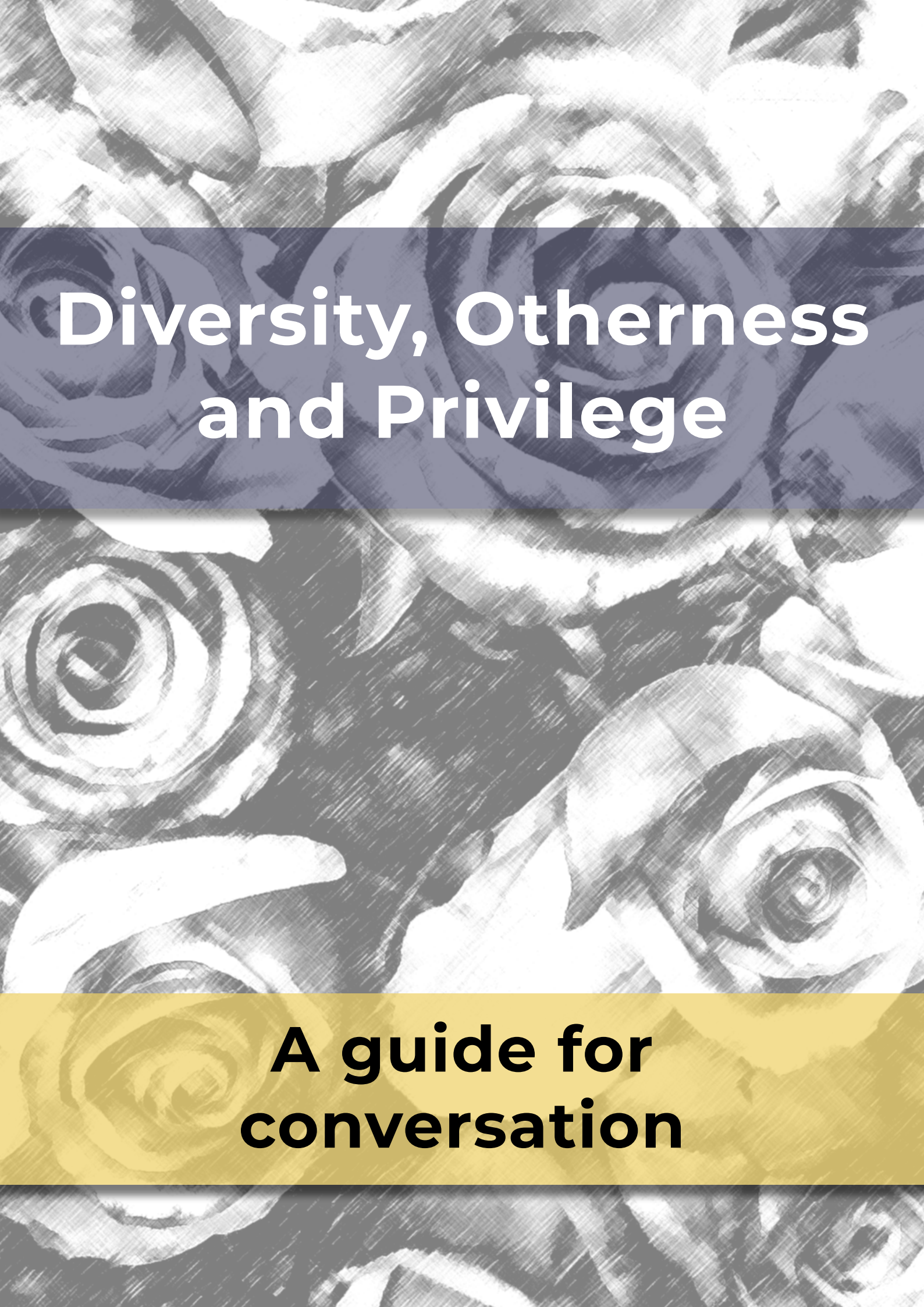




Diversity, Otherness and Privilege

**A guide for
conversation**

This resource

This resource, produced by the Susanna Wesley Foundation (SWF), has been developed by Dr Emma Pavey at SWF. The six diagrams in the booklet are based on the work of SWF Research Officer and Methodist Minister Rev Ermal Kirby; his work has focused on cultural diversity in Methodist churches in different contexts over several decades. The diagrams are, in turn, a development of ideas which he first encountered through the Zebra Project in East London. Additional text and graphic design are by Emma Pavey.

