

The Voices Project Script

written by Intro to Psychology students

**adapted by Alicia Nordstrom, Rebecca
Steinberger, Patrick Hamilton, and Allan Austin**

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Roles

Narrator	Alicia Nordstrom
Previously overweight female (Kelly)	Richelle Wesley
Previously overweight female (Rena)	Ashlee Danko
African American female (adult)	Sr Jean Messaros
Gay male (adult)	Chas Beleski
Lesbian (adult)	Melissa Sgroi
Hispanic female (adult)	Natalie DeWitt
Woman in poverty	Grace Riker
Male with AIDS (Andy)	Bruce Riley
Woman with AIDS (Karla)	Kit Foley
Muslim Woman	Rebecca Steinberger
Muslim College Student	Caitlin Hails
Indian American Woman	Erica Acosta
Indian American Teenager	Katie O'Hearn
Student #1 (interviewed Josh)	Tiffany Carotenuto
Student #2 (interviewed Josh)	Gerard Angeli
Student #3 (interviewed Indian American Woman)	Caitlin Hails
Student #4 (interviewed Indian American Woman)	Lauren Szabo
Conclusion	Alicia Nordstrom

**First performed on November 5, 2009 in Lemmond Theatre,
Misericordia University, Dallas PA.**

Scenes

Introduction	Alicia
Community	Indian American Woman, Indian American Teenager, Muslim Woman, Muslim College Student, Woman with AIDS, Lesbian Woman, Hispanic Woman)
Kelly and Rena	Previously Overweight Women
The Media	African-American Woman, Lesbian Woman, Hispanic Woman, Gay Man, Formerly Overweight Woman (Rena), Gay Man
Emma	Homeless Woman
Marriage	Muslim College Student, Indian American Teenager, Lesbian Woman, Muslim Woman, Indian American Woman, Gay Man
Fear Factor	Previously Overweight Woman (Kelly), Indian American Teenager, African American Woman, Gay Man, Muslim Woman, Woman with AIDS, Hispanic Woman, Lesbian Woman, Muslim College Student, Man with AIDS, Homeless Woman
Andy and Karla	Woman with AIDS, Man with AIDS
The Other Emma	Grace
Contradictions	Students #1, 2, 3, and 4

Introduction

Alicia

My name is Alicia Nordstrom and I am a psychology instructor here at Misericordia University. One of my teaching goals is to help students learn how the dynamics of culture—meaning our own cultures as well as others—affects the way that we interact and relate to one another. As most jobs involve working with people on some level, I find that the skill of understanding the complexity of this question is very relevant to our students and critical to being successful in the workplace as well as a good citizen.

This semester, I asked one of my Introduction to Psychology classes—which is comprised of mainly freshmen—to interview people from “groups of difference”. The groups I selected are groups that received stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination because they are considered outside of the “social norms” as defined by the majority racial, ethnic, and gender cultures of northeastern Pennsylvania. The voices from people in these groups are often unheard because we often let stereotypes and assumptions get in the way of forming relationships with those that appear “different”. These are the voices we are going to hear today.

I asked my students to rate their attitudes towards these groups in terms of which groups they had the most positive and negative attitudes towards, and knew the least and the most about. I split the class up into pairs and assigned each pair to interview a person from the community to find out about how that person’s culture or characteristic of “difference” affected their lives. I required everyone to meet with their interviewee for three hours and attend a “cultural event” to learn about the person’s culture, background, rituals, and/or lifestyle. To make the assignment even more difficult, I assigned each pair to interview a group that they had a negative attitude towards or knew very little about. Based on their interviews and experience, the students wrote mini-memoirs of the lives of their interviewees. These stories, which have been adapted into this program by a team of faculty members, will be shared with you tonight. This is The Voices Project.

Community

Voices

Indian American Woman

Indian American Teenager

Muslim Woman

Muslim College Student

Woman with AIDS

Lesbian Woman

Hispanic Woman

Indian American Woman

I am Indian. I grew up in India with my parents, two younger siblings and our servants. I was considered middle class, although my great-great-grandfather was king in India. But the kingship had ended by the time I was born. Growing up my siblings and I had our own nannies with a cook and a gardener along with a few servants and a night watchman. As I entered school at age four, going six days a week and ten months out of the year, it was not uncommon to see other boys and girls from different countries, like Kenya or Uganda. I never felt out of place in school; I felt like a typical student. My father was a sailor and my family and I accompanied him on his travels. I was in nine schools in eleven years, but no matter where I attended class, it was always more advanced compared to schools in America. What I learned in high school, Americans were learning in college. It was quite a change when I moved to America as a young adult.

Indian American Teenager

I am a thirteen year old Indian American. Both of my parents live in America today, but they immigrated here at different times. My mom came to America after she got married and my dad came when he was 4 with his parents. My family is very successful. My dad owns his own business and my mom stays at home to clean and cook. My mom and dad still carry out the customs of Indian culture because they feel we should still represent India.

Dance is a big part of Indian culture. They have a specific film industry called Bollywood, which I love because I enjoy dancing myself. Along with dancing, I like the foods that we eat. Indian food is very flavorful and spicy. I love when my mom cooks butter chicken because it is my favorite dish.

We live in a development with a lot of neighboring Indians. Therefore, we all get together and hold local Indian functions. Two of the most important functions are Onam and Diwali. Diwali is the celebration of light and Holi, where as Onam is a big festival and re-enactment of our God's return. Onam is the most important function out of all of them and it occurs once every year.

I love attending my cultural events. When I attend Onam I don a Sari, a long dress worn by females. The guys generally wear a Jubas which is a long shirt with designs on it, and either baggy or tight pants. Throughout the day everyone mingles, sings, dances, and watches plays about the return of God. Not only do I get to experience Indian customs in America, I also get to experience them in India too. I am still trying to learn all the customs of India so one day I can keep the culture spreading in my family.

Muslim Woman

I am a wife. I am a mother. I am a pharmacist. I am a Muslim. While growing up, the war in Palestine greatly affected my childhood. My family and I were forced out of our home country and into Jordan. But, our home in Jordan was filled with love and kindness. Although I grew up in a family of eleven children, I never once felt neglected or forgotten. In fact, I had a privileged upbringing; almost everything I needed or wanted was provided for me. My family was very religious, but also tolerant. For my education, my parents let me attend a Catholic school. In Jordan, Catholic schools were still run by Muslims, and I could still learn all I needed to about my faith, and the Catholics could learn about their faith, too. I am proud of who I am.

