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**The Climate for Diversity at Cornell University:  
Student Experiences**

**Full Report**

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## Prefatory Message from the University Diversity Council

What follows is an executive summary and full report of *“The Climate for Diversity at Cornell University: Student Experiences”* by Sylvia Hurtado, Professor and Director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. Professor Hurtado’s qualitative, focus-group-based research targets and expands on themes identified through the data in the Institutional Research report, *“Beginning to Assess the Student Climate for Diversity,”* commissioned by the University Diversity Council in spring 2013.

Surveys completed by the general population of Cornell students reflect a broad satisfaction with the Cornell experience, but the university recognized that underrepresented students sometimes registered less positive responses around engagement and inclusion than the responses of the general population. Professor Hurtado’s study was commissioned in an effort to better understand these less positive responses, as well as the steps that could be taken to support an inclusive climate for students. Professor Hurtado’s team engaged in face-to-face interactions with 99 students, and collected individual comments from an additional 298 students. This study reflects Cornell’s commitment to continuing to develop an ongoing responsiveness to the student constituencies mentioned above. We are very appreciative for the time that Professor Hurtado and her researchers spent with students, and for the depth of inquiry and the distinct voices that her study provides.

This new, in-depth information will be most valuable as it is integrated with ongoing diversity initiatives, particularly through the Toward New Destinations (TND) institutional diversity project. TND provides the conceptual context, structure, and scope that will enable units across Cornell, separately and collaboratively, to support the opportunities that Professor Hurtado’s research highlights. In this context, Professor Hurtado’s research is directly aligned with the TND core principles of Engagement and Inclusion. This study, though focusing on student engagement and inclusion, includes perceptions around opportunities that could be designed to help staff and faculty continue to develop programs and skills for the benefit of students. TND’s annual initiatives framework enables the institutional planning process to support initiatives with an impact on climate for students that emerge from all constituencies.

The University Diversity Council will be encouraging the colleges and units to review and pursue opportunities raised by this study. The [TND menu of annual initiatives for 2014-15](#) has integrated initiatives based on the investigation of climate for students, as well as collaborative activities that serve these goals.

This spring, the University Diversity Council’s regular meetings with the unit diversity council leads will be informed by Professor Hurtado’s findings, the data in *“Beginning to Assess the Student Climate for Diversity,”* and the metrics being developed around Engagement and Inclusion for undergraduate and graduate students.

The University Diversity Council will continue to promote activities, call for more efforts, and create measurement rubrics to impact Engagement and Inclusion, carrying forward such initiatives as:

1. The Intergroup Dialogue course (Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives and the Intercultural Center at 626)
2. The Skills for Success project (Division of Human Resources and Safety Services)
3. The online instructional course Avoiding Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace (Weill Cornell Medical College)
4. The Annual Pioneers in Diversity Awards, highlighting achievement and best practices (Weill Cornell Medical College)
5. Programming for new students, following upon Tapestry of Possibilities (Office of the Dean of Students)
6. Programs on micro-inequities and bias, following upon recent speakers: Ernest Hicks, Nancy DiTomaso, Deborah Spar, and Kimberlé Crenshaw
7. New Bias Response Team structures and planning (Student and Academic Services/Human Resources and Safety Services)
8. Bridging activities such as the United Student Body initiative (Student Assembly)
9. The “One Cornell” vision supported through a design competition for the Open Doors insignia (University Diversity Council)
10. Active implementation of the university’s revised procedure for addressing discrimination and harassment, [Policy 6.4, Prohibited Discrimination, Protected-Status Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Sexual Assault and Violence](#).



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## **Executive Summary**

### **Background and Purpose**

In accordance with plans and discussions among the University Diversity Council to assess the climate at Cornell, the Cornell Office of Institutional Research issued a request for proposals (RFP) to engage a consultant to study student views of the climate for diversity at Cornell. This climate assessment represents a second phase of data collection intended to augment previously conducted surveys of undergraduate, graduate and professional students in 2012-13. The specific charge was to “conduct qualitative research (focus groups, interviews) that will explore and expand on themes and issues emerging from our analysis of survey data.” It is important to note that the charge in the request for proposals focused on student experiences of the climate rather than a diversity assessment of the entire environment. In accordance with the RFP, student participants were to be drawn from different social identity groups at Cornell along with selected program personnel and senior administrators with the expectation that 8-13 focus groups and 8-10 interviews would be conducted.

Professor Sylvia Hurtado, with her team from the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at UCLA, was selected to conduct the assessment. She teaches intergroup relations, conducts research on campus climates for diverse students, and studies diverse learning environments. She assembled a team of professionals and graduate students skilled in qualitative research, mixed methods, and intergroup relations. The research team represented African American, Asian, Latina/o, Native American, LGBT, White males and White women, working-class, and middle class identities.

Dr. Hurtado conducted a preliminary site visit on September 5-6, 2013 to assess issues on campus and discuss the scope of work. She met with key student affairs and academic administrators, as well with staff in the Institutional Research Office to plan the logistics of the visit. The Office of Institutional Research used multiple methods to make students aware of this study and encourage their participation in focus groups: campus flyers, ads in the student newspaper, announcements in campus e-newsletters, and emails sent by program personnel working directly with various student communities. Interested students provided contact and social identity information via a “student climate for diversity focus group” website; based on this information, institutional research staff followed up with students by email to schedule their participation in specific focus groups. The social identity of the focus group facilitator was matched with the social identity of focus group participants (except in the case of international students). Fourteen (14) student focus groups, including 99 student participants, and 14 staff/administrator interviews were primarily conducted during the site visit between October 26<sup>th</sup> and October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013 (four interviews were conducted via telephone immediately after the site visit). To allow for more input from students, a website was opened to collect more information regarding experiences with the climate and also recommendations from students who did not have an opportunity to participate in focus groups

during the four-day site visit. Web respondents included 190 undergraduate students and 108 graduate/professional students. Documents were collected from the campus website and during the site visit. All data were coded for emergent themes and analyzed in relation to a model for assessing the climate for diversity (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2009; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar & Arellano, 2012).

### **How This Report Expands Cornell Quantitative Climate Assessments**

There are several ways in which this report explores and expands on the surveys administered in 2012-13 and reported in September, 2013. First, we attended to the larger context and the multiple realities of the diverse communities that coexist at Cornell, much of which cannot be measured *a priori*. A key assumption in social construction of climates is that it is informed by positionality and there is no singular reality, although we can find groups or individuals who coalesce around particular themes and issues. In accordance with a transformative evaluation paradigm (Mertens, 2009), social justice aims are primary; this includes attention and respect for marginalized communities, awareness of asymmetric power relationships, and linking results with action. The latter is represented in an appendix at the end of this report that compiles concrete, individual suggestions from study participants as well as in our own overall action recommendations featured in this section. We expect this report will serve as a basis for the design of new questions in future and ongoing assessments of the climate. Second, while the survey reports average responses for groups by social identity category, we attempt to capture more variability within each category. For example, the Latina/o, Asian, and Black students come from distinct ethnic communities with different immigration and migration histories but are subject to social categorization (by others) despite heterogeneity in each population. Third, Native American students at Cornell hail from different tribal nations and are generally excluded from quantitative reports because of their small numbers. They have a voice in this report. Fourth, students' powerful stories and examples explore and problematize existing norms, illustrate perceived forms of bias/discrimination operating in the environment, and expand on student resilience and their interest in improving the climate at Cornell. Finally, we offer our own interpretations based on what we heard, tying avenues for action with diversity research in higher education. We also recognize our role as external evaluators is to report on issues that others on campus may feel silenced about or fear reporting.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

The research team presents the summary in the form of five interrelated actions that follow from an integration of the findings of a qualitative assessment of students' perspectives on the climate for diversity. These findings build and expand upon the report of the Cornell surveys focusing on different undergraduate and graduate student communities focused on the social identities of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and international status. Specific opportunities for response and follow-up, based on diversity research in higher education, follow each area and many individual suggestions from the campus community are provided in Appendix A that can be pursued as part of an action plan.

We encourage the University Diversity Council and Cornell's diverse campus communities to use the findings in this report to adopt an agenda that will assist the University to take action in addressing these key areas: Authentic Forms of Engagement; Diversity Skills and Knowledge; Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment; Power Dynamics and Equity; and Bridging Diverse Communities.

### Authentic Forms of Engagement

**Findings.** Representation, or compositional diversity as one of the key areas in the *Toward New Destinations* (TND) diversity strategic planning initiative, is the first step in achieving diversity in any work and learning environment. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for engagement (another TND area). Although the campus prides itself on compositional diversity relative to other Ivy League institutions, some participants felt that there was more progress to be made in recruiting diverse faculty and staff. This may well be necessary to introduce expertise in the areas for action that follow. A key finding is that students from diverse Cornell communities were interested in having more conversations, addressing the issues, and listening to others. Some were quite articulate, thoughtful, and appreciated the opportunity to have a conversation as part of the project. Although this may be a function of who shows up for focus groups, overwhelmingly, study participants seemed ready for deeper forms of "authentic engagement." Students were tired of "shallow attempts at addressing diversity," and some staff suggested "it can't be just a one-time program" that is often in reactive response to an incident. Students also pointed out that there was no diversity education follow-up to the *Tapestry of Possibilities* program at the beginning of college. The study found that White students that want to be part of improving the climate also desire avenues for participation and engagement.

*"I feel like Cornell hasn't earned the word diversity yet...the 'ity' part, the divers 'ity' part hasn't been addressed enough." [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

**Opportunities for Action.** Our findings suggest that there is an opportunity to create an intentional educational and cross-unit initiative that creates opportunities for ongoing, sustained conversations promoting self-reflection at the individual level and proactive activity at the institutional level. Such conversations could occur inside and outside of classrooms, perhaps beginning with elements of this report. A series of related events that further deepen the conversations could be extended to follow *Tapestry*, especially when students are ready to make sense of their experiences on a cognitive and interpersonal level. Common residential experiences like North Campus are natural sites for additional programming. The nascent Intergroup Dialogue Project is promising, but it needs to be scaled up and/or take place in many more units.

### **Diversity Skills and Knowledge**

**Findings.** A common theme was lack of awareness and examples of how some students, faculty, and staff “just don’t get it.” Lack of awareness is a form of privilege, as lack of responsibility for behavior often followed. Students expected better from administrators, faculty, and peers but also attributed “ignorance” to prior socialization and differences in experiences. Students from minority communities feel compelled to speak up, often have to take on the “burden of educating others,” and sometimes find themselves without support. This makes it difficult for students in classroom situations that should be facilitated by faculty, or when staff expect programming to be led by students who are also learning how to negotiate differences, or in situations where Cornell authority figures (faculty or staff) are the offending parties. Although some staff feel strongly that educational initiatives should be “student-directed,” the President suggests it should be a collaborative effort, and students expressed an interest in having faculty, staff, or administrators take more responsibility for directing education as a way of showing their support. Relying on students to always take the lead can hide low competency levels, and students can “feel the vibe of discomfort” when faculty or staff are unprepared. In terms of graduation requirements, some students felt that diversity was important enough to require knowledge about different groups and improve their abilities to negotiate differences in their future.

*“It’s like they expect us to be ‘any person, any study,’ but how can you expect this of us when you don’t provide any support for students?” [Female Queer International Undergraduate]*

**Opportunities for Action.** Students recommended diversity training and education, and we agree, but diversity research indicates that the approach should be designed to achieve desirable outcomes and tailored for students, faculty, and staff. To advance general education, students recommended diversity requirements across colleges and better monitoring of what qualifies as a diversity course. In this context, we recommend faculty development activities to provide support for inclusive pedagogies, activities, and/or content that addresses diversity, which could become part of the teaching portfolio at promotion and merit evaluation. Training and professional

development activities should be accompanied with job evaluations that outline expectations for diversity areas or diversity competencies at all levels (unit heads and supervisors, as well as staff who work directly with students). An inventory or audit may be useful to identify ongoing training initiatives, length and frequency of training, target audience, and sources of support or shared unit responsibility.

## **Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment**

**Findings.** President Skorton has made a [public statement](#) regarding bias and sexual misconduct, and Cornell has a comprehensive website and assistance network for those who wish to [report bias](#) or discrimination and initiate investigations.

*“Most of the damage is when it gets in your head.” [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

However, students provided stories that illustrate many forms of bias, discrimination, and harassment that typically go unreported. “It’s a daily thing” to be reminded by others about one’s low socioeconomic status, invisibility, difference, or concern for safety in an environment where the norms of privilege are based on race, class, gender, and heterosexuality. In Appendix B, we provide a compendium of different examples drawn from students’ experiences that range from overt forms of traditional racism, sexism, or homophobia to more subtle forms of offenses or microaggressions that cause students to feel unsafe, internalize negative messages, or use adaptive strategies to subvert them. Some students felt as though they would be “causing more trouble by reporting something,” and some raised a concern that there appear to be no consequences for perpetrators of bias or discrimination. A related issue raised is the need for faculty and staff who can handle controversial discussions, have knowledge about multiple forms of diversity, and can identify implicit bias and common patterns of bias/discrimination across identity groups to help students make sense of their experiences.

**Opportunities for Action.** Monitoring and public reporting of incidents will be important to understand progress made in the reduction or elimination of bias, discrimination, and harassment. However, it is most important to focus on prevention through educational activity because most incidents go unreported, especially subtle forms of exclusion (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). The university should help students, faculty, and staff become familiar with various forms of bias in order to empower targeted individuals to “name” the offense and identify ways to respond. The separate compendium of bias incidents and microaggressions names experiences and may help individuals to realize that they are not alone in these experiences. Further, it should make available specific articles and resources to show that there is a rigorous research tradition across fields of study that defines forms of bias, discrimination, and harassment and their causes. Finally, codes of conduct and policies should be reviewed to determine if they effectively deal with overt and subtle forms of bias.

## Power Dynamics and Equity

**Findings.** Several issues were evident regarding power dynamics on campus in terms of the way inclusion and exclusion operate for various groups. We noted students find their sense of belonging in very specific niches at Cornell, constituting comfort zones, areas of mutual interests, and personal goals. This is true for both majority and minority students but the distinction between them is legitimacy. The historical presence and hierarchy of Greek organizations, including “secret societies,” create a “division between us and them” that is part of a campus culture and affects the climate. Policies help to curb dehumanizing hazing behavior but otherwise, much goes uncontested. In contrast, cultural affinity and identity-based spaces that provide a sense of safety for students, belonging, and purpose are questioned as legitimate spaces for learning and socializing. We noted that program directors, like the students they serve, are expected to carry the burden of advancing diversity, with few resources and little authority. Further, some groups receive less support than others and this translates into invisibility and exclusion. Stories about the special challenges of women in male-dominated fields, sexual misconduct, or campus rituals suggest that young women are vulnerable at a time in their lives when they should feel empowered and resilient. We found Cornell students who devise adaptive strategies to navigate power dynamics and the maze of obstacles tend to make their own satisfying experiences, but their efforts are in contrast to the effortless worlds of privileged groups.

*“It’s important for Cornell administrators to know that in order to produce the most robust change it seems like they want to pursue, you have to address power dynamics.”*  
*[African American Female Undergraduate]*

**Opportunities for Action.** If diversity is a core institutional value, it must be integrated into the daily work of individuals as part of the campus culture. Each unit (and sub-units within) should be directed to take responsibility for equity, diversity, and inclusion. Metrics for equity, depth, and pervasiveness of initiatives should be included in TND goals to ensure transformative rather than incremental institutional change. It is important to recognize how power dynamics operate in the environment, including resistance to change, to discuss adaptive strategies at the institutional level. Ensure program directors participate in planning efforts and that more groups are included as part of diversity initiatives across both academic and student affairs. Cornell should provide more inclusive and attractive social alternatives to the Greek system.

## Bridging Diverse Communities

**Findings.** The “silo” metaphor was a predominant theme among focus groups and interviews, with fragmentation potentially leading to student isolation. But students were also quick to point out “it’s who you know” and how one gets connected, and social networks were used to find a broad range of opportunities through exploration or links with specific programs. The educational implications of a “lack

of common cause” are that few students have common educational experiences. The decentralized nature of the University presented numerous opportunities but events and initiatives seemed uncoordinated across student and academic affairs, excluding some groups. Many students do not know about all of the opportunities that exist to engage across difference on campus, and the occasion of the focus groups brought many students to spaces they had not previously visited. In addition, web site respondents encouraged recognition of many diverse communities based on disability, religion, international identities, and political viewpoints in the diversity and equity discussions.

**Opportunities for Action.** These findings point to the opportunity to devise a network plan for the campus, building on student modes of adaptation and mapping institutional diversity/inclusion efforts that can be coordinated with TND. Diversity research suggests the benefits of rewarding units, initiatives, and individuals that are doing the most to create community and address diversity goals, increasing the visibility of diversity-serving groups, clubs, and organizations with a common calendar of events, Facebook page, or app, and encouraging collaborations to share resources to support new initiatives. Some campuses have adopted diversity theme semesters that highlight diversity topics across academic and student affairs units, energize the campus, and focus on the development of students’ diversity skills and knowledge. We recommend the creation of events where like-minded students can gather and share their commitment to changing campus climate, and identify other ways of bringing the campus community together. This bridging activity requires coordination to increase impact across a decentralized campus. While several large universities have divisional models for coordinating diversity work, a collaborative model can work with a strong accountability mechanism. We were not asked to assess the entire climate for diversity, but the campus may consider a broader organizational assessment in the future.

*“We are constantly thinking about not only the Black community, but how we bridge the gap between our community and other communities.” [African American Male, organization-specific member]*

# Introduction

## Context of the Study

Most climate assessments begin on college campuses after an overt incident of discrimination that generates media attention, student activism for institutional change, and subsequent campus discussion. A number of racial incidents were reported on college campuses across the country during the same time period prior to the study, among them one at Cornell in May 2012 involving an individual atop a fraternity house who threw bottles and taunted Black students with racial insults as they walked by the house. According to one staff member, “it hit the campus like a thunderbolt” during Slope Weekend when students were supposed to be studying for finals. This event was followed by several reported sexual assaults on or near campus and another racial incident in town in Fall 2012. These incidents sparked action. For example, students became more heavily involved in speaking out against racism and sexual assault. Vice President Murphy created an Incident Management Team and changes have been made to improve reporting, police assignments, and a plan for training. President Skorton also issued a statement on bias and sexual misconduct in February 2013. Just prior to the Fall 2013 site visit, however, another incident occurred involving cultural appropriation in advertising an event sponsored by the Athletics department called “Cinco de Octubre.” While the event was stopped before the planned date and a meeting was held to address the issue, the “costumes” had been purchased and several students had already appeared in the dining halls in Mexican hats and attire. This incident prompted some students to action and the incident still lingered on participants’ minds during the site visit.

Prior to these incidents, the campus had launched a new set of diversity goals and reporting structure for all units, called *Toward New Destinations* (TND), encompassing major areas for targeting action plans including composition, achievement, inclusion, and engagement. During our visit to campus, it was too early to assess the campus-wide strategic planning/accountability initiative, and only a few students were aware of the diversity planning in units that may eventually affect their campus experiences. The current report extends the strategic planning areas of inclusion and engagement in TND with attention to student experiences regarding the multiple dimensions of the campus climate, specifically their perceptions and behaviors associated with diversity (or lack thereof) in social and academic spheres and the normative culture on campus. This report is based on a qualitative study of the student climate for diversity, authorized by the University Diversity Council in Spring 2013, and follows on the heels of a campus-wide survey of undergraduates, graduate students, and professional students. Preliminary survey results were released to the campus community in September 2013 and the site visit for the qualitative assessment followed shortly thereafter. This report is intended to expand on areas of the quantitative survey and capture aspects of the climate that were not measured by or could not be explained from the quantitative data.

Therefore, we have captured the campus atmosphere at a moment in time where it was beginning to build momentum for reporting and achieving diversity goals while also experiencing incidents of bias, discrimination and sexual misconduct. Climate studies should be part of regular campus assessment, and used to develop proactive approaches that address the source of the problems as well as build inclusive environments for students. We expect this report will provide a window into the multiple communities on campus that will help Cornell achieve its diversity goals of inclusion and engagement. The report can also serve as the basis for the discussion of issues; we expect that many different communities will find evidence in it for improving the climate for diversity.

## Methods

Overall, the study followed the principles of transformative evaluation where the focus is on 1) placing central importance on the lives and experiences of marginalized communities, 2) analyzing asymmetric power relationships, and 3) linking results of the inquiry to action (Mertens, 2009). Essential elements of this approach include the recognition of how privilege influences what is accepted as reality as well as how multiple versions of reality are socially constructed and coexist within contexts shaped by political, social, cultural, and economic dynamics. Our role in evaluation was to bring these multiple realities to the foreground for institutional reflection and action.

### Mixed Methods Collaborative Design

This study utilized a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, wherein Cornell provided survey data to HERI researchers to inform the development of qualitative protocols and key areas for probing and observation. The quantitative survey data and the subsequent analysis provided a general understanding of the research problem, while the qualitative data and their analyses refined and expanded those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth (Rossman & Wilson, 1985; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell 2003). However, this report only presents the qualitative findings intended to complement survey results. The climate reports should be read together for a comprehensive picture of the climate.

**Document Analysis.** In addition to the survey data, public documents such as campus statements about diversity, targeted diversity program materials, and the campus website, as well as any internal documents (e.g., strategic plans and policies) were examined for themes related to a diverse organizational climate. The campus provided an extensive list of documents including previous reports, studies, memorandums, and announcements that provided context for understanding the campus climate. The research team also reviewed and coded recent reports, documents, and resolutions related to diversity, inclusion, and incidents.

**Protocols.** Development of the protocols was based on the initial site visit notes, analyses of documents, analyses of quantitative data, and the MMDLE framework (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-

Wann, Cuellar & Arellano, 2012) encompassing multiple dimensions of diversity (history/culture, composition/representation, psychological/perceptions, and behavioral/interactions). A semi-structured interview technique was utilized for both the focus groups and interviews that allowed us to respond “to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). Maxwell (2005) suggests that this technique increases the “internal validity and contextual understanding and is particularly useful in revealing the processes that led to specific outcomes” (p. 80).

**Focus Groups.** In total, 14 focus groups were conducted from October 26-30, 2013 with 99 students. The groups ranged in size from 4 to 12 individuals and consisted of the following identity groups: African American undergraduates, an additional focus group of African American males participating in SWAG, Asian and Asian American undergraduates, Latina/o undergraduates, Native American undergraduate and graduate students, International graduate students, graduate students of color, low-income undergraduates, LGBTQ undergraduate and graduate students, female undergraduates, female graduate students, White male undergraduate and graduates, and a “fishbowl” discussion among female/male undergraduates from a variety of racial groups and socioeconomic backgrounds. Four students participated in two different focus groups. Across all focus groups there were 19 African Americans, 14 Latina/Latinos, 17 Whites, 7 Native/Native Mixed Ethnicity, and 16 Asian Americans; 23 students identified as international; 12 as LGBTQ; 38 as “lower class” or “working class”; and 34 participants were graduate students. The social identity of the facilitator was matched as closely as possible to that of the student participants (except for international students) in order to help build trust and provide a comfortable and open atmosphere for discussion.

**Interviews.** Fourteen (14) in-depth individual interviews were conducted with a range of administrators and program directors. This information was useful because students are not privy to all staff concerns, planning, or decision-making regarding diversity issues. These interviews also provided more context for the study and further developed an understanding of students’ views.

**Data Analyses.** Prior to the interviews or focus groups, participants were asked to complete a brief biographical questionnaire, gathering data on a range of relevant background characteristics (demographic information, campus experience). All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company, checked for accuracy, and loaded into NVivo8 qualitative software. Pseudonyms were selected to protect the identity of and provide confidentiality for individual respondents.

In order to develop the coding architecture utilized in NVivo8, each transcript was open coded by examining the raw data and identifying salient themes supported by the text. This constant comparative approach follows an inductive process of narrowing from particular (text segments) to larger themes that allows the researcher to attempt to “saturate” the categories—to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking until the new information does not

provide further insight into the category. Once saturation was reached in generating themes, several iterations of coding schemes were developed wherein codes were created, expanded, defined, and refined. These categories/themes in the raw data were labeled as “nodes.” Inter-coder reliability was conducted on a limited set of texts to ensure accuracy of themes/codes and reliability. Once the coding structure was finalized, the data was coded and stored under the relevant node and the link to the full transcript was maintained. Commonalities and differences were identified across social identities to understand similarity of experience as well as issues unique to a particular social identity group through cross-case analyses.

**Validity.** In order to triangulate our findings we combined the quantitative survey data, the qualitative text data, observational data from the focus groups and interviews, and document analyses. In this way themes were established not only based upon converging participant perspectives but on converging data sources, thereby increasing the validity of the study (Creswell, 2009). Limitations in one data source may be able to be addressed in another data source, with the potential of the qualitative data to yield new areas for further investigation.

### **Website Data Collection**

To allow for more input from students, a website was opened to collect more information regarding their experiences and perceptions of the climate and also recommendations from students who did not have an opportunity to participate in focus groups during the four-day site visit. The student web responses were coded using the original Excel file sent by Cornell University. The majority of the demographic data were recoded into ‘1’ or ‘0’ for easy analysis. The recoded responses include those for undergraduate/graduate status, male/female, LGBT, citizenship, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, African American, Latina/o, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and White. This sample included 190 undergraduate students, 108 graduate/professional students, 121 females, 30 males, 32 LGBT, 9 Queer, 65 US citizens, 77 Asians, 74 Whites, 43 Latina/os, 27 African Americans, 5 American Indian or Alaska Natives, and 2 Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders. The actual responses to the question about experiences with diversity were coded for emergent themes and were related to the themes emergent from the focus groups.

### **Climate Model Guiding the Assessment**

A guiding model for assessing the climate involves five dimensions of the campus climate for diversity as part of the Multi-contextual Model for Diverse Learning Environments (MMDLE) (Hurtado, et al., 2012). These include 1) the historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion on a campus illustrated by the history, cultural norms, and rituals; 2) the compositional diversity evident by representation of diverse groups among students, faculty, and staff; 3) the psychological dimension, which includes perceptions, sense of belonging, marginalization; 4) the behavioral dimension, which includes the frequency and quality of interactions across differences, including overt instances of

harassment/bias or ally behavior; and 5) the organizational dimension, which includes the curriculum, policies, budget or resource differentials, and tangible commitments to creating a diverse learning environment. While many have identified the campus climate to be primarily individual or group perceptions (the psychological dimension) and their interactions (the behavioral dimension), these intergroup dynamics are shaped by structural realities (e.g., representation of diverse people) and campus environmental norms shaped by history and asymmetric power relationships.

Although this model formed the basis of questions posed to participants, it is important to note that the charge in the request for proposals focused on student perceptions of the climate rather than a more thorough diversity assessment of the entire environment. However, participants offered many recommendations that touch on the organizational dimension and we were able to ascertain some elements from documents. A more thorough organizational assessment is actually necessary to understand how best to move the campus' diversity agenda. For example, with new strategic planning underway in the *Toward New Destinations* (TND) initiative, we could only gauge awareness of the initiative and were not asked to evaluate whether accountability mechanisms and assessment benchmarks were in place to guide the institutional transformation (or incremental changes) across units.

As alarming as public incidents of racism or sexism are, these are often rare in comparison to many of the day-to-day incidents of bias, discrimination, or harassment that go unreported and continue to affect students in their daily work, learning, and social environments on campus. That is, only about 13% of underrepresented students report a campus bias incident to a campus authority, and much higher proportions report various forms of bias encounters when asked about exclusion or specific insults or threats (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). One has to reach deeper into students' experience of the climate to understand the extent of bias or discrimination as well as how they experience inclusion and sense of belonging on campus.

## Findings: Multiple Voices and Multiple Dimensions of the Campus Climate

### Historical Legacy of Inclusion and Exclusion: Any Student, Any Study?

Despite the challenges that Cornell is currently facing in terms of the campus climate for diversity, there is historical evidence of intent to create a more inclusive environment. Although some may think “it is just a motto,” the motto symbolizes a commitment to diversity from the University’s inception, establishing roots of inclusion that the campus may choose to build on in the future. Due in part to its unique origins as a land grant institution, as the nation was dismantling slavery and developing new institutions to service public and economic needs, Cornell was the only Ivy League institution to admit both women and people of color in the 1800s. The first professor of Civil Engineering and the namesake of the Cornell Observatory was Estevan Fuertes, who hailed from Puerto Rico. The [Diversity Timeline](#) on the Cornell Diversity and Inclusion website depicts a host of other efforts over the past 149 years promoting this mission, but how do students, staff, and administrators today think about the historical legacy? An academic administrator discusses the history:

*There’s a famous quote (in a letter) from the first president [Andrew White] saying, “even if all our five hundred White students were to ask for dismissal on that account, fine. Those students are here,” referring to students of color. They were pretty adamant about it. There’s, of course, all sorts of issues, and difficulties, and incidents...over the years. I’m not saying that it’s all happy land, but having that as your founding statement, and having carried it out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in a pretty strong way ...It’s on our seal...It’s pretty strongly affirmed.*

When students were asked about the motto, their responses reflected different views regarding how diversity is enacted. Most students found the “any study” portion of the motto to be fulfilled, with most departments and majors accessible for all. They praised the range and quality of academic offerings. However, students problematized the “any person” portion of the motto far more. For students of lower socioeconomic status (SES), the “any person” motto rang true, as Cornell financial aid enabled them to attend a place they never could have afforded, but they also noted that it is “any person” as long as “you have the resources to pay.” White males saw these words enacted, as they saw “a crazy amount of diversity,” but did also note that most students share similar educational backgrounds and financial means. Students of color and LGBTQ students in particular understood the motto in nuanced ways, speaking not only to issues pertaining to their specific group, but to larger issues within the campus culture.