This booklet is a resource for communities to consider all kinds of diversity, and their own sense of otherness and privilege, both individually and, most crucially, in community.

Obviously a booklet cannot cover this complex topic comprehensively. We trust that this booklet will nonetheless stimulate questions and discussion within communities, and generate conversation, empathy and understanding as an ongoing practice.

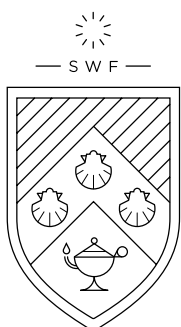
A Facilitator Guide and other resources are also available via our website (see below)..

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The Susanna Wesley Foundation (a partnership of the Methodist Church in Britain and the University of Roehampton) is committed to an ethos of participation that facilitates learning in, between, and from communities of faith.

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Introduction

Many aspects of our identities are socially constructed rather than innate. In other words, who we think we are is based largely on ideas we have incorporated from the society around us. This also applies to our interactions with other people. When we encounter another person, or group of people, the similarities and differences we happen to notice, and the judgements we make based on what we notice, are influenced by what we have learned and experienced about different types of people.

What we think and what we do when we notice difference, and when we experience difference, is the subject of this resource.

In this booklet, we present six different models for interacting with others: **Assimilation**, **Rejection**, **Syncretisation**, **Conversion**, **Toleration**, and **New Creation**. These are linguistic and visual tools for thinking and talking about diversity, otherness, and privilege, and how our communities can build competencies in this area.

Also provided in this booklet are short discussions of key terms that you may come across, with questions to consider, as well as some resources for further exploration. You may find these discussions helpful as you consider the diagrams.

As we begin, it's important to note that while some of what we think and do when we encounter difference may be conscious, much more is often unconscious or implicit.

Learn more about **unconscious bias** in a short video from the Royal Society: search for 'Royal Society unconscious bias' on Youtube.

Harvard University have a number of implicit bias tests available online that claim to demonstrate this: search online for 'implicit bias test'.

While we (arguably) cannot 'cure' unconscious bias, thinking honestly and carefully about these issues together can help to bring to the surface the ways in which we treat those we perceive to be different from us. It can also help us to understand the perspective of others who see us as different.

Otherness

*Being or feeling different in appearance or character from what is familiar, expected, or generally accepted.
(Cambridge Dictionary)*

Labelling or treating a group or individual as 'other' is an act of power. It determines what is placed at the centre, as the norm, and defines anything else as on the margins. 'Othering' is a term to describe this process. This is why the ability to define oneself, and indeed one's own otherness, is empowering.

The power dynamics involved in the concept of otherness are crucial to understand because, as many sociologists and theologians have emphasized, we are first and foremost relational beings, which means we can only really know ourselves in relation to others, and vice versa. We cannot be well-functioning human beings in isolation.

From this perspective, learning to recognize both our similarities and our differences in an equal, empathetic way that gives the other the freedom to be themselves, is at the heart of a flourishing community. In other words, learning to negotiate 'otherness' and understanding its relationship to power is of crucial importance for both ethics - how we treat each other - and an understanding of our own identity.

Questions

Have you come across the word 'otherness' or 'othering' used in the ways described here? If so, where? If not, how do you feel about these terms?

When have you experienced being made to feel like an 'other' - how would you describe this experience and its relationship to power?

When have you - intentionally or not - 'othered' someone; in other words, made them feel like they were different from the core group of which you were, or are, a part?

Privilege

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group (Oxford Dictionary)

In western societies overall, people characterised as white, middle or upper class, educated, young adult, male, heterosexual, cisgender*, and without disability are privileged. While these labels, like all labels, hide nuance, those who can identify with all of these characteristics at once have the most power and the most access to resources. This may come in the form of language terms, cultural practices, representation in the media, access to services, and so on. You may be able to think of further examples.

Recognizing where one is privileged is not a bad thing, but it can be a challenging idea that evokes strong emotion - what matters is what we do with that privilege once it is identified. How does it impact how we treat those without that privilege? How does it impact how we treat those with more privilege than us?

The term 'white privilege' is used to refer to the particular advantages connected to those who have white skin. While many sources relate this to the North American context, it's important to consider how it applies in the UK.

Questions

When have you felt that others had unearned privilege that you did not have? How did you feel?

When have you experienced privilege - an awareness that your advantage was due to a characteristic that society favours, rather than having been earned?