Muslim College Student

By the time I had to begin thinking about college, I knew that I wanted to stay local. By staying in the area, I wouldn't have to worry about people not accepting me because of my religion. Also, I have Muslim friends that go to other schools where I grew up, so I could still get together

and hang out just like old times. Another reason I wanted to stay here was because I am very active in my church and love teaching Sunday school. I enjoy teaching the kids why Muslims believe what we do and how we go about believing these things. I also like to guide the kids and give them a way to look at our difference and realize that it is a positive one and that being different can be a good thing.

Woman with AIDS

I can relate with other people who have HIV/AIDS rather easily. I recently went to a photography exhibit showing portraits of Americans with AIDS and was able to connect with the victims and their emotions. I felt like I knew them and could reach out to them. Within my community of AIDS, I get together with people and have multi-cultural dinners. We share a part of each other and have a good time while we're together. In fact, I wish we could have them more often. Something that we all do to keep ourselves feeling good is to say the rosary. I pray all the time to keep myself calm which helps me handle my anger and feelings better.

Lesbian

After I graduated high school, I intended to attend college and earn a degree in physical therapy. However, my dreams were cut short when my financial aid was eliminated. During my few years at college, I was exposed to more lesbians and we all had a common similarity with each other. I felt special, and I still do, to be a part of such a unique group.

Hispanic Woman

Dance is the way that I give a piece of my culture to the community. After moving to Wilkes-Barre, I began to teach CCD classes, and after class I would teach five girls how to dance. This dance group spread and now I have over forty dancers, including eleven boys. Their ages range from nine to as old as students in college. I teach dances from all over the world to educate the public about the Hispanic culture: the Mambo from Cuba, the Samba from Brazil, the Salsa from Puerto Rico, and of course dances from the Dominican Republic. I also teach dance to preserve the culture in the Hispanic children. I don't want the children to become to "Americanized".

Introduction to Kelly and Rena

Alicia

Research shows that people who are overweight and obese are less likely to be hired and married based on their weight. I specifically wanted to hear the stories of people who struggled with weight gain and weight loss in order to learn more about their experiences. Although we contacted many agencies and support groups in the area, we couldn't find any volunteers for my students to interview. With some luck, we were able to find two women who had recently lost weight and were willing to share their stories.

Kelly and Rena

Voices

Previously Overweight Woman (Kelly)

Previously Overweight Woman (Rena)

Kelly

I was born into a small family with two other sisters, one older and one younger. I was the heaviest out of all three of us and I stayed that way throughout all my years growing up. From an early age, I would rely on food to comfort me. However, my father limited what I could and couldn't eat. I was allowed to eat as much as I wanted at dinner but was not able to snack other times during the day. That is what led me to binging at a young age. Whenever my father wasn't around I would eat and eat and eat. It was almost like I was stacking up on things until the next time my father was home.

Rena

My older sister was always the smaller one. She has always been skinnier and shorter and just overall more petite. My mother always would make comments about how small my sister was, inferring that I am not. Even though she thought I was bigger than average as a child, I never thought about it until my high school cheerleading coach made comments about my weight. This sometimes made me feel unattractive or even angry. I tried to not let the comments get to me.

Kelly

Middle school was a nightmare. By eighth grade, I was determined to lose weight and started my first "diet". I would allow myself to have a pretzel and a rice cake for lunch each day after skipping breakfast. Then at dinner I would eat normally and then repeat the cycle the next day. Over the course of my diet I lost about 35 pounds. I felt great at this point. The boys stopped bullying me, kids started to notice and mentioned how good I look, and even my family said that I look great!

Nothing made me feel better than my eighth grade graduation when academic awards were given to the students with the highest averages. Not only did I receive the most, I got almost every award given out that day! I had proven to all my classmates that it didn't matter what I looked like or how popular I was, I could still achieve things in life.

Rena

After graduating high school and college, I married a loving husband. I was working full time and living a good life. I would run and workout regularly. I had the time to sit down and eat properly with my husband. When I was 28, I got pregnant and put on a lot of weight. Once my first daughter was born, I started to lose the baby weight and actually lost some extra pounds along with it. Then, when I was 30, I had my second child. But, this time, something was different. I didn't shed the baby weight.

Now I was in a completely different life. My daily schedule had now become: take care of the babies, go to work, feed the babies, make dinner, clean up, put the babies to bed. I barely had time to eat and when I did, I grabbed something fast. My metabolism was much slower, and my diet was much poorer. I didn't have time to prepare a full and healthy meal anymore and I had no time for myself. Not only did I keep the weight from my second pregnancy, I started to slowly add on to it. I was 46 pounds overweight. Even my own mother would make inappropriate gestures. She would buy me clothes that were "large" enough to fit me, and made sure to point it out.

Kelly

High school and college got better for me. I stopped my diet and started to slowly gain weight back, but I was happy because I had friends. During college I had to walk a lot and discovered I really liked it. In my sophomore year I got a gym membership and began to work out. This is when I began to notice that my menstrual cycle was irregular. I figured it was due to the abuse I put on my body from my eighth grade "diet", but I went to the doctor and was placed on birth control. I gained weight after being placed on the pill and not too long after, I met my future husband.

This was the major turning point in my life! I no longer care about what I looked like, all that mattered was that I was with him. I started to eat healthier around him; however this brought back the binging. When I was alone I would eat more because I wouldn't eat as much when we were together.

The binging got worse after I went to graduate school four hours away from him and I gained 45 pounds in a period of two years. My husband moved up near me and was completely supportive. We got married not too long after and I purchased my wedding dress about 10 months before our wedding. When I bought the dress it was actually big on me; however weeks before my wedding I had to get my dress taken out in order to fit in it. Things escalated from there as I gained more and more weight.

Rena

My first Weight Watchers meeting was one of the worst days of my life. I remember standing outside, chatting with my neighbor, who was very petite. She was on her way to a Weight Watchers meeting with her husband (who was trying to lose weight), and she invited me to come. I was so embarrassed and angry. That night, I told my husband how furious I was that she would say something like that to me. Reluctantly, I decided to go. When I arrived, they made me step on the scale. When I saw my weight, I almost fell over in shock. I was almost 200 pounds, and I had to lose 46 pounds to get to a healthy weight. I decided to give it a try for just one week. This wasn't the first weight loss program I tried and none of them had worked. Even though I thought it would fail, I made an effort and took the program seriously. When I weighed in the next week, I couldn't believe that I had lost 5 pounds. Over the next year, little by little, even with a plateau, I lost 53 pounds.

