TELLING YOUR IDENTITY STORY

1.) How would you describe your identity in no more than five words? These words could encompass any aspects of your identity that you consider important (race, ethnicity, professional affiliation, cultural affiliation, etc.). Write them down.

2.) Looking at these five words, think of a time when one (or more) of these aspects of your identity led someone or a group of people to make an assumption about you, and that assumption resulted in that person or persons treating you in a specific manner. Write down, in no more than two sentences, a brief description of what occurred.

Some examples:
“When I was 15, someone assumed that I wouldn’t like their music, and so they put on a different song they thought matched my interests more.”
“When I entered the synagogue, all heads turned, and someone rushed over to me and asked if I needed help finding my way around.”

3.) Look once again at your five words and think of a group or activity in which one (or more) of these aspects of your identity was a reason that you were involved. Once you’ve identified that affiliation, think of a time when you might have felt alienated from that group because your beliefs or actions didn’t seem to match the group’s identity. This might have been verifiable alienation or might have been perceived.

Some examples:
Actual – “My feeling about that policy didn’t align with the group’s values, and once I expressed my feeling, I was no longer invited to certain activities.”
Perceived – “My stance on that issue in our society didn’t seem to connect with what the group cared about, and so I feared that I would be left out if I expressed it. I said nothing and it left me feeling disconnected from my peers.”

Write down, in no more than two sentences, a brief description of what occurred.

4.) Choose which story you want to tell – The narrative from prompt one or the other from prompt two. Know that you can always work on the other choice in the future.
5.) Now, take 3-5 minutes to visualize the story. Ask yourself these questions as you reflect on the experience:

- What does anyone hearing the story need to know at the beginning to frame it? Do they need to know how old I was, where I was living, what was going on in society, how I got to this group or this place, etc.?
- How would you describe this aspect of your identity in relationship to this story?
- What sets the story in motion? Is it a conversation, an observation, a need, a want, a concern?
- Who is with you in this story? Who are the other players? Are they your friends, strangers, etc.?
- What is the physical place in which this story takes place?
- Once the story is on its way, what feelings arise?
- What thoughts are occurring to you that are private, and which do you express publicly?
- What obstacles occur in the story, and how do you overcome or get stopped by them?
- How do you embrace and enjoy, or fight back against and struggle with, what is taking place?
- Where does the story leave us – Are we in a place of hope, of challenge, of possibility?

6.) Write down the first line of your story.

Some examples:
“\( I \) walked into the room.”
“I was thirteen, and it was my first time away from home.”
“I’m Jewish, but never really considered that an obstacle.”

7.) Skip two pages and write down the last line of your story.

Some examples:
“And that’s when I knew I had to leave.”
“We worked it out and are still working it out to this day.”

8.) Take 20 minutes and fill in between the beginning and ending with your writing.

9.) Read your story.

10.) Share your story.