How does the notion of privilege emerge in your faith tradition or worldview, both in its history and its ideas? How does it intersect with ideas about grace, or notions of superiority?

Diversity

The state of showing a great deal of variety (Oxford Dictionary)

A group that is diverse is one that contains people with variety of characteristics. In order to function well, such a group must find a way to allow people to express themselves in a way that is equal and inclusive, and which generates a feeling of unity, justice and peace. This is a very challenging task.

By its very nature, a diverse community will always be in flux; it is a dynamic, organic gathering that will require flexibility, constant communication, and acceptance of change.

Perhaps the most important skill in developing a diverse community is listening deeply and lovingly, without an agenda. We can work to generate safe space for those whose voices are not as privileged to be heard. We can all try to listen more than we speak, recognizing that we do not know the burdens the other might be bearing, and that we can all work to move out of our comfort zone. Through engaging in processes like these, the ways in which we are similar as human beings emerges to sit alongside important considerations of how we differ.

Questions

What does your faith tradition or worldview teach about diversity in relation to unity, justice, and peace? What examples does it present of listening and moving outside of one's comfort zone?

What challenges does a diverse group bring? Is there ever a reason to have groups with limited diversity?

What are the benefits of creating diverse communities?

Models of interaction with difference

The following pages present the six models representing the ways we might interact with those who are different from us.

We invite you to explore and discuss these models, thinking about how they represent experiences you have had or witnessed. Discuss how they might provide a way forward for your community.

Explore both when you have felt like the pink oval, the 'them', and when like the group, the 'us', both as an individual and as a community. Consider too how the models intersect with the terms otherness, privilege, and diversity, and the questions associated with those terms.

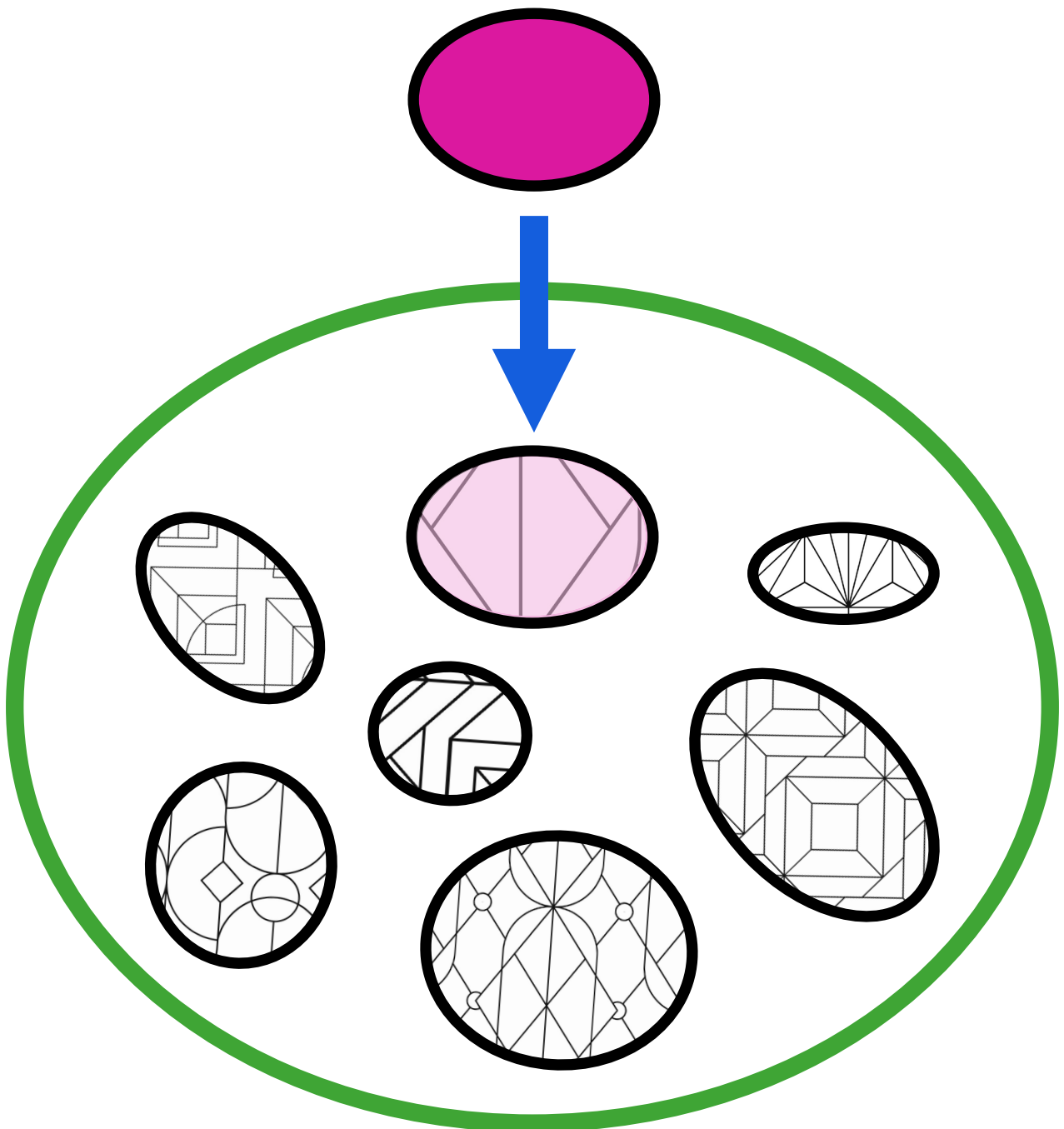
Finally, think about how your faith tradition or worldview provides examples of each of these ways of interacting with difference, through tradition, through holy texts, and, most importantly, in practice.

Let us not tire of
preaching
love
it is the force that will
overcome the world.

Oscar Romero

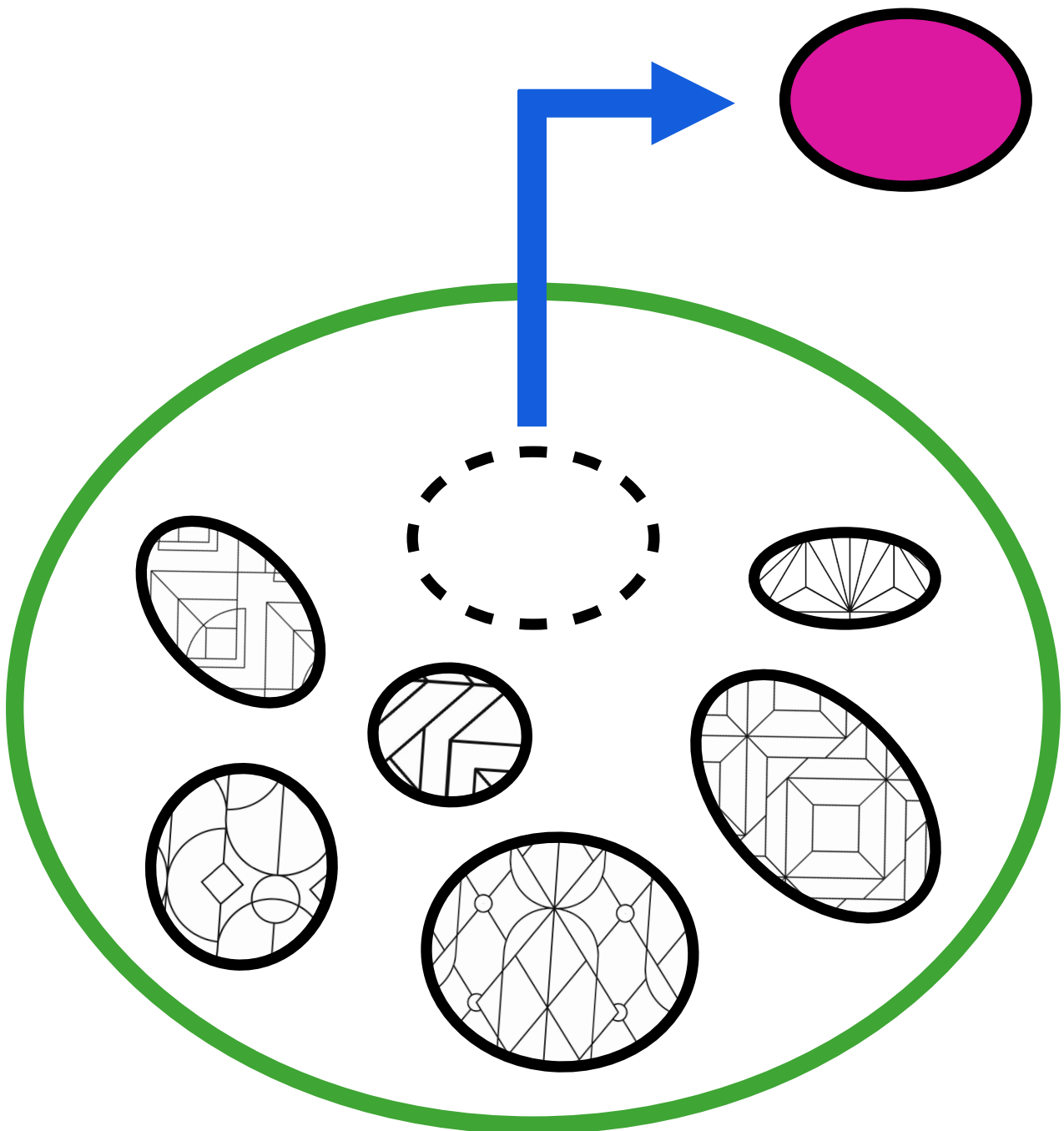