Kelly

After two years of marriage my husband and I decided to try and start a family. I took myself off birth control and waited six months for my menstrual period. It never came. I went to the doctor to see what the issue was. I was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovary Syndrome which affected my

weight and lowered my chances of getting pregnant. This devastated me and brought up my old memories from being teased in middle school to my undersized wedding dress. I was at my heaviest at this point, but somehow, thankfully, I got pregnant. I had my son and six weeks later I went to the doctor for a check-up. I found out that I hadn't lost any of the baby weight I had gained from being pregnant. This is when I knew I needed a new way to lose the weight and keep it off while staying healthy.

I joined Weight Watchers and learned how to eat healthy along with exercising regularly. I loved being able to count what I was eating by the points associated with the foods. I lost seven pounds in the first week and a total of 53 pounds over about eight months. I have lost almost all of the weight I wanted to and I am now pregnant with my second child. I plan to still watch my weight during my pregnancy and lose all the baby weight and more after this baby is born.

Rena

As I lost the weight, people would come up to me and ask me if I was sick. It was as if they didn't believe I had the ability to lose weight, as if they thought I was lazy and just ate too much. Some people in family didn't respond positively to my weight loss. When I went to see my cousin for the first time since I lost all the weight, she did not say a single word about it. But when her husband came in, he went crazy with praise. My older sister told me not to lose any more weight. I think she didn't want to lose her status of being the small one. As for my mother, she turned out to be the biggest critic and admirer of my weight. She always comments on how good I look. I know she has always loved me for who I am, but sometimes I wish that a part of her love wasn't based on my weight.

The Media

Voices

African-American Woman

Lesbian Woman

Hispanic Woman

Formerly Overweight Woman (Rena)

Gay Man

African-American Woman

In first grade, we did a project in which we drew self-portraits. My class was predominantly white, so they all used orange crayons to color themselves. Since I was black, I started coloring my face with the brown crayon. My teacher took my brown crayon from me and I was forced to color myself orange. My parents knew exactly what was happening. They bought me a brand new set of crayons and had a sit-down with the teacher. I didn't color for the rest of my childhood.

As far as the media and pop culture goes, I definitely do not identify with the stereotypes and examples of my group. In my opinion, they're all really exaggerated portrayals of typically urban populations. Sometimes, I feel as if I'm representing my entire race and gender.

Lesbian

Unlike heterosexual couples, lesbians cannot show our feelings to each other in public. In a way, I feel a little jealous towards heterosexual couples. It is not fair that we have to hide our love.

Believe it or not, I found some type of connection from media images. The media has surely helped us more positively than negatively. For example, Ellen DeGeneres has her own talk show, hosted the Academy Awards, and even Rosie O'Donnell has her own show on XM radio.

Melissa Etheridge, a famous singer, came out publicly and many people still liked her knowing

that she was different. The general public admires these lesbians for who they are and what they do.

Hispanic Woman

Throughout high school and college, the television was the avenue by which I learned American culture. When there was something I needed to know how to do, like applying to college, this was my one dependable resource that I could count on for advice, guidance, and understanding. It was my guide to American culture.

Growing up, I used to watch "The Cosby Show" and see these perfect American families. But I never understood how the Cosby family could sit down together and talk about a problem. In my family, we do not discuss together what's going on or how situations can be fixed; we learn from our mistakes, defeat obstacles, and never look back.

"The Cosby Show" also taught me about cultural differences in social interaction. I noticed that, when the son or daughter's friend came over, they went straight to their bedroom. This would be considered disrespectful in the eyes of my Hispanic parents. In my culture, when our friends visit, they stay in the family room for the specific purpose of hanging out and conversing.

Previously Overweight Female (Rena)

The media portrays obesity a lot better than it used to. A lot of media will advertise and report on living a healthy life rather than eating junk food. Even shows such as "The Biggest Loser" illustrate the realistic struggles with losing weight. Hopefully these positive changes in the media can help those who stereotype obese people understand better.

But there are stories you don't hear. For example, celebrities lose a lot of weight very quickly but you don't hear about how they maintain it. Maintaining that lower weight is actually a lot harder than losing it. After losing weight, there are only two things to do: stay at that weight or gain some back. Since losing 53 pounds, I have gained 12 pounds. It is slightly disappointing.

Gay Man

I feel that the media's portrayal of gays is completely one-sided. They always pick the worst gay person to interview or talk about. I believe that the media is largely responsible for people discriminating against gays. Most homosexual men are not guys who float around with boas and dance like girls out on the streets, yet these are the people that the media targets and exploits. Also, people still think that gays make up the largest percentage of people infected with HIV/AIDS. This is not true, but the uneducated don't realize it because the media still relates the disease directly to gay men. The majority of gay men are like anyone else. They have professional careers and look for long-term relationships with a single person.

Hispanic Woman

"The Brady Bunch" was another TV show that taught me how the typical American family works. The Mom and Dad went to work and took care of everything for the family. Alice, the housewife, cooked for the family and cleaned the house. In my house, it seemed that all of these things were backwards. There were not only my Mother, Father, me and my siblings living in my house; my extended family resided there, too. When it came to cooking, I was in charge of making dinner for my family. We certainly did not have somebody like Alice in my house. So what is the average American family? In my case, it is nothing like I was shown on the television.

Introduction to Emma

Alicia

The first person to volunteer to be interviewed for this project was a woman living at Ruth's Place, a shelter for homeless woman. She sent in her consent form immediately and wanted very badly to share her story. The two students who were assigned to interview her did not have a car, so they took a van to the shelter to meet with her. Emma sat on her cot, shaking and crying, during the entire first interview and she opened up her heart and soul to two strangers she had never met. Here is Emma's story.

Emma

Homeless Woman

I wake up to a crowded room of women, beds lined up from wall to wall. It is likely to be just another day of hard work as I struggle to rebuild my life that went downhill from the time I was fourteen. My name is Emma Patrick; I'm now 45 years old and I've been living at the women's shelter these past seven months. I never dreamed that I would be here. I am working towards my eventual goal of having my own place and being self-sustained. Currently, I work a part time job at a motel, but the pay is only a little over minimum wage. I'm trying to find another part-time job in the evening because I won't be able to support myself with the amount of money I currently make. I'm living proof of what life can become when you make the wrong decisions and hang around with the wrong people.

I was born into a working, middle class family. My Dad was an alcoholic and Mom was into drugs, but according to them they didn't have a problem. We were always disciplined with a belt and my mother always made my sister and I keep up on our chores. As I got older, the family secrets became evident. With my father there was some fondling that everyone kept swept under the rug. If we tried to tell our mom it would just be brushed aside.

At the age of 14, I got a terrible toothache. After the surgery, my mother gave me these pills that she had. That's when all my problems started. I loved the way the drugs made me feel. When my mom stopped giving them to me, I began to help myself. I would take them out of the medicine cabinet or my mom's purse to get my fix.

My school life didn't change once I started doing drugs. I had one friend who knew. I was very popular, kept good grades, and was a cheerleader in high school. My boyfriend, John, was three years older and played on the football team. We got married after I graduated and I told him about my problems with drugs when I was 21 years old. Although he was extremely supportive and understanding, I could not overcome my addiction to pills. I hurt him in a lot of ways that he

could never forgive. On one instance, I was so desperate for money to buy drugs that I stole his mother's credit card. On another occasion, I used his medical major in college to my advantage by phoning in my own prescriptions. I don't think he ever realized how bad I really was. When he found out, I know that I broke his heart. I know that I loved him and he loved the girl without the drugs--- without the secrets.

Throughout the past fifteen years, I have had four children. I do not get to see them today because of the choices I have made in my life. My first child, James, was partially raised by my parents and then shipped off to the Milton Hershey boarding school. I still get to hear about him today to see how he is doing, but I don't see much of him. Growing up, I wanted to be a singer. The idea of the stage and all of those people loving you amazes me. My son James became everything I wanted to be. He was in a movie with Robin Williams. I'm glad that I get to see what I wanted to be in him.

My second child, Stephanie, was born into a custody battle when I was in rehab. I missed the court date to get her back because I was so caught up in heroin at the time.

My last two children were with a different father. I was closest with my second daughter, Abigail. My third daughter, Samantha, was only 9 days old the last time I saw her.

The thing that hurts me most about my past is losing my kids. I never thought I would put a drug before my children, but I was so caught up in my addiction that I would do anything to keep it going. When Samantha was nine days old, I went to smoke crack with a guy that I had met before. I left the children with their father, even though I knew he had to work. I ran away for two days and he knew exactly where to find me, but I hid every time he came looking for me. He had been drinking heavily and when I finally returned home, we got into a big fight and he hit me. My parents took the kids away from us because they didn't want them in that environment.

To this day, I can't believe that I walked out on my kids, especially Samantha being only nine days old at the time. My kids are some of the most precious things that I have gotten out of this

life, and I just simply walked out on them and let them be taken away. Ever since I was a kid I wanted to grow up and have children and a family. I never saw myself having four kids and not being able to see them anymore. Even if they were still with me now, I would not be able to provide properly for them. That is what hurts me most about my past.

As my addiction continued, I would do anything for the drug which eventually landed me in jail. I was starting to get my life back together when I was sent to another prison due to overcrowding. I was able to get along well with some of the other girls. One night, two of the girls smuggled in cocaine and we got caught after somebody squealed. I was assigned to 90 days in solitary confinement. I spent my days crying and each night I would pray to God to take me, to not let me wake up, and to help me stop letting drugs run my life. I had just about given up hope until one morning the sun was shining into my room. I could smell the fresh grass and hear the birds chirping. I looked out and could see the most beautiful day. I started pacing my room, back and forth, back and forth. I would stop, look out the window, and start pacing again, talking to God the whole time. Finally, I sat down with some paper at the window and wrote "The Answer".

On a usual day, I get back from work and hang out with the other girls in the shelter. It is good to have a support system to come back to. As of now, I am still living off of food stamps, but that is sure to change soon, now that I have a small, but steady, income from the motel I work at. I have been clean for over two years, but the hardest thing is getting back on your feet. I go to counseling once a month and take anti-depressant medication to keep an optimistic outlook. As of now, I will remain at the shelter, where I feel safe, until I am ready to take my life back into my own hands and live it the way I should have from the start.

Marriage

Voices

Muslim College Student

Indian American Teenager

Lesbian Woman

Indian American Woman

Gay Man

Muslim College Student

Throughout middle school and high school, most girls cannot wait to date. They look at every boy wondering which one will like them and be their special first date. Not me. Being Muslim, I was not allowed to date growing up. During high school, I had to watch my friends get ready for prom and other dances, and I knew that I would not be allowed to go. This was hard for me, but there was one plus side. One thing that made me respect this aspect of my religion was watching the heartbreak. Although one may think I would be the last person to call in a relationship problem, I was often the first. My friends would call me in all kinds of distress and I would listen to them talk about their boyfriend problems or how their boyfriend was cheating. Also, I didn't have to worry about being let down by a boy I liked not liking me back. When I turned 19, I found and married the love of my life. We do not have arranged marriages, but we are not allowed to date around. I learned to appreciate the value of saving myself, because I have never had my heart broken and was able to give my whole heart to the man that I would spend the rest of my life with.

Indian American Teenager

Although there are many positive things about being Indian in America, one thing that people discriminate me for is marriage. In India, it's a tradition that a significant other must be picked by the family. If the family clearly sees it's not a good match, they will pick another person until they feel they've made a good decision. Many people have said to me that it's "unfair" and "not

right” for my family to pick who I marry. Although I can choose not to marry the man that is picked for me, I would still prefer to not be a part of how Indian marriages are arranged. Even so, I feel that I need to stick with India’s tradition and plan on raising my children the same way. Another tradition is that I have to be married by age 22. I’m only allowed to be divorced once according to my Indian culture so I have to make sure I am matched with the right person in a reasonable amount of time if I want to stay married.

Lesbian

I convinced myself that it was not the sex or gender that I fall in love with, but it is the person. Right after college, I actually dated a guy when I was in between relationships with females, but it did not work out. I think I dated a male just as a rebound for the relationship that I got out of at that time. After college and many years of searching, I fell in love with a person who made me happy and who became my best friend. That person was a woman and I have been with her for 20 years. From the beginning, we admired qualities in each other. We knew that we found our soul mates.

About 10 years ago, we started talking about starting a family. When my partner told her family about this, we got reactions that we were not expecting. My partner’s father said, “You are not going to get married?” (He meant with a male.) It took some time for her parents to accept what we were doing, but everything worked out. Their responses changed over time, especially for her brother, who had the most difficult time with this situation. Her brother and his wife are Christians and they believed what we were doing was a sin, but as time passed they respected and accepted our actions and decisions.