Indeed, as students parsed out the motto, they spoke to critical elements of the normative culture of Cornell’s campus: the fact that there is a very dominant racial, socioeconomic, and ideological

identity that marginalizes other groups, the ways in which the University relies on non-majority groups to not only educate majority members about difference, but also to support one another in their struggle as members of marginalized groups, and the lack of campus solidarity. In the Latina/o focus group, one young man pointed to the ways in which “any person” was hard for him to agree with because of the power dynamics that exist between the individuals from the dominant identity group and those who are marginalized both numerically and in terms of institutional culture.

*But I think it's hard to say that any person, any study is what this school really revolves around because in terms of demographics, there is very much a dominant identity and with that, there's a dominant socioeconomic identity and dominant ideologies. Often times students of an underrepresented group, whether it be race or ethnicity, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, often have to take on this burden to educate the other, the Other in parentheses. It's highly problematic in a place where it's supposed to be any person, any study. You have institutionally marginalized groups. Not because they're inferior, but just because of sheer numbers and that tension between dominant and underrepresented ideologies, [is] how it unfolds here. [Latino Undergraduate]*

The notion of this “burden” to educate placed on students outside of the dominant identity was mirrored by a LGBTQ student who felt that in order for the motto to be enacted, the work of supporting students from non-dominant identity groups again fell to their own group members. She expressed frustration that the institution would not take on the responsibility.

*It's like they expect us to be any person, any study, but how can you expect this of us when you don't provide any support for students when they arrive on campus? How can you do this when you place all the onus and obligation on student organizations to support these students instead of the administration itself, instead of the faculty, instead of the staff, instead of having them be trained in order to provide and support these students in any academic and university setting? [Female Queer International Undergraduate]*

Being members of underrepresented groups is a challenge in and of itself, but add to that the responsibilities of educating others about your culture and experiences, supporting one another in an environment where you are often “othered,” and it is understandable why some students at Cornell struggle to see the “any person” part of the Cornell model ring true. A final challenge to the motto is the fact that some students see it as dividing the campus even further, down to the most basic unit of an individual, where there is no collective identity and no unifying factor across difference. As one undergraduate stated:

*To me, “any person any study” has just kind of reinforced the kind of attitude that at Cornell it’s really about the individual and there’s really no sense of group solidarity, collective identity, and on such a huge kind of fragmented campus, it can leave students feeling very isolated, and it’s all about any person, any study (individualism). It’s about who you know (in terms of personal connections). [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

The student responses speak to the depth of student experience and the wise and discerning ways in which they observe and interact with one another and their campus culture as a whole. The vast majority of the Cornell students we spoke with were perceptive, caring, engaged students who wanted to co-construct an inclusive, united campus where “any person, any study” is also reflective of “One Cornell”—where they can be who they are, respectful of difference, supported by their University, while being united in working towards the common goals of academic excellence and respect for and engagement with difference. These goals will not come to fruition until both the University and students themselves recognize exclusionary and marginalizing elements of campus culture.

### **The Normative Culture of Privilege: Race, Class, and Gender**

Many students in the focus groups spoke about the normative culture, describing this dominant culture as wealthy, White, and most often male. This is not surprising, but as students told us about their campus experiences, it became clear that this culture brings with it certain privileges and therefore creates exclusion, marginalization, and divides. Students who are not members of this dominant identity described the culture of privilege on campus as affecting their experience in multiple ways, from the very way the campus is structured, to the ways in which non-majority students are expected to behave, to the resultant bias incidents, as an Asian American female explains:

*I mean, the campus as a whole is very White, and that doesn’t mean in terms of demographic or number of students, but just the way it’s structured, the way it’s set up,... Students of color here are expected to assimilate into the mainstream kind of community, and there are all sorts of incidents and bias... [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

**Racial dynamics.** Some students of color felt that the University places attention on White students’ efforts over the efforts of minority communities. In this way the organizations led by and serving people of color were ignored despite their actions towards promoting positive change. This was deeply frustrating to some students, as an undergraduate describes:

*Honestly to me it just looks like—it's just a continuous perpetuation of this White privilege that we're talking about, the fact that—it's like this pedestal that you're on. No one ever talks about the efforts of like the Black Students United or La Asociación Latina, CAPSU, all these different organizations that represent, advocate for these minority communities, people of color communities. No one ever talks about them. No one ever praises them and their efforts. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

Other students felt that it was critically necessary for White students to examine their own privilege, but that staff and faculty were not willing to help them do so. As a result of this privilege being long-standing, recognized by many students, but unacknowledged by the campus as a whole, this element of campus culture remains highly problematic in many students' minds. An undergraduate stated,

*It's hard for people to have such a reflective discussion about their own identities that have allowed them to have more advantaged experiences in certain senses or certain contexts than other students. No one wants to know that and Cornell is not willing to—I don't feel like Cornell is at a place where they're willing to facilitate that discussion. I guess that is where it is the job of students to be proactive in facilitating such discussions themselves. Every student knows that there's a lot of diversity here, but not every student is really willing to recognize their privilege. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

With many students from privileged, White backgrounds, their exposure to diverse populations is limited, and focus group members felt that these students do not question their role in creating a positive climate for diversity with engagement as an important component. An aspect of White privilege is being satisfied with the amount of diversity as long as there are "others" present. An undergraduate shared:

*The reason why I have a problem with the University's diversity initiatives is because, while they bring in all these different people from different backgrounds, there's not enough effort for the students to also question...those assumptions they're making and can change the way they are interacting with each other. It's not just like here I am, oh, White male, rich, White male, and I'm surrounded by all these people from diverse backgrounds. I must be okay. I don't need to question anything more. No, just because you were sitting next to a person of color, that doesn't mean that the world is a perfect place. You need to change how you're interacting with that person. To do that, you need to educate yourself about what you don't know and what assumptions you've been making your whole life. [LGBT White Undergraduate]*

White students in some of the focus groups perceived that there is a lot of diversity at Cornell, with one White male undergraduate saying, “In my year and half here, I’ve enjoyed the diversity a lot as a student—just meeting so many different people with so many different backgrounds—I think ‘Any student’ has definitely held out.” Cornell probably represents the most diversity some students have encountered and so in his view the motto rings true.

Although majority students may be well-meaning and genuinely feel that the current compositional diversity is enough, they do not have to think about their race, gender, sexual orientation, or disabilities on a daily basis. They are not aware of the embedded benefits of privilege and the distinct experiences of students from marginalized communities. Rather White victimization is raised as a critique of diversity initiatives, as a student on the website stated, “I feel as if straight White men receive no services and are the victims of diversity efforts at Cornell. I’ve been forced to attend many diversity or cultural sensitivity programs that make me feel as if I am a negative, victimizing force within my home community [here].” Another White student stated on the website, “There is a generally accepted perception that ‘diversity’ is code for ‘White males are not welcome’ and thus the counter perception among White males that diversity related issues and events are not structured to include them.” This was evidenced further in other web responses, where students could anonymously state that minority communities were privileged. One student stated, “I feel that sometimes stereotypical diverse students receive special treatment and more opportunities.” A White female stated difficulty representing herself in the current climate, indicating a need for exploring multiple social identities in connection with both privilege and oppression:

*The strive towards diversity on campus is often overbearing. I feel as though, being a White, straight American-born citizen, I can only contribute as a female, not as a whole, multifaceted person. I sometimes feel that the opinions of minorities are taken into consideration more than those of whatever the majority or plurality is, for all aspects of diversity. [White Female Undergraduate]*

Previous climate research has established that racial conflict is higher at institutions where the students perceive that some other group is gaining benefits, when actual benefits go unrecognized, and where sometimes students feel a lack of attention from the staff/administration (Hurtado, 1992). Therefore, attention is considered a resource, as an African American male stated, “They’re always praising the efforts of the White people. That’s what’s happening and it happens all the time here. Why?”

Attention to the unique needs of students from different social identities is part of becoming a diverse learning environment (Hurtado et al., 2012). As one staff member/administrator stated in the interview, “As Adam Clayton Powell said, and specifically about Blackness, ‘being pro-Black does not make one anti-White.’ Being pro-students of color does not make one anti-White.” Another staff member explained this point in reflecting on the tension on campus:

*You've got the whole idea, the concept of being multicultural, and then you've got your offices that are the cultural affinity groups. There's a lot of discomfort at Cornell with supporting the concept of cultural affinity. It's a tension there. I think the upper administration, by and large, doesn't understand that supporting the cultural affinity groups doesn't mean exclusion, it means supporting the cultural affinity groups to grow and have a better understanding of themselves and that you can have dialogue, even when you support cultural affinity groups. In fact, you can probably have better dialogue [when students feel supported].*

**Lack of Awareness.** Privilege is also based strongly in a lack of awareness, where one can claim not to see discrimination and individuals are not responsible for their behavior if they do not know it is offensive. A student describes the complexity of this lack of awareness, citing not only the historical implications of Cornell being an Ivy League school but also the fact that people are not engaging and learning about diversity.

*There are so many different things that diversity includes, but if you have a student population that is not required to enlighten themselves on that, then we're just perpetuating the ignorance [about diversity] and inequality that, really, like even the Ivy League in general was founded on. For example, even the fact that people like us, maybe even 100 years ago, probably weren't here all that much and now there's like this new conglomeration of students, but is there an [increased] awareness across campus? I think not. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

Underrepresented students across the focus groups brought up issues of what they termed "ignorance" voiced and acted upon by their White peers, professors, and staff. This manifested itself in two ways: 1) speaking and behaving in ways indicating a lack of recognition and understanding of diverse perspectives, and 2) believing that no harm is being done by this behavior. A general lack of awareness about diversity was recognized by academic staff as well:

*Oftentimes, I do find majority students, and this is mostly through a course that I happen to teach, we start talking about some issues around diversity and they usually are just very unaware and just don't have a sense of what's going on.*

Another administrator states:

*There is a tendency that makes it more likely for students of modest means to try to hide that background, to try to pass for being able to participate in everything, and students who are wealthier to be oblivious. Many lived a life where everything was scheduled and planned by their parents, and Cornell's just another one of those*

*things. Not to their fault, but they don't really get that other people's lives are profoundly different.*

In the case of socioeconomic differences, many students felt that because so many Cornell students came from elite backgrounds, those students may never have had the exposure to diverse individuals and simply did not understand how to put themselves in another person's position of having less or being non-majority members. This became more problematic for focus group students when their majority peers chose to remain ignorant, as a gay Latino undergraduate shares:

*These conversations around how these [climate incidents] are offensive or why they're a problem, why they continue to happen, never really happen. But I feel like part of the reason why these things happen even though it makes no—makes sense but isn't right—in a place like Cornell is because it draws on sort of, like, an elite background. Not all the time, but it draws on people that have elite resources or access to good high school experiences to get to a place like Cornell, so oftentimes that might be someone who doesn't really understand a lot of issues around diversity, whether it's gender, racial, socioeconomic. Of course these things are going to happen, and I wish places like Cornell would be more understanding of this and productive about it and not just try to sweep it under the rug.*

Another Latino undergraduate further elaborates, creating links between the current climate at Cornell and larger societal issues and the role of socialization, but also emphasizing the need to take responsibility:

*Ignorance just means someone doesn't know. Obviously it may be a matter of actually not knowing that this is offensive or not understanding the issues around diversity, whatever type of diversity it is. I think you—just like you can't blame someone for what they were born into, like opportunity structure, whether it's privilege or disadvantage. But it does become a problem when there are opportunities to educate yourself here, if you do want to. Or somebody comes up in your face and you choose to look the other way. Then it becomes more of an issue with choosing to stay ignorant or choosing to not hear the other side. I definitely do agree, a lot of it does play off of ignorance, which is not an inherently negative thing. It's just a product of residential segregation, history, policy, the years before we got here. It's a manifestation of it and it blows up here in some cases.*

Another undergraduate shares:

*I guess it's because of just the lack of education about the Native Americans as a whole. People, I think, just have a stereotype in their head, and I agree. I always have to—I fight with people about it, and it's, like, "Why are you telling me what I am" kind of thing. Yeah. It's frustrating to the point where I feel like—I don't even say it anymore sometimes because I don't feel like having that conversation. [Native American Female Undergraduate]*

Specific examples of lack of knowledge about a particular culture were most evident in descriptions of the overall treatment of Native students by both their peers and faculty members. Native students described extreme incidents where peers and faculty made statements about Native culture, evoking the most stereotypical image of Native people that was offensive to students.

*It's constantly—if you mention [your Native identity], to people—you have to justify [your Native culture]. They'll be, like, "Oh, but you have red hair. Oh, but you're not wearing feathers." Actually, that was a statement. Okay. If I go to Target and buy feathers, am I a Native American? Yes. [Native Female Undergraduate]*

*Even with professors, there's a lot of ignorance. Actually, last week in one of my lectures, one of my professors showed this super stereotypical sketch of a Plains Indian headdress person. They're, like, "This is a Native American. They don't scalp people anymore." [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

*Professors are bad, too. I've had professors tell me right in their lecture, "Native people are dead and don't exist." Basically, I'm just, "Are you serious?" Then I go and introduce myself after lecture, but it just—it's kinda disheartening to hear that from people who I think are incredible intellectually, just amazing, but they just don't know. [Native Male Undergraduate]*

Native students were generous enough to attribute this ignorance to their small numbers on campus, and a general lack of information about Native culture. The students described such behavior as "They just don't know," or "They just don't get it," a phrase which came up repeatedly in not only the Native focus group, but also in the Latina/o, African American, and Graduate Students of Color focus groups. A graduate student gave specific examples encountered on a daily basis in her department:

*My department chair has literally gone out and said, "Oh yeah, we don't have a problem with diversity. We can get ethnic minority students. We got international students, no problem. They don't seem to graduate. We don't know why that is." I say this to [illustrate], this is the type of environment that I'm dealing with. I have an*

*advisor that doesn't understand why nigger's a bad word. I have a department chair who doesn't see a problem with their graduation rate for their minority students. Not to mention we don't really have any minority students. I mean there's [less than a handful] of us. [There haven't] been any recruited—like even at the recruitment events you don't get minority students to come to the recruitment events. It is a huge issue in my department...I think a lot of faculty don't get it. Then I think—well I haven't had anyone act maliciously, I guess, purposefully say or do anything racist [to me]. I think they just don't realize that there is an issue [in the department].*  
*[Female Graduate Student of Color]*

Some students have not had friends that have experienced threats to their physical or emotional well-being because of their social identity, and think Cornell is a safe space. Depending on their social circle, overt instances may be rare in their experience. As one student said:

*I do feel like, when it comes to the gay community and also racial minorities, I feel like it is a pretty safe campus. I'm not a part of either of those communities personally. I obviously have friends, but I feel like the campus is really safe physically and emotionally. There's lots of programs, good outreach. [White Low-Income Male Undergraduate]*

**Raising Awareness Through Training.** Education and professional development can provide avenues for students, faculty, and staff to recognize and raise awareness of how normative behaviors create exclusion and perpetuates stereotypes. In fact, the importance of diversity training for faculty and staff in particular was highlighted in focus groups where many students echoed the sentiment of one African American male graduate student, who suggested Cornell “mandate diversity or inclusion training, should I say, for faculty, department chairs, deans and TAs.” A Latina female [web respondent] also suggested “mandatory training for departments about how to engage with diversity, how to train diverse graduate students, and how to deal with work/life balance for these diverse students.” Likewise, a LGBTQ undergraduate suggests faculty education as part of the solution:

*I think academic advisors should be so much more supportive than they are here on campus. They should be educated about these issues. They should reach out to students. Like when I came out to my academic advisor, it was a really awkward moment and I think he had no idea what to do. He's provided me with no support ever since then.*

Another student suggested a focus on inclusive practices and teaching:

*While I understand that faculty time is already quite stretched across an array of responsibilities, I think that a sensitivity training or some kind of "refresher course" in inclusive practices and teaching among senior faculty might be helpful in addressing some of the issues diverse students face in interacting with faculty. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

Administrators and staff also recognized that diversity training and helping staff and faculty understand the range of student experiences is important for improving the climate. One suggests it cannot be a "one shot" workshop but a sustained effort, while another states the diversity and bias training should be woven into mentoring competencies:

*When students come in with experiences [of distress or injustice] that are unfamiliar to [faculty and staff], they may sympathize, but...They just don't get it, and they're not going to get it if there's not an institutional mission to change how people think and an effort [to educate those who work with students]. This is deep work, and this is an ongoing effort that needs to happen.*

*Good mentoring of diverse students, of course, is good for all students, but some of the issues that really have come up are the issue of imposter syndrome, stereotype threat. Letting faculty know what those concepts are and really how to work with those concepts in our diverse students. We're not asking for anything special, but asking for them to understand what some of the unique challenges might be for a woman in STEM or for an underrepresented student or a student who is a first generation or a disabled student. Trying to help them work with those students and provide a supportive environment, so letting students know that they have high expectations for them, that they expect them to achieve at very high levels, but then providing that support.*

To understand some of the special challenges that students face means stepping outside of one's comfort zone, leaving that place of privilege, and pulling aside the veil of ignorance that privilege can create. This means finding common ground between individuals and among groups, and uniting as members of the Cornell community. Many students struggle to feel that they belong to the larger campus community. Nor do they feel that much common ground exists; instead, they find a niche community.

## One Cornell?

Indeed, when we asked what made students feel like they belonged at Cornell, many students expressed that no one thing brought them together as Cornellians and they did not really feel as though they belonged to the larger campus community. It was belonging to their smaller communities that created a common experience across all students.

*Everyone has these small communities and they're at Cornell, so I guess it's like One Cornell. You feel like you belong at Cornell because you are in these communities. It's not like everybody feels like they're at Cornell as one giant experience. [Asian American Male Undergraduate]*

Beyond this shared experience of operating in their own small communities, most students felt that Cornell lacked a common bond, a sense of shared identity. Two female undergraduates explain:

*At places like Penn State, even if you're not into football, you know about Penn State football. You know—you share that in common with every single person at that school. There's nothing here like that. Nobody really cares—I mean some people care about sports, but relatively nobody cares about sports. There's just—I feel like there's nothing that everybody cares about. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

*It's big; it's a huge college, a huge university. There are a lot of people doing a lot of different things and I value this. I think it's really important. I wouldn't be able to—complete the sentence, "I'm a Cornellian because," I don't know. I have things that I identify with in Cornell, but that's not because I'm a Cornellian. I feel like I couldn't complete the sentence and I think that's problematic. I don't—I feel like I don't know what a Cornell fabric is to begin with and I'm graduating in like two—I don't know in like six months. [International Female Undergraduate]*

**Comfort Zones.** With students' sense of belonging coming from smaller niche communities such as organizations they joined, cultural clubs, and clusters of friends specific to a salient aspect of their identities, these identity-centered spaces were where they felt the safest and experienced the greatest sense of belonging. Students felt that they gravitated towards these spaces filled with those with whom they most identified because, as one female undergraduate said, “the groups are formed because they are comfort zones for a lot of people” and these groups enabled students to more easily create a social life based on key commonalities. An Asian American female undergraduate elaborated further:

*I'm sure all of us, almost all of us had a lot of ethnically diverse friends in your freshman year, right? Because you came in and you probably just hang out with people in your dorm who are not necessarily the same race or ethnicity. It just happened so that culture group might be a better sort of gateway for you to break into a social life on campus. And you start it there and then you kind of just keep going, and it's just hard to break away from that group.*

Despite their tendencies to socialize in communities based on distinct elements of their identity, students were keenly appreciative of all the groups that were available for them to join, as well as the ability to develop their own groups based on their identities and interests.

*I think Cornell is a place that has so many resources and one of the main things that I feel as a senior looking back on my Cornell career that I'm really appreciating is the fact that if you want to do something on this campus, if there's an initiative that you want to make happen on this campus, although it sometimes might be hard to find the resource, there's something, there's some department that's gonna—that has money to sponsor or chip in, you wanna do this, some department that you can do research with; there's just some way to make your passions come to life. The fact that any student is able to pursue that makes me feel like I'm part of the fabric.  
[African American Female Undergraduate]*

Top administrators were aware of the challenge of creating a bond within the Cornell student body. President Skorton provided further insight, explaining:

*That's the biggest challenge, and that's what I mean by One Cornell. How can we find common ground? You can't find it in every case, but I think you can find it in some cases. There are some concerns on campus that supersede all of these divisions like violence, suicide, sexual assault, incidents of hate speech.*

Such issues may unite a campus, but these are hot topics that are outside of many individuals' comfort zones and are permeated by legal issues to regulate behavior. Research suggests a superordinate identity that can be shared across groups is a useful strategy for improving intergroup relations (Gaertner, Dovidio, Ward & Banker, 1999). However, as identified by both students and administrators, a unified Cornell identity is still elusive. Establishing a common bond is central to efforts in facilitating dialogue with students from different communities. These limited opportunities are further hindered by the lack of shared academic experiences and requirements when it comes to diversity. As one gay male undergraduate reported, "Cornell is a very segregated, compartmentalized school, not only racially or socioeconomically, but academically." This was echoed by an administrator who said, "Yes, so that's the complexity of Cornell...it's a very super-

decentralized institution. Each college does have its own graduation requirements, and there has been some interface between certain colleges, but there is a lack of common cause across the campus.”

**Educational Program Implications.** According to study participants, some colleges and programs have a diversity requirement and others do not. Some diversity requirements can be fulfilled with classes like general sociology. Some departments are proactive and educated about diversity, while others seem inactive. Hence the “silo” metaphor was a reoccurring theme throughout the focus groups, with departments and colleges operating completely independently of one another. One program director speaks to this point:

*Wherever we're headed, it will take a lot of time even still because there are some departments, I think, that have really great things happening for the students, but we don't collaborate enough to share best practices around diversity education and initiatives.*

Beyond acting as yet another barrier to engagement across difference, this “silo” effect seems to be creating vastly different student experiences in terms of diversity depending on their department and college. Additionally, each department reinvents the wheel on the diversity front instead of learning from one another and working together.

In a different example, one student describes his positive experience in the engineering department:

*There's a diversity program in engineering initiative, I know at least, because that's the field I'm in. They do a really wonderful job of different scholarships, different fellowships, bringing the engineering community together, at least having events, having lunches and things like that just to let people know—and engineering could be a very isolating field. You could spend a lot of time alone—just letting you know that there are other people like you around and creating a sense of community.*  
*[Native/Mixed Ethnicity Male Undergraduate]*

Positive accounts like the one above were few and far between, so it is clear that these efforts are not shared or built upon across departments or colleges. In fact, one staff member further describes the efforts of the School of Engineering, sharing that OADI is mostly a supplementary service for engineering students while it serves as a main support for students in other schools.

*There are variations among our colleges—as on many campuses, our School of Engineering is very well supported and has a large diversity office. We partner with them on lots of things, but their students are well supported. We're more supplementary in that instance, for example. Whereas, in other places, the students*

*are quite dependent on how [we at OADI provide support]—we're the ones that are serving those students.*

Other students outside of engineering did praise the fact that their college required them to take classes outside of their major that enabled them to develop a “well-rounded look at things.”

*I love being in Arts and Sciences because I take classes in a million different departments. I love taking classes outside of my major...a lot of my friends will say, "I hate the fact that I can't take this course because it doesn't fulfill this requirement. I can't minor in this because it's not offered in my college." Specifically I know a few of my friends—I'm taking a class in African American literature and they have a literature requirement that they have to take, but it doesn't fulfill that requirement for CALS. I think Arts and Sciences does do a good job of requiring you to take different kinds of courses about different topics so that by the time you graduate you have this well-rounded look at things. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

Students in other colleges voiced anger that they were unable to take the scope and breadth of courses they desired, and many found the courses that were offered to fulfill the diversity requirement to be lacking.

*There's seven schools and only the CALS school has a diversity requirement. Let me tell you that diversity required is BS. I'm taking sociology and I'm not learning much [about diversity]. [White Female Undergraduate]*

This silo metaphor played out at the graduate level in an interesting way; the isolated nature of the departments was acknowledged by many students, but they described being not only able, but encouraged, to take courses in other departments. While this did not pertain to diversity requirements or courses, it does show some ability for students to leave their silos and look elsewhere for diversity courses. The way in which graduate students can successfully leave their silos can serve as a resource for adapting a similar functionality in the undergraduate programs.

*In my department we have, I think, eight international students, including myself. We've got Korean, Latin American, European; I think we have one American...where we are encouraged to explore opportunities outside of ILR, outside of Cornell. Especially given that, at Cornell, I feel like the departments tend to be a little silo-ed. They don't talk to one another. At ILR, my chair, the advisor told me—constantly encouraged me to look outside in sociology or in social sciences, or even business school, outside of Cornell. [International Female Graduate]*

A program director echoes students' sentiments about the silo-like functioning of Cornell:

*I'm sure you've heard the silo image come up a million times. One college does it this way, and this college offers this...because there are seven different colleges here. They all have their own ways of doing things, really. Engineering might offer this set of programs and supports for their students, and Arts and Sciences does it this way, and ILR does it a third way. We know that our students aren't bound by those silos. They're crossing over. I think the silo metaphor carries into their identities, too, not just their academics. How do we break that down? — I think, is a really big question for Cornell, and I don't have a good answer.*

The silo metaphor does indeed carry into student identities, as they do operate in their own niches, but some are encouraged to venture beyond their comfort zones. The absence of linkages among students, as they are both constrained by and move from these silos, can be a barrier to promoting understanding and acceptance of others. Both Cornell's top administration and parts of the student body have made attempts to unify the University by developing campaigns such as "One Cornell," with a special interest in embracing the diversity on campus. Although the effort is important, the varying interpretation and implementation of "diversity" across units in educational programs and curriculum has been a roadblock.

### **Beyond the Numbers: We Are Diverse, But What is the Quality or Degree of Interaction?**

When we asked what diversity means at Cornell, students problematized the word itself in meaningful ways. It was evident that they had spent time processing what diversity means within the context of their Cornell experience. Primarily, students were distressed that Cornell's diversity mission seems to be limited to creating a diverse student body (focused on composition) without strong and steady campus-wide commitment to promoting engagement across groups. They also consistently expressed frustration that diversity events only seem to serve members of the host organization, foiling student attempts to raise awareness.

A student tackles what diversity means head-on:

*Okay, so I kinda get the feeling that the usage of the word diversity bothers me cuz—so when I came to Cornell we all get those pamphlets with those images of everyone being so diverse. We're all kumbaya and happy and smiling. I feel like that doesn't say anything about all the different kinds of bubbles [student communities]. The actual depth of differences of an individual experience... We're all sources of different socioeconomic statuses but I feel like the message I'm getting for Cornell for four years has been, "Tough love. Everyone just get along. I put you all here. Now*

*make friends and be friends”—I feel like Cornell hasn’t earned the word diversity yet. I feel like it should be, “We have a diverse population” or, “Our demography varies by gender variance, nationality, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion.” We have all these sorts of things but I feel like the “-ity” part, the divers“-ity” part hasn’t been addressed enough. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

Across all focus groups, the idea of “different kinds of bubbles” or communities were mentioned, with most students operating primarily within the small niches they had carved out for themselves, and lack of intentional activity to promote engagement across difference. In students’ minds, Cornell brings diverse students to campus and that is where the University’s diversity efforts end, where students are left to their own devices, and where there is room for growth. The student’s idea of Cornell’s diversity lacking the “-ity” part is a keen observation that focuses on the quality or degree of interactions. This was reiterated by other students and staff members.

*It’s almost like they’re creating these opportunities to say that Cornell is so diverse, but they’re not actually communicating between these groups...I just feel like a lot of the time Cornell’s focused on creating diversity and not really including people in it and promoting communication between those [differences]. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*When I got here I saw different colors everywhere, people speaking different languages. You look at somebody and you expect them to be speaking one language and oh, surprise, no, not at all. I thought it was like, “Oh wow, this place is really diverse, this will be great.” I think the longer I’ve been here, I think that that’s not necessarily the case. I think that there’s a lot of people with diverse backgrounds, but I don’t think that there’s really a diverse mindset. [African American Female Graduate]*

This concern was echoed by three different program directors:

*I think diversity has been, from my experience, a very over used term at Cornell, and very poorly understood, especially multi-cultural diversity. I think a lot of work, from my experience, has been done over the years to kind of inform the large Cornell community that we value diversity. Very little work I think has been done to bring groups from different multi-cultural backgrounds together to actually talk about issues we face together.*

*Engagement—now that we have this wonderfully diverse university body assembled, how are we engaging not only within our groups but between our groups? How are students navigating and experience the culture and the climate?*

*I think, with all good intentions, there's still a lot of empirical talk about diversity but not sufficient engagement, and working through stuff, and having hard conversations. I feel that sense about this sometimes, and sometimes I feel like—there's a point sometimes I wonder if we're sorta just rearranging the chairs on the deck.*

Again, whether talking about “diversity,” a “diverse mindset,” “communication between groups,” or “engagement,” it is clear from student and administrator accounts that they feel a diverse body of students exists on campus, but the task in creating pathways to communication between and across groups has yet to be achieved. Despite this challenge, it is also evident based on the wide array of clubs and organizations students belong to, as well as the plethora of identity-centered events being held, that there are many opportunities to create engagement across difference. Students see missed opportunities for engagement and increased awareness everywhere. For example, Asian American students described having a photo of Bhangra on the front page of the paper, but cited that there was no article, nor written explanation, describing the cultural festival or anything in depth about their experience. Similarly to program pamphlets showcasing diverse individuals, many students felt Cornell focuses on showcasing their diversity superficially but does not focus on extending engagement to promote learning.

