Life Map

Using the Activity Sheet from the cycle of socialization, students will think about their social identity and times in their life when they recognized or learned about each of their social identities. Students will develop a personal life map which will include these events from their past leading up to the day of class. They must include a minimum of ten events from their past. When brainstorming events think of these social identities: race, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, religious, able-bodied (use identities from the identity wheel.)

Life Map Activity (developed by Marcella Runnell Hall)

Purpose: To begin or continue thinking about your individual life’s journey and how that impacts who you are today.

Materials: one sheet of paper, pens/pencils, markers, photos, magazine clippings (on your own), etc.

Directions: Starting from the day you were born, leading up to this moment as you are now a student, you will chart your journey using the concept of a Life Map.

A Life Map is a visual representation of your socialization process as it relates to your individual experiences.

Students will do the life map activity as homework and bring their life map to class to discuss in small groups

You may use pictures, words, blurbs, or symbols, to create your map. You should be thinking about your life’s journey in relationship to the specific social identities we are focusing on this semester. For example, you might want to think about how your physical or mental ability has impacted your life or your experience in your family. This includes dehabilitating/chronic illness. You might also think about how your gender identity has impacted your life’s experience. For example, what gender expectations were placed on you growing up? Were you encouraged to play sports? Date a particular type of person? Express yourself in a particular way? In terms of race and/or sexual orientation, how did being social identities impact you in school? Friendships? Sports teams? Dating relationships? Interactions with your family?

If you are having trouble thinking about significant events you might try using some of these questions to jump start your process. Think about a time...

• When your identities made a difference to you or to someone else.
• When you felt uncomfortable being your race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.
• When you were treated well because of your race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.
• When you were mistreated because of your race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.
• When you were laughed at because of your race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.
• When you felt good about your race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.
• When you noticed a representation of your race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability in the media. What messages did you receive from the incidents described above?
• Which messages were positive? Negative?
  1. Also think about... How have your behaviors changed in response to any of these messages?
Students are to note at least 10 key events in their lives that brought awareness to them about social/cultural identities on their life map. It would help if the instructors did examples from their own experience to help frame the activity.

**Students will share their life maps in Small Groups**

Students will form groups of three-four. Ask each participant to share the events from his or her life map and then together discuss their answers to the following questions (30 minutes):

- How are the life maps similar? How are they different?
- Does cultural background influence life map?
- Where did the strongest messages about your identities come from (family, community, religion, media)?

**IV. Lead Large Group Discussion**

Reconvene the group and lead a group discussion using the following questions:

2. Were there any similar experiences amongst the same identities (did females experience some of the same things as other females, people amongst the similar socio-economic status, ect.,)

3. Where did the strongest messages about identity come from (family, community, religion, media)?

Record responses to questions four and five on flip chart paper. Recording participants' responses will serve as good reinforcement.

4. What are some of the negative messages about an identity that you do not want to accept?

If not mentioned by the group, add the following suggestions:

- Get clear about your own beliefs on social and cultural identities by writing down in a journal your thoughts and feelings.
- Find friends and supportive adults who have similar beliefs about _____.
- Use self talk to counteract negative messages about identity.
- Try critically analyzing media images about social identities with friends or family.

**Summary and Closure**

Thank participants for sharing. Conclude the activity by summarizing the main points that arose in the discussions.