influence over,* and, ironically, it is often the least obvious to us. As many of us strive to articulate what it is that we want in our lives and how we might go about creating it, we frequently overlook our own personal context. A favorite joke exemplifies our unawareness: A wise older fish swims by a couple youngsters and asks jovially: "How's the water today?" The younger fish looks at her friend, and says, "Water? What water?" Most of us, like the young fish, do not recognize the system of beliefs, values, assumptions and patterns of thought that inform our reality and construct our actions, feelings, and thinking.

## Layers of Context

Here are some of the contexts shaping us and our experience of life:

The language we speak	Family	Dualism
Our physical body	Religion	Social conditioning of all kinds
Physical ability	Capitalism	
Race	Money	
Sexual orientation	Addictions	
Gender identity	The idea that we are a separate self	
Class		



# Layers of Context Map

1. List your first thoughts on the layers of context that have shaped you:

2. Possible contexts you were shaped by:

The language we speak	Family	Dualism
Our physical body	Religion	Social conditioning of all kinds
Physical ability	Capitalism	
Race	Money	
Sexual orientation	Addictions	
Gender identity	The idea that we are a separate self	
Class		

3. Fill in the contexts you were most shaped by in your life:

