Harnessing Uniqueness and Finding Similar People

Chapter 6 addresses race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and other aspects of diversity that shape individual students' expectations and experiences of college life. Some students find the university to have greater diversity than their smaller hometowns, while others came from more diverse urban settings. Many students struggle to understand how they fit in and how to make sense of others' attitudes. Students reflect on experiences with inclusion and exclusion during college, and many come to understand these experiences as part of larger social structures. Readers learn how to harness their identities as a personal strength, while also finding others who are similar enough to understand and support their perspective, values, or interests.

This chapter focuses on *diversity and identity*, which are key areas of growth for most college students. The goal is to encourage students to reflect on and understand their own identities and view diversity on campus as an opportunity to develop "soft skills." Soft skills refer to engaging with others in emotionally mature, respectful, and empathic ways. Talking with other students about their differences and similarities builds these skills, and college campuses often provide new opportunities to engage with people from different backgrounds.

STUDENT STORIES: WHAT WE EXPERIENCE

In the following stories, Jacob discusses feeling like a "fish out of water" on campus because it is more diverse than his hometown. Andrea and Cody, on the other hand, report that the same university is *less* diverse than their hometowns. Cameron shares about experiencing racism for the first time, and Eduardo and Marco discuss being bicultural. Linda relates her family's reaction to her dating someone from a different culture, while Landon describes his family's reaction to his desire to learn more about Muslims. Nikolaus describes being categorized as white to boost his chances of getting adopted, and William talks about the pressures of conforming to white ideals. Hayden, who reflects on what it is like to be bisexual, engages the issue of sexuality. Erin and Braden discuss religiosity, the former turning away from it and the latter engaging it more actively. Together, these students are diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, country of origin, culture, gender, sexuality, family status, and religiosity.

#fishoutofwater or #dontbelong: Do you feel like a fish out of water? Sometimes I do. In class, my prof called this "culture shock." All I know is it's so different here than back home.

Jacob describes what it is like to move from a small town where all his classmates were similar to him to a large university with greater diversity:

My elementary school years were spent in a mostly white public school. I did very well on all my homework and tests, and I was very interested in school at a young age. I had always gone to school, come home, went right to my homework, and then played outside until dark. I had no cares in the world, and I was privileged to live in a safe neighborhood with tons of other kids to socialize with. These were all kids just like me. I was situated in a neighborhood where my race and class identities were solid, and I had the advantages of being zoned for a great school system. Since my parents were able to afford to live in a place with access to such a school system, I started off with a huge advantage at a very young age . . . Once it was time to consider middle school, I had started to stand out as an academic student. Because my parents were well off, I had the opportunity to attend a private, Christian prep school. . . . There were only about 80 students in my class there, and I still did not encounter people who were much different than me. I did not understand any of the world outside of my little bubble. . . . I was so surrounded by driven people at such a young age that it was all I knew. Every student was required year-round to be in an athletic activity, play an instrument or be in the choir, and participate in fine arts. All of this was to be done while maintaining perfect grades and taking bible classes. We were able to go on amazing retreats, and even a Florida beach trip in eighth grade. In my mind, life was perfect, and I had no idea what the real world was like . . . Things became different when I came all the way to this campus to compete on the track and field team and pursue my undergraduate degree. Even though I had competed in track all throughout my middle school and high school years, everyone on the team was so different than I was used to. It is almost safe to say that no one was alike at all. We had athletes on the team from everywhere in the world, not just across America.

Conversely, **Andrea** describes nearly the opposite experience when she came to campus, as it was less diverse than the urban context she was accustomed to:

When I first came to this campus, one of the things that struck me was the lack of diversity. In my classes back home, we were very mixed, both in race and economic status. There were of course a few students from the upper class, but most were lower to middle income. Our classes also had a lot of minorities, unlike here. In all of my last semester's classes in college, I counted only 10 non-white students. People also regularly make racist comments to me. One instance [of this that I encountered was], my roommate's friend commented on my boots by saying, "are those your ni**** stomping boots?" No one had ever said anything like that to me before and it made me realize just how racist America still is. This is not the only instance of racist comments I have heard since being in the South. Recently, we played a game against a southern university. While I was warming up in the outfield, one of the fans yelled out to one of the umpires, that was black, "Are you blind? Come on dark-faced blue!" I was immediately taken back at the fact that he just screamed this across the field for the whole stadium to hear. He was so unashamed of his racism. One of our outfielders who is Latino also said that he had been yelling nasty comments to her all game. Based on her phenotype, or physical appearance, the man felt that he was superior to my teammate and the umpire and felt the need to assert his superiority in front of a large group.

Similarly, Cody describes experiencing less diversity in college than in his hometown:

I observed this [less diversity] to be true coming from a racially diverse high school, to the more homogeneous context here on

campus . . . Because of this, [in high school] I was often learning about, and getting to know people that looked different than me and had different backgrounds. This environment allowed me to be more open and accepting of differences in society and encouraged me to think about social problems in a more encompassing manner, as I could still feel empathy for people that I did not identify with. However, my experience shifted in college. It was clear to me that the lack of minority students represented a racial disparity in our society. As I walk into my classes for the first time each semester, especially honors courses, I notice that many of the students seem to reflect my race and class.