Assimilation

Make 'them' like 'us'



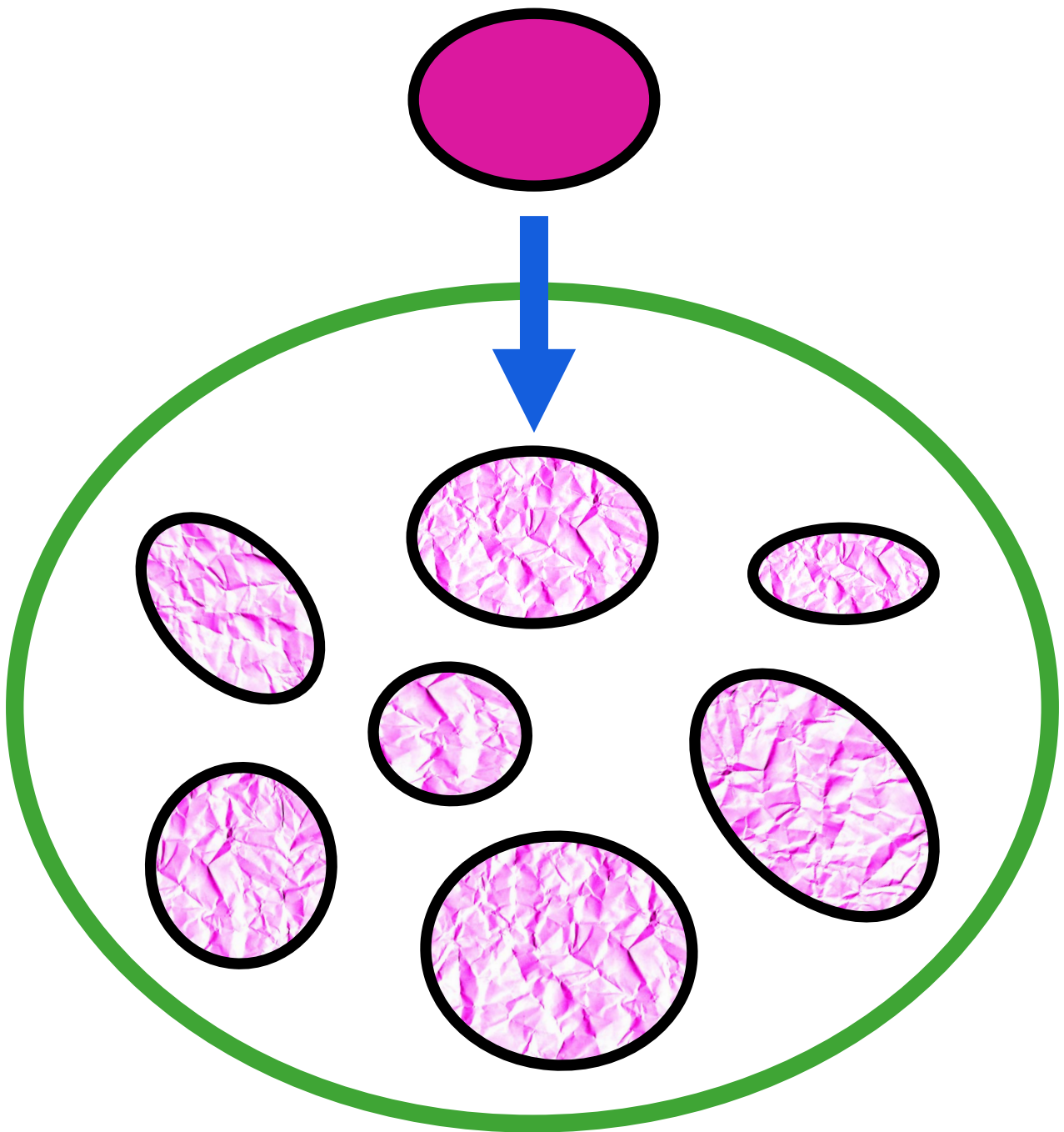
Rejection

Send 'them' away from 'us'