Further, many students expressed frustration that the programs and events that they hosted as members of minority-serving or LGBTQ organizations were only attended by fellow group members. They expressed that White students or straight students (regarding LGBTQ events) often did not attend because they felt these activities were not relevant to them or were not intended for them; thus the events were only serving the members of their own organizations. A Native female undergraduate and a program director provided insight on this matter:

*I love the diversity events we have, and I love getting to learn about—more about the Cayuga people, and there's so much about other tribes that I've learned through NASAC and Akwe:kon and AIP, and that's wonderful, but I wish to a certain degree—our community's so small, and the people who are interested are so small, but we have all these great organizations and events, but they're really only helping our group. Other people outside aren't really reaching out.*

*There are lots of different groups and programs, but the question students started to raise was the impact of those programs and groups. Who is attending—students*

*thought it was the same people attending the same type of programs, and the campus programming wasn't pushing students to interact and to learn from each other. It's as though to push the conversation forward, you really need the people who are not already participating, and how do you get those people to participate?*

Student organizers who are actively working to improve the campus climate watch White peers exclude themselves from diversity-related events and activities. An African American female undergraduate explains:

*Two White freshman males came to the door and they're asking what it was and we're explaining that it's the diversity org fair. We said that they're welcome to come in. One of them said something, and what we heard was that, "But I'm a White male," and then he walked away. I was kind of like, "That does not mean anything to us. You could easily come in, learn about the different orgs and feel free to enjoy the rest of your day." It was just heartbreaking to hear that. It was just frustrating, cuz Cornell's starting to pride itself on being, "Oh, yeah. We're working towards diversity," and everything, but there's still so much that could be done.*

Yet another student adds:

*It's kind of something that gets talked about a lot when in different organizations that are planning events that are based around cultural themes and whatnot, because like even if you do invite other people who aren't minorities, they don't come anyway. It's kind of that reaction where it's just like, "Oh, that's a minority thing; it's not for me," or, "Oh. They're talkin' about their problem; it's not for me." ...We need to get to a place where it doesn't have to always [reflect this attitude]—or we can be comfortable exchanging even if we're not all in the same demographic. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

Student interest in cultural exchange, dialogue about diversity, race, equity and structural inequality is encouraging, as this indicates that there is already a group of students prepared to engage in diversity-related discussions. Unfortunately, based on students' accounts, not all Cornell students are ready and they have yet to reach a stage of engaging in meaningful ways. The barriers of privilege, the inertia of ignorance, and a lack of common ground are real. Nowhere are these elements more exposed and raw in students' minds than in relation to Greek life and its pervasive influence on campus culture.

## Greek Life: “A division between us and them”

Although we had no specific questions about Greek life, the Greek system was one of the most frequently discussed topics, primarily regarding the distinct ways in which it influences the normative culture, creates divisions among students, and excludes racial/ethnic minorities and LGBTQ students. Because the Greek system is woven into the Cornell way of life, and is essentially as old as the campus, it still creates social status hierarchies that students are aware of and tensions among students.

Students felt that the Greek community created an atmosphere of “us” and “them” where the “us” was understood as Greeks and then all other students, minority students and then White Greeks, and resultant Greek heteronormative spaces and LGBTQ safe spaces. Very few White Greek members participated in our focus groups, and those that did felt that their respective Greek communities were inclusive. As one White Greek male fraternity member describes, “We always pull people from all different areas. We have a bunch of Asian kids and a bunch of other backgrounds too, a bunch of other races.” Nonetheless, perceptions held by non-Greek students were that the Greek system was by and large inaccessible and unwelcoming if you do not have a certain background or look.

One student explains:

*I think there's still a ton of exclusion because of the lifestyle basically. I mean people in some of the top tier frats they'll regularly go out to bars, and I've heard this firsthand, and spend over \$100 on drinks. For a weekend they'll just rent out a cabin in the Catskills or something and just go party there all weekend. These are extremely expensive activities. The thing is I don't care what Cornell says about trying to make the Greek life more accessible. I don't think they're making an effort to do that. Even if they tried to make an effort to do that, it'll never be accessible because of the lifestyle. It's associated with a super high expensive lifestyle where you just spend tons of money on alcohol, tons of money on trips...I mean it's just ridiculous. It's so detached from my daily experience. [White Male Low-Income Undergraduate]*

Furthermore, many students expressed that there was little meaningful interaction between students in Greek communities and non-Greek students, particularly in the social arena. Because most bonds of friendship are formed outside of the classroom, coupled with the fact that Greeks mainly socialized with other Greeks, students felt that social circles remained closed and thus diversity was limited even further.

*I think the Greek system is another divide within, it divides social experiences. If you don't have social experiences outside of class, it's very, very unlikely that you're gonna be really close to those people in your own personal levels. You won't share a lot of things with the person you sit next to in class. You'll probably share more things with the person you go out and party with or talk. In terms of these issues, I think the Greek system has that divide and because you don't interact with them or people are restricted in their interactions, you just don't get enough diversity in your circle—social circle. [Muslim Female Undergraduate]*

*Well, for me coming into Cornell and looking at schools in general, I never knew—cuz they're always ranking some of them to show how Greek a certain school is, but I never really knew what that meant cuz I didn't think it was a big deal, but then coming here I realize just how dominant—and I'm speaking about White Greeks—how dominant they are. Me, personally, I feel like that causes a division between us and them. I feel like a lot of times with the majority Greeks is that—it's like their own little world. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

Beyond limiting interaction across broad groups, participation in the Greek system causes divides within smaller communities. For instance, participation in fraternities and sororities divides the Black community on campus. Several African American students expressed that their fellow Black students who pledged the “White” frats and sororities had chosen not to be in the Black community.

*I feel like especially on Cornell's campus it's kind of determined in those first weeks of school your freshman year whether or not you will be in the Black community or not. Well, I guess it would be the spring, because that's when you can rush and pledge sororities and fraternities—but so it's almost at that point when a lot of students decide that they will pledge a White sorority or fraternity. That's when it's like, “You've decided not to be in the Black community. You will no longer be really associated with us,” and then in a joking way a lot of students will say—I've heard them say that they think that they're White or they don't consider themselves Black. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

This shunning and division surely comes as a result of the ways in which members of the Black community have experienced bias and exclusion coming from members of Greek organizations, and the exclusionary messages sent by the Greek culture. African American students joining predominantly White Greek organizations signals that they may be accepted despite the homogeneous and exclusionary elements of Greek life.

However, members of the Greek community often made students of color and LGBTQ students feel unwelcome at their events, and in many cases, even fearful. As an African American female undergraduate student said “Literally every time I went, there was an incident that occurred.” Other students recount similar incidents they have experienced:

*The first time I went there this guy was drunk—he came up to me. He said, “Oh, yeah. I don’t like Black people. I’m racist, but my girlfriend, she really broke up with me because of that. I’m just tryin’ not to be as racist, so Hi. What’s your name?” Yada yada. The same fraternity, I went back again—I don’t know why—I went back again and then my other friend was there. It was one of those—cuz she has natural hair. We were there and then of course the guy made a big deal about that and he was like, “Oh, yeah. You remind me of that Black girl I saw in the commercial who didn’t want people touchin’ her hair. Do you mind if I like—[touch your hair]?” Just things like that, and I feel like things like that are what shapes my idea of the White Greek life, and I just feel like it causes a big division between us and them, cuz it’s like it’s their own world and I don’t ever feel like we’re welcome. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*I have never once felt safe at a frat or sorority party. I always feel like I have to hide the queer aspects of myself and my identity to protect—to physically and emotionally protect myself at night. I’ve been called many slurs: faggot—homosexual—at parties, and I’ve never once felt safe. [Queer Undergraduate]*

*My friends and I have been the victim of race-related threats and violence from White frats. It seems a common experience for Asian people from the Northeast, but the rest of us have never had to deal with anything like that in this country prior to coming to Cornell. [Web Response, Asian Female]*

Fraternalties in particular were linked to excessive alcohol consumption, which appeared to be a factor in what made certain environments feel increasingly dangerous for not only students of color and LGBTQ students, but also women. One of the most surprising stories related to the Greek system is what one former Greek rushee shared regarding a ritual termed the “2-1”—a strategy designed by Greeks to gain the trust of female party-goers and “prime” them to take advantage of them later on. The student described it:

*In the party planning process I’ll tell you it goes two, one. Two, there are parties where you’re a gentleman at. You don’t touch any girl there. You have fun. You don’t let them drink too much. They come back. You do it again. The third one, this is the plan. It happens everywhere. The third one is the one where you break out the hard*

*liquor instead of beer. You try to get girls as drunk as possible. There's three parties. You have the girls. You're nice. You don't do anything nasty. Then the last one, you hit 'em hard. [White Male Undergraduate]*

This revelation took everyone in the focus group by surprise, especially since one female in the focus group participant had just shared her perspective on the Cornell Greek system:

*I have some friends in fraternities who I don't think fit the stereotype and are just—okay so my friend's in this one fraternity. He said they really value being gentlemen. He was like, "Yeah, can you come to our party and tell everybody that we're gentlemen? That's what we're like. We're not gonna treat you like a typical guy to girl interaction at a frat party." I thought that was really sweet. [Mixed-Race Female Undergraduate]*

There appeared to be disbelief and disappointment around the room, with students responding to that revelation, "People plan that?" and "It's terrible. It's terrible. I'm so angry." The conversation at the table picked up, with much of the discussion revolving around the "be a gentleman" image that Greek fraternities project, how that contributed to the notion of being "hoodwinked," and the heavy drinking. The student remarked on the existing binary for heterosexual male masculinity on campus, suggesting that the current climate and culture creates two paths for acceptable masculinity:

*With men the huge critical impasse or juncture is same semester, freshman year, during rush. That's when you decided the fate of what kind of man you are at Cornell. If you don't join, you join the majority of men at Cornell who don't get seen or heard a lot. We're just out there. We're not at parties. [We're] just nice guys doing their studies, hanging out with friends. Maybe having small apartment parties but not doing huge ragers or anything. [...] Then there's the other. I think it's a third of men at Cornell are in Greek life. It's a very limiting definition of how you can act and how you can be if you're going to join a fraternity. It was a little offputting just how sexualized they make life at Cornell. Everything's about going to parties and getting chicks. Even the pledging process was full of activities like getting the most embarrassing photo of a girl that you can get and sharing it. [...] There's an entire email listserv dedicated to sharing porn that you find that all the brothers must be a part of. Just the way they talk about women as—objectifying them. All the classic things that you hear about the classic fraternity. It's alive and well. [White Male Undergraduate]*

This account provided context for the discrimination, harassment, and fear that females in many of the focus groups shared. Their perspectives and experiences pointed to the misogynistic culture of the Greek system and how the partying scene contributed to women's feelings of fear and vulnerability. In addition, the link between the Greek system and alcohol consumption was strong, and through our conversations with female students it became apparent that harmful and offensive incidents against women largely occurred in settings where alcohol was present, including parties hosted by fraternities and parties in Collegetown.

A program director spoke to this issue:

*I think that alcohol definitely contributes to the rates of sexual violence on campus and also to the rates of denial that it happens, confusion of what someone experienced and did it rise to the level of a sexual assault or not, and, of course, contributes to the guilt and self-blame and victim-blaming that go along with it as well.*

Indeed, females on both the undergraduate and graduate level shared major concerns about their safety in and around Cornell, fearing Collegetown on weekend nights, being weary of drunk drivers and drunk male pedestrians who "don't respect their boundaries," and inevitably overhearing men brag about their conquests on Saturday morning bus rides. An Asian American female undergraduate shared her viewpoint on this matter:

*I feel like when people's inhibitions are shrugged off of them at night for some reason because they're partying or they're drinking, that really brings out the worst in them. I think definitely Cornell men at night who come out from partying make me feel really unsafe.*

For women, having to endure unsettling experiences is just further evidence of the fact that they are outside of the normative culture, no matter their race or SES. Unfortunately, the marginalization of women extended beyond Greek life to many other aspects of the campus environment.

### **Marginalized Women: "There's a very weird gender dynamic at Cornell"**

Female focus group participants raised an array of issues regarding their gendered experience at the University, including: a lack of safety at Cornell, hostility in STEM fields, a lack of transparency in funding structure, and inflexibility in academia relating to family planning. However, the most prominent issue for women was the treatment they received from males as a result of the partying and excessive alcohol consumption that appears so prevalent in and around Cornell.

**Feeling Unsafe In and Around Cornell.** Building on women's concerns about safety and Cornell's drinking culture, the environment both on- and off-campus was further described as both a backdrop for aggression or harassment from male peers in general, and inaction on behalf of Cornell. Female students shared their surprise at how unsafe Cornell and the greater area felt as compared to large urban areas like Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago. A White female undergraduate student explains:

*What I found really interesting is that I'm from New York City, from Manhattan. Often, I go to see my friends in Manhattan and then I come home at night. I never really felt the threat. Then, when I came here, because of all the incidents that you hear about and all the emails that you get, it scares me that New York City might seem or, just because Ithaca just seems like such a friendly place, and then everybody says, "Don't walk home alone. Take a friend with you." It's weird.*

Students continued recalling experiences when they felt uncomfortable and unsafe in the areas surrounding Cornell, including three students who said:

*I don't think that it's limited to on-campus. Now I live on campus, but I didn't last year. I actually had an incident happen to me and a colleague of mine while walking downtown. We called 911 and, by the way, they were not very responsive at all, we were just at the mercy of this person. Thankfully we were safe. I was able to get help from somewhere else....I think that they need to get rid of these lamps. They're really aesthetically pleasing, but not really good, if you're trying to deter a crime. Because there's nowhere that you can see a potential person coming. It's almost always really dark. I'm like "How do you expect, as a woman, I should feel safe?" when I can't even see who's walking in front of me. [African American/Jamaican Female Graduate]*

*One day I was upstairs chatting with a friend in this big house I was staying in. I come back down to my room which I had left unlocked, and there was a drunk girl sleeping in my room without a coat on. I mean she didn't have a wallet, she didn't have shoes...another male friend of mine had brought her back, just as a way of keeping her away from trouble. I don't know what she was thinking, but she had just gone off with a strange guy. I mean he had to do a lot of white knight—he's not a white knight, but he had to do a lot of white knight things, because where the house was, there was so many times when he would see male students, frats, I don't know what they were doing. Just steering girls which were semi-unwilling to wherever creepy place they were gonna bring them. He had to be like, "You need to back off, buddy." Then once the man said, "No, she's mine," because her best friend had*

*apparently gone off with his best friend. Apparently he [felt he] was entitled to the other [woman]—whatever. It was just horrific. [International Female Bisexual Graduate]*

*Now even just walking back from my friend's house in Collegetown, which is like literally we're—it's my house—it's our backyards touch and even walking back from his house at night, if it's past midnight, I'm kind of freaked out about it. I used to be able to walk across the entire campus by myself and not feel uncomfortable. Now I—and it makes me really angry now that I feel unsafe. [White Female Undergraduate]*

The general feeling of fear and hyper-awareness continued to be voiced by other females in the focus groups. For them, safety concerns began to have an impact on their academic lives.

*[It's as if we feel we] can't defend ourselves and we need to have someone protect us, and I know for me a professor almost didn't let me join a class, a night class, because they were afraid that I couldn't walk home by myself at night. [White Female Undergraduate]*

*I'm in my fifth year, so I can see [safety concerns] go up from the first year. I used to be in the library until 2:00, I used to take the bus home at 2:30 a.m., and I felt absolutely safe. Then these incidents started increasing in number and now I'm more careful. I go home by 10:00 and I don't—I mean I'm lucky in that I can work from home as well. Then I just go home and work from there. It's sort of gone up, actually. [International Female Graduate]*

A few administrators were aware of the fear women had in and around Cornell, and one administrator stated, “If you look at that as gender discrimination, this is women feeling like they can't go out at night.”

The focus groups revealed that female students were in fact very concerned about their safety, and that these concerns had a tremendous impact on their overall campus experience. The women were also convinced that there were men who did not see their actions or the treatment of women as problematic. A Native female undergraduate elaborated:

*Men here, specifically White males, but pretty much men as a whole, they don't see issues in how they talk about women, how they treat women, how women are treated by the institution or by their peers.*

The fact that many male students do not see any issue with the ways in which women are treated or the impact of such treatment on women's lives again speaks to their privilege and the normative culture at Cornell. Men are not often placed in the position where they have to think about what being a man on campus means, what rights they are guaranteed, or what privileges they enjoy.

Beyond safety, other gender issues at Cornell included an unwelcoming environment in STEM-related departments, a lack of transparency in funding, and lack of consideration for women's identities outside of their academic lives. It is important to remember that although at the graduate level experiences and circumstances can be department-specific, the issues presented here (with the exception of STEM issues) spanned various academic departments at Cornell.

**STEM Fields Are Unwelcoming.** Several female graduate students described facing particular challenges, chief among them being women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). As generally found in the research focusing on women in STEM fields, gender-based marginalization came into play as the women shared difficulties in surviving and excelling in their STEM departments. One student told the group her particularly isolating story:

*I have not had a very good experience with the [STEM] department. I haven't experienced this in any other department, but the [STEM] department, in particular, I've had a lotta people try to intimidate me. Particularly in [a STEM subfield]. I did a lot of work in undergrad in it. I had people, when I would try to go to seminars or talks, threaten me, and tell me I better not go into [this subfield] and tell me that they didn't want any more competition. Speakers just come and say really inappropriate and offensive things that, I guess, more women would take offense to. I'm the only girl in the room so—yeah, I haven't had good experience with that particular department. [Female Graduate]*

The same student further shares that she hesitated to attend departmental events in fear of being excluded or being further threatened. The description of the hostile environment showcases the exclusion of women—who are already low in numbers. As another female graduate student astutely pointed out, the negative culture felt by women in science departments can be related to the elitism of STEM fields, and therefore allowing women into such spaces is in a way relinquishing that power and exclusivity long held by men. A few women in STEM referred to “the old boys network” and the challenges of existing in such an environment. One undergraduate female student extended this idea:

*I have to take 18 credits worth of science classes, which for me is a very—what's the word—intolerant field. Science is traditionally White male dominated and extremely patriarchal, and has been used against queer people and women, and so I don't consider science to be a safe field. Going into science classes, I also try as much as*

*possible to stay within sociology courses and FGSS courses, and so when I have to go to a science class I know that people aren't going to be considerate of my identity. [Queer Transgender White Undergraduate]*

The previous accounts of the treatment of women in STEM speaks at least partially to the overall “culture of science” and partially to the culture of Cornell. Despite the issues in the larger STEM culture, the University still has the responsibility to do what it can via policies, faculty training, and student dialogue to change the atmosphere for women in STEM departments.

**Lack of Transparency in Funding Opportunities.** As with many graduate programs across the country, funding at the graduate level is dependent on each individual department’s structure and policy. The distribution of money to students also varies—some may prioritize incoming students, some may prioritize productivity. The same may be true at Cornell, where each department follows its own protocols on funding distribution; however, it appears that the protocol on funding structure is not clear for many students. This lack of transparency made it particularly challenging for graduate women as they prepare to start families or try to raise their children. A student who is married but whose partner lived in a different city due to financial need explains:

*I think one of the tough pieces for me, that I've experienced in my program, is that the funding seems to be somewhat opaque. It's not entirely clear who gets what types of funding. I'm on a teaching assistantship, but there are graduate research assistantships, and training grants available in our department. However, how those are made available to the graduate students in our division is not entirely transparent. What it seems to be is that the presiding PI on whatever training grant it is identifies students that they think are strong or could be aligned with their research interests. Then I think they offer a student, or a student gets nominated, but there's not really a transparent application process for competition among the students in our department for that type of funding. Which, for students who have a TA-ship, like myself, that requires me to be physically located in, and based in, Ithaca. [White Female Graduate]*

Not exactly knowing how to apply for funded research assistantships, or not having a structure that makes the steps clear, makes it not only difficult to get training that will facilitate a research career but to plan financially for the future. The same student provides further insight on this issue:

*I did find it to be extremely challenging to have to coordinate how we would be able to see each other, maintain our relationship for those two years. He's finally been able to move here and find work, but we basically had agreed that if he weren't able to move here without a job, then we would still have to continue to be separated,*

*because the cost—the amount that—the stipend we get in our department just really isn't a lot for us to think about the next steps after and beyond Cornell. [White Female Graduate]*

For many of the female graduate students in our focus groups, knowing about funding opportunities could help them in reallocating resources as well as provide a realistic timeline to fulfill both academic and personal goals. Additional barriers briefly mentioned by female graduate students were the difficulty of being pregnant and worrying about child care while pursuing a graduate degree. Although no female graduate students present in the focus groups were pregnant or currently had children in child care, they spoke on behalf of their peers in sharing that child care costs were very high, making the expense difficult to take on while earning a graduate student salary; one female peer was forced to take on a Residential Advisor job in order to receive free housing and lessen the cost of living. This, once again, highlights the need for increased awareness of funding opportunities and structures with the hope of easing the barriers faced by women in academia.

**Family Leave Policy and Planning Decisions.** However, even when a couple of students reported a family leave policy that facilitates family planning by allowing students to take a semester or year off and have paid insurance, the lack of a stipend made it difficult to make ends meet. Additionally, that year off could be seen as a blemish in a student's academic trajectory. One student explains:

*I was just gonna do that [take a leave]. You take a semester or a year off, but then I found out I have fellowship that year. I ended up coming back to school, kind of, sort of working with a small child. Then I found that later on, actually when people look at my CV, if I would've had that family-leave year, it would've bought me—like hiring committees are instructed to take into account official family leave. However, if I do my PhD in five years, I'm gonna have this dead zone because I had a baby for a little bit. No one's gonna take that into account. That would be a piece of professional advice that I'm surprised I didn't—no one gave me at the time. I would've liked someone to come and talk to me about how do you integrate these things,...then I would've planned differently. [White Female Graduate]*

The reality for female graduate students is that in large part, academia does not cater to individuals' family planning goals. Advisors do not want to touch the subject, when these are real issues for women's roles and identities:

*When I came in I was really excited, people were open to my ideas. Over time as you're not enabled, you see your options narrowing, or you're steered onto a given path, which can be difficult sometimes. One of the things that I realized quite*

*quickly, I had actually spoken to my graduate advisor about family planning. In that first meeting with her I was like, "Oh yeah, I wanna take my exam, and then my partner and I are gonna start trying for having a family." She was like, "I am not here to talk about family planning. I'm here just to support your education, and for you to get through." That was really hard to hear. I think, since then, I've really had to— with her at least—really separate my personal life from my academic life. [Mixed-Ethnicity Female Graduate]*

### **Socioeconomic Divides: "It's a daily thing..."**

One central theme of division we have touched upon only briefly thus far is socio-economic differences. These differences were plainly evident in the quantitative data, where students reported distinct experiences based on SES. Cornell prides itself in having the most socioeconomic diversity of any of the Ivy institutions, but this sizeable portion of low-income students also creates more divisions between students who seem "equal" but whose status differences are real. Moreover, national studies consistently show that low-income students are least likely to be retained in college, regardless of ability (Franke, 2012). Consider again the dominant context of campus wealth, and imagine the ways in which students of lesser means might find campus culture inaccessible and exclusive. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds shared their stories of feeling that Cornell faculty and staff assume that all students have wealth and can fully engage as academically expected, feeling that their financial situation was a barrier to taking advantage of the networking resources offered by Cornell, and that their necessity to constantly work or be on a tight budget is a detriment to their non-academic pursuits. One low-income, White, male undergraduate put it simply:

*I think I would say it's a daily thing, whether it's not being able to go on a trip or a weekend trip and feeling marginalized from that, or being the worst dressed person in the room. I would say it's a daily feeling you get.*

Feeling unable to extensively engage in an academic setting felt particularly crippling to low-income students. Students shared academic experiences where faculty would expect them to be able to take a trip abroad to fully immerse themselves in study, or providing opportunities that required students to spend money. A White female undergraduate from a low-income background provided the following story:

*Then there was another [class] where we're doing research for a Costa Rican company and in the middle of the semester the professor says, "By the way, they offered to host us if we decided to come and it's going to be \$500 for a weekend. If you wanna go, we could all go." The thing is that first of all, when you signed up you*

*didn't know that was there. A lot of people in my class were saying, "Well I can't afford to spend \$500 in a weekend even though it's an amazing opportunity." I feel like classes where they take trips like that— like extraordinary trips—and it seems to me there's a lot more than I assumed. It really does exclude people very obviously too, because if you go on a trip you're gonna know who's there and who's not there. You're gonna assume they probably couldn't afford to go. The fact that the university doesn't—I know they cover some of it sometimes, but sometimes they don't. It kind of makes me feel excluded if I can't afford to go [to] Europe for the week.*

Another White male undergraduate from a low-income background shared:

*One of the extra credit things I had to do the other day was register for \$25 for a 5K to go do. I do struggle academically, I need all the extra credit I can get. It's like well, I'll pick up a couple extra shifts at work and hopefully [be able to pay]—but I did think that was kind of [unfair]—there was no alternative to paying. You couldn't just go and volunteer. You had to actually pay and register and be on the roster to go participate for the credit.*

Aside from being unable to participate in these academic opportunities due to their socio-economic background, students also found that taking advantage of the excellent networking opportunities at Cornell (and therefore taking advantage of the prestige of Cornell) was difficult and alienating. This particular feeling is shared by a student:

*There are also receptions. I only know this because we bring political people to campus to give speeches. Afterwards we have a reception open to anyone who wants to meet, say Howard Dean or something. When I go I don't have a fancy suit. There's a weird air of everyone knows how to act. It's very business formal. I've never been in a situation like that and I'm not learning by feeling awkward in them. I keep going because I enjoy it, but that is a time when I'm like there is a certain culture in this room that I'm just not a part of. I don't look it and I'm not acting like it. I just can't imagine a resource that would help me with that. I can't afford a suit and I don't know what it is about being in the room but it just feels weird. [White Male Low-Income Undergraduate]*

An African American female undergraduate from a low-income background further illustrates this:

*I mean I go to events like that too sometimes. I'm like I don't know how to dress. I don't know the proper etiquette in how to work a room or schmoozing. All those concepts are foreign to me and I don't engage in that regularly. I feel as though*

*people with resources do because that's a part of that culture. It's a part of an affluent culture...*

Another student shares:

*I can't do squat. I hate that because my parents tell me, "Oh, this is the greatest time of your life. Enjoy it. Embrace it. Go out. Have those four years." Sometimes I can do that. Not other times, always, always in the back in my mind that, "Can I afford this?" No, don't do it. Missed experience. Missed networking. Missed opportunity. That's too bad, you didn't have the money. Because you gave it all to get here to have those experiences but you have no money so you can't actually do it. Sorry. Catch-22. It sucks. I had to take four years out of high school to work to pay to come here [as a transfer student]... I'm spending all of my money to come here... If I can't pay my tuition next semester I don't have anyone to default to. I don't have my parents. I don't have wealthy aunts and uncles or grandparents who can cosign on a loan. I don't even have that much. [White Low-Income Female Undergraduate]*

Even when wanting to engage in academic endeavors with their peers, low-income students felt excluded based on the technological equipment they could afford or have access to.

*I think in the ways that we talked about before where in the library we have a study group. I'm sitting there with my shabby library textbook. Everyone else has their own copy. Things like, "Hey, do you want to complete this assignment at my apartment in Collegetown? I have to say, "I have to run to the library and rent a laptop before I come down there." Even then I have to return this laptop in three hours, so I might not make it. Those are the things that happen every day where I don't want to project it onto anyone else thinking that I don't belong. I just feel like there's an undue burden on me to do things that other people at Cornell do without thinking about it. That made me feel like, yeah, I'm definitely different than the other people here. [White Male Low-Income Undergraduate]*

The feeling of exclusion for low-income students also exists when interacting with Cornell faculty and staff. This same student who described the issues with accessing technology explains how these disadvantages are linked with feelings of being singled out:

*And on that note I have professors who when you walk into class there's like a pre-class question that you have to answer. You have to answer that on your laptop. If you want you can write it down on a piece of paper and turn it in, but then I have to write it down on a piece of paper and walk up in the front of a lecture hall of 200*

*people and hand it to the TA at the front of the class. [White Male Low-Income Undergraduate]*

Furthermore, low-income students felt that their lack of money and the amount of time spent working to make ends meet hindered their ability to participate in many social events, organizations, and clubs. Because they could not participate in these activities, low-income students felt they missed out on a great deal of typical college experiences, and felt extremely separate from their wealthier peers.

One White male undergraduate of low-income background states:

*I think it does make you feel like you're losing out on the whole Cornell experience because a large majority of these students do engage in these activities. Going abroad or even just being able to afford to go on a service trip. I think it does make you feel like you're losing out on a lot.*

Yet another White, female, low-income undergraduate reinforces this idea, adding how lack of money affects her social life:

*Socially speaking it makes it very difficult to be a part of the larger community without money. It means that everyone that I hang out with has to be of the same socioeconomic status. I have to consider that for next year as I'm applying for housing. I want to be a student and I wanna be involved. Right now I'm thinking, "I'm a junior. I really need to start networking. I need to start working harder." I realize, "Well, how I am gonna pay for my housing?" I have to apply to be an R.A. so I can get free housing. If I become an R.A. then it means I have less time to be social. Those are things I have to weigh all the time. I can't really have a social life. I can't be as successful like how I defined success. I won't be able to be at that point because I simply don't have the money to be successful.*

Students of low-income background also felt that the ways in which their wealthier peers spoke about their privilege, were exclusionary and often joked about those with less.

*I still found that I lost some of these contacts that were too different from me because they would say something like, I don't know, like I don't mind people having way more money than me and coming here in this big car. I don't even—I never had a car in my life, stuff like that. I don't mind, but then they would say something about a person we see on the street and I would identify with that person more, like making fun of them for having an old cell phone, or whatever it is. I'm like, "Well,*

*maybe they just don't have as much money, duh." That's why you're kind of driven into those groups. I learned that I can't bring up those struggles that I have as a working class [person]...I've learned that I have to stay in my group to talk about what's important. It's really sad. I don't know, I mean that's where it gets to the level where it is a University problem and maybe could be addressed through policies. [White International Female Low-Income Undergraduate]*

In addition to the aforementioned issues, having little money and attending an expensive school is stressful for students. Worries about food, housing, and managing daily expenses are commonplace for students from lower SES backgrounds. Several students share:

*[During break] most of the dining halls close down. What if you have a meal plan and what if Cornell sponsors all of your meal plan? You can't really afford to go out. What, there's like five, six days where you have to plan your own meals. That's inconsiderate of so many people. [White Low-Income Female Undergraduate]*

*Many times I just don't eat because it's just really expensive. [Latina Low-Income Undergraduate]*

Given the mission and fundamental structure of Cornell, there will always be students from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds; the necessity of easing students' difficulties and helping them to feel like an integral part of Cornell will not cease. Low-income students in the focus groups were dissatisfied with the unrealistic wealth-related expectations from their faculty and staff, the difficulty in taking advantage of Cornell-related perks, and the struggle to engage in non-academic pursuits when money was an issue.

### **Diversity Within Communities**

When we consider the experiences of students in underrepresented identity groups, it is important to remember that there is great diversity within these communities not only just in terms of individual experience, but in terms of country of origin and cultural identity. Several students of color pointed out this diversity among racial groups. In contrast, the survey data do not differentiate within racial/ethnic categories. We explain some variations here that may be explored in future data collection.

**African American.** Some African American focus group participants described a "schism" between Africans, Caribbean, and African American students where they experienced difficulties relating to cultural and ethnic differences based on country of origin:

*...you have African people and you have Caribbeans and then you have African Americans. Because there's a substantial collection of each group and there are substantial differences between each, you have kind of I guess— you have people not maybe—I don't wanna say interacting with each other, cuz I don't think it's common, but it is there. You kind of have a sense of a little bit of a schism. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

This second quote speaks not only to these “substantial differences” but failure of a program to actually create a learning experience out of these differences.

*I've never really experienced all the differences until I got here. I remember coming in freshman year and there was a program in one of the program houses and the title of the program was, “My Black is better than your Black.” It was basically the idea of people talking about their differences as an African or as an African American or as a Caribbean and just kind of like hitting on those differences. The conversation didn't go very well. There was a lot of just back-and-forth about “mine is better than yours.” It turned out to be really, really bad. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

While people who phenotypically look Black may be categorized in one group by others, they may have a more specific, racial or ethnic affiliation as their most salient identity. A program director speaks to these differences:

*I wouldn't necessarily say that it's "the African American student experience." They are Black students at Cornell. Then you have Caribbean student association, and Nigerian student association—all the different subgroups.*

We heard similar stories in other minority groups, where students described the wide range of backgrounds and experiences within their own racial groups and how they affect intergroup relations.

**Native American.** Native American students come from many tribal nations and described differences that led to questions about identity, with some students feeling as though their peers thought they weren't “Native enough.” Students, most often of mixed descent, described feeling tested by other members of the cultural community:

*I think especially from the Native community...You also get the attitude, like, “Oh. Well, you're not Native enough to have checked that box.” On the one hand, who are you to tell me my identity? [Native American Female Undergraduate]*

Similarly, the few Native American students that come from reservations felt different from those who did not share the experience of growing up in the same environment. A male undergraduate said:

*Native American populations are very diverse from the city and from wherever, but not having people to relate to on that level, from reservation life—I felt isolated for a really long time.*

Native American students represent less than 1% of the student body; therefore acceptance can be challenging. Among the groups, however, we found the Native student community to be very engaged and united through Native American programs and organizations, including the American Indian Program, Native American residential hall, and student organizations. These entities offer support to members, much like an extended family.

**Asian American and Asian.** Several Asian American students noted the fact that Asian Americans and Asian international students constitute very different populations. Moreover, country of origin in Asia and region of the US often act as another source of differentiation that affects which group(s) students choose to affiliate with on campus.

*I come from a Filipino American community back in New Jersey. Largely, all the Asians I knew were only Filipino. In coming to Cornell, I realized I recognized that Filipinos do not make up the majority of the Asian community. The range of experiences for Asians and Asian Americans on campus is very wide, from those who do not recognize race as part of them—especially for international students. I feel that the Asian American experience is also impacted in that way. Depending on where you come from in the country, whether that's coming from California and being in the largest Filipino American community outside of the Philippines, then coming to here versus coming from a very intimate community from New Jersey, is a very different experience and defines how much you identify as Asian American. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

The degree to which students identified as Asian or Asian American, or the existence of so many subgroups within the Asian population, was not a divisive factor among Asian American/Asian students. Instead some students describe adopting a panethnic identity:

*I then recognized and realized the importance of identifying with other Asian Americans, and therefore I began to really strongly advocate for myself as an Asian American. I attempted to advocate for others as an Asian American. From the very beginning of my Cornell experience, I framed it in such a way. I joined a social*

*justice—social awareness group for the Asian and Asian American community. I participated in the umbrella organization for the Asian and Asian American community. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

Students also praised the availability of the many organizations and clubs serving distinct segments of the Asian/Asian American community.

*There's so many different organizations and clubs on campus, like whether you identify us as Chinese-American, mainland, or you're from the mainland China or whether you're a Korean-American, you have different Indian dance groups. You have a Vietnamese Student Association, you have Japanese groups...I think Cornell just has a lot of outlets. [Asian American Male Undergraduate]*

Among Asian and Asian American students, the variability within their population on campus and resultant range of outlets were not seen as sources of exclusion or tension, but instead viewed as sources of strength for the Asian community as whole. So although they may view themselves as distinctly Chinese-American, Filipino, Indian, or Japanese, most students seemed to value this variability as a strength of the wider community of Asians and Asian Americans. However, one major issue students shared relating to this variability was the fact that it goes unrecognized by the larger campus community.

*I think one of the basic problems here on this campus is that Asians are taken as a collective group. Individual experiences and the cultural differences between, and the complexity of a culture within the Asian and Asian American community is not so much recognized. I think it's—that's a real problem on this campus is that Asians are taken as one group and it's not really divided. There's no recognition of the experience between let's say a Filipino American and a Korean American, or a Filipino American and a Pakistani American. I think the experiences are very—I think those experiences are very diverse. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

Failure to differentiate is a form of bias, described in the next section, where majority members tend to see students as “just Black” or “just Asian.” The normative culture of Cornell functions to place a collective identity on non-dominant cultures, assuming that they are all the same, and failing to see the distinctions that are so plainly evident to group members. In this way non-dominant students are marginalized. Their unique struggles and contributions are ignored or overshadowed by dominant group members.

**Latina/o.** The Latina/o community—one of the largest minority student groups in Cornell—is very diverse, with students (or those students’ families) from many parts of the Spanish-speaking world

including South America, Central America, and Mexico. However, as in the case of African Americans, Natives, and Asian Americans, this ethnic group is in fact composed of students with an array of ethnicities, experiences, and perspectives that simply cannot be encompassed by one overarching label or identifier.

The Latina/o students in our focus groups shared their thoughts on the meaning of “Latina/o,” a term used and assigned to descendants from Spanish-language countries, including those who are US-born. Although the use of the term implies that all who use it share an automatic unifying bond based on group membership, there can be differences in who is accepted into the community. One Latina student describes her experience of identifying with other Latinas/os, but finding that they did not necessarily identify with her:

*Coming from California I was shocked to find that my identity as a Latina became questioned by international Latino students. Several times when I am meeting people for the first time they think I don't know how to speak Spanish because I tell them I am from Los Angeles. They don't hesitate to tell me I need to take dance classes when I go to Latin parties, jokingly call me a “gringa,” or I am told that even though I am American I am still warm, kind, helpful like Latinos. I am first-generation born in the U.S. raised by immigrant parents, but no one really cares to hear that. It is still shocking for me to hear comments like these although I have been here for over a year now. I am happy to meet Latino international students, but in return I feel they are indifferent towards me. [Web responses, Latina Undergraduate]*

As the data in this report has revealed, while students seek niche communities to connect with others at Cornell, not all find connection in ethnic-specific organizations. A program director provided further insight:

*There are a lot of Latinos on this campus who don't connect with Latino studies or the Latino Living Center. We have many multiracial students on campus, and then we have some less culturally-affiliated students, and they may feel intimidated about coming up here [to the Latina/o Student Success Office]. There's a lot, very pervasive, of “I'm not Latino enough.” Hopefully, this space creates some opportunities to delve into people's identity, but for a lot of students it's too threatening.*

Cornell creates different challenges to one's identity. White peers use color-blind ideology to demonstrate acceptance and specific ethnic affiliations are not as represented, as one student says:

*I do think race is a big factor in my life because even this friend of mine, she's White. She comes to me. She's like, "I feel like you need to stop characterizing yourself as Hispanic<sup>1</sup> cuz I feel like you're the only one that sees yourself as that way. I don't see you. I just see you as a female. I see you as my sorority sister." The first thing I think about as identity is Hispanic although now I'm realizing I'd rather be characterized as Guatemalan American because my parents are Guatemalan. My mom raised me in a Guatemalan fashion. Although I was surrounded by different Hispanic people, I went to a school that was very diverse economically and culturally. Just being part of the Hispanic community and also not feeling connected to it is a big problem in my life here at Cornell especially. Cuz back home I'm fine. I'm Hispanic. I embrace it. I love it. Here I just don't feel a part of it. [Latina Undergraduate]*

Mexican-American or Mexican students comprise the majority of the Latina/o group. One Latino student shares:

*Mexican-Americans, Mexican students are going to be more pronounced among the community. But I think probably there's a bit of a lesser emphasis on—maybe not so much Central America, but South America and other groups that are perhaps not at present because of lack of participation or lack of numbers. [Latino Undergraduate]*

These issues add another layer of complexity to intergroup relations—intragroup differences that are not acknowledged by the wider Cornell community—and can result in a variety of responses. Amidst pressure to assimilate, students have to find a community and also may encounter bias for the first time away from home. The next section deals with this important climate issue.

### **Bias, Discrimination, and Microaggressions**

There are several forms of bias. We focused on stereotypes (based on traits or characteristics), discrimination as behaviors that show preference for the majority group and subordinate the minority group (Engberg, 2004), and microaggressions. Microaggressions are “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino., 2007, p. 72). There are three types of microaggressions as defined by Dr. Sue (2007) and his colleagues. *Microassaults* are akin to old-fashioned racism, constituting deliberate and conscious assaults by the aggressor, and can constitute harassment. We included harassment and sexual assault in this category. *Microinsults* are generally outside the consciousness of the aggressor, and include behavioral action or a verbal remark that conveys rudeness, insensitivity, or demeans a person’s racial identity or heritage. *Microinvalidation*, also outside the consciousness of the aggressor, includes actions that exclude,

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<sup>1</sup> Hispanic and Latina/o are used interchangeably, as students used different terms to talk about the group.

negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (Sue, et al., 2007). In addition, we identified stories of tokenism, status leveling, competency proving, color-blind attitudes, failure to differentiate, and cultural appropriation. These examples and more are presented in the compendium provided at the end of this report.

Diverse students reported that microaggressions and discrimination incidents were part of their daily experience at Cornell, ranging from the subtle to the explicit. When asked how typical bias incidents are, students described numerous accounts of harassment and discrimination. In fact, harassment was one of the most dominant codes to appear in the web responses, particularly among Latinas/os, Blacks, and Asians. This indicates students prefer to share these anonymously. Most, if not all, of these incidents obtained in focus groups and on the web were *not* reported to authorities. As one African American student said, “I feel like bias incidents happen every day, but it’s whether or not they get reported.” In fact, this sentiment was echoed by two program directors who respectively said “I think that it [bias incidents] happen probably a lot more regularly than the community ever knows about and never really acknowledges” and “I think it [bias incidents] happen a lot more than what’s actually reported.” This section presents evidence regarding these intuitions.

Select anecdotes are reported to show the major categories of incident type as well as depth of experiences. In each section that follows, we indicate examples that are typical for each group. Across all focus groups, members of multiple minority groups frequently reported having to justify their presence on campus, often hearing the statement “you only got in because...”, indicating that peers effectively continue to marginalize students who do not fit into the normative culture.

**Racial Incidents: African American Students.** The bias incidents described by African American students primarily centered overt forms of racism, but also included a few classroom incidents where professors evidenced microinvalidation behavior. The stories are categorized by types of bias behaviors.

***Microassault: Conscious Verbal Attack***

*To speak to what I’m talking about, there was a night where me and a couple of my friends were walking back from Collegetown. We were walking home. We were literally by a traffic light and a random car full of all White men, like a full packed car of White men drove up near us and then screamed—I apologize for the expletive—but they were like, “Look. Black bitches,” as if we’re some almost extinct species to be admired for a little bit. I don’t know. We were shocked and we were trying to confront them about it, but as soon as we started to, the light turned green and they drove—they literally sped off because they saw how pissed we were. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

### **Microassault: Exclusion From Parties Based on Race**

*I remember freshman year and I knew an upperclassman who was in a frat that was predominantly White. He was like, "Oh, yeah. Just come out. It'll be fun." I went with a group of friends and before we even got into the door, before we even got to the entrance, there was some Caucasian guy and he was just there and he was like, "Oh. There's no Black people allowed at this party," and then a couple people overheard this in the back. It was a couple other White people and they came in and they apologized, just like, "Oh, no. We're sorry; we're sorry. There's just no more room. There's just no more room. He's just kidding." Of course we were just like, "Okay," and we're just not gonna go. "It's not worth being here," ...—you kind of look in terms of society and you see [exclusion] in the professional level how it's like once you have a certain number or just that one face, it's considered enough. Then if you try to add more, if you try to bring more [Black] people in, then that's where more issues arise. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

### **Microassault: Confrontation with a Conscious Racist**

*He came up to me [at the fraternity party]. He said, "Oh, yeah. I don't like Black people. I'm racist, but my girlfriend, she really broke up with me because of that. I'm just tryin' not be as racist, so Hi. What's your name?" Yada yada. The same fraternity, I went back again—I don't know why—I went back again and then my other friend was there. It was one of those—cuz she has natural hair. We were there and then of course the guy made a big deal about that and he was like, "Oh, yeah. You remind me of that Black girl I saw in the commercial who didn't want people touchin' her hair." [African American Female Undergraduate]*

### **Microinsult: Unconscious Verbal Assault**

*I remember freshman year I was in this [type of] class. The teacher...he's a really old, White guy from [state], you know what I mean? He kept using the N word; I'm just like that's not okay. I had to bring it up to a TA because I was afraid to go to him and say could you not say that in my presence? [African American Female Low-Income Undergraduate]*

### **Microinvalidation: Class Activity Highlights Black Inferiority**

*Also last year when I took a [type of] class the teacher made us engage in this activity. We had talked about French colonialism in the Caribbean. I guess to make a*

*game or something she was like okay we're gonna pretend like we're the Europeans that came over and colonized the Caribbean. What do you think the White people are gonna think about the Black people? There was multiple choice, check off. One of 'em was oh these people are cannibals, these people are uneducated, these people aren't right. I'm like why are we doing this? What? This is 2013, why are we doing this? We cannot do activities like this in class, we can't do it. [African American Female Low-Income Undergraduate]*

In the latter class activity, it is not clear what the purpose of the exercise was in requiring students to check that Europeans would think Blacks were inferior. It resulted in a microinvalidation, where the instructor assumed that students would not be offended because it was a historical perspective on race relations. However, without follow-up in the classroom or discussion, students walked away thinking that the instructors were teaching that Blacks were inferior and that was a correct answer. Was the instructor aware of the presence of a Black student in the classroom?

In related examples, *failure to differentiate* is a form of social categorization described in bias literature. It happens often to Blacks and Asians, where people of other races cannot differentiate between individuals' unique characteristics and only see their phenotypical features. This recognition bias is something that occurs in all races but happens most often among White people who fail to differentiate or notice ethnic differences among individuals in racial categories. One African American male said:

*I think that being Black at Cornell, there are two different ways to look at it. There's one, just being Black to everyone else [identity expression] and to everyone else you are Black [social categorization]. You're not Caribbean; you're not African; you're not African American; you're just Black.*

Blacks are aware when someone does not see them as an individual but views them as "just Black." Sometimes they can actually count on this happening on campus, and use it to their advantage. One student jokes:

*Now, see they [swimming test supervisors] don't—they can't tell some of these [Black] ethnicities apart, so if you're Black, sometimes you get your friend to do it for you. Sometimes that works, because you bring in the card and they don't know who you are. You're like, "Hey, I'm Paul." They're like, "Oh, hey Paul. Go swim." You swim. Whatever. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

**Racial Incidents: Asian/Asian American Students.** One Asian American male undergraduate observed the overarching theme of race-based incidents and harassment directed at Asian and

Asian American students when he stated: “There’s also a perpetual foreigner stereotype for Asian and Asian Americans.” Sue et. al., (2007) calls this being an “alien in own land” phenomenon that is pervasive due to ethnicity, language, and phenotypical differences from the normative majority culture. It is not considered malevolent but students found it disturbing and uncomfortable. Indeed, many of the incidents described by students revealed an element of this particular type of Othering as foreigners, and distancing from the normative culture.

**Microinsult: Unconscious “Alien in Own Land”**

*I mean, I could definitely hear it in people’s conversations. I mean, it’s sort of like things that go under the radar; I think they still exist. There are things like when you might assume—I guess the most common questions, as an Asian-American person, people want to know where you’re from. I feel like I get that a lot. That, and as in like, “You’re not really,—like, you’re not normal. You’re not part of the majority, so you must be originating from...” [Asian International Female Undergraduate]*

**Microassault: Conscious Verbal Response**

*I’ve had people tell me to go back where I come from, especially if I say something that’s critical, maybe, of Cornell or this country, it’s like, “You should be grateful to be here. Go back to where you came from.” [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

**Microassault: Conscious Verbal Harassment**

*I feel like when people’s inhibitions are shrugged off of them at night for some reason because they’re partying or they’re drinking, that really brings out the worst in them. I think definitely Cornell men at night who come out from partying make me feel really unsafe. Actually one time I was walking with one of my friends who’s also Chinese. We just passed by these three drunk college students. It’s pretty obvious that they were coming from a party. The drunkest of the three looked at us and just went, “Ching chong, ling long, ting tong.” Then another thing was—so my friend who was more angry than me was like, “!#X\* you.” She was so angry. I was just like—another thing is like he didn’t—well I didn’t expect the drunk guy to apologize. His more sober friend was like, “I’m sorry we’re trying to train him.” I was just like, “What?” [Asian American Female Low-Income Undergraduate]*

These constant onslaughts are so typical that beginning to categorize and name them in the research has been helpful for students to realize that they are not alone in being the target of bias.

In the web responses, Asian students mentioned a lack of sense of belonging more frequently than any other group.

**LGBTQ Students: Sexual Identity-Based Incidents.** LGBTQ students face a constant onslaught of aggressive and exclusionary behaviors and language. As depicted throughout this report, these students faced an unwelcoming environment both on and off campus, feeling that campus spaces were heteronormative, homophobic at times, and sites of conscious acts of aggression at times.

***Microassaults: Verbal Harassment at Parties***

*Then another example, for Greek life, I have never once felt safe at a frat or sorority party. I always feel like I have to hide the queer aspects of myself and my identity to protect—to physically and emotionally protect myself at night. I've been called many slurs: faggot—homosexual—at parties, and I've never once felt safe. [Mixed-Ethnicity Queer Undergraduate]*

***Microassault: Verbal and Response to Fear***

*I've experienced just a number of incidents at night or even on Slope Day, where I heard a couple of really homophobic comments made as I was walking around by some students in a fraternity. It was the same Slope Day that the Sig Pi accident happened, actually. Incident happened. As a coping mechanism, I never walk around at night, or if I do I walk in groups or I carry around, illegally, pepper spray or my Taser gun. Just little things like that, or even when I am on campus I don't dress a certain way or I don't look as gay as I want to, which is really rather unfortunate. [International Queer Female Undergraduate]*

***Microassault: Conscious Anonymous Acts to Prevent LGBTQ Activities***

*I lived on North Campus last year. Now I live on West Campus where Flora Rose house is, and both years I've done marketing/advertising for certain Haven events such as Filthy/Gorgeous or the annual LGBTQ homecoming party. I've put posters on all floors of these two buildings, and more than half of them have been ripped up or torn apart or written on. That just creates an extremely uncomfortable living environment as well, which is why I can't wait to live off of campus. [Mixed-Ethnicity Queer Undergraduate]*

These troubling accounts in combination with all of the other accounts shared throughout our focus groups lead to one basic conclusion: Cornell's non-majority communities have almost daily

experiences where they are harassed or discriminated against. They also have near-daily experiences where they feel invisible.

### **Examples of Racial/Ethnic Targeting: Cultural Appropriation and Exoticization**

Cultural appropriation is the act of taking some aspect of another's culture; when it is involuntary, unequal, lacks respect, and is enacted for economic gain, it can be considered a form of exploitation (Rogers, 2006). Exoticization occurs when White men stereotype Asian or Latina women's racial/ethnic features in a sexual way (Sue, et al., 2007). It is sometimes a form of positive racism where a stereotype is favored by agents because of its racial/ethnic quality, and the implication is that other groups do not have that characteristic (e.g., White women are not exotic). Exoticization is considered antagonistic to feminist values. Although they may seem like positive compliments to the aggressor, both forms are still offensive to the targeted group. The following are examples of how Latina/o students are targets of racial stereotyping.

**Cinco de Octubre.** At the time of the site visit, the Cinco de Octubre incident had gained attention inside and outside of campus. The incident became a starting point for discussion when we asked about incidents on campus. Cinco de Octubre was typical of the prevalent theme of lack of awareness, but also indicated how this translates into offensive stereotypes used to target student identity groups. The Cornell Athletic Department began marketing and planning a Mexican-themed campaign for the Homecoming football game. Part of the campaign included encouraging students to dress up in "their Mexican best" and take a picture in a photo booth. Mexican hats and ponchos were purchased and football players appeared in the costume in the dining halls to advertise the event. Students across several focus groups, spanning race/ethnicity, SES, and sexual orientation mentioned the incident and were troubled about the message it sent to the Cornell community. A Latina undergraduate shared her immediate reaction to this incident:

*In order to advertise for the event, football players dressed up [like "Mexicans"] in the dining halls Wednesday prior to when the event would have happened. It would have been a Saturday, but emails still went out about an "almost Mexican" photo contest. Friday morning, I don't remember the day, but we went to go speak to sports administration, and we spoke to the [staff member]. She said—she didn't understand why it could be offensive. She only understood the fact that it said Mexican could be offensive, but her whole idea of the minority Latino culture was a "festive" idea, even though the culture is much more representative than just a festive ideology. When we use those items to celebrate, it's actual celebration of the culture. It's not as a sports marketing tool to get people to attend a game. When we did go to speak to them and speak to other people, they weren't really receptive of that. I feel like a university that prides itself so much on [diversity], that we have*

*Tapestry for freshmen to teach them about diversity on campus and how to be inclusive of each other, and [that message] doesn't reach to administration or to faculty and staff that are supposed to make the entire campus, a diverse campus, feel comfortable here.*

As reported by various students and staff, despite the fact that the Cinco de Octubre event was cancelled, the promotion surrounding the event had already created a climate of disrespect. The realization that Cornell staff and administration would let an event get to such a developed stage demoralized students of color on campus and caused them to lose some faith in the University's capabilities of achieving a diverse learning environment. The Cinco de Octubre incident resulted in students feeling that the University did not value their identities.

*I don't feel that, in the year—almost year and a half—that I've been here, I've really felt like that University has made a strong stand for diversity at any point. One case being the recent issue with the Cornell University Athletics. I know a lot of Latino students were upset about that. I was actually upset about that as well, just because it just didn't show a value for people's identities. I think that in cases like that, you can't really go back and say, "Well, despite what these people are saying on Facebook, my University wants me to be here. My University values my identity." [African American Female Undergraduate]*

This incident had such an effect on students that some sought assistance from psychological services, made available by staff and colleagues. According to the students and administrators interviewed, the Cinco de Octubre incident tainted Cornell's diversity efforts and had students of color and allies wondering how such blatant stereotyping could happen. One student provides a different perspective on the incident, attributing the incident to individuals and questioning if there was a systemic solution:

*Cinco de Octubre, which is just so hilarious for how dumb it was. It just seems like some of these incidents are just the result of one person just being incredibly dumb and not—I don't really read into it like some big institutional issue...There's things that have happened that might point to more structural issues but I don't know. This most recent one, looking at it, it's just like that was just stupid. It's bad. I can see why people are offended and they have every right to be. I don't know. I just don't really see any big structural change to the university that could prevent something like that. [White Male Undergraduate]*

The inability to imagine an institutional solution can prevent progress on promoting awareness. There appeared to be agreement, however, that continued diversity training for fellow students

would help avoid incidents like Cinco de Octubre so that more students (e.g., student athletes in this case) could raise issues. An Asian American female student shared her thoughts on how the Cinco de Octubre incident could have been avoided and re-visited a common theme regarding lack of follow-up:

*MEChA, the Mexican umbrella group on campus, reached out to Student Assembly about their dissatisfaction, because all that they had received from the Sports Department was an official half-page apology. They believed that that apology wasn't enough. They wanted to open discussion, to tell them why they found it offensive, that they were basically using the way that they identified themselves as a way to have fun. They were like, "You know, for you it's dressing up. For us, we can't take off this Mexican costume. It's part of who we are." They were just like, "Yeah, the apology was great, but we don't even see it as an apology. There's just no follow-up." In the same way, for diversity issues, there's no follow-up. Maybe a good thing would be a senior year Tapestry, just a re-visitation of all the things that we had seen freshman year.*

Many were relieved that the event was halted, but damage was done. If there were more forums for guided discussion as a follow-up, more individuals would learn about the different forms of cultural appropriation (Rogers, 2006) and realize how forms of cultural appropriation and exploitation played a role in the event.

**Exoticization of Latinas.** Using physical characteristics to refer to specific racial/ethnic groups is also part of stereotyping. Although the sexualization of Latina students was not a frequent topic in focus groups, its link with the issues women face on campus makes it important to mention as it pertains to minority women. A Latina explained her experience with men at Cornell:

*I've also noticed that when [guys] are I guess you could say hitting on me, they always use—especially—I don't know, it happens to me way more here than anywhere else. I'm not sure why that is. They always use the word "exotic" instead of just saying, "Oh, you're pretty," or something, which I always thought was really strange and none of my friends who are Caucasian ever had somebody tell them they're exotic. I'm not a lizard.*

A program director also brought up this issue:

*I hear Latinas regularly talk about walking across campus and White men making comments to them, or hearing generalizations made in classes, or whatever. The*

*women here are conscious about that, being stereotyped and sexualized. It may be different than the way that it was back home for them.*

The exoticization of Latinas extends beyond the boundaries of Cornell, but it is important to note in an environment where male behavior already makes some women feel uncomfortable. In contrast, Black women expressed how “undesirable” they felt in the campus dating scene in a “fishbowl” discussion. Continuing conversations with women and men from different racial groups can help students gain perspective on race and gender issues that differ by community.

### **Multiple Forms of Marginality: Invisibility**

Beyond experiencing less direct microaggressions and/or more overt incidents, some non-dominant identity groups were marginalized even further, or to borrow a term from the LGBTQ students, “invisibilized.” The students outside of the Cornell normative culture were rendered invisible not only by and to their peers, but also by Cornell administrators.

**Native American Students: “We just get ignored.”** Native American students in the focus groups spoke about multiple forms of marginality and invisibility, feeling that they were overlooked by the University as a collective and excluded from University-wide diversity efforts. The fact that Cornell is on Cayuga land and this has not been formally acknowledged is a source of distress for students, making them feel as though the deep tie between their heritage and the University is being ignored as well. As one Native American female undergraduate shares:

*As far as the administration, I think they kind of ignore us. I know a couple years ago...NASAC pushed through the SA, a proposal to get Indigenous Day recognized on the student calendar. It got approved and everything, and then nothing got followed through with that. With some of the initiatives to get Cornell administrators and faculty to recognize Cayuga land in their speeches and stuff...we just get ignored.*

When there is no follow-through on efforts and opportunities to educate the campus community, students feel invisible and that neglect is a conscious act of exclusion. For example, whose responsibility was it to implement a Student Assembly action to recognize Indigenous Day? While Native American students make up a very small portion of the population, the contribution of their people is perhaps the largest of all, that of the land that Cornell occupies.

The Native population also seems to be ignored in relation to other diversity events and initiatives on campus. Even when other racial groups hosted critical race theorists for campus for a facilitated discussion, Natives and noteworthy Native critical race theorists were left out completely:

*For instance, last week when the critical race theorists came to campus, we weren't even contacted to be included in the discussion. All of the other programs were identified as participating and being included, and we weren't even included.*

The feeling of exclusion among Native Americans extended into the classroom. One Native student shared that she was told that her Native perspective was off-topic, promoting a political agenda, or disruptive. This was a microinvalidation (see compendium of bias and microaggressions) that categorized her distinct Native worldview as “disruptive.” This student feels excluded from class discussions:

*If you have something personal about the subject matter you're learning in your class...this relates to me...but if you say something coming from a Native perspective—I had a class where we were having a debate on climate change and species diversity. People were like “We all care about this ‘cause climate change is hurting fish diversity which is hurting fishermen and livelihood and stuff.” But if you say something from an indigenous perspective, like “Oh, yes. The decrease in diversity is hurting traditional medicine or traditional food sources,” I was told repeatedly that I was off topic, and that I was promoting a political agenda, and that I didn't get the point of the assignment. You almost don't wanna mention stuff that relates to you ‘cause I'm told that I'm off topic or being disruptive.*

These accounts reveal the ways in which Native students and their contributions to academic learning and education are rendered invisible both as a group and as individuals.

**Asian American Students: “It doesn't seem like they really care about Asian American students.”**

Asian American students also felt marginalized, with few resources and limited attention devoted to their needs. One Asian American male student said, “Institutionally, I don't know what's going on, and it doesn't seem like they really care about the Asian American students.” This exclusion was manifested for them in both the lack of a housing program devoted to Asian culture and the lack of Asian American faculty.

*Yeah, so there's an African American house you can live in, and there's this music house that you can live in if you're really into music, then there's the Latino house, and there's no Asian house. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*Even my Asian-American Studies Department, there's one faculty who's there right now. The rest of them are either gone or on leave, there's kind of no Asian-American mentors right now...there's no elders, no people to guide students. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

The nonexistence of an Asian American housing program made students feel excluded from the overall minority community and within the University community as a whole. The lack of Asian American faculty made them feel as though the University did not care about their need for Asian American faculty members to serve as mentors. Additionally, the placement of the A3C center in the basement only furthered feelings of exclusion and lack of consideration.

*They already stuck us in the basement, the ground floor. I don't think the size of our center is representative of the size of our population on campus, because we're almost 20 percent, and to be in this building, cramped down here--no one knows we're here. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

This invisibility was noted by the staff:

*I think that one of the reasons why this center and this space is so important is Asian students at Cornell historically have gotten much—are more prone to get lost in the shuffle of things. Being more of an invisible minority in society, and then on campus at large.*

Asian American students often attributed this to their model minority stereotype, feeling that because they do well academically and do not seem to need many academically-based support services, that they are perceived to not need any support at all. It is important to note that students also expressed satisfaction and belonging as reported in that section of the report.

**LGBTQ Students: “My identity feels very invisibilized on a day-to-day basis.”** Some students felt that their LGBTQ identity was rendered invisible from their very first interaction with Cornell during the admissions process, where the spectrum of gender-related identities was ignored.

*When it comes to admissions—we never talk about your gender identity or—besides the traditional man or woman. We never talk about sexual orientation. We never talk about gender expression, invisible identities, that fact that Cornell doesn't recognize this and see this as an important aspect of admissions. [Queer International Female Undergraduate]*

This concern was echoed by a program director:

*We're a Common App school, and so we ask whatever the Common App wants—puts on there, it's very binary gender question. I'm thinking of the ways that we ask gender on our application, the way that students sort of want to be able to self-identify as being part of the LGBT community and get connected to that community*

*and to those resources. There isn't an easy way to do that for them particularly as they are entering Cornell.*

Not having the option of expressing an important part of your identity during a formal application process is certainly marginalizing for students; for many LGBTQ students, this feeling is part of their daily lives.

*My identity as a queer person feels very invisibilized on this campus on a day-to-day basis, both during the academic day and at night during nightlife. [Queer Undergraduate]*

Many students described being unable to be themselves in most heteronormative campus spaces:

*I'm also an English major, which some of the courses—a lot of courses are cross listed in the department and professors are in both departments. I have still felt very invisibilized and it's still such a heteronormative space that it's—I mean it's so sad that only in one academic department can I write about my experience as a queer person, my experiences not conforming to gender norms or anything, and where I can just feel comfortable being myself. [Queer Undergraduate]*

The comments from LGBTQ students point to the fact that sexual orientation and gender expression are elements of identity that effectively other these students on a daily basis. These students find that their relationship with Cornell as an institution is being affected by the prevalence and privileging of the gender binary system, and a lack of consideration of the range of other identities. The ways in which these students are actively ignored is further evidence of the privilege other students enjoy and the ways in which differing from the normative culture affects student experience.

### **Hesitancy to Act: Reporting Incidents, Calling Out Bias, Pointing Out Invisibility**

As aforementioned, when students experienced incidents or negative treatment of any sort they did not generally report them to university officials or take any formal action. Only one student explained her decision not to report:

*Again, I'm thinking in retrospect, like that's something [a microassault story] that could easily be reported, but we didn't. It's the whole idea of are we causing trouble, causing more trouble by reporting something? I think that our university does—tries a lot to get rid of or decrease bias incidents or address bias incidents by making the*

*people directly involved in that incident apologize, when in reality they're failing to realize that it could be anyone on this campus. There are so many people who are pretty much perpetrators in bias incidents who don't have any action taken against them on a daily basis. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

This statement speaks to several important aspects of reporting: causing more trouble, ineffective University response, and lack of penalty against perpetrators. Any or all of these explanations could be responsible for students in the focus group choosing not to report the bias incidents they experienced, leaving this topic ripe for further investigation. Indeed, as this Native American female reports, sometimes students just don't want to "shake things up."

*I think people are very politically minded here, so they're afraid to bring up these things. They definitely wanna talk about it, but things get very—you know you don't wanna be too—...you don't wanna shake things up too much. [Native American Female Undergraduate]*

In a similar vein to hesitancy in reporting incidents, several students discussed their observations regarding hesitancy to call out and address bias directly. For example, in response to an incident where an individual at a fraternity house yelled racial insults and threw bottles at a group of students of color, both undergraduate and graduate students of color convened to organize a response, mainly in the form of a public protest. A graduate student of color in attendance shares:

*We're going along, and then as soon as we got—we started getting to real details of it, like what time exactly, a lot of the students—and these are mostly students of color. There's only one White person—no, that's not the truth. There's a couple White people in the room, but it was largely students of color. They started saying like, "Wait, hold on. I don't know if I'm comfortable going to the front of the frat house." The rest of us are like, "Well, why not? This is where it happened. Don't you think that this is where we should do this?" They're like, "Well, I'm scared cuz I don't know how my White friends are gonna feel. I don't know how my fraternity or Greek friends are gonna feel about this." That told me something. That was already my fourth or fifth year here. That told me something about the environment that exists at Cornell, and the degree to which students, even when they see something that's really blatant, feel comfortable enough to speak out and say—to call racism and misogyny, and anything that's just wrong, to call it out. [Latino Graduate Student]*

This student felt that other students were hesitant to call out racism because they feared the negative repercussions they would face from their White and/or Greek friends. Indeed, an incident against one sort of student does not represent an incident against all students. There is fear around

challenging the dominant culture. There were several other instances where graduate students of color observed their undergraduate students refrain from calling out bias and racism.

*One of the things that I've noticed, especially just—literally Friday I had discussion section, and people making comparisons between touching a pregnant woman's belly and touching Black people's hair. It's like, "Well, it's the same." It's like, well, it's not the same...Not really understanding why, right? It's not that the other students don't know that that's [!x#!] up, right? It's that there is a climate in the classroom that makes them feel comfortable saying, "Hey, that's wrong. I don't agree with that." Because what happens when they do that? Well, you get written off whenever you call out things that are happening. It happens all the time. It happens inside the classroom and outside the classroom. [Latino Graduate Student]*

*We often talk about—it's a neuroscience class, and we talk about the biology of the brain and drugs and how they affect that. One of the first questions we always give the students is a question about use of Adderall and Ritalin as a cognitive enhancer. What are the implications of access to those drugs, and how that will affect students' abilities to do well on exams and in school? One student commented that, "Oh well, generally people from low socio-economic backgrounds aren't interested in education, so it wouldn't really be an issue, cuz they wouldn't want to go to school anyway. Having access to the drugs isn't an issue." I mean obviously there's a problem with the statement, but the bigger problem is that nobody else thought there was an issue with that statement. Everyone else just sat there nodding their heads like, "Oh yeah, okay, that makes sense." The few people who were had this look of, "What?" they were taken aback by it, but didn't say anything. [African American Female Graduate]*

This observation on the part of graduate students speaks once again to the privileging of certain viewpoints over others. These accounts point to a campus climate that breeds quiet resignation to experiencing overt bias and offensive statements, and where those who speak up face negative repercussions. From students' viewpoints, if they want something to be done in cases like these, they have to take it upon themselves.

### **Is the Onus On Students for Campus Change?**

As students dealing with a rigorous course load, involvement in extracurricular activities, possible work in part-time jobs, and the common pressures and stressors of a typical college lifestyle, the perception that the task of developing an inclusive campus falls on them can be overwhelming. We learned that many students believe that if any change in Cornell's campus climate is to occur, it will

have to be initiated by them. This lack of trust in Cornell to take on this responsibility not only leads to frustration, but also disappointment in the University. The repercussions of student-led action are very real—and in some cases potentially harmful—especially for those who find themselves in sensitive situations where their safety could be threatened. A student from the LGBTQ community explains:

*I feel like as a leader in the queer community I have this obligation to be out constantly, but at some points it's just not safe. It's just not okay to be out. What I hate about this university and the administrators and the board of trustees, even, who I've had some exchanges with, is that every time I tell them such a thing, the onus is put on the student. It's like you have to educate these people in every situation, and my point is that some of these situations are literally unsafe. I could get killed if I did this. People don't understand that that is a threat and that that could happen. I feel very unsafe when I do come out. [International Queer Female Undergraduate]*

Two students share their frustration with Cornell's lack of initiative on diversity-related change. One states "How can you do this when you place all the obligation on student organizations...instead of having [faculty and staff] trained in order to provide support..." Another says:

*In terms of students putting on these events or being educators themselves, it's like we're students first and for some of us to have that burden that others don't of educating others, is a problem. It should be the university that takes more of an initiative to be that educator. But because of an infrastructure and—you can only do so much, I understand how it isn't so much of an issue—priority I guess. [Latino Undergraduate]*

The frustration students feel about the lack of initiative on Cornell's part is further fueled by Cornell's hesitancy to come to their defense when they are attacked. Of course, the University does have a history of issuing statements that acknowledge certain incidents on campus, but students perceive that to not be enough. One African American female undergraduate explains:

*There have been plenty of attacks on our various program houses. Even though it's not only culture-based, there are various program houses that people who are interested in music can have. For example, Ujamaa, which is a program house that has a lot of information on African culture, African American, Caribbean, when things like that get attacked, it's always the students on defense. It's not Cornell on defense. This is Cornell's housing. Cornell pays for this. They pay for the electricity; they pay for the water; they pay for the rooms, but the students have to defend. If*

*Cornell can defend things like that instead of making students defend for various different instances, I feel like that would be—that's a statement. That's Cornell talking about race, but Cornell's very neutral. I don't know if it's—I mean there are plenty of reasons, I suppose, why you don't wanna talk about controversial things, but I think just by saying something about race and ethnicity and gender and things like that, that people have in their mind.*

Students of color were dissatisfied with the level of engagement Cornell administration had with sensitive situations, leaving it to them to do something about the issue—whether by protesting, organizing, or issuing statements via the student newspaper. Students by and large felt that the responsibility for change and proactiveness fell consistently on their shoulders. Interestingly, while students of color saw this inaction as negative and harming, Cornell administration perceived the situation to be demonstrative of the tenacity, ingenuity, and passion students of color possess. However, at least for some of the administrators interviewed, there is recognition that students should not feel burdened to be the main active agents in improving the campus climate at Cornell. A staff/administrator adds:

*They [students] sort of seize their own power to do something. I mean that's how, for instance, SWAG came about, when the students organized and were able to get enough people to vote online so that they were able to get a Pepsi Co. grant that initiated SWAG two summers ago. I mean Cornell students are very much self-starters. Students will also say, "I should not be the one to carry this burden." We've heard that historically, for sure from the LGBT community at a point in which the social climate was not what it is today. We've heard it certainly from students of color as well, that it should not be incumbent upon them to educate the institution.*

Ultimately, the administration does recognize that students cannot take on all of these challenges themselves, but also points out that the administration can't do it all either, instead calling for collaboration. As President Skorton states:

*I think that collaboration is the way to do it. I think it's unrealistic to think that the students can do it all. That's crazy. It's also unrealistic and unfair to think that the 'administration' is going to do it all. Because at the end of the day, people make choices.*

### **Student Negotiation-Adaptation Strategies**

Beyond actively creating change on behalf of diverse communities, students outside of the normative culture often described needing to utilize distinct negotiation and adaptation strategies

to enable them to survive and thrive at Cornell. These students altered their psychology and behaviors because of the challenges they encountered based on their racial, gender, or sexual orientation identities. Most often, it was African American, female, and LGBTQ students who described having to develop these strategies.

**African American Strategies.** African American students by far described the most prevalent use of adaptation and negotiation strategies, most often to increase their sense of belonging, to make their White peers more comfortable, or to portray themselves as counter to Black stereotypes. Even starting early on in their campus experience, they strategically sought out both individuals and connections to help them navigate campus culture.

*I found that although yes, it may be difficult to at first find who to talk to and how to navigate, the resources are there but you have to kind of push through in trying to find the right people, the right connections. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

For many African American students, these connections came in the form of an African American professor or staff member.

*I personally go to one of my advisors—not advisor, my mentors in the school. She works in the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives. She doesn't teach any class. She's just an administrator. She's always been receptive towards me, so I go to her and I talk to her and she's always there. I have her phone number. I can call her or text her whenever I need anything. She's always been able to support me. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

More often, African American students described what seems to be a need for constant vigilance and pointed intention in proving their intellectual worth and divergence from stereotypes of Black people in the minds of their White peers.

*It's unfortunate to say it, but I think in many cases your behavior does shift a little bit where you make an effort to be a little bit more articulate, being mindful of the fact that many students on this campus don't even feel you belong here. There's that effort to demonstrate that you are competent and you do deserve to be here; you are just as smart as everyone else. It has a big impact on your behavior. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

This student's statement is very telling about the experience of what it is like to be a Black person at Cornell. She fully recognizes that she is outside of the normative culture and that majority members don't think that she belongs. She feels that in order to prove that she deserves to attend Cornell she

has to demonstrate her capabilities and play a part even down to being mindful of the ways she speaks. In fact, altering speech to fit within the normative culture was a critical adaptation strategy shared by other African American students as well.

*There's always that constant effort to make the White people around you feel comfortable and not be seen as the angry Black woman or the angry Black man or the person who has an attitude problem. There's always that mindfulness of stereotype. I personally know that if I speak in the settings where I'm the only Black person in the same way that I speak around friends when a TV show is on, people probably will think, again, I don't belong here. I think in a lot of sense it very much goes back to belongingness on this campus. It's just something to be mindful of.*  
[African American Female Undergraduate]

Students want to feel that they belong, and they want their majority peers to recognize they belong and their talent as well. Other African American students shared their need to perform academically and the burden of having to prove their worth time and again. Many students voiced that they didn't just carry this burden for themselves but for all members of the Black community on campus.

*When I'm in a group project academically, there is always the pressure to go above and beyond. I think that comes from the fact that with many Black students on this campus there's the whole idea that in everything you do you are not only representing yourself; you're representing your entire race. If you don't do what you're supposed to do in your group project there's the worry constantly or subconsciously that your group partners are going to feel like, "Oh. She didn't do everything that she was supposed to do. That means all Black people don't do everything they're supposed to do. I'm never working with another Black person again." It's unfortunate that we have to carry that with us, but I think it just very much is a reality of a lot of the experiences of Black students academically and socially and in general on this campus.* [African American Female Undergraduate]

Despite the fact that they are willing to alter their speech or behaviors to fit within the cultural norms of Cornell, a few African American students emphasized that they do not want to assimilate.

*I think just by virtue of being a Black person, you always do have that burden of acting different around people in different situations just so that you're kind of aware of where you are, who you are, how people can perceive you and it's just that burden that you just are dealt with based off of different things that have happened in history and by virtue of just having a different experience as a Black person, by having different colloquialisms, different dialects, different ways of talking. People*

*don't really see diversity, and being a human being and having a different culture, it's always that superiority, inferiority and in order to kinda fit in and get where you need to go you kinda have to accommodate without assimilating. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

This student addresses not only linguistic code-switching, but also the power dynamics between majority and non-majority students on campus and between the normative culture and diverse cultures. These power dynamics were especially challenging because Black students were often the only Black people present in a given situation and when they pointed this out to their White peers, they encountered negative responses.

*About that awareness, I feel like—well, what I've come across in—not every interaction that I've had with people who weren't of African-American descent—but a lot of the times it's almost as if the White students...They feel uncomfortable when it's made known that, "Oh, but did you notice that I'm the only Black one in this class?" Then they're like, "Oh, does that make you feel some type of way? Should I respond to that?" [...] It's almost when you bring it to people's attention it makes them feel more uncomfortable. In my experience, as long as you don't bring up the fact that I'm Black here, then everyone's havin' a great time and we all get along. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

For African American students, these experiences are nothing new, particularly "being the only one." Time and again in the focus groups they made reference to their sole presence in classrooms across campus, something they had gotten used to over time from earlier educational experiences.

*I think what helped me was when I was in middle school, high school, even though the part of Los Angeles that I came from had quite a substantial amount of diversity in that there were many people from ethnic backgrounds. I often found myself in classes where I was by myself, and I think that because in college that is often the case, having that kind of experience before coming here did prepare me for situations where I would be the only one in a class maybe of like 50 or the only one in the lecture discussion section, so it wasn't so hard to adjust in terms of that aspect. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

These adaptation-negotiation efforts centered around having to find support, justify their presence at Cornell, prove their worth, and engage in both code switching and identity shifting while also making their White friends comfortable. It burdens students to straddle cultures and difference in order to manage their social and academic lives.

**Female Strategies.** Women of all races discussed the ways in which increasing concerns about safety on campus and escalating incidents of sexual assaults forced them to alter their behaviors and thinking. Many female students expressed that since coming to Cornell they had become more hyper-aware and cautious. They found themselves feeling more vulnerable and more dependent on men for security, especially when walking around campus.

*I was gonna say I think being female means being a bit more vulnerable, especially like—it seems like you guys are all really concerned about walking home. I definitely share that concern. I feel like it's that constant looking for "Okay, who's gonna walk me home from this?" Or, "Who can I ask to." I'm learning, just like you said, to adapt by finding people who are gonna help take care of you, but also that notion of, "Should I need to be taken care of?" [Mixed Race Female Undergraduate]*

Although they adapted to the dangers of sexual misconduct on campus in these ways, they did not appreciate having to make these adaptations.

Additionally, women in some male-dominated majors felt that they had to prove that they were on equal intellectual footing with their male peers and that they deserve to be at Cornell.

*I think, for me it's—maybe it's because I'm in business, but it's always having to prove that you are on the same level, if not better than the majority of the people in my classes cuz they're mostly male or men and always trying to stand out in info sessions for banks and stuff because you're probably like one of the three girls there while everyone else is a guy. [International Female Undergraduate]*

It is clear that most of the adaptation strategies described thus far are in response to the normative culture, where students then feel that they have to prove that they belong. Alternatively, however, LGBTQ students described adaptation strategies aimed not at fitting in, but at sheer survival and safety.

**LGBTQ Strategies.** LGBTQ students adapted by not always being open about their sexuality, not traveling by themselves at night, and only situating themselves in queer-friendly spaces and avoiding potentially hostile spaces altogether.

*It's spaces such as these, or that they just create such a heteronormative—it's this gender kind of idea of what a person should be, where the football jocks in the classroom are the only ones who are allowed to talk and everyone else is kind of suppressed. I've just never felt the ability to be out in my own space, and in terms of my day-to-day activities. [Queer Female Asian International Undergraduate]*

*Academically I tend to focus—I tend to situate myself only in safe queer spaces, and that's why I decided to major in women and gender studies because it's one of the only few academic spaces I feel comfortable in. [Queer Mixed Ethnicity Undergraduate]*

*As a coping mechanism, I never walk around at night, if I do I walk in groups or I carry around, illegally, pepper spray or my Taser gun. Just little things like that, or even when I am on campus I don't dress a certain way or I don't look as gay as I could want to be, which is really rather unfortunate. [Queer Female Asian International Undergraduate]*

LGBTQ students, more than any other group, faced not only hostile situations but an environment where they felt their safety could be threatened. Additionally, students sought out places and spaces where they could fully be themselves and feel that they belonged.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging is an individual's psychological sense of feeling integrated in a community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). On a group level, it is considered social cohesion. While there is no single experience that promotes social cohesion on campus, individuals from different social identity groups develop a strong sense of belonging. We focus on several communities where sense of belonging was a common theme of the discussion. There were some distinct findings regarding sense of belonging for certain groups that revealed very strong group cohesion, specifically among Latina/o, LGBTQ, Native American, and International graduate students.

**Latina/o Students.** There was a considerable range of experiences in terms of how Latina/os found a sense of belonging on campus. Some felt more accepted by the majority student culture and clubs, some in their niches in other cross-racial communities, and some within the Latina/o programs and organizations, representing differences in background and also preferences on campus. This may also have to do with features that allow some to be accepted because some look like the majority on campus. One student commented on the topic of treatment on campus:

*The way I'm treated fluctuates depending on how I'm dressed. Again, I don't mean to speak for all the guys in the room, but if I have on a collared shirt or button down shirt, people will hold the door for me, or people will actually say, excuse me. Whereas if I'm dressed like this, with a t-shirt and a hoodie, people are hesitant to sit near me or don't really hold the door. Don't really say, excuse me." [Latino Male Undergraduate]*

Regarding this comment, students who had lighter skin color said they never had that experience. These students went on to share that they had never been discriminated against and only sometimes heard racialized jokes. One Latino undergraduate said, “I’ve always been part of a majority, coming here being the minority. I still felt really welcome and really comfortable. I’m happy and I’ve never been discriminated against.” Some students did not perceive marginalization and found acceptance in the White Greek and multicultural Greek communities.

For some, the sense of acceptance came from finding a home in programs that represented identity-based education, such as the Latina/o Studies Program. One Latina undergraduate shares:

*I think what’s made me feel like I belong here is structures, like the Latina/o Studies Program or the LLC that doesn’t taboo cultural differences and has really helped me be informed, be able to feel that I do belong here. Just because I’m a minority, doesn’t mean that I can’t achieve as much as somebody else.*

There were others who felt that the most important factor in making them feel a sense of belonging was finding a space where they were emotionally supported. For some of these students, their families and on-campus friends were their anchors. Finally, there were a few who had yet to feel like they fully belonged, and vacillated:

*I could probably answer that question and go back and forth for days, but I mean, coming from my perspective, which may not be representative of most Latino males or most males, whatever, from my perspective, I think it is a matter of—I don’t want to say privilege. But I’m happy for [other Latinos] that don’t experience those issues of racism as Latino males, or the women in the room too. Also if it isn’t that much of an issue, well then that’s good because the times that I felt it, whether it be a bad look or someone made some joke about Latinos or whatever, or I feel awkward being in a space. I’m looked at as the angry Latino. It does take a toll on you and it does wind up producing some form of internalized racism. [...] In an academic sense, yes I do feel I belong. But I still have my moments where I’m, like, ugh, I definitely feel like, from a resource base and how resources impact the way you see the world, no. Not that I don’t belong here, but there’s a big mismatch because I don’t have that [resource]. I never did. [Gay Latino Undergraduate]*

The student points out another criteria for belonging in various groups: resources. Latinas/os, just like most non-majority student groups, will continue to face challenges at a place where their views and experiences are not the norm, but with the appropriate efforts and resources their experiences can be validated.

**LGBTQ Students.** Like many Cornell students, LGBTQ students felt a sense of belonging in their small community. For these students, the LGBTQ center and their LGBTQ friends were some of the most valuable communities.

*I only feel really comfortable expressing myself in defined queer spaces on campus such as Haven, the LGBTQ Student Union, or the Feminist, Gender, & Sexuality department and their courses, because I feel like they are very accepting and open to my—the queer community, and they understand how we feel marginalized. [Queer Mixed Ethnicity Undergraduate]*

*As a student in the College of Arts and Sciences, a very liberal arts institution part of Cornell, solely FGSS department is one of the only places I feel safe expressing my identity. [Queer Mixed Ethnicity Undergraduate]*

Despite finding these places of belonging, LGBTQ students felt “invisibilized,” marginalized, and threatened in most other campus spaces, especially on North Campus. Thus they specifically spent most of their time in Haven, the LGBTQ Resource Center, the Arts Quad, and the FGSS department, while also finding tiny safe havens with a few supportive individuals from the Carol Tatkon Center, counseling services, and University administration. Some students even had to go as far as to “avoid the straight world altogether,” as detailed in the bias incidents section of this report.

**Native American Students.** Native American students felt the greatest sense of belonging within their smaller Native community. But more than any other group, Native American students emphasized the importance of the sense of belonging that came from their specific program (AIP), their Native American peers, and their program house, Akwe:kon. The community, familial bonding, and sense of pride that stemmed from these sources were invaluable to success in students’ minds.

*AIP is great. Having AIP is a great support system, even though they’re from—they may be from different tribal affiliations—the sense of community that they help build...It helps, and it helps you realize that you’re not the only one having issues. [Native American/White Female Undergraduate]*

*AIP is one of the more supportive diversity programs on campus. I don’t think people outside the program realize this is half the reason I haven’t transferred out or dropped out of Cornell yet because I do have this support. [Native American/White Female Undergraduate]*

*Akwe:kon makes me feel like I belong here. Akwe:kon was founded by Ron LaFrance, who is a person from my reservation. That connection to my [heritage]—makes me*

*proud to be here. One of the first Native Americans to graduate from Cornell was Solomon Cook,—just acknowledging that I come from a history like that—it just makes me proud that I can do this. I can get through this place, as hard as it is and as difficult as my time has been here. I can do it. [Native American Male Undergraduate]*

Native students across the board highly praised the positive impact that AIP and Akwe:kon had on their campus experience. These two resources help improve the student experience, as they seem to even have saved many students from dropping out of Cornell altogether.

**International Students.** International students were exceptions to the limited sense of belonging shared by other students interviewed. They felt a strong connection to the University and great camaraderie with their fellow students. They attributed their connection to their peers and to the values espoused by the Cornell administration and the shared burdens of both the weather and challenging work respectively.

*I think the biggest sense of belonging I feel for a lot of us is that we are fellow sufferers of the same weather. We go through the same experience together, and you have to endure the cold months, four or five months. That sense of fellow suffering creates a sense of belonging to Cornell and to the community. Not just about the weather. Let's say we have a deadline in front of us in the department or in our research group. We are all working towards it maybe 18 hours a day to get some results before the deadline. Then you get a sense of community which does not come from anything else if you are going through the same problems together as part of the community. Backgrounds don't matter. If it's work, it needs to be done. There are no two ways about it. If you are working together, whether towards a submission for a term paper for a course or to submit a paper for a conference, if you're working together with people, then that creates a sense of community and belonging that I don't think anything else does with this. [Male South Asian International Graduate]*

*When you're put in hardship, I think that we get closer and can relate to each other much better. Over here I have realized that Cornell is a tough school in the sense that we have a lot of deadlines, a lot of homework, and a lot of pressure to do well. Everybody goes through that. You can instantly connect with someone based on that, that, "Oh my God, we have so many assignments. Oh my God, how could they do this to us?" Yes, people do bond over happy things, but then I think misery is a very good thing. Given the weather and the situation here, it's a very good bonding factor, I guess. [Female South Asian International Graduate]*

*We were watching a video clip at some event—it was yesterday—where even President Skorton said, “If you don’t know who to talk to, send me an email.” Everybody’s open for your problems, your suggestions. Everybody wants you to feel welcome and feel a part of it. I think that’s a really nice thing that makes you feel part of a community. [Female European International Graduate]*

It is clear that most international students in the focus groups found the campus to be a welcoming, positive environment. Central to this was a shared sense of goals (meeting a deadline in a research group) or common misery (e.g., weather or overload on coursework). They appreciated the openness of the administration and efforts on behalf of their US-born peers to include them. Although they felt a strong sense of belonging with peers from their home countries, most of them also felt at home on campus and a strong sense of campus pride.

### **Program Housing**

Aside from the unique sense of belonging experienced by LGBTQ, Latina/o, Native American, and International students, another important source of belonging for many students stemmed from living in culturally-centered program houses described as supportive, welcoming places to live. Indeed, students who lived in special interest housing programs loved living in them and felt comfortable and secure in the sense of community they developed.

*I've always lived at the Latino Living Center, which is a program house oriented around Latino culture. It isn't Latino-exclusive. That's helped me develop a sense of comfort. I don't feel threatened. Even freshman year, I never felt threatened being there. I'm sure some people are like, "Oh, he's gay," but that wasn't much of a thing for me. [Gay Latino Undergraduate]*

Many students of color also expressed frustration that program housing centered around culture was criticized for being self-segregating because it becomes “a place of color” within a predominately White space, while fraternities and sororities are “mostly White people living together” and no one seems to question it.

*When you have events like at the Latino Living Center for example, it's always students of color that are there. The program houses, which can be organized around a culture or a special interest like music or—what else is there? There are cultural ones that are—the ecology house, an interest house. There are always—the cultural ones, they're stigmatized. It's like these “self-segregating” problematic things. But they're open to new people coming in and learning, but that almost*

*never happens. Part of it is how the space becomes a place of color, it's a dominant space type thing. Even that in itself is a problem. [Latino Undergraduate]*

*I can't even tell you the number of times I've had to tell people that being in a program house is not self-segregation, because if you look at Greek houses, why is it mostly White people living together? What's the difference between that and a program house? I just feel like at Cornell we need to sort of clarify that diversity is not just minorities coming together; it's everyone of different backgrounds coming together. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*When program houses are being attacked, it's the Black students' issue to address the fact that—any student can live in a program house. It's not a means by which Black students self-segregate, and that follows through to many situations in general. Of course that's very pessimistic, but I think that that's very much the reality of the situation. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

The fact that culturally centered program housing is so often the subject of debate is frustrating for these non-majority students, as these program houses offer primarily members the option of living in a more familiar atmosphere among others seeking a similar shared environment and experience. This debate over housing is a manifestation of the cultural tension within the campus environment, as culturally-centered housing is an expression of identity within a culture where individuals are expected to assimilate. It is clear that ethnic program housing stands in dynamic opposition to Greek life, a domain in which the University condones “homogeneity, exclusion, and selection” both socially and within housing as part of the norm. Thus these “safe spaces,” these program houses open to all who wish to explore their identity, are counter to this norm.

It follows that students living in program houses felt that their choice of residence and pride in their identity makes people uncomfortable and limits their interactions.

*I think last year one of the difficulties I had was—'cause I lived in Ujamaa Residential College. I was really excited about it and proud of that because I think Ujamaa's a great space. I think all the program houses are great spaces. I just remember the looks I would get when I would tell people that that's where I live. It just seemed like the—all the openness they had to talk to me sort of closed immediately. I think, for some reason, I think some of you are kind of hinting at this, but it's like if you're proud of a particular part of your identity, it's off putting to people. I'm proud to be African American, I'm proud to be a woman. If you scream it from the mountaintops, people are gonna be uncomfortable because they don't understand how to deal with*

*that. I think that is what creates the divide. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

When this student states “all the openness they had to talk to me sort of closed immediately” and then goes on to describe the discomfort she observed in her fellow students, she emphasizes this cultural tension, the way in which this cultural affinity runs so very counter to the dominant norm.

Several students also shared their experiences of being a racial minority within the context of culturally-centered program housing. These students learned a great deal from living in these communities and felt connected to their housemates despite being pushed out of their comfort zones. They all noted the disbelief and discomfort others faced when they revealed their living situations.

*I had a great experience actually [in Ujamaa]. I was really close to my RA and my RHD. It was a really quiet place to study. My roommates were chill. I connected so much. I'm incredibly grateful for the happenstance that I got out of my comfort zone just cuz I was placed happenstance in Ujamaa. It's almost theatrical the way people respond. It's almost as if they don't know what to make of it, an Asian person living in a primarily African and Caribbean community house. Another thing is I think people tend to judge things before they actually step inside Ujamaa. There's this misconception that Ujamaa is isolated. It's only for people who are Black and et cetera. Actually all the program has is admitted freshmen, at least 80 people and people who are not even interested in the program houses. If you really, really feel uncomfortable there are ways where you can leave. Most of the time that doesn't happen. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*I live in the Latino Living Center. Whenever I tell people that, they're like, "Did you choose it?" I didn't. I got placed there. I think it's been the most amazing accident that's ever happened because I've never hung out with so many different Latinas before. I've never really branched out into the Latino community. I regret that. Now that I'm living there, because I realize that the things we need to do for their community in order to expand our Asian awareness as well. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

One student in particular described living in three program houses, citing one of her college goals to be around different people. She found each program house she lived in to be welcoming and inviting. Her experience shows that the opportunities to engage across difference are there, and various individuals and groups are ready and willing to accept others and embrace difference.

*I feel like this place gives a lot of opportunities to experience diversity in their program houses. I've lived in three so far. I lived in a multicultural living learning unit when I was a freshman. Being around different people was my goal when I came to college and I've definitely been able to do that. Last year I lived in Akwe:kon which is the house that celebrates Native American heritage and culture. There are a lot of different student groups and activities and they're always very welcome. You don't have to be a part of that ethnic group or that culture. I mean they're always very welcoming. They want you to come. They want you to learn about them. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

These positive feelings of students who lived in culturally-themed housing was echoed by program directors, who expressed that among other positive attributes, program housing options provide better training for RAs to discuss diversity issues, and could serve as models for diversity-related dialogue.

*In those houses, I think naturally people are trained more, especially the residence hall directors. The RAs naturally gravitate towards those conversations more. Really the ideal is that the conversations pertain to everyone and they should be happening everywhere, not just in the themed houses.*

Although students did not speak a great deal about program housing, it is abundantly clear that they serve as places of comfort and community for their residents, providing a sense of belonging that racial minority and queer students often cannot find elsewhere on campus. These houses become families for students. One drawback seems to be some majority student criticism and resentment of these houses as exclusionary and places of segregation, although it is clear from student accounts that these houses are not only open to other students, but welcome and embrace them.

### **Avenues for Change**

Students who recognized the lack of diversity-centered conversations and resultant action found varied avenues and outlets to challenge and change the normative campus culture. In their view, this was best accomplished through independent action, or students teaming up with fellow students without involving the institution. Students in the focus groups described participating in quick-response organizing, co-programming among racially diverse organizations, having student-moderated dialogue, utilizing social media to bring attention to inequalities, and sharing their voices on student panels for newer students.

For the few students who described engaging in collective action, they found it to be a valuable tactic in gathering a critical mass of students and making themselves heard. They sent out emails and quickly gathered fellow students, enabling them to react swiftly to incidents.

*We just sent out an email and convened in a room. There were a lot of students. There were a lot of undergraduate students, and students from very different organizations, several graduate students with myself. One of the things that I noticed was we're planning, we're saying okay, what are we gonna do? We're gonna have a critical witnessing right in front of the frat house where this happened. We're gonna say that this is wrong, this shouldn't happen, right? [Latino Graduate]*

Like the use of email described above, the impact of technology was certainly evident in the ways other students described their ability to get information out to one another quickly and to share their thinking about necessary change and action with the larger Cornell community.

*My friend and I have started this—we literally just started a few days ago so there aren't many photos on it, but this like hashtag on Instagram, Where are the women? All—almost all the portraits are of Cornell men. One of them is just like five portraits; it's like icons of the industry. It's in Statler Hotel and it's all men. We're just posting all these photos of these portraits of men on Cornell and like, "Where are the women?" I mean that's—I feel like it's kind of something that the University could definitely change—we target that they're not really doing that good a job of it. It's like all the White men are being idolized as icons of the industry and there are definitely women that have done some awesome things. [White Female Undergraduate]*

Beyond these quick response methods for creating change, several students also described participating in planned programming where they were able to sit down and engage in discussion across difference.

*We did programs that—for example, we're doing a diversity in the workplace program. Things like that, where students are able to have these dialogues with each other without administrators and professors and things like that in the room. I think it's a really key way of trying to get that conversation going, because it doesn't seem forced. It's more so real to you and you don't really need a moderator. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*I was on the recent panel at a freshman dorm within the past two weeks. It was shocking because it was a floor of at least 50 freshmen, and I would say over half of*

*them didn't even know what LGBT stood for. I was shocked because at a place that tends to claim to relish diversity, how do you not explain what diversity is? [Queer Mixed Ethnicity Undergraduate]*

Through the means described above, students were able to create change on their own behalf and address areas that were problematic for them. Many of these avenues of change have not yet been widely adopted, but the promising practices described in the next section have already become more institutionalized in promoting engagement across groups, challenging the normative culture on campus, and improving student experience.

### **Institutional Promising Practices**

Several students discussed institutionally-based efforts and spaces they felt furthered engagement with diversity. In reviewing all the focus groups, we coded these institutional initiatives that naturally came up in the conversations without prompting. These were efforts that sent positive messages about diversity or promoted inter-group interactions, challenging and expanding the normative culture. Obviously the program houses are sites that promote these sorts of activities, as described previously.

**Tapestry.** When asked what diversity-related experiences they had at Cornell, most students cited only Tapestry, saying that the performance promoted awareness of important diversity related issues that they may not have considered before. One Asian American female undergraduate said:

*In freshman year, every Cornell alum is required to attend an event called "Tapestry" in order to graduate. It's a one-hour-thirty-minute thing where student actors, they act out these issues. You would have someone representing LBGTQ or Asian Americans. In regards to Asian Americans, these actors would act out how they feel about being a model minority and what impact that has on them in the campus. It really raises awareness. When I went there, I was just astounded. I never thought that much about these things when people brought it up in front of me. I think that it was a great event. Since everyone's required to do it, it sort of forces exposure on your first experience here at Cornell. It's the first week during orientation. Everyone's required to go there. I thought it really helped open the door.*

Despite their appreciation of the overall message of the Tapestry presentation, students had some suggestions for improvement. They felt the incidents portrayed in the performance were too exaggerated and obvious and missed depicting some of the more nuanced microaggressions that more commonly occur on campus. Two students share their critiques below.

*I went to Tapestry and actually thought—I thought it was an astounding performance. Everyone’s supportive discussion was great. The facilitation of discussion was geared towards the right track. However, my critique of the Tapestry was that it was way too exaggerated. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*A lot of the play’s performances were very exaggerated. They weren’t addressing the microaggressions that people face every day. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

The second main concern regarding Tapestry was that it is a one-time event. Students felt their peers didn’t take it seriously because it was only offered as part of orientation and there was no follow-up.

*I have a couple of things to say. The first thing is about Tapestry. I think it was a good initiative, but as some people have said some people do take it as a joke to go to. That happens to a lot of orientation events, but a lot more so with Tapestry because of the exaggeration of those situations. There’s not much follow-up to that kind of work besides the orientation event. [Asian American Male Undergraduate]*

Despite these critiques, most students truly appreciated Tapestry, but just didn’t feel it was enough.

**Intergroup Dialogue Project.** Beyond Tapestry, a few students also praised the work done through both the Intergroup Dialogue Project and other coursework on equality, describing the ways in which they provide awareness about diversity.

*I’m an undergraduate facilitator for a course called The Intergroup Dialogue Project which is taught in this room. We talk about dialogue. We do activities like this where we do fishbowls. I think that’s a way that we can make social change on campus. The purpose of the class is to have conversations like that but on a particular topic so like SES, or gender, or race, or religion. You get to hear about the experiences of the other group. Think, if students were trained in dialogue skills and knew how to have conversations like we’re having now [in the focus group] about their social identity and their experiences—like just having this conversation here has increased our awareness in a lot of ways. [Asian/White Female Undergraduate]*

*There’s actually a class that I took last—well, actually earlier this semester. It was called “Structural Barriers to Equality in Planning,” and on the surface it sounds like very, very, very broad, but it was actually also known as a multicultural conversation about race and racism. I would say that the classes that are necessary to enlighten*

*the student body, they definitely exist, but also going back to the need to make it so that—just like you need to learn how to speak a language if you're in the arts school, the Arts and Sciences—you should have an awareness, like a basic awareness of what diversity is. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

**Academic Diversity.** A couple of students felt that the academic diversity at Cornell is one of the University's strengths. They appreciated being able to explore a wide range of intellectual areas and work in research groups on a range of projects.

*I think you made the distinction where there's academic diversity, is actually really amazing at Cornell. That's an experience I have too because I work with the Hopi Tribe, work with the—health communication is my research interest. I have the opportunity to work in the Native American community and with a Native American professor and that's really outstanding for someone like me to have that opportunity. I think it works well in the academic space. I know other people who work on different projects, or just the professor that you're working with, or the grad students you'll meet in a research group, I think that's where diversity works really well. [White International Female Undergraduate]*

This sentiment was echoed by an administrator:

*I think that for me the real strength of Cornell is the diversity of the colleges. In terms of basic research and teaching around fundamental concepts in the College of Arts and Sciences and then applied learning, pre-professional training in the other colleges, we have already on campus a microcosm for what I think we ought to be seeking in U.S. higher education, which is a way of seeing the opportunities that arise when you take inquiry and creativity and merge them with practical applications that might make changes in the world or in society.*

**Diversity in Engineering Initiative.** Although few engineering students participated in these focus groups, one particular engineering student sang the praises of the engineering school. He felt that they do a good job creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, particularly attributing this to the diversity programs in engineering initiative.

*There's a diversity programs in engineering initiative, I know at least, because that's the field I'm in. They do a really wonderful job of different scholarships, different fellowships, bringing the engineering community together, at least having events, having lunches and things like that just to let people know—and engineering could be a very isolating field. You could spend a lot of time alone—[efforts are in] just*

*letting you know that there are other people like you around and creating a sense of community. At least in my field, it's quite good. There's also a lot of good things that are going on within the engineering school, doing—there's a lot of initiatives that are going on and a lot of programming and boards that are put up even in the chemical engineering, but building where the DPE—their headquarters are. There's a board for each group of their leaders, what they're doing, a student of the month. Everyone that's going into that building is seeing those things as well. I just think there are some good things. [Native American/White Male Graduate]*

Providing further support for the work done by engineering, one female graduate student described the extensive diversity training engineering TAs are required to complete. This is the most extensive diversity training described in any of the focus group interviews.

*In engineering every TA has to go through diversity training. We have to go through training, and then they talk about diversity. They do diversity training, and they also do—like if you see a student in trouble, how do you reach out and support them. [Female Indian International Graduate]*

**Identity-Specific Programs and Offices.** The programs and offices that serve specific non-majority groups on campus are well appreciated by students and described as sources of belonging and invaluable information. Below students describe the important roles that OADI, the LGBTQ Resource Center, and Latina/o Living Center play in their lives.

### **OADI**

*I come here every day. I see people like me who are who are going through the same things as me. They offer free printing. That's something really rare to come by. They offer funding to get help for standardized tests and things like that. This place is what makes a difference for me. [...] We're here right now and you can see it's very open. You see people and talk to people. The counselors here are wonderful. Come in and tell them about my problems or financial problems, academic problems, everything. Places like this really make a difference. [African American Low-Income Female Undergraduate]*

*It was really, really difficult for us to build the momentum and keep things going. It's really only been maybe in the past three years that I know the [Black Graduate Professional Student Association] has gotten any momentum. As of this year I know they've gotten a significant amount of funding from OADI [...] We've all been working and collaborating together. I think that's what helped support—or garnered*

*more support for each of our individual organizations. Because we were all operating on our own, struggling a little bit. [African American Male Graduate]*

### **LGBTQ Resource Center**

*In my own experience...I have attended a number of events that were, I guess, just for the general Cornell community, some of the LGBT organized—LGBT Resource Center organized events like the faQ mentoring. I must admit that I actually learned a lot from those events because things like discrimination against bisexuals, I'd never realized that because my identity is as a gay man, not as a bisexual. [Gay Latino Undergraduate]*

### **Latina/o Student Success Office**

*Academically I think it depends on the subject for me whether I feel like I belong. There's some classes I take and I will be one of the high achieving students. By then I know, okay, I belong here, but I also think that, while this is an Ivy League school and you're here for Ivy League education, it's also why don't you have that sense of personal belonging in order to have personal development. I think what's made me feel like I belong here is structures, like the Latino studies program or the LLC that doesn't taboo cultural differences and has really helped me be informed —be able to feel that I do belong here. Just because I'm a minority, doesn't mean that I can't achieve as much as somebody else. [Latina Undergraduate]*

### **Cornell Center for Intercultural Dialogue**

Students did not refer often to the Center in focus groups, though from our site visit observations it was a busy space with students coming and going. It is a hub for most of the major non-majority student organizations, and is used mostly as a resource center. Some students who attended the focus groups there had never been inside; while we were there a class on intergroup dialogue had just concluded and one student from it joined our “fishbowl” conversation between men/women and class differences. An African American male stated:

*I think what the intercultural dialogue center, 626, is doing is really good with their intercultural classes...where they talk about cultural issues to kinda prevent these bias incidents from happening. I just think it's a lack of education and people not taking it seriously enough. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

Though we conducted some focus groups and interviews at the Center, students rarely referred to other types of programming or services. Perhaps it is a symbolic space to them and they identify more with the specific groups who meet or have an office there than with the Center. In searching all focus group references to the Center, students complained about the structure within the Center, “Asians in the basement” and the LGBTQ office upstairs, leading one student to state “outing” happened if you went upstairs. Another student stated that the center was not centrally located but on North Campus.

Most Centers run with minimal staff and resources, making it difficult to sustain programs with only volunteer student support. One African American female mentioned a program that brought students together presumably after one of the incidents, indicating that more pervasive and sustained dialogue needed to occur: “They were having open dialogue in the Intercultural Center and things like that, but the way that they focused it so much on this one fraternity, I feel like kind of these bias incidents are all across the board, in all of the frats and sororities.” This highlights the fact that the Center cannot be the only diversity programming for the extracurricular education of all students.

The institutionally facilitated programs and practices successfully engage students in thinking about diversity, or supporting diverse students, with very little staff and resources. Overall, the institution can do much more in every unit to support diversity as a core value. Next, we describe activities of a similar nature, although these are facilitated by students themselves.

### **Student-Facilitated Promising Practices**

Students described and praised several student-led efforts such as co-programming among groups, ALANA, SACIDI, and NASAC, and student-led dialogue programs. It is critical to note that the information about ALANA, SACIDI and NASAC all came almost exclusively from the Native American focus group, as they seemed to be the most involved in promoting cross-cultural communication and possess the most working knowledge of these organizations.

**Co-Programming.** Efforts at co-programming were not described often, but one African American student shared the fact that “Black Students United on Campus teamed up with AKPsi, a business fraternity which is mostly people who are White.” Additionally, one Native American female shared that NASAC has worked on co-programming with Students for Justice in Palestine and Latina/o organizations.

#### ***ALANA, SACIDI and NASAC***

*We have ALANA, which is the intercultural dialogue programming board, SACIDI which is the new Student Assembly Committee on Diversity Initiative. Then some of*

*our own reaching out, like NASAC has— co-programmed with SJP, which is Students for Justice in Palestine...—we do some stuff with the Latino orgs, looking at some of the parallels between our cultures and the happenings to our different peoples. It helps, I think, build the idea of community between the diversity groups. [Native American/White Female Undergraduate]*

It appears that co-programming across difference is happening, at least occasionally. It is also important to recognize that the above statement is one of the few times that the existence of ALANA, SACIDI, and NASAC was acknowledged by students across all focus groups. So although these groups are dedicated to bridging difference and supporting diverse students, few students seem to know about them. To highlight the work of these organizations, one student describes the valuable work NASAC is doing below:

*I think that we have amazing opportunities to learn about diversity. There are just so many different organizations on this campus, and being a part of NASAC and different orgs that get to collaborate with the different organizations and umbrella organizations—I think that it's a powerful tool to connect people together, that we are finding parallels between racial profiling at the northern and southern border, and we're talking about it and connecting the Native community to the Hispanic community. Those types of things I think are powerful. [Native American Male Undergraduate]*

**Student-Led Dialogue.** A couple of students discussed student-led dialogues, where students were free to explore sensitive topics on their own terms without a Cornell employee present. Students found these authentic conversations to be valuable in promoting exchange.

*We did programs that—for example, we're doing a diversity in the workplace program. Things like that, where students are able to have these dialogues with each other without administrators and professors and things like that in the room. I think it's a really key way of trying to get that conversation going, because it doesn't seem forced. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

Administrators also see the value of such student-led dialogue, particularly as explained by one, who, when asked about the student-led efforts of Latinas at Cornell, says:

*We do have several, I think we have three right now, Latina sororities who are also helping raise awareness. I regularly see this, and I hear students talk about it on an individual basis anecdotally. I hear that voiced in group settings. We have, at the Latino Living Center, the Café Con Leche series. Student organizations regularly put*

*on programs. You see a number of the sororities will put things on, or various groups will put things on, and they will look at issues affecting women.*

**SWAG.** A few African American male undergraduates described the important role that SWAG plays in positively shaping their Cornell experience. They felt that SWAG provided them with the various sources of academic, social, and professional support needed for them to be successful at Cornell and beyond.

*It's a peer mentoring program called SWAG. It stands for Scholars Working Ambitiously to Graduate. It's a program that's focused on increasing graduation and retention rates for Black men. We do that through several different means: event planning, academic enhancement, community service, professional development. Like in our roles with SWAG, we are constantly thinking about not only the Black community, but how do we bridge the gap between our community and other communities. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

**Common Social Spaces.** Graduate students felt an increased sense of belonging to the Cornell community through graduate student social events, such as ones hosted by the Big Red Barn, and were cited as great places to meet students from other departments and build camaraderie. As one student shares:

*The Big Red Barn often hosts a lot of activities for graduate students. There's TGIF, there's Salsa Nights, there's productive write-ins. All sorts of things. You meet other graduate students from other departments. You talk to them, and it's nice. You meet a lot of other fellow grad students. I think it's a good way to get that sense of community, to know that other people share the same troubles and tribulations that you're going through. [Female South Asian International Graduate]*

These promising practices are only a small portion of what will help Cornell improve the campus climate for diversity. The game-changer on this front is reaching more students: those who are willing to have difficult discussions and push for change on behalf of themselves, their peers, and the campus community as a whole.

## Potential Allies

One of the most significant findings of these focus groups was learning that students wanted to do something about the issues at Cornell, but oftentimes—with White students in particular—they were unaware of where to go to do something about it. As one student explains:

*I mean, I've read the reports that you're talking about and stuff like that. For example I never knew this office existed, the physical space. I guess it's just a general ignorance of what sort of programs are here at Cornell for diversity. Also this feeling that I wanna help solve the problem but I don't feel like if I can just waltz into the diversity office and say, "I wanna help." Then that would just be counterproductive and stupid on my part that I have some sort of unique perspective that can help this out. There is this feeling that I don't know what to do, and I don't know how to be part of a solution. I'm just passively not discriminating against people which I do an okay job at. I just don't know how to be part of the solution other than just being another nice guy on the sidelines. [White Male Undergraduate]*

Students at Cornell face many challenges, some specific to the institution and others specific to students of this age group who are experiencing the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The way students in these focus groups engaged each other was encouraging, and at the end of each session, there was a feeling that these types of exercises were what would help move the community forward in engaging with diversity. Also, the common refrain was that students appreciated hearing how others were also struggling and that there was a sense of solidarity in this struggle. Thus it became abundantly clear that there are many Cornell students who are not only willing, but excited, to get involved in efforts to enhance and promote diversity. These students expressed that participating in the focus group dialogue empowered them to feel less alone and to feel connected to others who shared their circumstances, across gender and race.

*For me, it was really nice and comforting to know that even outside of the community that I put myself in on a daily basis that I can still connect with other people. The experience that I'm going through and the struggles that I'm going through aren't just limited to the Black community that I'm in, that there are other people that are going through it as well. I think that if we acknowledge that and that there are bigger things than just race and ethnicity that connect everybody together. We can come together as a community, a whole. [Female African American Undergraduate]*

Other students expressed similar enthusiasm about the dialogue that took place during the focus groups:

*Basically this is first time I've actually been at college. I was at community college. I lived at home. That was very interesting to hear that all the struggles are shared. It was, I'm not gonna say nice because it's never nice when you struggle but it's like, "Okay. I'm not actually suffering alone. There are other people going through this." It was really nice to think about how, despite all these differences, if we're willing to be a little bit more vulnerable to each other, eventually people will get hurt. It is a learning experience and we're all willing to forgive each other. I thought that it was excellent. [White Female Undergraduate]*

*I feel like it's not so hard, is it? I mean it requires some fear and you're a little bit hesitant at first but I think that all Cornellians and students and faculty have it within them to have these conversations. I think institutional hierarchy of power's totally gotta be addressed because I think that's one of the things that the administration doesn't do. Part of the reason why is because Cornell's such an old institution. It's got quite a history. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

Similarly, every administrator and staff member interviewed voiced a very similar commitment to engaging in diversity in a variety of ways: making their respective centers welcoming places, creating organizations committed to engaging in communication across groups, and seeking, valuing, and utilizing student input as it relates to diversity.

Three different staff/administrators share their perspectives:

*My hope for this space and one of the reasons why I'm so glad to be here is because we do now have a dedicated space that does have this wonderful open broad mission to celebrate students of Asian descent from all different backgrounds. The hope is that this can be a vibrant space with a lot of traffic. Where students know that they could come here and have a comfortable space that's always open to them, and also get referrals to go other places. They know at least a starting point, like a home base.*

*I have created several organizations here, one that's called the Leadership Roundtable, and I select leaders from—and I started to do this after I saw an incident or two or three happen where there's no communication across groups. This is a group of student leaders—and we use this space here as a rallying point or a drawing point.*

*We need to integrate this [diversity] conversation to keep it going forward and progressing, not keep having the same discussion over and over. We need students to tell us what does that look like. Helping them take their idea, their concept, their advice on authentic discussion, applying what we know around [diversity] effectively, as to educate effectively, as to engage as professionals, utilizing their input.*

As illustrated by these program administrators' and students' words, we spoke with individuals at Cornell willing to work on improving the campus climate for diversity, and many of them are already engaged in promoting positive change. Beyond these efforts, students had many other ideas for improving the climate for diversity. These came in the form of suggestions offered by individual study participants in focus groups and from web responses that we categorized in terms of their potential for informing action to address key areas: Authentic Forms of Engagement; Diversity Skills and Knowledge; Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment; Power Dynamics and Equity; and Bridging Diverse Communities. These suggestions are compiled in Appendix A, "Suggestions from Study Participants."

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## Appendix A – Suggestions from Study Participants

In each interview and student focus group, ideas for change naturally arose from the conversations about the climate at Cornell. In addition, students were asked to respond on the web to offer recommendations for improving the climate. Student Focus Group, Web Response, and Staff/Administrator suggestions are grouped according to five interrelated categories of findings based on the integrating themes/action recommendations in the Executive Summary. These include addressing 1) authentic forms of engagement, 2) diversity skills and knowledge, 3) bias, discrimination and harassment, 4) power dynamics and equity, and 5) bridging diverse communities. We think there were many good ideas, some of which may be easier to address, and others which are more difficult but important to institutional transformation. It should be noted that the areas are not mutually exclusive, and are interrelated in developing a more inclusive, diverse, and equitable environment at Cornell.