#diversity #racism: Had a great conversation today in class about racism, and it made me think back to the first time I ever witnessed racism, in high school. What about you—when was the first time you ever saw or heard something racist happen?

Cameron describes his first encounters with racism:

One of the most dramatic contrasts between my two high schools presented itself in the racial makeup of the school. At my first high school, I was never in class with more than two people who were not white, though in my second high school nearly 30% of the students identified as a minority race. My Spanish class had a 4:3 ratio of native to non-native Spanish speakers. In Kansas, I was never exposed to people who were different than me, in a meaningful way. My family, church, school, and community were made up of people that looked just like me: white and upper middle class . . . With this increase of diversity came an increase of issues among people who were different. The first time I heard the word "n******" yelled down the hallway, I gasped. My mouth flung open in disbelief that someone would say that word, much less so loud. Even more shocking was the lack of reaction by everyone else, which helped me see that this was normal there.

Cameron then recounted that people at the second school thought that it was acceptable to say this word if it was used as a term of endearment among non-white students. Though this may have been the norm in that setting, it may not be the case in college. These formative interactions, however, are likely to continue to affect Cameron in college, even though the norms around him have changed. It is thus important to reflect on the expectations of each new social environment.

#frommexico #opportunity: Look for the #opportunity in each obstacle. Have sympathy for those who have less than you do. That's what life has taught me anyway.

Eduardo explains how growing up as an immigrant has shaped his experience of being bicultural in college:

I spent the first few years of my life in Mexico. When I first arrived in this country, I couldn't communicate. My grades displayed me as being far behind the rest academically . . . My teachers didn't know how much I could truly do because of the language barrier. I had to learn English before I was able to demonstrate to my teachers that I was a bright student with the will to learn despite my disadvantages . . . I also learned that some children need more help than others. My experience encouraged me to pursue a career in which I would help other disadvantaged kids . . . My experience of being an immigrant child, unable to understand, allows me to have sympathy for other kids who need a little extra help to succeed.

Marco reflects on being bicultural:

Two days ago, I recovered a repressed childhood memory while watching a George Lopez stand-up special. The comedian and I share a cultural background; we are both first-generation Mexicans in the United States, with two languages and two

cuisines . . . For me and George Lopez, there are American ways of doing things and Mexican ways; our culture is having two cultures. So when Lopez brought up the old Spanish phrase, '*Sana sana, colita de rana*,' a soothing rhyme used by mothers when their children are in pain [translation: "heal, heal, little frog tail"], I laughed the hardest I had that day, out of pure realization that (a) my 'White-American' self had allowed me to forget how often my own mother used the phrase throughout my upbringing, and (b) that the use of culture to explain how people act collectively *worked*—George Lopez's audience howled with me, and we all howled together because we had a mutual understanding that '*Sana sana, colita de rana*' is how we Mexicans deal with things, things like the scraped little knees of our children.

#interracialdating #interracialfamily: Brought my boyfriend home to meet the family. Turns out my 'rents are actually excited about possibly having a "biracial marriage." Well, we'll see . . .

From a different point of view, **Linda** reflects on dating some-one from another country and reports her family's reaction to the relationship:

Second year of college, I began dating a man named Marco, he was born in the U.S., but his parents moved to this city from Mexico. We began talking because I was minoring in Spanish, and he told me he was impressed that I "knew" another language. Surprised that he felt that way, I responded saying "but you speak both English, and Spanish, because of your family?" and he said "yes but I live in the United States, of course I speak English." What I found interesting is that his life as a child was more integrated with different languages than mine would ever be studying a language, yet I received more praise for my knowledge and effort of learning another language than he did . . . I was privileged to be able to learn a language, whereas anyone raised in a family of a different culture . . . was expected to know English, yet most

Americans don't know another language . . . Because of their race and language barrier, they are excluded from praise for knowing multiple languages.

Moreover, when I told my parents about dating Marco . . . they said maybe we will finally have a "biracial marriage" in the family, almost as though it was a badge to show that we were different from "other whites," and wouldn't be carded off as racist. Then they asked if he was Catholic, and I said yes (I was also raised Catholic), and that reassured them that he wasn't "such a bad guy." However, I question what their views would have been if he would have been Muslim, or Buddhist . . . Their happiness towards the relationship based on Marco's religion, demonstrates the idea that they liked the familiarity of the culture he was brought up in . . . To them, he demonstrated diversity by not being Hispanic versus white [even when at the same time he ironically] "wooed" them with his generic, culturally popular religion.

#adopted #becomingwhite: One of my profs talked about "white privilege" today, and I can't help but yet again be confused about whether I am white or privileged. Definitely confusing since I was born to Asian parents, abandoned in Russia, and adopted by a white family.

Nikolaus describes race and adoption:

The journey of my life begins in a distant country where I was born and immediately put into an orphanage. In Russia, I was born to parents who were both teenagers, and I was the third child. From an early age, social factors began to forge how my life would play out. The first of these is through labeling . . . This labeling was portrayed in my life through the designation of my race as Caucasian on my birth certificate, even though I could have been simply labeled as Asian. I was most likely labeled this way because it gave me a higher chance of being adopted . . . By being as close to white as possible I could then be more desirable. Passing as

white comes through many different forms. I have darker skin because of the location in Russia I am from and am often confused for being Mexican. Just a couple of weeks ago in the dining hall, one of the workers started speaking to me in Spanish, and I had to tell them I didn't understand, and she said, "sorry you just look Mexican." . . . To further fit this white American standard, when I came over to the United States my name was changed from Nikolaus to a name sounding much more American and which passed with a greater degree of acceptance: Nick. [By being labeled white, my adoption fees were most likely higher.] While having a higher price tag may seem silly, it meant that I could be considered white and was advertised that way to attract American families.

#whitemale #pressure: Some say that pressure creates diamonds, but I'm not so sure.

William discusses a different aspect of diversity:

The structure of the American society is one conducive to the success of white, heterosexual, upper-middle class, Christian males. . . . As a white, heterosexual, upper-middle class, Christian male, I can say that . . . in the midst of all of my privilege, the fact is often overlooked that I still have to work hard to achieve my goals, and furthermore it is often forgotten that because success is supposedly granted to me ahead of others in similar positions to myself, outsiders who know nothing of my life have higher expectations for my success in the modern world. Consequently, if I do not succeed, I as a white, heterosexual, upper-middle class, Christian male will be a social outcast among my friends and family. While it is harder for underprivileged groups to succeed, white, heterosexual, upper-middle class, Christian males are burdened by an anticipation of success at a higher frequency than any other group, because it is perceived as markedly easier. Being a white, heterosexual, upper-middle class, Christian male is both

a blessing and a curse in today's society, in that it comes with an expectation of success that not every privileged male can or will reach.

#bipride #notjustaphase: happy #bipride. where's the fun in choosing sides??

Hayden discusses another aspect of diversity, sexuality:

I am bisexual. This is a phrase I have always struggled to say because although society's attitude toward the LGBT community is changing for the positive, overall, many individuals' attitudes are still hateful and unaccepting . . . As a bisexual individual, I can pass for straight, which gives me a strange sort of privilege, for through this "passing" I can be accepted as a "normal" (read: straight) member of society. Even though heterosexual people can see me as being a member of their group . . . once members of the straight community are aware of my status, full acceptance is rarely entirely given . . . My identity is belittled. I, like many other bisexuals, am told that it is "just a phase" or that I "will figure out what I really am once I find the right person."

#notcatholic #agnostic: Just learned what the word "agnostic" means today. I think that is what I am now. Sorry grandma:/

Touching on another form of diversity, **Erin** describes having grown up religious but moving away from religiosity now as an emerging adult:

I considered myself to be Catholic until around my junior year of high school. This was probably because my immediate family was Catholic, and that is how I was raised. Then in high school many of my friends did not have Catholic beliefs, and so I was not exposed to Catholicism through them. Additionally, my school was not afraid to address some controversial beliefs of the Catholic

Church. Through these experiences I concluded that I no longer believe in the Catholic Church.

#christian: I'm a Christian. I am not perfect, but I do think Christianity gives me strength.

Braden describes how growing up Christian affected his values:

Christianity gave me a unique view on life that allowed me to constantly move between social groups . . . [Within certain denominations,] Christianity views sexual relations before marriage as wrong, including those in the mind brought on by pornography, while the society that exists around us is extremely centered on exploring sexuality and the pursuit of sexual partners outside of the covenant of marriage . . . The human race is innately sexual, due to sex being the way for reproduction, but the sexual desires are for more than just reproduction. Humans have an obsession with sex that occurred throughout the ages and will still occur in the future. These sexual influences were pushed on me and societal influences connected sexuality to masculinity . . . Christianity, however, is meant to be concerned with what is godly and right, not what is masculine or feminine. Through its stance on masculinity and sexuality, Christianity is, in essence, a powerful source of socialization . . . The beauty of society is that there are others who have had similar experiences to mine, but still others who did not . . . [and whose] views on my life and their own experiences could be vastly different from my own.

#islamophobia: stop the hate.

Landon discusses how he is affected by the anti-Muslim sentiment in his family:

With my continuation and interest in language, I asked my parents (for Christmas) for a book on learning Arabic (for example, a

> dictionary, or Rosetta Stone type software, etc.). Their first question was if I was going to convert to become a Muslim. I stated no, but I wanted to learn more about their religion. I told them "Arabic is a wide-spread language, and not everyone who speaks Arabic is Muslim." They replied "Well you better not convert!" Instead for Christmas, I got a book against Muslims from the perspective of an African woman being kidnapped.

SCIENCE: WHAT WE KNOW

As these student stories illustrate, questions about diversity and identity make up an integral part of college life. These questions often arise during emerging adulthood when young people are figuring out who they are and what it means to be an adult. Issues of race, gender, religion, sexuality, and language can surface in college, while emerging adults explore their own attitudes about the privileges and constrictions that come with their identities, as well as learn to navigate the ways these facets of diversity structure university life. Often college presents a time to reflect on what is normal and on the culture of one's upbringing. For example, Becker (2013)[1] finds that social institutions—such as education, family, economic, and political institutions—establish social norms. The shared culture these norms create provides people in the same social groups with similar understandings. Many of the student stories illuminate the ways that race can shape young people's identities, often by conveying a sense that conforming to the dominant culture is required to "make it" (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 2013)[2] and forms the structure of the university. Jacob recounts how being in college allows him to see being white as coming with certain privileges and expectations. Eduardo, Marco, and Nikolaus all wrestle with what it means to be an American, a category tied up with race, language, and culture. All three of these students experience the feeling of being in-between identities.

Beyond identity issues, it is also important to learn from research that race is related to socioeconomic status. For instance, Thomas Shapiro (2013)[3] has shown how racial differences in rates of homeownership contribute to differences in wealth, a measure which reveals a greater gap between races than does income. **Eduardo** provides an example of this:

> My parents are from Hidalgo, Mexico. They left everyone and everything they loved in pursuit of a job in a foreign nation where I would have more opportunity. Our socioeconomic standing is of the lower class. Growing up, my father worked in construction and my mother had a job cleaning homes, hotels, and rehabilitation homes. The racial wealth gap was prevalent in our family . . . Immigrant families do not have any previous accumulation of wealth or property in a new country. They also simply do not have the documentation to build a mortgage and have credit.

In this way, race and ethnicity are structural issues, meaning they are built into the institutions and processes that form the economy. Matthew Desmond and Mustafa Emirbayer (2013),[4] in a book entitled *What is Racial Domination?*, explain that race is also symbolic, meaning it is something people actively create and recreate as they formulate ideas and meaning-making processes. This is especially true for international students. The authors explain: "We misrecognize race as natural when we begin to think that racial cleavages and inequalities can be explained by pointing to attributes somehow inherent in the race itself (as if they were biological) instead of understanding how social powers, economic forces, political institutions, and cultural practices have brought about these divisions" (2013: 342). For example, in *More Than Just Black*, William Julius Wilson (2010)[5] explains how his race is perceived differently based on the circumstances surrounding his appearance, such as his clothes:

> I am an internationally known Harvard professor, yet a number of unforgettable experiences remind me that, as a black male in America looking considerably younger than my age, I am also

feared. For example, several times over the years I have stepped into the elevator of my condominium dressed in casual clothes and could immediately tell from the body language of the other residents in the elevator that I made them feel uncomfortable. Were they thinking, "What is this black man doing in this expensive condominium? Are we in any danger?" I once sarcastically said to a nervous elderly couple who hesitated to exit the elevator because we were all getting off on the same floor, "Not to worry, I am a Harvard professor and I have lived in this building for nine years." When I am dressed casually, I am always a little relieved to step into an empty elevator, but I am not apprehensive if I am wearing a tie (pp. 1–2).

These symbolic dimensions of race come across in the experiences of many students. Students from racially homogenous social environments may recognize the importance of these dimensions of race for the first time in college, once they are interacting with more diverse student bodies. Whether in a more diverse environment, or a less diverse environment, or because they are suddenly confronted with racism, their experiences illustrate how race affects their college experiences and social interactions in the world at large.

Granted, ideas and issues related to race arise long before young people enter college. Debra Van Ausdale and Joe Feagin (2013)[6] study young children and find that even at three and five years of age, kids grasp racial and ethnic concepts and use them as meaningful categories for interpreting social interactions. They explain: "The complex nature of children's group interactions and their solo behaviors demonstrates that race and ethnicity are salient, substantial aspects of their lives" (p. 140). Despite the ongoing difficulties of navigating race and racism, we are mindful of a book entitled *Cosmopolitan Canopies*, in which Elijah Anderson (2013)[7] engages in what he calls "hopeful sociology" by identifying places within cities in which people change racial stereotypes. These city locations allow people to put their "urban guard" down a bit, eavesdrop on each other, and in other ways engage in what Anderson calls folk ethnography: assessing information about each other through thoughtful observation. We believe

that college can likewise provide a context in which people can change their preconceived notions about those in other racial and ethnic groups. As Cody of this chapter explains, "Urban areas, being more diverse, tend to facilitate more empathetic, positive race relations (Anderson 2013). My high school was large and extremely diverse; therefore, it could be compared to an urban area that consists of many different races and cultures."