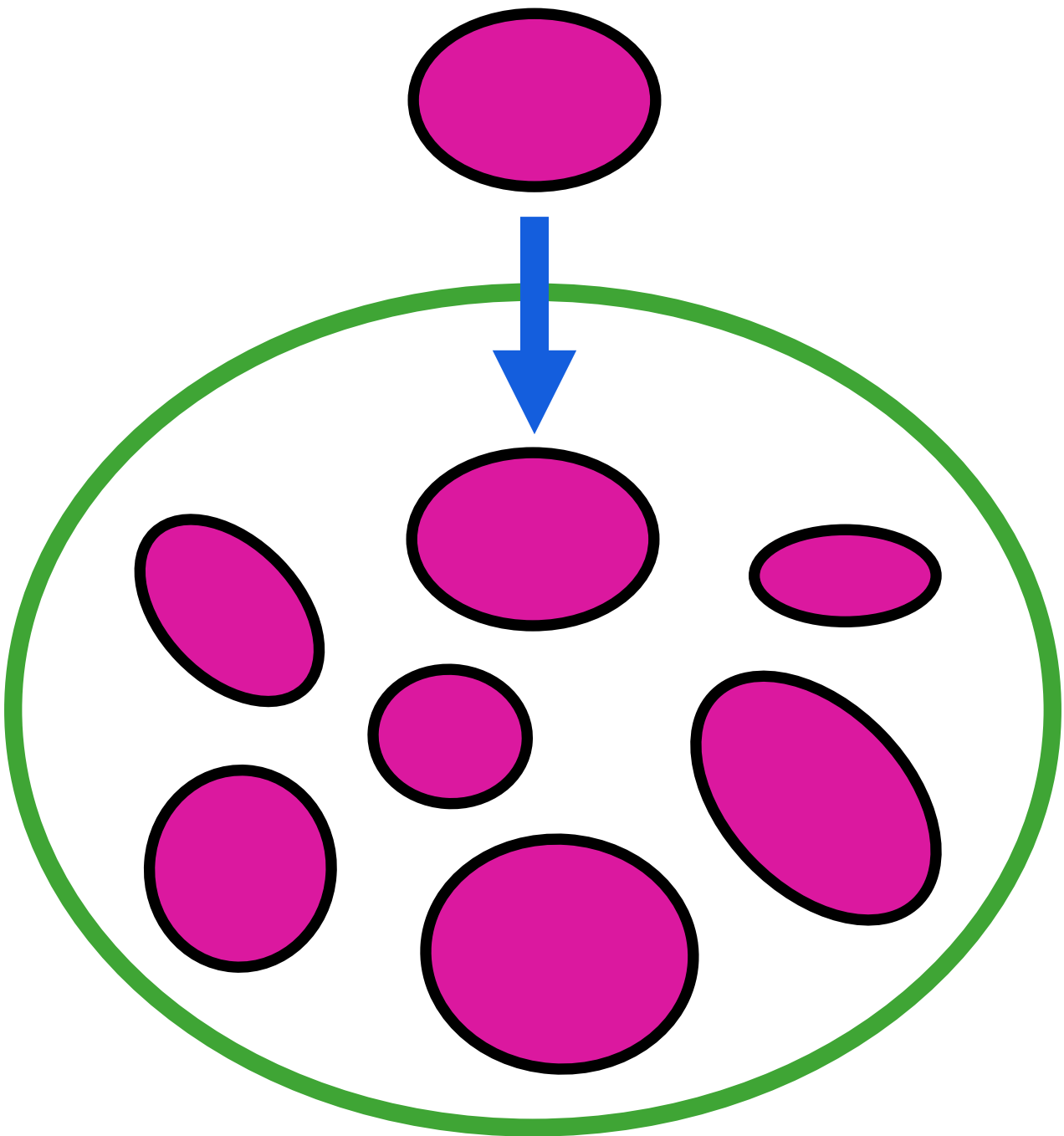
Syncretisation

Mix 'them' up with 'us'