### Authentic Forms of Engagement

#### Student Focus Groups:

##### 1. Create a course for candid conversations

*They just know that, “Okay, yeah. There’s people who are black; there’s people who are gay; there’s people who are transgender,” but it doesn’t change anything for them. I feel like if there was some kind of initiative, similar to what our freshman writing course is, that if you had something—be it one credit—be it something where you allowed students to have more candid conversations about race and about what their relations are and to kind of examine their own biases, I think that would help more, because really at the end of the day, again, if you’re just gonna see that Tapestry play, you’re not gonna have any other interaction with race or anybody who’s different from you the rest of your four years of school, unless you work with someone in a project or someone becomes a part of your frat and that’s it. Your thinking and your state of mind won’t change and it will just perpetuate that. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

## **2. Require an Intercultural Dialogue course**

*That reminded me of the Intercultural Dialogue Project, the education course, and I honestly think that that should be mandatory for every student on campus because it allows people to be candid about different kinds of identities that people go through or self-identify as. I just think that that should be mandatory. I think Cornell is trying to diversify through initiatives on the institutional level. However, the students that this school attracts, I don't necessarily think they have the mindset or awareness to be open and try to be diverse within themselves, if that makes sense. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

*I'm an undergraduate facilitator for a course called The Intergroup Dialogue Project, which is taught in this room. We talk about dialogue. We do activities like this, where we do fishbowls. I think that's a way that we can make social change on campus. The purpose of the class is to have conversations like that but on a particular topic, so like SES or gender or race or religion. You get to hear about the experiences of the other group. It's from a curriculum from another school. I think if students were trained in dialogue skills and knew how to have conversations like we're having now about their social identity and their experiences—like just having this conversation here has increased our awareness in a lot of ways, just hearing the male side or hearing the lower versus upper SES side. I feel like awareness is the first step. Then creating clubs or programs or activities where we can have conversations like this. I think just awareness is a huge part of it. [Mixed Ethnicity Female Undergraduate]*

## **3. Create a Feminist, Gender and Sexuality Studies [FGSS] Requirement**

*I think there's a lack of education, even within the queer community, but and within the general community as well, and part of that invisibilization of queer identities and queer identities within the LGBTQ community happens because people aren't encouraged to take that FGSS class. It's not a requirement, and I don't see why it's so absurd to make that a requirement when so many other colleges have a women's studies requirement. Just like a simple intro course that could—like the amount of people that don't understand that gender and sex are different, and gender is a social construct, and that it's possible for a woman to have a shaved head and be muscular and also wear lipstick or something. That shouldn't be a bizarre thing. [Transgender Queer Undergraduate]*

#### **4. Urge administrators to attend diversity group meetings**

*I don't know how feasible this is, but I think it could be beneficial and kind of cool and build an understanding between us if some of the administration maybe at the end of the year, beginning of the semester, whatever, went to some of the different umbrella groups—one of their meetings at the beginning or end of the semester just—instead of doing this diversity focus group, actually interact—the administration, President Skorton or the vice president or whatever—actually getting to interact with these umbrella groups and the minorities on campus. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

#### **5. Follow up with students who enter through special programs**

*I feel like another issue is that Cornell—as far as diversity initiative—Cornell kind of focuses on just getting the numbers and then it's like once we get here you're just kind of left out in the sea, basically. I feel like there needs to be more follow-up done once we get in here with the programs that they have, the PSP program, which brings certain students together. They're from multiple different backgrounds normally and then they bring them in for a summer program and then let them get used to Cornell and used to the climate and whatnot and then once they get in here there's really no follow-up with that. They have all these things, but they don't follow through with anything to see if they actually work. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

#### **Web Responses:**

##### **1. Promote faculty involvement in campus diversity programming**

Students feel that faculty are absent from participating in diversity activities on campus and should be more involved. Their participation can also result in them being more sensitive to, and aware of, issues of diversity on campus.

#### **Staff & Administrator Interviews:**

##### **1. Promote conversations about diversity**

*I think we have to acknowledge that while, on the one hand, we have to challenge our White students, and colleagues, and others that while they aspire not to have this conversation, the issue's going to continue to demand conversation. It will not*

*go away. It will simply reappear when a single new incident occurs, when there is some big blowup such as, recently, this Cinco de Octubre incident with the athletics department. It will reemerge in that we need to all come to this as stakeholders.*

## **2. Promote ongoing conversations about diversity and Greek life**

*I think we need students to tell us the most authentic way we can do this program [conversations about diversity in frats and sororities]. I think that it has to be ongoing. It can't be just a one-time program. It has to be this ongoing discussion and conversation that takes into account that the students who are engaged in that conversation today in October in 2013 aren't gonna necessarily be the students that are engaged in April in 2014, and so on and so forth. We need students to tell us what does that look like. Helping them take their idea, their concept, their advice on authentic discussion, applying what we know around diversity effectively, as to educate effectively, as to engage as professionals, utilizing their input.*

## **3. Increase institutional commitment to bridging gaps relating to diversity**

*I think that there needs to be greater institutional commitment to programs focused on, say, African-American male retention, focused on other areas where gaps exist related to diversity. I mean we've got a lot of good things going on here. We've got things in place that many other colleges and universities do not. I'm trying to look at this through two lenses, but I think that, in order to achieve the objectives that are set, resources, human and financial, have to be put behind these things. It is imperative, and to the extent possible we, as administrators have opportunity to meet with students around these things, to communicate what is taking place.*

## **4. Diversify the University Diversity Council**

*Well, I would hope that from the responses that people are giving and especially the information from the students about their experiences drive changes to structure, particularly at the University Diversity Council level. The fact there's no one on that Council that works [directly] with the LGBT community is problematic.*

## **5. Create accountability for diversity from the top down**

*[We need ] accountability for our President, our Provost, our Deans, our VPs, all the way down to the department chairs, accountability for diversity. For bringing them in, for composition, but also engaging them, including them, looking at their*

*achievement. All of this should be tied to accountability. What that means, of course, is up to our senior leaders to decide what that means, but some ideas would be tying it to their reviews, to their raises, to all of the things that incentivize them to do well and to be seen as a top professional here, to tie that to some diversity metrics.*

## **6. Modify tenure and promotion**

*Number three [in a list of proposals] was to modify the tenure and promotion process for our faculty...just to really say if teaching is important, then mentoring should be important. If you are going to take the time to mentor a diverse student or a woman in your area, you ought to get credit for that. You should be rewarded for that in the tenure and promotion process and really starting to value and incentivize those behaviors that we want to see with faculty with things that matter to them. What are their leverage points? What are their carrots? Tenure and promotion.*

## **7. Create more opportunities for students to engage across difference**

*We have students who form genuine and real relationships across difference both organizationally and individually. I think we need more opportunities for that because we really do wanna prepare our students to be global leaders, and that's the language and the lingo that you'll hear, but how do you do that? Are we taking all of the steps required for our students to have the kind of cross-cultural skills that organizations want and that the world really requires at this point when you see our seismic shifting in demographics here and leadership? I think we need to be doing a better job of that.*

## **8. Re-think North Campus programming**

*As freshmen indicate on the freshman survey that they fill out before they get here—that particularly majority students have an interest in being in a diverse setting. I don't think we capitalize on that, that from the moment they finish Tapestry of Possibilities, we need to have more offerings and more opportunities in this first-year village up here (North Campus) while they are still forming friend groups, before the fraternity rush begins, because rush shifts the whole dynamic up here, and I spend a lot of time up here in this freshman village, while they are still, like I said, forming their friend groups and functioning with an open mind. I have campus partners that strongly agree with me. I'm just not sitting here sprouting these ideas. I've spoken to enough campus partners who agree that this is the place to start. We have the longest time with them, and they're all up here together.*

*They're all centralized. To me, that's a slam-dunk and a win-win right there, but we're not doing it.*

## **9. Create space for professionals to voice their views on diversity**

*I think that the university could do a better job of hiring people who have a genuine understanding and commitment to creating a healthy diverse environment here and then also giving space for those people to freely express their voices without thinking they will lose their jobs or that there will be penalties. I think there are a number of people here who care about the university climate for the professionals and also for the students but don't feel as though they can even speak up or contribute to whatever initiatives because they're afraid of punishment and penalty...there is very much a climate of being a quiet cheerleader for diversity because it's not a safe space to really—people don't feel like they have the luxury of saying, "This is not okay," or "I'm not enjoying my experience here," etc.*

## **Diversity Skills and Knowledge**

### **Student Focus Groups:**

#### **1. Institute a focus on awareness, education, and change**

*I do think that we need more awareness in the broader spectrum to celebrate all that we have to offer here. I specifically think this is a good first step. There's three steps to change or to move forward. The first step is awareness. We need to be aware of all the multicultural happenings on campus. The second step would definitely be education. That's the next step that we could take is to show what all of these diverse groups on campus do. I think sometimes we, in our heads, almost think diversity relates back to race. We forget we're unaware that that also includes religious groups on campus and the LGBTQ community. I know personally I don't know much about social groups I don't myself identify with. I would love to see more about that and resources that all Cornell students can access, such as newspapers and broadcasting of certain events on campus, so better PR. Then, after that education step can you only reach the third step, which is change. It's a whole process. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

## 2. Create a diversity requirement across the colleges

*[I think we need a] more realistic and meaningful diversity requirement across the colleges, because yeah, I guess college has a diversity requirement, but it can be filled with classes that aren't necessarily related to issues around diversity in the US or at Cornell necessarily. I think it was crazy that we have a swim test. We have a swim test at this university, but there's so much to learn from a class on race, ethnicity or gender or sexual identity or any form of identity that we're going to interact with here. I don't see why we don't have a requirement that specifically makes us have those conversations. [Latino Undergraduate]*

## 3. Improve faculty training

*Another thing is I feel like something that—there's a discrepancy between staff support and faculty support. Especially regarding things or issues regarding gender, religion, race. I feel like the faculty preparation is a mixed approach. Some people get it. Some people really don't. They obviously feel unprepared. I can feel the vibe of the discomfort. Of course I would just veer away from any conversation regarding it. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

## 4. Mandate diversity training

*Mandate diversity training for RAs. Mandate diversity training for incoming freshman. Mandate a one credit class that all students have to take, and in its place, it has to be done, abolish the swimming class. Those three things. Mandate diversity or inclusion training, should I say, for faculty, department chairs, deans and TAs. [African American Male Graduate]*

## Web Responses:

### 1. Require a diversity course for all students

Many students expressed that a diversity requirement would allow students at Cornell to gain valuable information about race, class, gender, and sexual orientation that can improve campus climate, tolerance and acceptance. Students shared that diversity courses do exist on campus, but currently are not required to be taken by all students.

## **2. Offer sensitivity training on diversity for faculty, staff, and students**

A number of students complained that faculty, staff, and students are all guilty of perpetuating stereotypes, microaggressions, and discrimination on campus. As a result, it could be beneficial if faculty, staff, and students were offered sensitivity training.

### **Staff & Administrator Interviews:**

#### **1. Support faculty on how to mentor diverse students**

*Support our faculty on how to mentor diverse students. Good mentoring of diverse students, of course, is good for all students, but some of the issues that really have come up are the issue of imposter syndrome, stereotype threat. Letting faculty know what those concepts are and really how to work with those concepts in our diverse students. Trying to help them work with those students and provide a supportive environment, so letting students know that they have high expectations for them, that they expect them to achieve at very high levels, but then providing that support and that infrastructure to make sure they can actually achieve that. Being cognizant that sometimes when they criticize students who are already feeling like they don't belong, they need to temper that with positive reinforcement as well.*

#### **2. Provide sensitivity training for faculty**

*I feel like faculty members really need more sensitivity training, and more—in addition to ideally increasing numbers of Asian faculty members. Just more training, and more awareness [is needed] of how to really interact with their student populations. Because I think that a lot of this is new to some of the faculty members who are contributing to some of the problems.*

#### **3. Require cultural competency training**

*Require cultural competency training for people in my office. Require staff development and use of best practices so that you don't treat all students the same. You can't treat all students the same. Different approaches are going to meet different needs, but to support that custom and to hire more Latino staff. Just building a community here will help me feel more supported.*

#### **4. Recognize Cornell sits on homeland of Cayuga People**

*I think because Cornell is a land grant institution and they're in the territories of the Haudenosaunee people [Iroquois], and the other big failing of Cornell is that it doesn't formally recognize that they're in the homelands of the Cayuga People. There's no official recognition of this, where in contrast, the level of recognition at all of the other universities around us now is palpable. If Cornell does not understand what it means to acknowledge the Cayuga people and that we are in their homeland, then they need to say that. If they understand it, if the administration understands it and has chosen not to recognize the Cayuga people, they need to say that also because they are two very different positions.*

#### **5. Better promote LGBTQ resources**

*I think also providing information through our colleague network groups to staff and faculty around what resources are available. I would say the vast majority of faculty and a lot of the staff don't even—might not even know that an LGBT Resource Center exists on campus. So that's a simple educational piece around that would be important, and we're able to really think through changes, whether it's through residence life or in athletics about are we able and comfortable having conversations around LGBT issues?*

#### **6. Provide more information during orientation about the Women's Resource Center**

*I think orientation is a big moment for students. When you first come to Cornell, this is our chance to tell you what this community [WRC] is about in terms of the values that we hold, in terms of the resources that are available, cuz we know that a lot of students are coming in already having experienced some form of dating violence or sexual violence and maybe have never had the chance to seek help for that, let alone the numbers that we know are going to experience sexual violence while they're here.*

#### **7. Train advisors in best practices**

*A couple of my colleagues and I have talked about the need to have a selective group of advisors who come together and say, "Here are some best practices for advising, and here are some things that you need to be aware of, minimally, for the minimal amount of time commitment if you're gonna advise. Here are the basic things that you need to check for to hold these students accountable."*

## **8. Provide leadership development training**

*Then also there needs to be some leadership development training because I feel as though the culture here is one that really encourages being submissive to titles but not necessarily learning how to be assertive when things don't go your way. There's a lot of poor decisions that are made by the students in terms of how to execute their student organizations' goals and initiatives. There isn't enough guidance from professional people to help them figure out and navigate the best way to get some things done.*

## **Bias, Discrimination, and Harassment**

### **Student Focus Groups:**

#### **1. Make Cornell safer by improving lighting**

*I don't know about you guys but when I walk across campus, there's no lights. Then once you hit College Town even at the bridge it's not very well lit which is—I feel like North Campus—I've never come in North Campus. When I have there's lights everywhere. It's like a stadium. I feel incredibly safe. I walk across and all of Campus Road, I think that's what it is. These lights are not working or they're intentionally not there. I don't know if there's cameras. I don't know. I don't feel safe. [White Female Undergraduate]*

### **Web Responses:**

#### **1. Exact consequences for racist and discriminatory acts on campus**

There is a sense that many hate crimes and discriminatory acts go unpunished. There is also a perception that such acts are perpetuated by the Greek system and are ignored by the university.

#### **2. Address the race and class discrimination that occurs in the Greek system**

There is a great concern that the Greek system discriminates in their recruitment process (against non-rich, non-White, and non-straight students), and that members consistently participate in harassing other students based on their social identities. Many students claim the university often ignores these realities and does not hold Greek organizations (particularly fraternities) accountable for their actions. There are claims that past complaints against the Greek system have been ignored or that offenders have only received slaps on the wrist.

## **Staff & Administrator Interviews:**

### **1. Provide continuing education about sexual assault**

*It would be nice to—not in a way that's gonna scare anyone off, because it [sexual assault] happens at every university—but to make it clear that we understand that's the case and to proactively talk about it. It's not a message that you can only hear once. It's a message that needs to be reinforced again and again. It's a message that needs to change over the time students are here on campus: creating programming, discussion opportunities, awareness-raising events that address that and address it in a way that's developmentally appropriate for students coming in as freshmen, leaving seniors, and what they might have experienced between then and now.*

### **2. Provide late night transportation options**

*The transportation issue: I know what it costs to run that a few nights a semester. Again, I've heard nothing about any kind of additional resources, even though this is a major issue we have on campus. I would also love it if it continued, the program that was piloted. I'm not a transportation person. I'm, like, "Why am I running a bus program?"*

### **3. Emphasize support for LGBTQ students**

*I think that we need to look at what we're doing to actively recruit students, how we're able to support students in their programming, and being able to provide quality advisors to these students that have experience with LGBT issues. Really just wanting there to be more of a statement from Cornell, the larger institution that it is indeed supportive and open to LGBT people.*

### **4. Have administration issue strong statements against bias**

*I think it would be helpful if, in times when there are egregious things that impact the student community of color, if there were even a statement or something made from administration "This is not something that's acceptable here," it might make [students] feel like the university cares.*

## Power Dynamics and Equity

### Student Focus Groups:

#### 1. Address power dynamics

*I think that it's important for Cornell administrators to know that in order to produce the robust change that it seems like they want to pursue, you have to address power dynamics. We've gotta really stop with all of the superficial, shallow attempts at addressing diversity, addressing inclusion and addressing the needs of students of color and students with disabilities and students who are gender minorities or students of low socioeconomic status. There's no way to attack it without addressing power dynamics. If Cornell doesn't want to do that, it's not going to happen, so I think we need to be so much more mindful as an institution of how we use our resources to try and take a stab at these issues. If you're not willing to have a conversation about power dynamics, you're going to hear the same sentiments that you heard during this entire focus group 10 years from now, 20 years from now. It's not going to end. I really implore Cornell to take a hard look at itself. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

#### 2. Address issues regarding the physical location of Minority-Serving spaces

##### ***Asian & Asian American Center [A3C]***

*I talked to some freshmen who are Asian-Americans, and they don't know about A3C at all. They don't know it's down here, they don't know you can come here for help, or you can just come here to study if you want to study in a quiet place, and it's so close. It's like, if there was more funding to host more events here that freshmen can come out to and make them more aware. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*I feel like other departments on campus don't even know we exist. They're like, "Asian-American Center? Oh, is it student run, or is it actually part of the institution? What is it?" It's like, there's no efforts to address that we're part of things. It's a center that's trying to cater to the A3 population. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

### **Akwe:kon**

*Already, I feel that just the location of all these things is just so inaccessible to the general student body. This is the fourth floor of a building that most people don't even use. Akwe:kon is all the way back there...way too far for anyone to get to on a day-to-day commute. People won't pass it. There's no opportunity for people who don't already know about it to [come here]...I don't wanna say purposely, but you never know what goes on in these politics. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

### **LGBTQ Center**

*Even within the intercultural center, there is animosity between the different organizations that occupy it. The space is literally segregated in terms of floor. The top floor is the LGBTQ RC. The middle floor is ALANA and things like that. Then the bottom floor is just reception, and on the basement is the Asian and Asian-American Center. It's literally segregated in that sense, and every time you go up or down the stairs it literally outs you, whether you're Asian or whether you're gay. I'm not even kidding. It's like you go up the stairs, it's like you instantly out yourself. How can you create a space like that where students cannot even feel comfortable entering the space because they out themselves automatically? There are students who have come up to us and be like, "I can't come to your support group because I'm outing myself by this very venture." [Queer Female International Undergraduate]*

### **OADI**

*Maybe not related to anything, but I've been noticing in the last weeks just kinda a lot of non-minority students that have come to Cornell, it's almost like they don't really see a lot of African Americans in their daily lives. I'm just wondering, the placement of these things, I feel like with the Center for Intercultural Dialogue, that being on kind of North Campus, south of Thurston Bridge, when you come to OADI, a lot of people don't know where this is. It's like the people who go here and work here all the time are letting their friends know and that's who comes here. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

### **UJAMAA**

*Then there's just the fact that more affordable housing's on North Campus. It's almost like you're not gonna see these groups interacting cuz there really isn't a place on Central where we all can meet and hang out. We're kind of drawn to each*

*other because we are that support system. That's where we have Ujamaa, which is also on North Campus. It's just kind of in these physical built structures that it's like you will be on this side of the bridge and you will be on the third floor or second floor, actually. There's not an opportunity for people to mix and mingle at all. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

### **3. Diversify portraits and other images**

*All—almost all the portraits on Cornell are of men. One of them is just like five portraits; it's like icons of the industry. It's in Statler Hotel and it's all men. We're just posting all these photos of these portraits of men at Cornell and like, "Where are the women?" I mean that's—I feel like it's kind of something that the University could definitely change—target that they're not really doing that good a job of it. It's like all the White men are being idolized as icons of the industry and there are definitely women that have done some awesome things. [White Female Undergraduate]*

### **4. Increase Asian American faculty and staff**

*Even my Asian-American Studies Department, there's one faculty who's there right now. The rest of them are either gone or on leave, so it's like, there's kind of no Asian-American mentors right now. I'm a senior, so I'm not doing too badly, but it's kind of like, there's no elders, no people to guide students. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*There should be more staff, too, because right now, A3C director has dual functions with being assistant dean and the director for the center. I know from our past director, she had so much work given to her that she couldn't—she didn't have time to address everything that was under her responsibility. [International Female Undergraduate]*

### **5. Diversify representation in the Cornell *Daily Sun***

*To go back to the *Daily Sun*, Cornell's newspaper on campus. I do think that it does need work. I do think that a lot of Asian groups are represented superficially or just not to the fullest extent that it could be, to describe what it [the Asian group] is and what they've done on campus. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

## 6. Improve outreach

*I think that in terms of figuring out diversity and who's coming to Cornell, I think one of the main key things that I would like to see specifically is more outreach to high school students who come from areas similar as mine. The only reason why I found out about Cornell is by the luck of getting into a summer program at a different top institution and just found out that Cornell existed and had just great opportunities. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

## 7. Increase the minimum wage

*One just baseline suggestion to Cornell or concrete suggestion to Cornell is consider paying your federal work-study workers minimum wage. Not the total being minimum wage but Cornell's contribution being minimum wage, because the nature of the federal work-studies that the government pays 70 percent, Cornell pays 30. Why are they being lauded for the accomplishment of giving me work study when I just end up working for Cornell and costing them \$2.50 an hour? The purpose of this federal work-study is so that I can work 15 hours a week and make the amount of money I need to stay afloat, not work 30 hours a week and make the money I need to stay afloat. [White Male Undergraduate]*

### Web Responses:

#### 1. Increase campus efforts to diversify the student body and faculty

The university can do more to increase the diversity of the student and faculty body.

### Staff & Administrator Interviews:

#### 1. Re-imagine 6-2-6: Center for Intercultural Dialogue

*Well, I mean, I think we need to re-imagine that space [626]. I don't think that moving the center—I've been at Cornell for five years, and we've already moved once. In the 20-year history of the center, we've moved five times. There hasn't been a very strong presence in any one area for the Resource Center, which I think is somewhat of a problem as well. I think that trying to get that main floor sort of re-imagined and reworked is going to be important, but I think that also requires there to be a lot of strong, top-down leadership from individuals who really understand why it's a problem for students to not feel comfortable going to the LGBT resource*

*center or to the Asian/Asian American center or wherever it is safest for students of certain identities on campus. I haven't really seen that support coming from anywhere.*

## **2. Hire more Native American faculty**

*I think the university needs to hire more Native faculty. They need [to] hire more Native faculty that are doing research around critical indigenous issues. That would contribute to creating a critical mass. I think we need to be a department. I don't think it's working as a program. I think that there needs to be somebody in this position that's equal here, that's an associate provost for indigenous studies as an ethical issue because Cornell and America have benefited from the resources of indigenous peoples generationally. There does need to be reciprocity. The minuscule budget that we get for this program is really a very minor thing in the bigger picture of Cornell's finances.*

## **3. Diversify faculty**

*Increase the numbers of diverse faculty, diverse tenured faculty, faculty who actually have tenure who kind of have that cachet and that sense of grounding that they are here as a tenured faculty person, that they can serve as role models for our students. Our students can see that they're not the only one and that they can achieve as well to that level and be a tenured faculty member at Cornell.*

## **Bridging Diverse Communities**

### **Student Focus Groups:**

#### **1. Promote diversity efforts more effectively**

*I feel that a lot of the diversity programs are for minorities, but the minorities are not necessarily the ones who need to know that there's oppression going on. We're aware of that, so I think that some sort of connection between the diversity programs and the general population. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

#### **2. Increase co-programming among student groups**

*I think the best way to get these conversations going is through students doing it themselves instead of—if the institution wants to have a class, that's fine. If the*

*institution has various initiatives, that's fine, but I also think that one of the main ways to try and get people to be more aware about each other is to really do things—students have to engage in these conversations. That can be done through—by the simple fact of being open to different co-programming things that we do. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

### **3. Promote LGBTQ resources**

*I know I did get flyers my freshman year automatically put into my mailbox, but what about the transfers and people who maybe didn't realize they were queer freshman year, but then as they—their sophomore year they don't automatically have those resources sent to them, either. It's like if the university can hang up posters for homecoming everywhere, in every single building, how come they can't do that with the LGBT Resource Center and advertise it in the exact same way? [Transgender Queer White Undergraduate]*

### **4. Hold more introductory/survival courses for international students**

*I believe the college should actually hold many more courses for international students, English class, just ways to communicate. When I want—when I want to choose a course, it's very limited. [East Asian International Male Graduate]*

*Maybe there's some events that's about the new information that we need, for example, our rights here [in the U.S.]. I know that there are some workshops about attacks, but other aspects I haven't seen anything. It's good to have that kind of assistance that can inform us. [South Asian International Female Graduate]*

## **Web Responses:**

### **1. Have campus diversity initiatives that also focus on class and religious diversity**

Students feel that the diversity efforts on campus are too heavily focused on race and must expand to include class and religious diversity. Some students feel that the representation of students from low-income and working class backgrounds can be increased, as well as students from various religious backgrounds.

## **2. Instill some type of bonding or unifying activity at Cornell that increases a sense of campus unity and encourages diverse interactions**

A lot of students complain that there is a lack of diverse interactions on campus. Some believe diversity programming and housing are to blame, others believe it is just a part of human nature (to gravitate toward similar human beings). Students suggest bonding activities that can create a greater sense of unity on campus. They are not clear about what these activities look like, but they would like to feel that a larger unified Cornell community exists.

## **3. Have support resources for low-income and working class students**

There is a perception that the challenges facing low-income and working class students are ignored by the university.

## **4. Integrate graduate schools more fully into campus diversity activities**

Many graduate students feel they are left out of diversity-related activities on campus. They don't always receive emails or announcements about activities as well. Diversity programming should also target graduate students.

### **Staff & Administrator Interviews:**

#### **1. Bring silos together to work as one**

*It feels like Cornell is really hard because—I'm sure you're heard the silo image come up a million times. One college does it this way, and this college offers this. I think if there are ways to bring together, at least around women's issues—to bring together all the people that are working with women as advisors to the different student groups, as academic advisors or engineering programs and the vet school and whatever else—it's hard. That doesn't happen, and I don't know what it would take for everyone to sit down in a room together. I feel like it practically takes the President convening a Council to make people from different programs to sit down and talk to one another.*

#### **2. Broaden conception of diversity to be more inclusive**

*Beyond that, I would say from an institutional standpoint, when we talk about all of our quote/unquote diversity initiatives at Cornell, we're really talking about underrepresented minorities as defined by our university, which means black, Latino and Native American students. We're not really talking about Asian or Asian American students, and we're definitely not talking about the LGBT community, let*

*alone people with disabilities or lower socioeconomic class, first generation students. I think that from an institutional standpoint, the fact that LGBT students just aren't considered part of the diversity conversation all the time is problematic.*

### **3. Consider policies around transgender students**

*I think that we should really be looking at what are our policies around trans students and being able to change gender markers, and how they're able to use preferred name on their ID cards, on their class rosters as they interact with the university.*

### **4. Create spaces that inclusively embrace female identities**

*I would love to figure out how we can do a better job of creating spaces that allow women to be their full selves and not have to pick and choose their identities or what feels salient today. "Okay, I'm gonna go to this discussion because it's about women and math," or, "Nope, I'm gonna go to this dinner because it's for a conversation about being Latina at Cornell." Those things shouldn't be mutually exclusive, but I think for a lot of students, they feel like they are.*

### **5. Give more consideration to disability issues**

*I think the university is—in terms of disability, it does—it's beginning to see that as an area of diversity, but I think that it's fairly new and some of the leaders of the university are—they're not all at the same place, in seeing disability as an aspect of diversity. I think, by and large, the view has been race and ethnicity and LGBTQ issues have been in the forefront of—and women are a diversity initiative, but I hope that we'll see disability coming up as more of an aspect of diversity in the future.*

### **6. Increase faculty/staff visibility in student spaces and communities**

*I think, one, it would be helpful if they saw more administrators, whether they were administrators of color or people who are allies, who were visible in their communities and their space. I think in my experience here, the administrative and full-time professional timeline for how they experience Cornell only really overlaps with the students' timeline in the classroom. You have the grown-ups in the classroom who are teaching the students. Those daytime hours overlap, but aside from that, they're living like two separate worlds. For the staff and faculty who are really committed to engaging with the students, I think it would be important for*

*those people to come into the student life, which would mean that they would have to come in after 5:00 into those spaces, and that's really challenging—getting people to agree to do that. I think if students saw more faculty and staff in their spaces, coming to their events, it would be easier for them to see who their allies are, and then they would make better use of those resources. They forget that there's this exhaustive list of resources there, and then they're just inundated with too much information to remember, "Oh, there's this person over here that can help me." Putting a face with those titles would be helpful, I think, for the student.*

## Appendix B – Compendium: Categorization of Bias Incidents and Microaggressions

During the focus groups, we asked students if racial incidents and sexual misconduct were prevalent on campus; they shared stories that included overt and subtle instances of bias and discrimination. We also asked students on the web site to generally convey their experiences with the campus climate. This compendium categorizes many of the stories we heard, a few of which have been included in the main report as examples of particular challenges specific groups face. We have organized selected quotes here according to concepts in the literature (see references). The compendium can be used for discussion related to each concept definition and student experiences.