In addition to race and ethnicity, many other forms of diversity and identity emerge in campus life, and often intersect to affect students' identity. By way of illustration, Marco of this chapter says, "Even 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman 1987, as cited in Risman 2013) played a role in identifying with either group [White or Hispanic]. Across racial lines, similar performances can result in different, gendered meanings, as well as meanings that intersect with race itself." This highlights the role of gender and sexuality in individuals' identities and behaviors. C. J. Pascoe (2013)[8] studied talk of sexuality and found that negative stereotypes of gendered behavior, especially regarding masculinity, are often used to reify gender categories. In day-to-day forms of speaking and interacting, and whether intentionally or not, people may ostracize other groups that do not look or act the same as their reference groups do. This in effect polices the boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, or those like "us" and those that are different.

Georg Simmel discusses this in an essay called "The Stranger" (1908),[9] in which he describes strangers as being outside of a group and yet still helping to define the group by confronting it with the difference that makes it distinct from other people and groups. If nearly all of one's experiences are in being an outsider, the result is *social isolation*: disconnection, often evidenced through having few close friends, a concept distinct from loneliness, which is the subjective experience of being alone regardless of the number of connections (Parigi and Henson 2014).[10] The obvious downsides are that disconnection can lead to feelings of loneliness and a loss of community over time. Yet there are potential advantages to experiencing isolation. First, being an outsider creates a detachment that allows for rational analysis of a group's dynamics, without biases wrought from emotional connection to members of the group. Plus, a degree of detachment

from groups may be necessary in order to have difficult conversations, as defined by Stone and Heen (2010)[11]: discussions of what matters most, the subjects we simultaneously desire and struggle to discuss and that arouse strong emotions.

One of the best examples of a matter that many Americans find it difficult to discuss is religion. As Erin of this chapter summarizes, "Similarly to class and race, religion is an extremely complex, but also extremely important part of our society. It provides people with a social group that has similar beliefs and values as themselves (Dandaneau 2013)... Socialization, or interacting with others to form our personal beliefs and values, makes up a large part of what religion a person identifies with, believes in, and belongs to (Dandaneau 2013)." Steven Dandaneau (2013)[12] describes religion as a universal cultural phenomenon that consists of institutionalized social practices, having to do with rituals that are deemed sacred, and which often fosters bonds of social solidarity among those sharing the same beliefs or partaking of the same rituals. Erin adds, "This [the importance of religion] has become more and more evident to me as I have grown older . . . Our individual religious beliefs are important when looking at society because they make up such large social institutions for people to be involved." William of this chapter also reflects on the ways that Christianity forms an important aspect of his identity, which can both connect and divide.

In recent decades in the United States, the religion that tends to stir the highest emotional response and is likely the least understood of major religions is Islam. This is well illustrated in Landan's story about his family's apprehension toward Muslims. By Landan's account, their apprehension seems to stem from negative and inaccurate preconceptions. As Jen'nan Read (2013)[13] explains, American Muslims actually represent a diverse group who are generally "highly educated, politically conscious, and fluent in English" (p. 520). Their religious beliefs and practices are not uniform. Read adds: "In a country marked by a declining salience of religious boundaries and increasing acceptance of religious difference, Muslim Americans have largely been excluded from this ecumenical trend . . . we need to move past the fear that Muslim Americans are un-American so we

can bring them into the national dialogue" (2013: 526). What Landan is encountering are erroneous beliefs in society about who and what Muslims are. In fact, many Americans overestimate the size of most minority groups in society, whether it be Muslims, members of the LGBTQ community, immigrants, or other racial and ethnic minorities. It seems that although many Americans want to embrace diversity, most overestimate how much diversity there actually is. At the same time, most white Americans do not interact with anyone who is not also white, leaving colleges and universities to be one of the few places where people from different backgrounds have the opportunity to interact and learn from each other.

ADVICE: WHAT WE (CAN) PROVIDE

#fishoutofwater #sodifferent #diversity Both **Jacob** and **Andrea** feel disconnected in ways that are normal among emerging adults. Although administrators and advisors often stress exploring different career paths and skill sets, transitioning into adulthood can also entail trying out different kinds of places, getting used to different kinds of people, and learning how best to engage within one's given social context. The safety net of emerging adulthood means that one can explore and experiment with fewer consequences. For Jacob, this may mean stepping outside of his comfort zone and embracing the diversity of campus while carving out a smaller group of friends with whom he shares interests and a similar background. Likewise, Andrea may decide that now is the time to explore the unique things a smaller place has to offer, as well as find a way to connect with her interests back home (for example, art, music, cinema, sports, food). We recommend that students like Jacob and Andrea find supportive adults on campus who can help explain that becoming an adult will occasionally mean working in unfamiliar settings and with different groups of people. College is the time to explore how to fit in within unfamiliar circumstances and how to make connections in those settings. It is an important life skill, and one which students can—at least from time to time—enjoy learning along the way!

Both Jacob's and Andrea's feelings of disconnectedness come not only from the size of their classes or university, but also from the broader social environments into which they've been plunged. As Stuber (2011) [14] notes, colleges and universities are not neutral settings; rather, they operate with cultural norms and expectations that some students may find difficult to grasp and practice. Whereas some students at Jacob's university come from larger cities and social settings and thus "have a leg up," Jacob is not the only one from a less diverse background. And although Andrea has found campus less diverse than her hometown, her situation is similar to Jacob's in that she must also work to integrate herself into her university's social life by "socially and psychologically [separating] from life prior to college" (Stuber 2011: 11, as both inspired by and adapting Tinto 2012[15]).

There are several things students like Jacob and Andrea can do to become more connected to their institutions. Perhaps most importantly, they should look for opportunities to build additional cultural and social capital by getting involved with extracurricular activities, such as student groups, clubs, community service, Greek life, and internships. Doing so will not only help them along their academic and career paths in the long run, but it will also benefit them personally in the short term by providing them with the opportunity to make new friends and feel less isolated. For Andrea in particular, it might be helpful to become involved in groups that advocate for or work toward specific diversity goals. Many of these groups can be found easily online. This would allow her to cultivate a more diverse network of friends and help her respond to the racism that understandably unsettles her in her college environment.

To students like Jacob, we recommend finding activities outside of their comfort zone in order to make friends with students from different backgrounds, perhaps checking them out online first. Knowing everyone back home is comforting is great, but it is also important to recognize that college is the time to hone the social skills involved in interacting with all kinds of people. These skills may prove crucial when Jacob graduates and begins his career—potentially in a big city or even another country. Andrea, too, should see her new environment as an opportunity to gain skills. Finding activities she enjoys and engaging with her fellow students (many of whom are already friends with each other) can help her find her

own place and build relationships that will reduce her feelings of discon-nectedness over the next few years. Especially given the variety of ways her life may play out, it is good for her to know that college is the time to build up skills—including social and cultural ones—that will help her thrive in different kinds of social environments later in life.

#diversity #racism Like Andrea and Jacob, **Cody** and **Cameron** notice how different campus is from their pre-college life. Each of these students has their own experiences and sense of what is familiar. When they begin college, they are challenged to think about their prior lifestyles. We rec-ommend that these students embrace the opportunity to rethink things and seek out resources on campus to aid them in doing so. For example, if a student is from a homogeneous background and wants to see other cul-tures, he or she can visit a multicultural center on campus or find an activ-ity (sports, theater, student groups), or an online site that brings together students from different backgrounds. It is also crucial that these students begin to think about how they can use their own lifestyles and experi-ences to advocate for someone else on campus. Sometimes it is easiest to begin this sort of advocacy online, by supporting diverse groups of people with likes on social media apps, or reposting their content. Additionally, students can find a registered student organization of the group of people with whom they want to work. Important in all these examples is that stu-dents seize the opportunity that college provides to encounter, converse, and navigate relationships with a diverse array of people.

Cameron relayed how he first heard the "N" word when someone called it loudly down the hallway. This is an intense experience, and we recommend that students like Cameron think about how they can use that experience. For example, Cameron could talk with Jacob, Cody, or Andrea about what happened, to ask questions about what kind of envi-ronment they grew up in and how they learned to be respectful (or not) of other cultures. Students can talk with each other about how to talk with someone who did not have the same exposure as they did, as well as how to learn from others when they engage them about new experiences. Sometimes these challenging conversations are best had online, where students can respectfully vocalize social problems and offer anonymous

readers tips for improving. Even if their friends are not initiating these conversations with them, students can take it upon themselves to become leaders and to model to their friends how to have those difficult, necessary, and meaningful conversations. This is part of developing "soft skills" that bridge divides across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines.

#frommexico #opportunity and #interracialdating #interracialfamily The stories of **Eduardo**, **Marco**, and **Linda** also highlight how students learn key social skills during college. For Eduardo, we recommend reflecting on having empathy for someone. Empathy is a soft skill that cannot be learned from a book. Being able to empathize with other people will enable Eduardo to listen and offer feedback in a constructive, respectful way in the workplace. For both Eduardo and Linda, who know both Spanish and English, we encourage them to think about the value these language skills can have in a workplace. Speaking Spanish builds cultural competence to work with the Latino community, or if they pick up another language, with that community as well. In addition, we advise these students to harness their ability to communicate with people from diverse cultures. Gaining experiences speaking with people from different cultures will help the students engage their language abilities in an empathetic way.

Eduardo and Marco could also consider getting involved with the international student populations on campus. Perhaps they could work with a student group to reach out through social media to local high schools or immigrant communities in order to help new students transition into college. In this way, they can employ their own experiences in the service of others. This will also bolster their college credentials and provide them with further social support on campus related to their cultural experiences. Being able to follow their own path through college and share their sense of biculturalism with others will undergird their resiliency and promote their unique stories. We advise these students to embrace their cultural background and to connect with the Latin American Studies Department to learn more about their heritage and how their backgrounds can be a strength in their academic background.

#adopted #becomingwhite #whitemale #pressure With **Nikolaus** and **William**, two distinct sides of white male privilege are engaged. Nikolaus

describes how his classification as white promoted his chances of adoption, even though his ethnic background and appearance are not typical of white Americans. William lists the advantages of his undoubtedly white and male status, but also feels pressure to live up to the high expectations he thinks others have for him. What these two students share is that they are highly aware of the advantages that can come with being labeled white and male. These background social statuses affect them in college because they believe they have what they need to perform well. In light of the intense pressure that William describes, we advise him to seek out ways to prevent that pressure from overcoming him and from becoming a source of resentment against people who are underrepresented. For example, he could start a blog to share his experiences. Otherwise, he is at risk of relying on his background as a crutch, and he may end up diminishing what he is capable of accomplishing.

We recommend that students like Nikolaus and William let their work in college speak for itself, and caring adults on campus would do well to reiterate this point (especially because such students may need to hear it often). It is helpful to recognize that some doors may be open to them because they are white and male, or (in cases like William's) because they come from a well-resourced background. However, they should also think about how to own their pathway and construct the education plan they want, keeping in mind what resources they have and how their backgrounds affect their college experiences. In addition, as with the previous set of students, we recommend that William and Nikolaus think about ways they can leverage their statuses, advantages, disadvantages, and experiences to serve others. For instance, they might work with both similarly and less privileged groups on campus and in high schools by sharing their own insights into college, starting or engaging in dialogues across racial and cultural lines, and connecting on social media. Indeed, one great way to confront the pressure to live up to certain standards is to reach out to those who have less, instead of comparing oneself to those who are similarly or better situated. These are ways to harness the good and the bad aspects of students' backgrounds to shape personal strengths.

#bipride #notjustaphase #notcatholic #agnostic #christian For **Hayden**, **Erin**, and **Braden**, we have some simple pieces of advice. Braden

is a devout Christian, and thus we recommend that he visit campus ministries or find a place of worship off campus. This will provide him a place to exercise his faith and find like-minded individuals. Hayden is secure in his sexuality and sounds well-poised to help others to understand bisexuality. We encourage him to build on the experience of people misunderstanding his sexuality by advocating for himself and others, including through existing student groups and organizations. Erin is squarely in the life stage of emerging adulthood and does not want to constrain herself. We recommend, however, that instead of completely writing off her religion at this early point in her life, she should reach out to her mom. We advise her to take the time to explore, moving beyond her own personal reasons, in order to seek out information from other people.

#islamophobia For the final student featured in this chapter, **Landon**, we recommend that he consider how learning more about Arabic and Muslim communities could affect his career. Considering the ways his passion for religious diversity challenges his parents, we advise him to find other social support and alternative perspectives on this interest. To gain the cultural competency he desires, he would need to utilize the resources on his college campus. For example, Landon could investigate whether the university offers Arabic as a major or minor, and whether there are professors who are Muslim. If so, he can reach out to these professors to learn more about Arabic and Muslim culture. There may be jobs in which Arabic language proficiency is especially desired, and talking with faculty or advisors about those positions could help Landon carve out his own career path. In addition, Landon can seek out students on campus whose first language is Arabic and students who are just learning the language. In these pursuits, we advise Landon to be mindful of his family background. If his parents are unaccepting, he can still pursue his goals and dreams, but he will need to find ways to explain to them why he is so passionate about this. Seeking out campus resources will help him to be resilient in this process and to teach him how his career path can benefit from the cultural sensitivity he seeks to build.

In summary, there are some similarities in the advice we offer to different students. This is because all students should be mindful of their individual realities, how their context and backgrounds shape who they

are and how they can work with others. We advise students to consider how openness to other people, as well as learning the ways their lives are both similar and different, can develop their soft skills. Taking the time in college to reflect (see appendix A), have constructive conversations, and seek out opportunities to discuss differences will serve them well. At the same time, we recognize that joining clubs and reaching out across racial, religious, and identity lines does not solve the structural problems related to race, gender, sexuality, and religious differences. Moreover, at this particular moment in the United States, college campuses are environments where discussions of rights, privilege, advantage, and disadvantage can quickly become heated and emotional. We strongly support students' right to organize and make themselves heard when they are advocating for themselves and others. We also implore students to engage in difficult conversations as a way to learn about and find ways to work across differences in race, sexuality, religion, and other identities and belief systems.

TOGETHERNESS: WHAT WE (CAN) SHARE

Next, we offer a possible dialog between several of our case studies.*

Regan and Abby. During the second week of classes, a sociology class is in the middle of a group activity entitled "Crossing the Line" (see appendix C for a description of this activity). Two participants in the activity, Regan and Abby, begin chatting because they noticed each other's "Go Greek" T-shirts.

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* As described with the first togetherness section in chapter 5, faculty and support staff are important social supports in navigating college, as are fellow students. In these togetherness sections, the goal is to suggest ways that students can support one another in navigating college. Akin to a reality television show, the students are interacting with each other in ways that build their relationships around some of the challenges and opportunities these students described in their case studies. Given the challenges already expressed within the case studies, the goal in these situations is to focus on the positive ways that students can support one another. Inevitably social interactions can also be fraught with negative experiences, and we do not mean to suggest that all social interactions occur positively. Rather, we offer some possible ways to support one another, which students can and will modify to add their own authentic approach. To review student stories alongside these togetherness sections, readers can refer to the table of case studies preceding chapter 1 and the brief synopsis of student stories included within that table.