My partner and I went to Massachusetts to have a commitment ceremony. At our ceremony we both wore beautiful white gowns. People have the perception there has to be one “butch” and one “fem” in same sex relationships. This is not true. In our relationship, we are both feminine.

Shortly after our commitment ceremony, I got pregnant by in vitro-fertilization with an unknown donor. Four years after my first son was born, we adopted. My youngest son is now two years

old and my oldest is six. I knew that raising children would not be easy, but we now feel more accepted in society by having a family. We feel more like heterosexual couples by having children. Since the time my children were born, they have known me as their “Mama” and my partner as their “Mommy.” We are open with our relationship to our boys. We are raising our children with an open-minded outlook on life and showing them the diversities of different families.

Indian American Woman

I could explain in depth about the festivals India has, but to really understand and grasp the meanings behind it, one would have to attend one. Like the festival of Karva Chauth, when the wives fast all day and eat and drink nothing, not even water, until the moon rises. The wives pray for the longevity of their husbands, and then men wait for their wives and they buy them clothes in jewelry and dote on them. It’s a very sweet and loving ceremony.

Gay Male

My experience in the community has caused me great emotional stress. For example, when my partner and I were trying to sell our home we had a realtor come to our house to determine a selling price. We were nervous about her visit because we thought that it was obvious that we were gay. We had two different plaques on the wall, one with my name and one with his name. We worried that, if she knew that we were gay, she would discriminate against us by unfairly pricing our house. This didn’t happen at all; as a matter of fact, if she did realize we were gay she did a very good job of hiding it and seemed not to care. We are always concerned about what other people think about us and how they view us. Because of this we never show any public displays of affection out on the streets, which is the way most gays live their lives in this country.

Introduction to Fear Factor

Alicia

The following lyrics are from the Bloc Party song, Hunting for Witches*:

[ROTATE ACROSS GROUP, ONE PERSON AT A TIME, ENDING IN UNISON]

I'm sitting on the roof of my house
With a shotgun and a six pack of beer
The newscaster says "the enemy is among us"
As bombs explode on the 30 bus
Kill that middle class indecision
Now is not the time for liberal thought
So I go hunting for witches
Heads are going to roll
So I go hunting
1990's, optimistic as a teen
But now its terror, airplanes crash into towers
The Daily mail says "the enemy is among us"
"Taking our women and taking our jobs"
All reasonable thought is being drowned out
By the non-stop baying, baying for blood
So I go hunting for witches
Heads are going to roll
So I go hunting
I was an ordinary man, with ordinary desire
I watched TV it informed me
I was an ordinary man with ordinary desire
There must be accountability
Disparate and misinformed
FEAR WILL KEEP US ALL IN PLACE. *[IN UNISON]*

*Retrieved from <http://www.blocparty.com/lyrics.php?lyricID=24>

Fear Factor

Voices

Previously Overweight Woman (Kelly)

Indian American Teenager

African American Woman

Gay Male

Muslim Woman

Woman with AIDS

Hispanic Woman

Lesbian

Muslim College Student

Man with AIDS

Homeless Woman

Kelly

I am not fat and ugly.

Indian American Teenager

I am not like my family in India.

African American Woman

I am not silenced.

Gay Male

I am not “feminine”.

Muslim Woman

I am not a terrorist.

Woman with AIDS

I am not without feelings.

Hispanic Woman

I am not without scars.

Lesbian

I am not contagious.

Muslim College Student

I am not an extremist.

Man with AIDS

I am not untouchable.

Homeless Woman

I am not lying down.

Kelly

During a time when I was going through enough bodily changes, the last thing I needed was to be picked on by some boys. By sixth grade I was about 5'6" and weighed close to 200 pounds. I was bullied in middle school by two boys my age. They would do everything they could possibly think of to hurt my self esteem. From mocking me in front of the class to coming up and saying mean things about my weight to my face. It made me feel like I was fat and ugly and just all around crappy inside.

Indian American Teenager

Can you imagine being the brunt of harsh discrimination by your own family? I always used to look forward to visiting India every summer but as I got older, my cousins started to make fun of

me because I wasn't exactly how they were. They were use to being around people from India all the time so when I came to visit, even though I'm Indian too, I still had somewhat of American in me. They made fun of the way I would talk because I didn't sound like them; they made fun of the way I sang because they sing different than people in the United States; they made fun of the food I would eat; and they even made fun of the way I dressed. I was aware that the way I would say or do things in India was different from what my cousins would do, but I didn't think they would pick out the little things that I would do. I felt like a half-breed. I didn't fit in in either culture.

African American Woman

"Women do not belong in positions of authority." That's what I was told by a friend of my employer. I told him that I felt that he was deliberately undermining me. Right in front of my boss, he replied, "I was." My boss did nothing, just as he did when one of my coworkers was sexually assaulted by her director. It also happened that she was also an African American. When she told the boss about it, he didn't believe her. He just moved her out of the department and kept the director and his big salary.

Gay Male

Although I am currently a college professor, I also own a successful construction company. During my younger years, when I was hiding myself as a gay male, I did things that were considered very manly, which is where I learned the trade skills that I have today. Being a gay man who owns a construction company is not easy in Northeast Pennsylvania. I feel compelled to re-enter the closet in order to successfully run my business and get work. Ninety five percent of my clients are straight and seventy five percent of my business goes to elderly people who would rather pay a higher price to a straight company. Things would be different if I lived in New York City where being gay is often a selling point for some companies. Here in Northeast Pennsylvania, however, openly gay companies seem to fail miserably.

Muslim Woman

I am now a resident of the United States. Upon receiving my Pharmacy Degree, I found a job at a local pharmacy. Though I loved working at the pharmacy, the subsequent years were some of the most challenging of my life. Everyone at the pharmacy accepted who I am, but didn't accept my religion. I constantly had to defend myself and my beliefs. I was constantly asked how I could support arranged marriage. Why I stood for being forced into wearing a veil? How was I even allowed to have a job with the confinements placed on me as a woman? All these questions I could answer easily, and I did my best in explaining my faith. They were beginning to see where I was coming from, and then September 11th happened. One day, I was walking to work alone, a guy shouted at me from his car, "Go home to YOUR country."

Woman with AIDS

I am able to hide it at times, unlike other people whose difference may consist of something more obvious such as skin color. However, I can't hide it all the time. I remember being put in a hospital room by myself because I had AIDS. It was as if I had the plague and no one wanted to be around me. I cried and cried until I couldn't cry anymore. It was hard being alone and having no one to turn to.