**Attribution rationalization:** The tendency to give less credit to women or minorities for positive outcomes (such as admission, work on joint projects, etc.) and give more undue credit to men and/or majority groups.

*I know that there's a lot of tension between students of different races and different genders, even sexualities. Even questioning why you're here, like I've had people say, "Oh, you got accepted because you're a woman," or I'm part Native American, "Oh, that's why you got accepted." It's so ignorant and rude and I know my friends of all different races and genders experience that too...I don't know if it's egos or just from people's backgrounds, people have been taught that [certain groups are not qualified], that this is how these institutions function. It's very upsetting.  
[Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

*I know in my [high] school, I was the only underrepresented minority student who applied and then got accepted. . They emailed us really awkwardly three weeks before the deadline [of admissions decisions] came out. . I knew in advance that I'd been accepted. . You'd say something. . "Oh, yeah. . I'm going to Cornell." They'd be, like, "Well, how do you know?" You'd be, like, "Well, they want me to come to diversity day." Then they're like, "Who are you?" Oh, you got in 'cause you're Native American—especially they're like, "What are you doing taking my spot?" or whatever. That's fine. It's, like, "No. It's my 4.0, but whatever." ... I also experienced something like that similarly last year [on campus]. This student from [South Asia] told me, "The only reason you got into Cornell is 'cause you're Native American." I wanted to slap her. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

I went to I guess a traditional frat party with one of my [White] friends from the pre-freshmen program. We went to the party and we were talking to one of her friends that she had met, and he was complaining how he had taken a prelim for [a class] and that it was hard, but he thinks he did well. Then he found his prelim score and it was an A minus and he was bummed out about it. I was trying to cheer him up. I didn't really know him but I was telling him, "Oh, don't worry about it. It's an A. You should be proud of yourself. I know a lot of people who have worked really hard in that class before and they would be so happy to have an A." He's, like, "When did you take that class?" I'm, like, "It was end of pre-freshman summer program." He was, like, "Well, that's because you guys are a bunch of minorities. You guys aren't as smart. That's how come they would be happy for an A minus, but I'm trying to get a 4.3." At that point of course I got upset and I was, like, "You don't understand. You don't even know what you're talking about." [Latina Undergraduate]

**Color-blind racial attitudes:** Attitudes that reflect the belief that discrimination no longer exists. Though based on the positive premise that we should all be treated equally, they discount the experiences of non-majority groups and can promote bias.

*I'm in this one course, and we have great discussions about things, but when it comes to race, I feel like people—people act like racism's over, and that's what I get from a lot of White students in my class. They're, like, "Well, it's 2013. We've overcome these issues. They're a part of the past. We have a Black president."*  
[Native Male Undergraduate]

**Competency proving:** When, to counter common assumptions about their presumed incompetence, women and members of minority groups frequently and repeatedly have to demonstrate that they are indeed qualified, capable, and/or competent. A related concept is **stereotype threat**, when individuals are at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about their group. This is often due to underrepresentation in specific contexts.

*When I'm in a group project academically, there is always the pressure to go above and beyond. I think that comes from the fact that with many Black students on this campus, there's the whole idea that in everything you do, you are not only representing yourself; you're representing your entire race. If you don't do what you're supposed to do in your group project there's the worry constantly or subconsciously that your group partners are going to feel like, "Oh. She didn't do everything that she was supposed to do. That means all Black people don't do everything they're supposed to do. I'm never working with another Black person again." It's unfortunate that we have to carry that with us, but I think it just very*

*much is a reality of a lot of the experiences of Black students academically and socially and in general on this campus. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*Maybe it's because I'm in business, but it's always having to prove that you are on the same level, if not better than the majority of the people in my classes cuz they're mostly male or men and always trying to stand out in info sessions for banks and stuff because you're probably like one of the three girls there while everyone else is a guy. [International Female Undergraduate]*

*I think one of the main times that I noticed something like that directly is whenever you have a group project and you may—if it's like in the beginning of class, in a big lecture class people don't know you at all. They don't know anything about you, but the minute you're signed into a group and you're the only Black person in the group, you're automatically looked upon as the weak link. That's the way I come across in pretty much almost all of my group assignments. People don't know me. They don't know what I'm interested in; they don't know anything about me, but the minute you come in you're thought of as a liability. That's kind of one of the main things I've experienced as far as that goes. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*I have a friend who doesn't like walking with a big group of Asians at night around Collegetown, which is off campus where all the parties happen, because he had an experience where he got like, "Why aren't you guys in the library?" They were all coming from somewhere with backpacks on. Some people have said to them, "Why aren't you guys in the library?" [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*I definitely feel like when I walk into a classroom, I'm not necessarily treated with the same type of intellect that other students are treated with. I come in with a mentality that, "All right, let me prove that I'm a good student," as opposed to walking in and knowing I'm a good student and the teacher acknowledging that, just as a baseline. I always feel like there's a standard that I always have to live up to as opposed to just being a student in class. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

**Cultural appropriation:** The act of taking some aspect or artifact of another's culture. This is very common in various forms, but when it is involuntary, unequal, lacks respect, and is enacted for economic gain, it can be considered a form of exploitation (Rogers, 2006). Using some other group's cultural symbols to satisfy a need for personal expression or exploiting them for personal gain is an exercise in privilege. It represents taking without invitation, in contrast to cultural exchange or transculturation, which is a mutual sharing of culture.

*There was—in order to advertise for the event, football players dressed up [in Mexican hats and ponchos], in the dining halls Wednesday prior to when the event would have happened. It would have been a Saturday, but emails still went out about an “almost Mexican” photo contest. Friday morning, I don’t remember the day, but we went to go speak to sports administration, and we spoke to the [staff member]. She said—she didn’t understand why it could be offensive... her whole idea of the minority Latino culture was a festive idea, even though the culture is much more representative than just a festive ideology. When we use those items to celebrate, it’s actual celebration of the culture. It’s not as a sports marketing tool to get people to attend a game. [Latina Undergraduate]*

*I have one example of an incident. My sophomore year, the multi-cultural umbrella organization ALANA, they were bringing Margaret Cho and they came up with a poster of her name in a Chop Suey font, like a really offensive, culturally reductive font. And this was the multi-cultural group, the group that’s supposed to be kind of aware of these things. [Queer Asian Female Undergraduate]*

**Failure to differentiate:** When members of a particular minority group are sometimes mistaken for another person of the group or a different group (e.g., a different ethnicity) by others. All groups share this unintentional recognition bias, but research suggests the effect is most pronounced for Whites when viewing racial/ethnic minorities.

*Now, see they [swimming test supervisors] don’t—they can’t tell some of these ethnicities apart, so if you’re Black, sometimes you get your friend to do it for you. Sometimes that works, because you bring in the card and they don’t know who you are [you are “just Black”]. You’re like, “Hey, I’m Paul.” They’re like, “Oh, hey Paul. Go swim.” You swim. Whatever. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

*Yeah, ... like a large group of drunk people walking in Collegetown, and then they saw me and my friends, they’ll literally say hello in Asian language. Like, they just assume we’re from certain places [in Asia], and I had that more than one time, so yeah—but I don’t find it offensive—they’re judgmental. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*I never received any comment that I would consider really offensive. I mean, I would have friends and they would always joke around and then some would just say some things that they obviously don’t know. It’s, like, oh in your household, do you make tacos? It’s, like, no, we don’t eat anything with tortillas. I don’t really see it as really ignorant in a way, but more as just coming from my Hispanic, Caribbean background and how it’s very—I can’t think of a better word, not well represented in the United*

*States as opposed to the larger groups, such as Mexican-Americans and so forth and even Puerto Ricans. I would sometimes be confused with Puerto Rican [students] even though my parents were from Dominican Republic. [Latino Undergraduate]*

*There's stuff all the time. They ask, "What are you?" I went to a BSU event, and some chick walked up to me and goes, "What are you?" I was, like, "A person—A female, obviously." Obviously not Black. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

*I try not to tell them where I'm from because immediately people will start stereotyping you or [put you in] this box or whatever. They already know you just from where you're from. It's ridiculous. You don't know. Also, I don't like people coming up to me and telling me, "Are you from this country," or, "Are you from that country?" "No. If you don't know where I'm from, then don't ask me." It's not anything, but I have my own identity. I don't like people just coming up to me and saying, "You look like so-and-so." [Male International Graduate]*

**Microaggressions** are “Brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” or other non-dominant group (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino., 2007, p. 72). Microaggressions can take the overt forms (microassaults) or more subtle forms (microinsults and microinvalidation) that are described here.

**Microassaults or Harassment:** Explicit racial derogations that are verbal (i.e., racial epithets), nonverbal (behavioral discrimination), or environmental (offensive visual displays) attacks meant to hurt the person of color (Sue, et al., 2006). This is generally deliberate and conscious. Microassaults are most similar to old-fashioned forms of racism in that they are deliberate and conscious acts by the aggressor, whereas modern racism is often expressed via subtle forms of discrimination where the aggressor believes he/she is not racist (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999).

*And when I worked with students who were not similar with me (and even some who were) I was called names like the F-word and/or the N-word (and was verbally threatened to commit suicide) so much that I've become more aware of the abuse and mistreatment that people that look like me (or have the same sexual preference as me) go through. I can confidently say that Cornell has made me more aware that it is just plain wrong to be a student of color who is also LGBTQ. Before Cornell I did not know that people—more so people my age—could be so racist, homophobic, and just plain hateful. I'll never forget being called a "n-word f-word" and how shameful I was explicitly made to feel. And this continued to happen throughout my four years as an undergraduate. [Web response, LGBTQ Graduate Student of Color]*

*To speak to what I'm talking about, there was a night where me and a couple of my friends were walking back from Collegetown. We were walking home. We were literally by a traffic light and a random car full of all White men, like a full packed car of White men drove up near us and then screamed—I apologize for the expletive—but they were like, "Look. Black bitches," as if we're some almost extinct species to be admired for a little bit. I don't know. We were shocked and we were trying to confront them about it, but as soon as we started to, the light turned green and they drove—they literally sped off because they saw how pissed we were. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*I remember freshmen year I was in this [subject] class. The teacher, he's a really old, White guy from [state], you know what I mean? He kept using the N word; I'm just like that's not okay. I had to bring it up to a TA because I was afraid to go to him and say could you not say that in my presence? It was just like the things that happen [to Black students] by a teacher. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*Then another example, for Greek life, I have never once felt safe at a frat or sorority party. I always feel like I have to hide the queer aspects of myself and my identity to protect—to physically and emotionally protect myself at night. I've been called many slurs: faggot—homosexual—at parties, and I've never once felt safe. [Queer Mixed Race Undergraduate]*

*For instance, when we had a Hallow Queen on Saturday, it was like a drag queen themed party and there were people who were dressed outside of the "normal," heteronormative gender stereotypes and gender expression. People feel unsafe. People have been called homophobic epithets. I've even been called racial epithets while walking down Collegetown in the middle of the night, like, "Oh, look at those !#&! Asians." Oh, that was another fabulous incident. I just think that it's in these spaces where students should feel comfortable, whether it be in a library, whether it should be in a classroom, that students don't feel safe at all with their identities, whether it be racial, gender, or sexual orientation. [Asian Female Queer Undergraduate]*

*I've experienced just a number of incidents at night or even on Slope Day, where I heard a couple of really homophobic comments made as I was walking around by some students in a fraternity. It was the same Slope Day that the Sig Pi incident happened. As a coping mechanism, I never walk around at night, if I do I walk in groups or I carry around, illegally, pepper spray or my Taser gun. Just little things like that, or even when I am on campus I don't dress a certain way or I don't look as gay as I could want to be, which is really rather unfortunate. [International Female Queer Undergraduate]*

*I lived on North Campus last year. Now I live on West Campus where Flora Rose house is, and both years I've done marketing slash advertising for certain Haven events such as Filthy/Gorgeous or the annual LGBTQ homecoming party. I've put posters on all floors of these two buildings, and more than half of them have been ripped up or torn apart or written on. That just creates an extremely uncomfortable living environment as well, which is why I can't wait to live off of campus. [Mixed Race Queer Undergraduate]*

*It's like it's their own [Greek] world and I don't ever feel like we're welcome. I even have one last thing. I even had—the same fraternity—another group of friends who were invited to an open party at that fraternity, but they were told to leave once they got there because they were minorities. They were invited by a Black member of the fraternity, so I thought that was very interesting. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*Sometimes when you have African-Americans in sororities or fraternities that are predominantly White they're the only ones accepted. I remember freshman year and I knew an upperclassman who was in a frat that was predominantly White. He was like, "Oh, yeah. Just come out. It'll be fun." I went with a group of friends and before we even got into the door, before we even got to the entrance, there was some Caucasian guy and he was just there and he was like, "Oh. There's no Black people allowed at this party," and then a couple people overheard this in the back. It was a couple other White people and they came in and they apologized, just like, "Oh, no. We're sorry; we're sorry. There's just no more room. There's just no more room. He's just kidding." Of course we were just like, "Okay," and we're just not gonna go. "It's not worth being here," but I remember just kinda seeing that and just kinda noticing how it's as if—you kind of look in terms of society and you see it in the professional level how it's like once you have a certain number or just that one face, it's considered enough. Then if you try to add more, if you try to bring more people in, then that's where more issues arise. It was definitely a very different experience, I think. [African American Male Undergraduate]*

*The first time I went [to a frat party] the guy was drunk. He came up to me. He said, "Oh, yeah. I don't like Black people. I'm racist, but my girlfriend, she really broke up with me because of that. I'm just tryin' not be as racist, so Hi. What's your name?" Yada yada. The same fraternity, I went back again—I don't know why—I went back again and then my other friend was there. It was one of those—cuz she has natural hair. We were there and then of course the guy made a big deal about that and he was like, "Oh, yeah. You remind me of that Black girl I saw in the*

*commercial who didn't want people touchin' her hair. Do you mind if I like [touch your hair]—stuff like that. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*Not at Cornell, but I remember I was in downtown Ithaca with a couple of my friends. We were just sitting over there and talking. Actually, we were talking in English. Then some guys passed by. I think they were drunk, and they were like, "Oh, which language are you talking in?" Then we were like, "English." He was like, "No, you weren't. You were talking in some other language. This is America." He was swearing. He was like, "You cannot talk in anything. You have to talk in English." We were so taken aback. [South Asian International Female Graduate]*

### **Microassaults: Female Assault/Sexually Based Incidents**

*I went out on Saturday and it was a while since I've been out. It's interesting that you bring that up because I was just with my friends, who were girls. We were just there to enjoy our time. This guy comes up behind and he asks me. He's like, "Hey, do you wanna dance?" I'm like, "No. Sorry, I have a boyfriend and I'm good." He grabbed me. I'm like, "I don't think you understand. No." I said no. He would not take no for an answer. He thought I was using the boyfriend excuse to get rid of him. I literally had to show him my phone, be like, "Look, it's a picture of me and my boyfriend. Leave me alone." It was a crowded party. People saw what was going on and nobody said a thing. It was scary. I obviously don't wanna be grabbed. I feel like alcohol maybe makes the aggression higher, which is a little bit scary, too. People don't understand when you're saying no, and that worries me a little. [White Female Undergraduate]*

*I know O week, O week is such a scary—like I don't know, as a woman—from any point from 8 P.M. until like 3 in the morning, people will drive by you and shout obscene things at you. You feel like you have to be in a group of people or like someone may try to touch you or try to say something to you that's inappropriate. O week to me was just such a shock. I was like, "What is going on?" [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*Well, yeah, I thought—when I was new here, I thought I made a friend and we went to athletic events together and stuff. It's like, "Now we're friends, can we be friends with benefits?" It was just so disrespectful. I never talked to him again because I was just trying to make friends. I thought, "Well, apparently that's just not possible at Cornell." I was just—I guess I kinda changed how I perceived everything. Some guys are just like that, it's just normal here. If it's not for me, then I'm the one standing out—then I'm the one who's wrong. The place is—that's how it works. [White Female Undergraduate]*

**Microinsult:** A behavioral action or verbal remark that conveys rudeness, insensitivity, or demeans a person's racial identity or heritage. The aggressor is typically not conscious that it is offensive to the target group.

*As an Asian on a campus with a large percentage of Asians, it can be annoying when people make weird faces if a lot of Asians are together. I hate that it's weird that a bunch of Asians are together, but it's not weird when a bunch of White people are together. [Web Response, Asian American]*

*I even had to out myself to my professor a week ago because I just—the way he was enforcing science upon me was just so insensitive and I was like, "Well, I'm a queer person and I don't feel comfortable within the field of science." There was just no sensitivity at all. Science is just a very culturally insensitive thing. For me, being queer is about being sensitive to all identities, and so that's why I am a huge proponent of queering all spaces. It's not just about making places accepting of different gender and sexual identities, but all different cultures and all different expressions. Forcing something like science upon us taught by professors that don't—that aren't culturally sensitive at all, it's extremely—makes me extremely uncomfortable. That's why I put myself only, as much as possible, only within the fields of sociology and FGSS. [Transgender Queer White Undergraduate]*

*I remember when I came for the open house when they were recruiting us, one of the professors had talked about roller derby. He just found it really amusing of the kind of women who would participate in that, and that was a very big turnoff for me. I was like, okay, I'm never joining your lab. It was only subtle things like that that are more heteronormative, but nothing outright, "oh, you faggot." I've never experienced anything like that. [Gay Male Graduate Student]*

*I'm also a Muslim girl. When I say this to people, they look at me, "Oh what, you drink, you party, you do this and that and that and you're Muslim. Are you sure?" It's weird. I get that a lot as well. I mean Cornell, I think, does a pretty good job in terms of religious support, I guess. I'm not really conservative. I'm very open about it. I feel—I identify as a Muslim girl though. I say that my religion is Islam, I say this. My interpretation is different and I get a lot of stereotypical questions and not really nice things about it. I don't feel comfortable talking about it just because people judge me. People judge me based on how I identify and then what I do. It's like my choice, you're not the one to judge, but at the end of the day it happens. I feel like it happens a lot more with Muslim girls. I know that there are really, really small circles of people. [International Female Undergraduate]*

*Our class is very open discussion, so people can jump in. There's no raising hand. People can comment on the whole healthcare thing they want. I remember the first day they jumped into [this discussion] the person was—and I don't know if—I don't wanna badmouth her, but I don't know what she was thinking. She said, "How many of those are illegals?" like [referring to] the Hispanic. Then they started getting into a little conversation. I was like, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, did they just—that doesn't have to be—," it's like maybe there's statistically two percent [using the system], I don't know. That doesn't have to be the first thing you go to if you see Hispanics that much uninsured, you go to illegal immigrants. I'm like wait, there could be cultural, monetary, so many other things explaining that, and that's the first thing you jump to? "You gotta step down." [Latino Graduate]*

*About that awareness, I feel like—well, what I've come across in—not every interaction that I've had with people who weren't of African-American descent—but a lot of the times it's almost as if the White students...They feel uncomfortable when it's made known that, "Oh, but did you notice that I'm the only Black one in this class?" Then they're like, "Oh, does that make you feel some type of way? Should I respond to that?" For example, I said that—you're talking about the murals all over Cornell and I'm like, "But you're not gonna see any Black faces in the murals," and they're like, "That makes me really uncomfortable when you mention that. Can you not say those things?" [African American Female Undergraduate]*

*I think with my experiences, at least—I'm not—I don't aesthetically look Native. I'm not—but usually, it's not like a direct comment. It's they're talking about it—affirmative action, or like I'm in a group of people, and they're talking about it or something, and they're like, "Oh, those people that just got in here 'cause they checked the box." It's not a direct—so there's not a—it's not usually a direct response to that comment. Like Phil said, it's more—most of the damage is when it gets in your head, and you're, like, "I'm not good enough to be here. I'm just here 'cause I checked the box," and you start telling yourself that. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

*I wanna talk about the Asians in fraternities. I was one time sitting down and just eating. Beside me, there was a conversation going on between an Asian American male and then his Caucasian friends. I don't want to assume that he was in a fraternity, but they did talk about some Greek life parties and some dramas that were going in their frats, or in some frats. I don't know if they were in these frats. There was kind of a question that kind of threw me off, when one of his Caucasian male friends asked him, "So, do you use chopsticks all the time?" I waited to see the Asian American male's reaction. There was a slight hesitation, but he answered fairly*

*normally. He was just like matter of factly—he was like, “No, I use forks, too.” [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*I think especially from the Native community, it’s kinda hard because you have it from two sides. You have people being, like, “Oh. You just checked the box, so you just got in here because you’re native,” or, “You’re not Native enough.” You also get the attitude, like, “Oh. Well, you’re not Native enough to have checked that box.” On the one hand, who are you to tell me my identity? [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

*Also last year when I took a [ ]class the teacher made us engage in this activity. We had talked about French colonialism in the Caribbean. I guess to make a game or something she was like okay we’re gonna pretend like we’re the Europeans that came over and colonized the Caribbean. What do you think the White people are gonna think about the Black people? There was multiple choice, check off. One of ‘em was “oh these people are cannibals, these people are uneducated, these people aren’t right. “I’m like why are we doing this? What? This is 2013, why are we doing this? I was just completely—we cannot do activities like this in French class, we can’t do it. One of them was oh let’s pretend that we’re the colonizers, what would they think who’s a superior race: the Black race, the White race. It was the correct answer to get the answer correct we had to check that the Black race was inferior and the White race was superior. I’m like stuff like that happens? [African American Low-Income Female Undergraduate]*

*There’s a lot of—even with professors, there’s a lot of ignorance. Actually, last week in one of my lectures, one of my professors showed this super stereotypical sketch of a Plains Indian headdress person. They’re, like, “This is a Native American. They don’t scalp people anymore.” [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

*It’s constantly—if you mention it, people—you have to justify. They’ll be, like, “Oh, but you have red hair. Oh, but you’re not wearing feathers.” Actually, that was a statement. Okay, if I go to Target and buy feathers, am I a Native American? Yes. [Native Female Undergraduate]*

*I think I remember my freshman year I was having I think lunch with the few of my friends that I play basketball with. I think in the group one person was Asian and then one person was White; then I think someone else, but I was the only Black person. Our conversation, I mean it was general. I don’t think anyone could hear it, but I remember looking up and seeing a couple of upperclassmen just talking amongst themselves and then they looked at me. I remember—I think this was in*

*RPCC—so they passed by me and I saw them—they kinda made eye contact me with me again, so I was just kinda wondering, “Okay. Is this somebody who I know or I don’t know?” I went up to go and I think get another piece of—an apple, I guess—and I overheard one of them saying that, “Oh. He’s one of them,” and I was kind of wondering, “Oh, what does he mean by that?” They saw me and then they were like, “Oh, oh. My bad, my bad,” that kind of thing. It really kinda confused me, because I was like, “Okay. I was having a conversation with some people who were of a different race, but you guys didn’t even hear the conversation that I was having with them and then you guys just automatically made a judgment that because I was hanging out with other people who just happened not to be Black, you already made the assumption that I don’t hang out with Black people or I’m just like another one of them kind of people who doesn’t hang out with Black people.” [African American Male Undergraduate]*

**Microinsult subtype: Assumption of criminal status.** The targeted individual is presumed to be a criminal, dangerous or deviant based on race.

*This is going into a different issue. Don’t mean to go off but I don’t know about female Latino students, but for male Latinos, I don’t mean to generalize, but I often feel like I’m feared and looked at, like, oh this aggressive Latino guy is scary looking, type thing. The way I’m treated fluctuates depending on how I’m dressed. Again, I don’t mean to speak for all the guys in the room, but if I have on a collared shirt or button down shirt, people will hold the door for me, or people will actually say, excuse me. Whereas if I’m dressed like this, with a t-shirt and a hoodie, people are hesitant to sit near me or don’t really hold the door. Don’t really say, excuse me. I don’t know about—I know other people in the past have expressed that to me, that similar things happen to them, but I don’t know if anyone here also has that experience. It’s happened with me and other people I know in the past have said it’s happened with them. [Latino Undergraduate]*

**Microinvalidation:** An action that excludes, negates or nullifies the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color.

*Professors are bad, too. I’ve had professors tell me right in their lecture, “Native people are dead and don’t exist.” Basically, I’m just, “Are you serious?” Then I go and introduce myself after lecture, but it just—it’s kinda disheartening to hear that from that level of—I don’t know—people who I think are incredible intellectually just amazing, but they just—I don’t know. They don’t know. [Native Male Undergraduate]*

*If you have something personal about the subject matter you're learning in your class, they [other students] like people making it relevant. Oh, this relates to me,—but if you say something coming from a Native perspective—I had a class where we were having a debate. It was on the climate change and species diversity. People were, like, “Oh, in this debate, we all care about this ‘cause it’s—climate change is hurting fish diversity which is hurting fishermen and livelihood and stuff.” But if you say something coming from an indigenous perspective, like, “Oh, yes. The decrease in diversity is hurting traditional medicine or traditional food sources,” people look at you like—I was told repeatedly that I was off topic, and that I was promoting a political agenda, and I didn’t get the point of the assignment. I was, like, “How is this any different than the kid you just praised for it being relevant to humans because it’s hurting his fisherman’s business?” You almost don’t wanna mention stuff that’s relates to you ‘cause you’re—I’ll be told that I’m off topic or being disruptive or something. [Native/White Female Undergraduate]*

**Microinvalidation subtype: *Alien in own land.*** The assumption that racial minority citizens are foreigners.

*I mean, I could definitely hear it in people’s conversations. I mean, it’s sort of like things that go under the radar; I think they still exist. There are things like when you might assume—I guess the most common questions, as an Asian-American person, people want to know where you’re from. I feel like I get that a lot. [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*That, and as in like, “You’re not really, you don’t—like, you’re not normal. You’re not part of the majority, so you must be originating from...” [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*I’ve had people tell me to go back where I come from, especially if I say something that’s critical, maybe, of Cornell or this country, it’s like, “You should be grateful to be here. Go back to where you came from.” [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

*I feel that a little bit on campus. I think it’s mostly in terms of microaggressions, and that people assume—if you are White or if you are African American that people assume you’re American. If you’re Asian, and to a certain extent Hispanic, people don’t assume that you’re American, to a certain extent, especially if you do have an accent. For some people it’s fine. It depends on how a person grew up. For a lot of people, it really does affect them. I think definitely Cornell men at night who come out from partying make me feel really unsafe. Actually one time I was walking with one of my friends who’s also Chinese. We just passed by these three drunk college*

*students. It's pretty obvious that they were coming from a party. The drunkest of the three looked at it and just went, "Ching chong, ling long, ting tong." Then another thing was—so my friend who was more angry than me was like, "F--- you." She was so angry. I was just like—another thing is like he didn't—well I didn't expect the drunk guy to apologize. His more sober friend was like, "I'm sorry we're trying to train him." I was just like, "What?" [Asian American Female Undergraduate]*

**Positive racism:** Making positive attributions that appear positive to the aggressor but are stereotypical to the target group and also lower the status of other groups (e.g., model minority stereotypes). Exoticization of minority women is another form.

*I've had a lot of people ask me if I speak Mexican here, which I thought was weird and awkward. I'm, like, well, do you mean Spanish? They're, like, "Oh, I guess." I'm, like, I wish, but not that good at it. I've also noticed that when people are I guess you could say hitting on me, they always use—especially—I don't know, it happens to me way more here than anywhere else. I'm not sure why that is. They always use the word "exotic" instead of just saying, "Oh, you're pretty," or something, which I always thought was really strange and none of my friends who are Caucasian ever had somebody tell them they're exotic. I'm not a lizard. [Latina Undergraduate]*

**Status Leveling:** Based on stereotypes about the lower social class of non-majority groups, status leveling occurs when we assume that a member of a racial/ethnic group belongs to a lower social category or position.

*Personally, I feel like some law school staff have also engaged in ignorant behaviors, such as a school secretary asking me for my "green card," when I said I didn't have a passport (I left it at my family home) and staff making assumptions about the socioeconomic status of my family—which I felt was due to my race. [Latino Web response]*

*You actually resent me for having to have financial aid. That was kind of a weird dynamic. I think also being low income and also being Black I mean people already assume that you—I feel like people assume that I will be a low income anyway. They would make comments like, "Oh well you have financial aid, you probably got here from affirmative action," comments like that. The intersectionality between being a person of color and then it being low income, it creates a weird dynamic which marginalizes you even more. [African American Female Undergraduate]*

**Tokenism:** Treating members of minority groups as if they are representative of their entire group rather than as individuals, especially when they are a numeric minority or the only person of that group present (solo status).

*With that being said, even in situations like this, where I'm told to basically speak how you feel as a Black person on campus, I feel like I get that in class, especially literature classes, or classes where race is brought in. I feel like I'm the, "Speak on behalf of all the Black people on campus." [Female African American Undergraduate]*

*Well, I'm in a Spanish class for the major and it's on Latin American literature. I'm the only brown person in the class, so it wasn't a big deal, but I definitely noticed that my professor would stare at me a lot. When she asked a question pertaining to Latin America or if I knew such and so information. That was a little bit awkward, but I think because I'm a girl, I haven't really experienced anything else. I know it wasn't me because I was sitting on the other side of the classroom to everybody else. When the teacher's staring at you, it's pretty obvious, but that was about it. [Latina Undergraduate]*

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