

Book Discussion Guide

Developed by

Micere Keels

Hae Min Byeon

Alexandra Ehrhardt

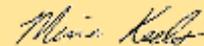
Hilary Tackie

Table of Contents

Preface: It Doesn't Have to be Race-Ethnicity to be about Race-Ethnicity	2
Chapter 1. Outlining the Problem	3
Chapter 2. The Impossibility of a Colorblind Identity	4
Chapter 3. An Ambivalent Embrace	5
Chapter 4. Strategic Disengagement	6
Chapter 5. Power in the Midst of Powerlessness	7
Chapter 6. Importance of a Critical Mass	8
Chapter 7. Finding One's People and One's Self on Campus	9
Chapter 8. Split between School, Home, Work, and More	10
Chapter 9. Out of Thin Air	11
Chapter 10. A Guiding Hand	12
Chapter 11. (Dis)integration	13

This discussion guide is designed to deepen your understanding of the issues discussed in the book in ways that can help the college planning process as well as facilitate adjustment during the transition to college. It can be used by high school and college counselors, parents, teachers, administrators, students, mentors, and many others who are invested in increasing historically marginalized students' college persistence.

It is my hope that with each discussion it will become easier for historically marginalized youth to challenge taken for granted assumptions about how to be a successful college student.



Preface: It Doesn't Have to be Race-Ethnicity to be about Race-Ethnicity

“Unlike students with college-educated parents, Marcela had no one to assure her that her struggles were a normal part of the transition. She had no one to offer strategies for managing the workload or encourage her to access campus supports. ... Through glimpses into her friends’ experiences, Marcela knew that there was insider knowledge she did not have access to. ... I begin with Marcela, a student who did not express any direct racial-ethnic identity challenges during the transition to college, because even though Latinx and Black students’ college-going identity challenges are often deeply connected to their sense of themselves as Black or Latinx students, many of these challenges are not directly about their racial-ethnic identity. Instead, many of their college-going identity challenges result from structural racism—an intergenerational system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work to perpetuate racial-ethnic inequity. In this system, Marcela was able to feel free of interpersonal discrimination and still experience systemic inequities in her academic and other college-relevant identities.” (pg. 3-4)

Discussion Questions

- 1. What are some of the major psychological costs of college? (pg. 1)**
 - a. Why do minority students attending historically White institutions pay higher psychological costs?
- 2. What is radical growth? (pg. 2)**
 - a. Do you think that it takes radical teaching to create radical growth in students?
- 3. In what ways was Marcela disadvantaged relative to her peers? (pgs. 2-4)**
 - a. Each of us has weaknesses and strengths, what is one of your strengths?
- 4. How is structural racism different from interpersonal discrimination? (pg. 4)**
 - a. What is one aspect of structural racism that you have experienced, or exists in your community?
- 5. Latino is often defined as “a person of Latin American origin or descent.” Why is this a gendered way of referring to people of Latin American descent? (pg. 7)**
 - a. What are some differences between the terms African American and Black?
- 6. What are your thoughts on why is race-ethnicity hyphenated throughout the book? (pg. 7)**
 - a. What are some other ethnic groups that have been racialized?

Chapter 1. Outlining the Problem

“Expanding [college] access while increasing costs without also attending to increasing the likelihood that students will graduate means that not only is college financially riskier but that increasing numbers of low-income and low-wealth students, who are disproportionately Black and Latinx, are exposed to that risk. James Rosenbaum and colleagues were among the first to call attention to the fact that given the reliance of low-income students on loans, broadening college access could further disadvantage those students if attention were not paid to increasing their graduation rates. This warning has not been heeded. Enrollment has increased faster among low-income students than among high-income students, but graduation rates have increased faster among high-income than among low-income students ... Because Black students take on the most debt, they have been hurt the most by a system that has prioritized broadening enrollment over increasing persistence. If we are to continue promoting college as *the* way to enter or stay in the middle class, we must do a better job of creating differentiated institutional structures that facilitate persistence.” (pg. 10)