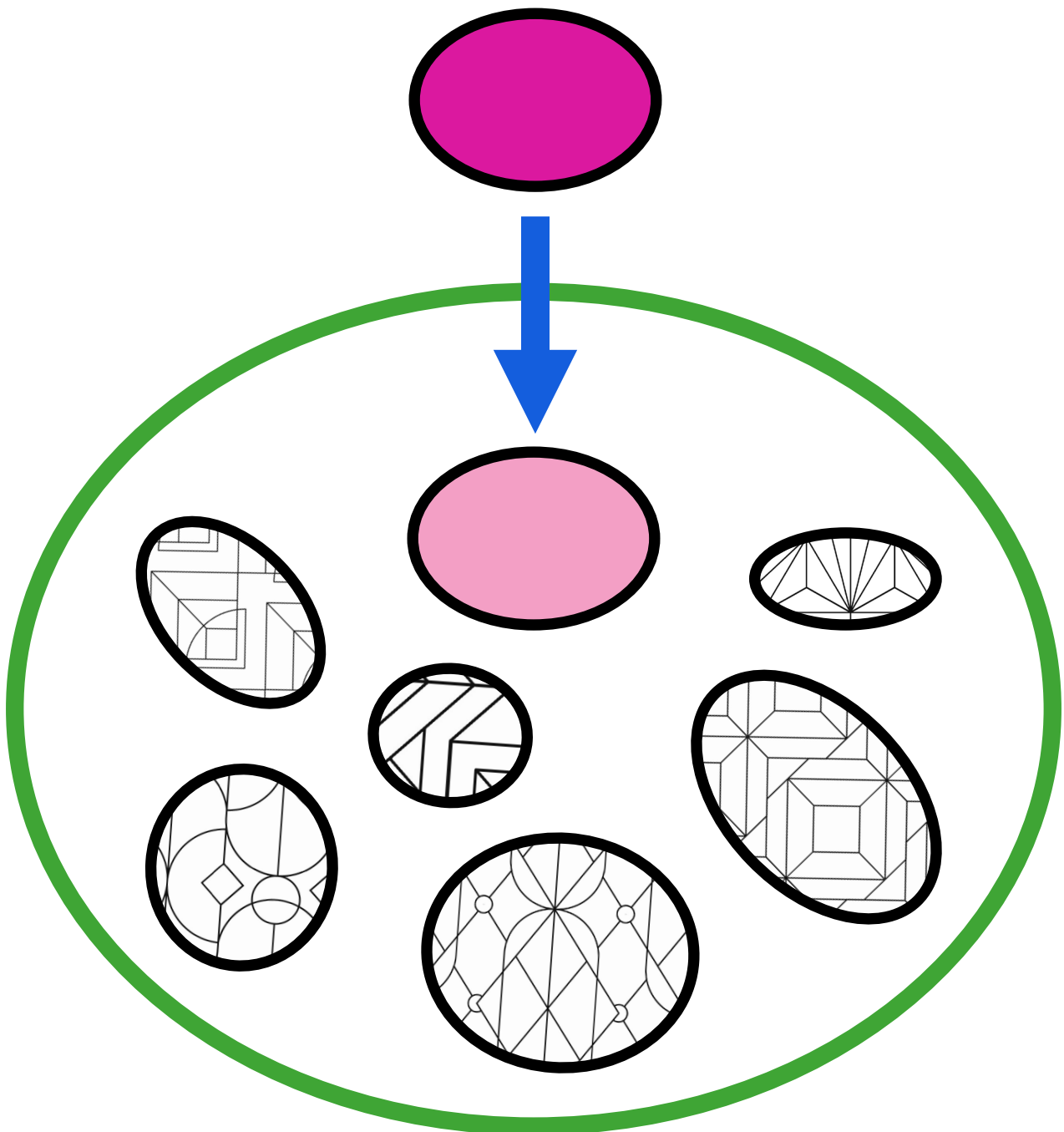
Conversion

'We' become like 'them'



