**LENSES ACTIVITY**

Developed by Cameron Houin (2018)

1. Draw two circles side-by-side that are not touching. Within these circles, list your various identities. Suggestions are provided below; you may also add identities that feel significant to your life (ex: college athlete, southerner, etc.).
* Twin
* Sister
* Friend
* Cat mom
* Student
* Counselor educator
* Graduate assistant
1. Upon filling in your identities, connect the circles in the middle to form the bridge of your “lenses.” Next, add an arm on the outside of each circle to complete the frames.

Every interaction we have, every perception we make, and every decision we choose are all colored by our “lenses.” Each individual looks through their own unique set of lenses based on their specific cultural identities, backgrounds, contexts, and experiences.

While we can never fully take off these figurative lenses, we can be aware of their existence in ourselves and in others.

Discussion prompts:

1. How might your lenses influence how you perceive the world around you?

My lenses could influence how I perceive the world around me because of the way that it impacts my vision of what other people experience and possibly how they view things as well. It is easy to believe that people can understand what I have been through or what I experience when considering my own lenses on the world. I may think that others either share this lens or see the world only from these lenses at times. For example, it is easy for me to see the world from the point of view of a student because of how long I have had this identity. I value education, so it is easier for me to empathize with other students, support funding or other projects that benefit students, and to stay in that lens because it is comfortable for me. These biases may be hard to keep in check but are critical to note and be aware of to improve as a counselor educator.

1. What feelings come up as you reflect on the fact that everyone who interacts with you is viewing you through their own set of lenses?

Everyone has their own unique lens that gives them a different perspective from their personal cultural background. I find myself feeling curious about those perspectives because it is an opportunity to be respectful and empathetic, especially if they are different from my own experiences and my own lens. Everyone has been influenced by different beliefs, values, and experiences throughout their lives and I am striving to become the best ally by being open minded and non-judgmental. I want to continue feeling curious, open-minded, and learn more about how I can best support those from diverse backgrounds.

1. Knowing these figurative lenses exist, how can we use this knowledge to help us most effectively work with others?

I believe that we can use this knowledge of figurative lenses to become more empathetic, communicative, respectful, and use our curiosity to explore common ground and celebrate differences we may have from others. Putting ourselves in another person’s shoes to gain more perspective on their lens can help us connect on a deeper level with them and create a healthier environment that feels safer to be ourselves. Creating a space that invites open communication can also help us remove possible barriers, which in turn can give us a place to become more understanding of diverse viewpoints. This can then lead to respectful and active listening without judgment being involved.