Discussion Questions

- 1. What evidence exists to suggest that access to the financial benefits of obtaining a college degree is a racialized issue?**
 - a. How does knowing about these trends affect your thoughts about your own financial future?
- 2. What have been some of the harms of the push for “college for all”? (p. 10)**
 - a. Have you been discussing the reasons why you should go to college or have you just been told that you “must” to go to college?
- 3. What are “identity-conscious supports,” and how do they promote student success? (p. 11)**
 - a. What kinds of identity-conscious supports could you see yourself finding useful in college?
- 4. List some of the various forms of insider knowledge that help students navigate college life.**
 - a. Who has given you the most advice about how to succeed in college?
- 5. What are microaggressions? (p. 12)**
 - a. Have you ever experienced a microaggression in the classroom? If so, how did the experience make you feel?
- 6. The author states that, “Historically marginalized students need safe spaces to develop” adaptive coping skills in order to “prevent micro-aggressive experiences from derailing [their] day.” (p.17) List some of the possible ways micro-aggressive experiences can be disruptive to a student’s day.**
 - a. Collectively brainstorm some healthy ways of coping with experiencing microaggressions.

Chapter 2. The Impossibility of a Colorblind Identity

“Simply matching the characteristics of a particular racial-ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, or other social group is not enough to determine whether and in which contexts an individual will *claim* that social identity. For example, there were times during the interviews when Julissa clearly identified as Black and liked being identified as one of the ‘Black representatives on campus.’ This occurred when she discussed her leadership roles in the predominantly White campus organizations. However, she also actively rejected being seen as just another member of the ‘Black community’ on campus, a community that she stereotyped as ‘entitled,’ ‘not inclusive,’ “[without] school spirit,” and low achieving. This one social identity—Black American—is associated with different stereotypes, roles, and opportunities, depending on the context in which it is evoked.” (pg. 24)

Discussion Questions

1. **What is the difference between “identity” and “identification”? (pg. 23)**
 - a. Are these two things interchangeable? Can they be separated?
2. **What is “respectability politics”? (pg. 24)**
 - a. How does “respectability politics” constrain the self-expression of youth from historically marginalized groups?
3. **“What has lingered from post-racial arguments is the idea that foregrounding race-ethnicity perpetuates racism, the argument being that if we want racism to disappear, we must first ignore the existence of race-ethnicity.” What is a large consequence of this type of argument? (pg. 26)**
 - a. How would you feel if someone excluded an aspect of your identity from public discussion?
4. **What is racialization, and why is it a relational process?**
 - a. Do you agree with Dr. Bonilla Silva’s argument of racialization?
5. **How does the “the math-science death march” perpetuate structural racism and cultural misassumptions? (pg. 29)**
 - a. How does it demonstrate the belief that competition is necessary to weed out “less able” students?
6. **“As Dr. Na’ilah Nasir notes, youth are always searching for ways of understanding who they are, and whenever they are in doubt, culture provides many stereotypes to fill the gap.” How does this quote from Dr. Nasir reflect Julissa’s college experience? (pg. 30)**
 - a. In what ways has cultural stereotypes filled gaps in your understanding of who you are?

Chapter 3. An Ambivalent Embrace

“We found that one-third of the 533 students in our larger survey were under tremendous financial pressure. These students started college in financial distress. What we focus on in this chapter, however, is the added psychological burden of managing the internal conflict of investing in a degree that they doubted would be worth the cost. As one political science and history major put it, ‘My biggest fear is that while I’m bending over backwards to pay off my tuition, I won’t be as successful as I plan to be in the future.’ Even those seeking profitable majors were worried; as one economics and marketing major put it, ‘Sometimes I wonder if college is worth it, because even with a degree, nothing is guaranteed in the current state of the economy. Sometimes I feel like maybe I am just wasting my time, especially when I could instead be learning a useful trade or skill that a college degree doesn’t provide.’” (pgs. 41-42)

Discussion Questions

- 1. What is the “college for all” expectation?**
 - a. Who or what do you think helps produce this expectation?
- 2. How does “important insider cultural information” help students in financial distress? (pg. 42)**
 - a. How does this reflect the cultural knowledge of higher-income families??
- 3. What are some of the reasons why obtaining a college degree is important to students from lower-income families? (pgs. 43-44)**
 - a. What are some reasons why obtaining a college degree may be important to you?
- 4. How did Tanya’s personality help her navigate through financial distress? (pgs. 48-49)**
 - a. How is her personality similar or different from yours?
- 5. Why do the authors state that an “abundance of financial aid information” is not enough? (pg. 50)**
 - a. Has your school provided help with making financial decisions about college?
- 6. How can students benefit from counterspaces for financially marginalized students?**
 - a. Why is it difficult to organize student clubs based on social class?