Hispanic Woman

My neighborhood was the toughest area in Brooklyn, and I only had two Hispanics in my class. When I started school, I spoke no English so it was very easy for the other kids to pick on me. In second grade I was given five cents each day to buy lunch. Every day the same three girls threatened to beat me up if I didn't give my five cents to them. Scared and not knowing the language very well, I automatically gave my money to them. In third grade, when I started to understand the language more, I was able to stick up for myself and stopped giving them my money. Also as a Hispanic child I had my long hair chopped off during class. I was stabbed with a pencil by the girl who sat behind me. I still have the scar from the pencil as proof.

Lesbian

I do wonder if there is a silent prejudice that I am not aware of. I have heard stories before, but they are usually nothing more than jokes, but sometimes those jokes can be hurtful. Recently I was affected very negatively because of an incident that I was involved in. I attended a conference in Pittsburg with a female friend and we had to stay overnight in a hotel. One of my male coworkers started a rumor that we stayed in the same room and it quickly spread throughout work. We were both very upset and offended when we heard this rumor. I would never put someone in that situation.

Muslim College Student

I also have a job just like any other college student; I work at a clothing store. This is where I experienced my first form of discrimination. One day while the store was very busy I was helping a customer when I heard a man yell,

“Hey, why don’t you take that table cloth off your head so you can hear me!” I simply turned to the man and calmly responded,

“No, thank you I would rather keep it on”

After an older woman heard the man say this to me she walked over, looked me in the face and said,

“I think you look beautiful!”

While the man was leaving the store I saw a look of embarrassment come across his sons face. I didn’t let it get to me because it doesn’t matter to me what others think about my hijab or my religion, it is my decision, nobody else’s.

Male with AIDS

If my softball friends said anything discriminating about AIDS, they did not say it to my face. Although they probably talked about my disease behind my back, I’m glad that they never said anything to me directly. I would not have wanted to know how they really felt. A year after I was diagnosed, I was hanging out with a friend of mind, helping his band get their stuff together before their gig. We were listening to the radio and a commercial for an AIDS walk came on. After the commercial my friend’s band member said,

“We should just take all the homosexuals and people with AIDS and put them on an island and just blow it up. That would solve this problem.” He had no idea that a man with AIDS was standing right next to him.

Homeless Woman

I don't say that I live at the shelter; especially at my work. I am there to earn money just like everyone else and my past struggles shouldn't matter. I constantly feel like I have to hide who I am for fear that someone is going to judge me.

Gay Male

My partner and I decided to take a trip to the forbidden island of Jamaica. I call this the forbidden land for gays because in Jamaica it is still legal to kill somebody for being gay. When we told our friends that we were going to vacation there they seemed shocked and told us that we were putting our lives at risk for no apparent reason. But I felt that there was a reason. I didn't want to limit myself to what I was able to do with my life just because other people did not like the fact that I was gay.

African American Woman

When I met with my son's principal, she made the assumption that I was uneducated and did not understand what she was saying. I had to explain to her that I have a master's degree from the University of Southern California and that I could assure her that I understood what she was saying. Another thing that hit me hard was when my son asked me the other day, “Mommy, does that kid not like me because I'm brown?”

Muslim College Student

September 11th was a part of my life that could have changed me drastically. When the incident occurred, my mother took my siblings and me out of school to protect us from any comments that would be made. Expecting to be ridiculed the next couple of days in school, I was pleasantly surprised that not one person had blamed the attacks on me. Many people who do not understand the Muslim culture, or are unable to differentiate Muslims from the terrorists, put us into one

group. I think it helped that I came from a community where everyone knew me. The same wasn't true for one of my close friends. She was driving on the highway and was almost rammed off the road by another car simply because she was wearing a Hijab. When she had pulled her car into the parking lot the driver followed her and smashed her car with a baseball bat.

Male with AIDS

I will never forget the time that I went to my friends' house after they had their first born child. There was a group of us together, all mutual friends. My friends were holding the baby and cooing over his cuteness. Whenever I got close to the baby, his parents would make an excuse to take the child back into their own arms, protecting him from the virus they thought I could spread through my touch.

Kelly

I am American.

Indian American Teenager

I am American.

African American Woman

I am American.

Gay Male

I am American.

Muslim Woman

I am American.

Woman with AIDS

I am American.

Hispanic Woman

I am American.

Lesbian

I am American.

Muslim College Student

I am American.

Man with AIDS

I am American.

Homeless Woman

I am American.

Karla and Andy

Voices

Man with AIDS (Andy)

Woman with AIDS (Karla)

Andy

Growing up in Ohio, I never had to worry about much. My family was close and secure. As soon as I graduated high school, I got a job working with my father as a carpenter and electrician. This was when I began my habits of drinking, drug use, and unprotected sex. Even though I worked side by side with my father, we never brought up the subject of my alcohol and drug abuse. I could tell that he was disappointed in my actions, but it was not enough to change my ways. I didn't see the consequences of my actions or take them seriously. I never thought that the negative results of my decisions would catch up with me. All of the damaging effects were something that happened to other people, not me. Little did I know that I would one day become one of those 'other people.'

Karla

I was diagnosed with AIDS when I was 40 years old. I have been a victim of this disease for almost twenty years and experience emotional ups and downs every day. Sometimes I feel that my life is over and I am going to die right away. Other times, I am in denial and think to myself, "I'm *not* going to die." Then I become angry. I am furious at everyone who is not there for me and mad at myself for being vulnerable and allowing myself to get this disease. Once the anger passes, I begin to feel sorry for the person I contracted this disease from, that is, my husband. However, there are times where, in another breath, I'll pray, "God, forgive me for saying this but, I'm glad he's dead." My husband passed away from AIDS in 1995.

Andy

My journey towards being diagnosed as a person with AIDS began in August 2001 during an amateur league softball game. A ball almost hit me in the head, but I didn't see it. After this incident, I began to have problems with my balance, health and vision. Sometimes, while simply walking down a hallway to get to the bathroom, I had to grab the wall to keep from falling down. I ignored this off at first, thinking that I just stood up too fast. I also experienced thrush, a yeast infection of the mucous membranes of the mouth and tongue. It appeared as white lesions that became painful at times. My sense of paranoia also became heightened as time went on. I was always trying to distinguish between reality and imagination. I knew something was wrong.