Regan tells Abby that questions about owning your own car and traveling to a different country made her realize that she may be more "privileged" (to use her instructor's word) than most of her class, which is something she did not expect. Abby completely agrees. Both of them become immediately self-conscious about how that might affect the new friendships they hope to make on campus, and both pledge to never let that be a factor. Abby mentions a new friend of hers, Austin, who went through rush but ultimately decided not to join a fraternity because he simply could not afford it. Abby had promised herself that she would not lose touch with Austin just because she was Greek and he was not. Regan thinks that is a great story. They promise each other that they will step outside their comfort zone, and use these four years to make friends who are different than them.

Riberto and Austin. Also during the "Crossing the Line" activity, Riberto and Austin strike up a side conversation. They had a slightly different experience from Regan and Abby—they have become aware of their lack of privilege. They began chatting because on several questions related to working-class backgrounds, they were the only two individuals in the class who crossed the line. They bonded by cracking a few jokes about some of the other questions, especially the one about owning your own car. Riberto says that the idea of owning your own car as a college student is plain crazy, and that he was just glad that the university had a public transit system that was included in his student fees. His hometown did not have a public transit system, which made it very difficult to get around. Austin shares his story about how he invested so much time in rushing, only to realize there was no way he could afford to join a fraternity. He worries that this will affect his social life, and, more importantly, his ability to meet people that might help him down the road. Ultimately, they agree that college is a great opportunity that provides them with many things they did not have back home, but also that this experience does not change who they are as individuals. They both share their insight about how college is a way to create a more financially stable future while maintaining the core values instilled in them by their working-class families. They are very proud of where they come from and cannot wait to see what the next four years will bring.

Chikako and Erin. As the "Crossing the Line" activity progressed, Chikako and Erin began to converse because they sat next to each other. Chikako noticed that they both hesitated to stand up in response to a few of the same questions, but he felt much better to see someone had similar feelings on those issues. They begin to talk about their parents. They share one slightly sarcastic story after another about how their parents stifle them, even though they mean well. Chikako loves his parents but they tend to suppress his secretly bold personality. He is tired of being stifled, and he is so ready to let it all out! Erin can totally relate. She grew up with devout Catholic parents—something she respects them for. She grew up scared of being different because it made her feel guilty about being a bad person. But after talking to people like Chikako, and really engaging in courses like this one, she is beginning to realize that she is not a bad person just because she is curious. She wants to check out some of the other religious student organizations on campus, and is excited about her new freedom. Both feel newfound relief that they are not the only ones on campus dealing with this type of guilt.

FURTHER READING ONLINE

- For further reading on this topic, see this description of how Photoshop was used to "doctor diversity" into a university's promotional materials: Wade, Lisa, September 2, 2009, "Doctoring Diversity: Race and Photoshop," The Society Pages, retrieved from https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2009/09/02/doctoring-diversity-race-and-photoshop/.
- Alternatively, here is an example of an advertisement that challenges the compartmentalization of status by adeptly combining race, class, and gender in interesting ways: Wade, Lisa, March 12, 2013, "Managing Stigma: Doing Race, Class, and Gender" The Society Pages, retrieved from https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2013/03/12/race-class-and-gender/.

Additional ideas for activities on this topic can be found at the following Web pages:

- Gorski, Paul C., "Circles of My Multicultural Self," Ed Exchange, retrieved from http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/circlesofself.html.
- "Cultural Artifacts," On Course, retrieved from http://oncourseworkshop.com/self-awareness/cultural-artifacts/.
- "Diversity Continuum," Eastern Illinois University, retrieved from http://castle.eiu.edu/eiu1111/DiversityContinuum.doc.
- Fishbowl Listening Exercise: Lakey, George, "Fishbowl, Panel and Speak-Outs : Three Listening Exercises, retrieved from https://www.trainingforchange.org/tools/fishbowl-panel-and-speak-outs-three-listening-exercises.
- What's the Difference, within the Defining Diversity section of these 101 Games for Trainers: Pike, Bob, "101 Games for Trainers," O'Reilly, retrieved from https://www.safaribooksonline.com/library/view/101-games-for/9780943210384/.
- "Flip Side—Human Awareness," Elizabethtown College, retrieved from http://www.etown.edu/offices/diversity/files/diversity-binder.pdf.
- "The Depth and Breadth of 'Multicultural,'" Cada, retrieved from https://secure.cada1.org/i4a/doclibrary/getfile.cfm?doc_id=23.

NOTES

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7. Anderson, Elijah. 2013. "The Cosmopolitan Canopy." In Susan J. Ferguson (Ed.), *Mapping the Social Landscape: Readings in Sociology* (7th ed., pp. 631–643). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

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