Chapter 4. Strategic Disengagement

“College is marketed to minority students as a place where Claire and Fiona should feel safe to explore their interests and discover new passions while enjoying equality among their peers. College will become their respite from the world outside. If the recruiters are to be believed, race-ethnicity and gender should play additive and integrative roles by contributing to campus diversity. But Claire and Fiona found that others responded to their race-ethnicity and gender in subtractive and rejecting ways. ... Their experiences with campus exclusion led them to realize that college life would not be the one they saw in TV sitcoms and movies. They learned that their college experience would have to be restructured in ways that would protect their core sense of themselves as Black women and allow them to maintain their educational goals and career ambitions despite their marginalizing experiences on campus.” (pgs. 55 & 57)

Discussion Questions

1. **Identify a few instances that encouraged the students in the chapter to separate their academic identities from their institutional identities?**
 - a. What are some ways that you may have experienced conflict between who you are personally and who you are expected to be in school?
2. **What does it look like to disconnect from campus life while maintaining one’s academic life?**
 - a. Considering the experiences of the students discussed in the chapter, list some supports you would find useful to succeed in college if you had to disconnect from campus life.
3. **In what ways did the students in the chapter experience their universities as emotionally unsafe?**
 - a. How do you think you would react if you felt emotionally unsafe at college?
4. **What are some problems with the expectation that college will be students’ complete home away from home? (p. 52)**
 - a. What are some of the assumptions that you have about what college life will be like for you? Do your assumptions resemble the “cosmopolitan canopy”? (p.55)
5. **Colleges are assumed to be spaces that promote diversity and identity exploration. However, this chapter shows that not everyone has the same access to that experience. Fiona states: “Some people are more friendly, they don’t really care about your skin color. And some people you can tell that it affects how they’re about to approach you. Or how they expect you to approach them.” (p. 53).**
 - a. How did counterspaces contribute to Fiona and Claire’s self-exploration, identity formation, and self-determination?
6. **Refer to question 4 above and find one news story about minority students having experiences at college that made them feel emotionally unsafe.**
 - a. Collectively, brainstorm some ways of managing those experiences in healthy and productive ways.

Chapter 5. Power in the in Midst of Powerlessness

“Traditional models of college student development argue that college provides young adults with time and space to free themselves of sociopolitical concerns and embark on individualized self-development. That is rarely true for students from historically marginalized groups, however, and in today’s climate, Black and Latinx students do not have the luxury to dissociate from larger sociopolitical issues.” (pg. 74)

Discussion Questions

- 1. How did Cindy and Faith differ in their pathways into college? (pg. 71)**
 - a. Are your high school experiences more like Cindy or more like Faith?
- 2. What kinds of experiences with racial-ethnic injustice did Cindy and Faith report? (pgs. 74-75)**
 - a. Have you experienced or witnessed any racial-ethnic injustice?
- 3. Why do the authors describe counterspaces as means through which individuals can develop agency? (pgs. 76-79)**
 - a. Why do you think it is important to develop agency?
- 4. How did participating in counterspaces relate to Cindy’s sense of empowerment? (pg. 78)**
 - a. How empowered do you feel to participate in responses to racial-ethnic injustice?
- 5. What were Faith’s reasons for describing separate graduation ceremonies held just for Black students as a form of self-segregation? (pg. 79)**
 - a. What are your thoughts about students organizing special Black or Latinx graduation ceremonies?
- 6. How does critical awareness differ from critical consciousness? (pg. 80)**
 - a. Have you had any classes that have influenced your critical awareness and/or critical consciousness?

Chapter 6. Importance of a Critical Mass

“Although all students face challenges as they adapt to college life, the transition can be particularly stressful for minority students transitioning to historically White institutions. These challenges are not only due to their lack of experience and comfort with being in a mostly White space; White students and staff are often equally, if not more, inexperienced and uncomfortable building bridges across racial-ethnic boundaries. Both microaggressions and overt discriminatory acts leave minority students feeling unwelcomed. As these experiences accumulate, minority students often begin to feel self-conscious, self-critical, and alienated from the college life they imagined.” (pgs. 94-95)