Karla

I had never thought that a phone call could change my life forever. I was hurt and angry when I found out that my husband was HIV positive and that I should get tested, too. I could not believe that I had to find out this way. I would have expected my husband to at least have the decency to tell me. I didn't know how I would ever forgive him. I thought that his use of drugs and smoking were the last of my worries when he was in Vietnam. I guess I thought wrong.

I lost a lot of close friends when I thought I could confide in them with my illness, which made me realize that I had to be careful with whom I chose to tell. This resulted in a loss of hope. I was frightened to come out, especially in small communities where everyone knows each other. When others came out, I would be happy for them and encourage them to keep talking about it. I gave them support because I knew firsthand how helpful it was when people were there for you.

Andy

I was 41 years old when the doctor told me that I had AIDS. When I broke the news to my friends on the softball league, they were supportive and watched my every move to ensure that I was safe during games. I appreciated their concern. However, more and more I realized I was becoming the 'other person'.

Before I was diagnosed, I would not have wanted to have anything to do with a person with AIDS. I wouldn't have wanted to be in the same room with a person who could possibly give me this disease. Admitting how I felt before contracting the virus helps me understand now why others treat me with caution. I was once them. Now that I am 'the other,' I realize that the only way to dismiss the stigmas of AIDS is to educate people on the virus and how it affects people's lives. Otherwise nothing will change.

The Other Emma

Voices

Alicia

Grace

Alicia

The following remarks are by Grace Riker, the student who interviewed the real Emma.

Grace

Starting this project, I was a little nervous. I think it's fair to say that we all were. I was nervous and a little angry that Dr. Nordstrom was actually making us do this. Making us think for ourselves. Pushing us out of our comfort zone. How dare she! It all worked out in the end though because I can honestly say that I've had one of the most awe inspiring, eye opening experiences of my life.

The first paper we had to write had to be about what we thought of people in poverty and who we thought they were in society. We had to interview a few people for this paper and I asked all of my people to give me the first three words that came to mind when they heard the words, "people in poverty" or "homeless people." The most common responses I received were, "Dirty, smelly and Lazy." I learned very quickly that "Emma" was none of that.

My partner and I were both very scared going into our interview with "Emma"; It's not every day that you're made to go to the homeless shelter and interview a woman you don't really know on her life. And it's hard to go into an interview without and preconceived ideas or judgements.

We were behind time-wise so we really jumped right into hard topics for “Emma” to talk about like her family and how she ended up getting to the shelter. The first interview was filled with a lot of tears. Not only from “Emma” but from my partner Katie and I. It was hard not to tear up when this complete stranger was sharing her life story. A life that seemed to start out alright but then turned into a roller coaster ride of drugs and rehab.

When “Emma” told us about her children, there seemed to be so much remorse and sadness for how she had just basically let them go. But behind that sadness there was also some sort of peace in knowing that they were better off with families that could provide for them more than “Emma” could now.

Another part of the project was a Cultural event. Other people had dinner or went to functions for that group in society. At first we asked to play games or watch a movie with some of the other people at the shelter but “Emma” had another idea. She didn’t tell us where she was taking us but just to trust her and that she would have a ride for us. We met her and her friend at the shelter and we started driving into Wilkes-Barre. My partner and I aren’t from around here so everything was completely new to us. We pulled over by a park and started walking towards the Market Street bridge. “Emma” led us down the stairs and through the brush that’s under the bridge and out by the water. It was there that most people stayed. She thinks most stay there because it’s more spiritual. You can see the new amphitheatre on the water off of the square, the Wilkes-Barre skyline is prominent. There is a cross off in the distance and the constant sound of the river running. Where we were standing was a patch of dirt right under the bridge. There was a little circle of rocks, in which a fire was made. That’s it. You think from T.V. shows that you would know what something like that would be like, but you really don’t. I’m speechless. I was

feeling so many emotions but its hard to put those into words that would be easily understandable. That was the realization for me. That's how low homelessness can get.

I learned two huge aspects of life during these interviews. One is that you don't do drugs, drugs do you. I know that "Emma" didn't want to give her children up, or leave them alone to be taken away. That isn't her. That was the drugs that did that. The drugs brought on her inability to fight and care for her children. The drugs got her to where she is now. But she has conquered the drugs and is slowly putting her life back together from the million pieces it was shattered into and living, as she says, "one day at a time because that's all you have."

Another aspect of life that I realized was to really appreciate what you're given in life while you have because just like that it all can be gone. "Emma" talked a lot about loneliness during our interviews. How she just wants to be loved and even though the shelter is where she lives, it isn't "home" to her. There are days where she wants to get away and go "home", but she doesn't know where home is. I looked at all the little things in life I have been given now and the people that I'm surrounded with and realized that I truly am blessed to have my life where it is.

"Emma's" story touched my heart very much and I know that she changed my perspective and outlook on life.

Contradictions

Voices

Alicia

Student #1, who spoke to Josh, an African-American male

Student #2, who also spoke to Josh, an African-American male

Student #3, who spoke to an Indian-American Woman

Student #4, who spoke to the same Indian-American Woman

Alicia

Before they wrote their memoirs, I offered my students the option of turning in one paper written by both interviewers, or two separate papers if each interviewer wanted to write their own. Some of the students who turned in separate papers had different perceptions of the events and emotions of their interviewee's life. I wondered: where is the "truth" here? In one account or the other? In both? Somewhere in-between?

The Voices Project comprises several layers of voices: the voices of the interviewees, their voices as translated by the interviewers, and those translations adapted to the stage. We all bring our own ideas and experiences into somebody else's story. This makes it difficult to really hear and understand somebody else's life, even when we honestly try.

JOSH

Student #1

I spoke to an African-American teenager named Josh.

Student #2

I also spoke to Josh.

Student #1

This is how I heard his voice:

When I was young, my parents separated and I had to move to Pennsylvania with my dad. That summer flew by, moving to Reading. It was great to be living with my dad, although I missed my life and friends in Long Island. My new school was about to start, and I was unsure of what to expect. Walking in the first day, I was surprised and very happy. Many of the students were black just like me. This made me feel more comfortable and more welcome. I instantly made friends and no one judged me. I was having a great time at school.

Student #2

This is how I heard his voice:

I went to live with my dad in Reading, Pennsylvania, an area that was nothing like the area where I lived with my mom. There were many black families in my neighborhood, and the neighborhood was not the best to live in. The area had gangs, something I was not used to. When I went to school the first day, I was surprised by what I saw. I was not the only black student in my grade, or even the entire school. I learned how people stereotype blacks and how to ignore those stereotypes if they were ever directed at me.