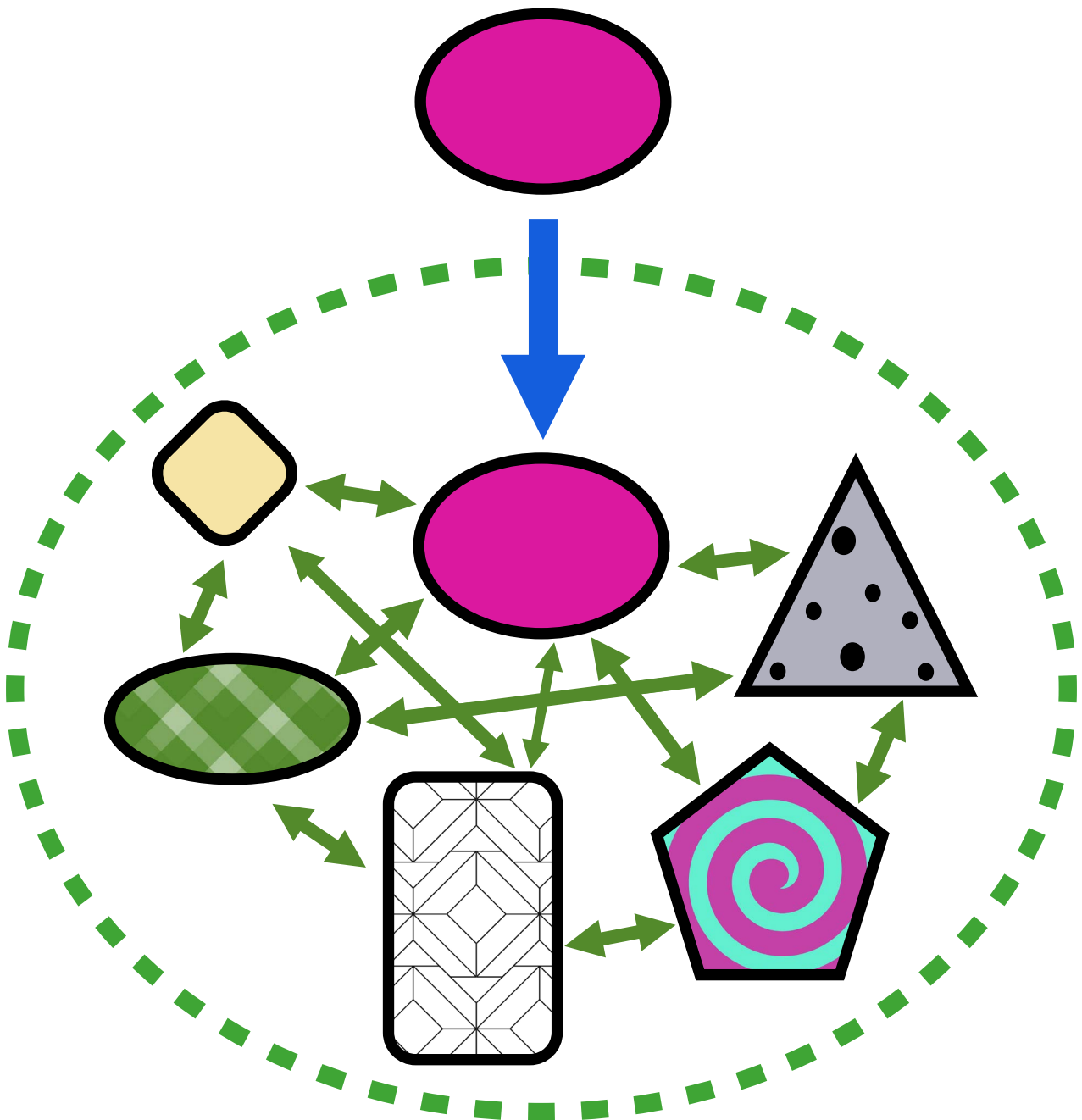
Toleration

*Allow 'them' space
alongside 'us'*



New Creation

*Discover new combinations
and patterns*



Resources

The following resources provide further ways to explore the area of diversity, otherness, and privilege for building community.

Block, Peter. (2018). *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (2nd ed). San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Hirsch, Afua. (2018). *Brit(ish): on Race, Identity and Belonging*. London: Vintage.

Palmer, Parker. (2009). *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life; Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Scharmer, C. Otto. (2018). *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*. Oakland: Berrett-Koehler.

Vogl, Charles. (2016). *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging*. Oakland: Berrett-Koehler

Resources from a Christian perspective:

Pohl, Christine. (1999). *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans.

Reynolds, Thomas. (2008). *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids: Brazos.

Zizioulas, John. (2006). *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*. London: T&T Clark.

*Cisgender (see p3): 'relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex' (Oxford dictionary). In contrast to transgender.



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