Discussion Questions

1. **What is structural diversity, and why is it not enough? (p. 83)**
 - a. Were any of your elementary or high schools structurally diverse?
2. **The authors call for the need to move beyond structural diversity to foster interactional diversity. What is interactional diversity? (pg. 95)**
 - a. Why does it take intentional efforts to create interactional diversity?
3. **What types of institutional supports could help students build friendship across racial-ethnic boundaries?**
 - a. What have been your experiences with building friendships across racial-ethnic boundaries?
4. **What do authors mean when they say that understandably, students dismissed “the personal impact of prejudice and discrimination” as a way of coping with discrimination and microaggression? (pg. 86)**
 - a. Do you think that normalization of discrimination can ever be an effective way of coping?
5. **How do anxieties about negative racial-ethnic stereotypes influence how Black and Latinx students’ participate in the classroom? (pgs. 88-91)**
 - a. Have you experienced self-doubt at school?
6. **How did having a “critical understanding of oppression” help students cope with feeling marginalized in the classroom? (p. 91)**
 - a. How might college administrators or student organizations help reduce the burden of marginalization?

Chapter 7. Finding One's People and One's Self on Campus

“This emphasis on networking and extracurricular activities begins long before students set foot on campus. During junior year of high school, students sit through presentations on finding their college fit and are repeatedly told that college is not just for higher learning. They are told that they are choosing the place that will be their whole world for at least four years, so they should figure out if it ‘feels right,’ if it attracts the type of peers they can imagine as lifelong friends, if it has the social and extracurricular activities that will keep them entertained, and if they can build connections that will get them jobs when college is over. Continuing-generation students hear stories about joining that perfect club or Greek organization that connected them to the people who became their closest friends and who opened doors to that perfect job. From academic literature to popular psychology in teen magazines and movies, young adulthood is presented as the age of finding oneself.” (pgs. 96-97)

Discussion Questions

1. **What are the seven vectors of college student development as suggested by Chickering and Reisser? (pgs. 97)**
 - a. How does this relate to any of your reasons for going to college?
2. **Why is there no one single minority experience? (pg. 98)**
 - a. What are some important factors that would create different “minority experiences”?
3. **What are racially-ethnically marked and unmarked spaces? (pgs. 98-100)**
 - a. Are there any racially-ethnically marked and unmarked spaces in your school?
4. **During a rough transition to college, Aliyah found solace in a faith-based group and the women's business club organizations. What drew her to these spaces? (pgs. 105-107)**
 - a. Do you participate in any clubs/groups, and what drew you to those clubs/groups?
5. **Lucas focused on participating in activities not related to race-ethnicity. What purpose did these activities serve in regard to his racial-ethnic identity? (pgs. 107-108)**
 - a. Do you think that Lucas' strategy would work for you?
6. **What purpose does collaboration serve in fostering a campus culture that does not marginalize minority student organizations as being solely for the development of one's racial-ethnic identity? (pg. 109)**
 - a. In what ways does your school promote co-operation and collaboration among student groups so that students can feel encouraged to participate in a diverse range of groups?

Chapter 8. Split between School, Home, Work, and More

“Many commuting students are moving between divergent social worlds. Their focus and energy are split between environments that abide by different norms and priorities, forcing them to shift their self-presentation throughout each day. This lack of coherence can make college more challenging than it is for students who reside on campus. ... Commuting students are more than simply students who cannot walk from their dorm or apartment to their classes. Often, these students are also likely to work more than twenty-five hours per week, are first-generation students, and are financially independent.” (pgs. 111 - 112)

Discussion Questions

- 1. It is assumed that commuting to college presents a challenge because of a lack of consistency between home and school life. In what ways was this true for the students discussed in the chapter?**
 - a. What differences do you expect to encounter (or have encountered) between your home life and your college life?
- 2. In what ways is the assumption that college students live on campus associated with particular ideas of who college students are?**
 - a. What are some factors that may lead to you living off-campus?
- 3. What were some of the ways that living at home supported Lucia, Kara, and/or Sammy?**
 - a. What are your expectations for how your family will support you while you are in college?
- 4. Kara had the lowest campus engagement of the three students profiled in the chapter. Make a timeline of how the various barriers she faced contributed to her low engagement.**
 - a. If you had the opportunity to come to Kara’s defense, what would you say to the professor she mentions on page 131?
- 5. How important were finances to these students’ decisions to commute to campus?**
 - a. What are some questions that you have about paying for college?
- 6. Sammy appreciated the student center that his school had for commuting students. What were some of the benefits the center provided Sammy? (p.122)**
 - a. What may be some other ways that colleges can help commuting students have a good experience?