Student #1

This is how I heard his voice:

Following another custody issue, I moved back to Pennsylvania with my father. There weren't even any black families in our new neighborhood. I now went to a school where I was the only black student, the only black member of the basketball and football team. While playing a football game one night, I heard one of the players on the opposite team yell out, "Nigger!" As I grew up, I had trouble making friends, and the friends I did have would often make jokes about black people. When standing in line at lunch, they would yell, "Hey, Josh, you're supposed to be at the back of the line!" I would try to blow it off because they were my friends. However, the jokes became annoying.

Student #2

This is how I heard his voice:

My dad had moved to another part of Pennsylvania because he got a new job. Sports were my favorite. I love basketball and love football even more. I find it rather nice that the typical stereotype of blacks is that we're good at sports. My new high school is all white so at gym, I always get picked first. My friends will joke around and say, "You only got picked first because you're black!" Well that may be the case, but I'm enjoying it. In school, my friends are all white. This doesn't bother me that much--but it would be nice to have some friends like me.

Student #1

This is how I heard his voice:

My life in Pennsylvania is better now, and I've made friends through sports. I do miss living in New York with my mom, but she still comes to visit. She was at my football game not too long ago. I had mentioned to my friend she was coming. When I pointed her out, he said, "Your mom's not black?" This made me laugh, but I was proud to say that was my mom.

Student #2

This is how I heard his voice:

My mom is biracial; however her skin is very light. One time she came to my high school football game in Pennsylvania.

"Hey, my mom came to the game today," I told my friend.

"Where is she, Josh?" my friend responded.

"She is sitting right next to my dad," I said.

"No, I still don't see her; I only see a white lady sitting next to him," he said, confused.

My white friend assumed that my mother was also black, like my dad and I. It became clear to me how racist this area actually was.

INDIAN-AMERICAN WOMAN

Student #3

I spoke to an Indian-American Woman

Student #4

I spoke to the same Indian-American Woman

Student #3

This is how I heard her voice:

I planned on going back to India until one summer night my friend Ashlee took me out to dinner. She surprised me with a few of our closest friends along with a man I had never seen before. He was so handsome! I couldn't help but ask for a phone number. We dated for a year and he asked me to marry him. I could not turn away. I was completely in love with him! So we decided to

stay in the United States since it was the only country he knew; it was just easier this way. I went on to give birth to three beautiful children: a daughter and two sons.

Student #4

This is how I heard her voice:

I decided to stay in the United States mainly because I met and married an American man and had a family, and also because I had become truly stateless. India is where I grew up but it is no longer my home because I moved to America. However, America is not my home either. I will never truly be considered a true American. I have no definite roots to just one place.

Student #3

This is how I heard her voice:

I never really faced racism. I continued to live my life. I became a professor teaching English literature at a university. My oldest son is a freshman at the university, and my daughter is in graduate school studying to be a pediatrician. My youngest son is the valedictorian of his high school. My baby brother plans to move to the United States next summer. I can't wait to be able to spend more time with him.

Student #4

This is how I heard her voice:

When I first moved to America, I experienced small incidents of discrimination from people. Upon living in America, I realized that because I married an American, less discriminatory comments came my way. The people in America were nice; they greeted me and asked how I was doing. Yet, at the end of the day, I was alone. They never invited me anywhere with them. That is so unlike how it is in India. In India, when you get to know someone, you can live with them, and they'll feed you and clothe you at no cost to yourself.

Student #3

This is how I heard her voice:

My children never faced any form of hatred or racism; not that I knew of. However, after the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center, my older son came home after school one day cursing like I've never heard him curse before. A fellow student had called him a "sand nigger."

Student #4

This is how I heard her voice:

My one son looks the most Indian, and he has faced some discrimination. One incident was after 9/11; he would hear the term "sand-nigger." He took it in stride.

I was making a normal trip to the grocery store that was close to my home, when two men cornered me. They started roughing up my hair and shoving me around. The one knocked me down and spit on me. He told me to go back to Pakistan. What ignorance! I quickly forgot about those men.

Conclusion

Alicia

In some ways, it's easier to hear the big, violent incidents because they capture our interest and fascination. But it can be a lot harder to get a grip on what day-to-day life is like. How do we see the less obvious, “hear” the silent prejudices that may be unspoken or inferred, or measure the contradictions and nuances in the daily lives of people considered different?

Who makes these rules of difference, these social norms that form ingroups and outgroups? If we look to the media, society, and other people to tell us who we are and where we belong, than what happens when people judge you based on one part of you without really knowing the rest of you? What does it mean when someone decides they don't like you, even when they have never met you or don't even know you? Does that mean something about you? Does it mean something about them? Does it mean something about society as a whole and the social norms that we create?

As a clinical psychologist, I was forced to confront the complex task of identifying and understanding how cultural differences affect how we view and treat one another. Although I've come to realize there is nothing quick or easy about this, I know that the success of our personal and professional lives depends on it. So, when we meet someone different than us, what are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to focus on the “similarity” (the thing we have in common as human beings)—if so, we become blind to differences that might otherwise give us the false impression that our lives are the same. Even if someone looks like me or shares the same the religion or health conditions as me, that doesn't mean that our life experiences or perspectives are the same. The opposite situation is equally confusing—are we then supposed to focus on the “differences” between people? Historically, the focus on difference has fueled issues of inequality—between women and men, Whites and Blacks, people of different religions and social classes. Overfocusing on difference could also lead to “tokenism” and stereotyping—assuming that people that share the same characteristic are all the same or represents everything we know about that group. So, which is it? Do we focus on the similarity or the difference or both? And if we are supposed to focus on both, how do we do that?

Each of you here tonight must find your own answer to this question. My approach—as it stands now—is to assume that everyone has his or her own unique story, and to create a feeling of similarity by sharing in it. If I can at least listen and get to know the person, than the stereotypes and judgments that I carry around with me can change with new experiences.

Twenty-eight of my Intro to Psychology students listened to the stories of thirteen people who were courageous enough and willing to share their personal lives with strangers. My students rose to this challenge and were strong enough to hear and communicate their experiences despite

whatever preconceptions they had going in. As part of their service commitment, my students are taking these stories out of the classroom to share them with others, as we have done tonight. We all have the opportunity to carry these stories with us and share them in moments when we might hear misunderstandings. We can honor and validate the life experiences we heard today by being The Voices for those who are not there to speak.

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