Chapter 9. Out of Thin Air

“We all have multiple identities that become more or less salient, depending on the context. When our multiple identities cohere, growth in one identity domain can strengthen and facilitate growth in other domains. For instance, a student who enters college with a strong activist identity could strengthen this aspect of her identity as she furthers her academic identity as a political scientist. Conversely, when there is conflict or tension between identities, growth in one domain can weaken other domains. For example, a student who enters college with a strong religious identity could feel tension between this identity and his emerging academic identity as a physicist. Maintaining conflicting identities is most challenging when the conflict occurs between two or more highly salient aspects of one’s sense of self.” (pg. 125)

Discussion Questions

- 1. What is academic identity? (pg. 125)**
 - a. What are some of the factors that have influenced your academic identity?
- 2. What are social identity threats, and how can they affect how someone feels about themselves? (pg. 126)**
 - a. Can you think of any interactions or situations that may have been threatening for some aspect of your identity, such as your racial-ethnic, gender, religious, or other identity?
- 3. What is the “good daughter dilemma,” and how does it affect the pursuit of academic opportunities? (pg. 128)**
 - a. Does something similar exist in your life?
- 4. What were the similarities and differences between Kara and Cindy’s experiences with their guidance counselor or academic advisors?**
 - a. Based on your own experiences, what can high school guidance counselors or college academic advisors do more of or do differently to better to support students like you?
- 5. Did Cindy integrate her family identity and her academic identity, or did she keep them separated? (pg. 135)**
 - a. When you think about who you are at school and who you are at home, do you integrate your academic and family identities or keep them separated?
- 6. What institutional supports were in place to help Cindy and Kara with their college transitions? (pg. 197)**
 - a. Why is it important to have college transition supports that go beyond helping students move in and select their courses?

Chapter 10. A Guiding Hand

“Only recently have we begun to hear of the ‘vanishing’ presence of Latinx men in college—‘vanishing’ because of their erasure from college campuses. In 2015, 43 percent of all Latinx college students were men, compared to 54 percent in 1976. The attention and programming directed to Black men is warranted; Black men make up only 5 percent of undergraduates at degree-granting colleges. However, Latinx men are not doing any better. They currently make up less than 8 percent of undergraduates at degree-granting colleges. As Victor Sáenz and Luis Ponjuan note, ‘despite these trends, research attention to [Latinx men] has been minimal, and public outcry has been almost nonexistent.’” (pg. 139)

Discussion Questions

1. **The traditional expectation is that students should make campus and the people they meet there their complete social world. How might this expectation be harmful for students from historically marginalized groups?**
 - a. What do you think about the importance of maintaining connections to pre-college friends and mentors?
2. **What are two factors that may place Latinx men at odds with their institutions’ cultural orientations? (pg. 140)**
 - a. How could these factors affect their risk for dropping out of college?
1. **Name a common institutional solution to the problem of students leaving college “because of their inability to adjust to the college context”? (pgs. 140-141)**
 - b. Why may this not be the best solution for students from historically marginalized groups?
3. **What are the four “motivation orientations” mentioned in this chapter? (pgs. 141-142)**
 - a. What are your motivation orientations for pursuing postsecondary education?
4. **“In sharp contrast to the experiences of the Latinx women discussed in chapter 9, José was able to quickly overcome his parents’ doubts.” What did José have to overcome to focus on school? (pg. 145)**
 - a. What are your thoughts about whether and how gender may have an effect on your own educational experiences?
5. **Marco pursued college with much more of an independent mind-set than Jose and Lucas. How did such a mind-set affect Marco’s first year of college? (pgs. 147-151)**
 - a. Do you think that, while in college, you will be (or are) more like Marco, Jose, or Lucas, and why?

Chapter 11. (Dis)integration

“Racial-ethnic supports are needed to counter racial-ethnic stress. ... Counterspaces are critical spaces where marginalized students challenge each other to push beyond stereotypical narratives, develop counterstories, and learn adaptive strategies from others who are navigating similar struggles. Essentially, counterspaces take many forms—ideational, physical, curricular, cocurricular, formal, and informal—and do many things. They counter discrimination, build critical group identity, become culturally affirming while fostering institutional belonging, provide psychological and physical safety, support academic achievement, and provide a social community.” (pg. 161)

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss in detail one of the suggested ways that colleges can facilitate meaningful interactional diversity.
2. Discuss in detail one of the suggested ways that colleges can facilitate the campus integration and college success of students from historically marginalized groups.