5

Resiliency in the Face of Setbacks

Resiliency, or how students can bounce back from personal and structural challenges to build a successful college career is the focus of chapter 5. This fifth chapter explores the value of having challenging experiences during college as a way to build this resiliency for life after college. College presents the opportunity to reflect on earlier experiences in families, cultures, groups, and within organizations. For students, reflecting on how their backgrounds affect current choices is crucial for shaping a personal and professional story that can guide choices in college, frame personal statements, and point toward potential career paths after graduation.

This chapter focuses on *resiliency*—rising to the challenges that life in college (and after) brings. Whether it is intense trauma, struggles with finding groups to belong with, or challenges in academics, part

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of college is figuring out how to overcome hurdles. Building on our basic introduction of this concept in chapter 2, the key to having resiliency is understanding the life course as a *social construction*, with college as a pivotal time when emerging adults learn how to balance their personal agency with an awareness of social influences. In order to construct a personal and professional biography, students should think critically about their prior experiences and evaluate what they want to repeat or continue doing, and what to change now that college provides the opportunity to do so. Important in this process is not giving society too much credit in defining who students are and can be, nor framing individuals as totally free agents with complete freedom to create anything, nor total responsibility for the outcomes of the choices they make. Life combines personal agency and social support, with occasional limits and setbacks, and college is the perfect time to strike the right balance of finding one's own path, coupled with awareness of the limits of the self and reliance on others for help when needed.

STUDENT STORIES: WHAT WE EXPERIENCE

In the following student stories, **Aaron** discusses the fragmentation he experienced between different peer groups, as well as within his family after his parents divorced. **Alexa** also describes her divorced parents and their social class distinctions, and tells about her struggle to balance everything as she carves out her own identity. **Chen** likewise discusses struggling to fit in to different social settings, but she experiences these struggles as someone who is shy and who internalized her parents' instructions to "hold her tongue." Resilient in the face of an emotionally abusive relationship, **Michalyn** reports how she is working to release herself from the bonds of others' expectations for her. **Connor** is a student who is "just not getting it." He is doing everything in his power to earn good grades, but having difficulty figuring out what class content is important and where he should focus most of his energy.

#outsider #identitycrisis: Who are you? They ask. I am what I want to be, or you want me to be, or you are who I want you to be. No one knows. But I know one thing, it's time to find out!

Aaron describes how the identity questions of the last chapter can come to a head during emerging adulthood, especially as students experience different cultural values and sort out social groups. He explains:

> Another area of my life [in which] I had to prove myself, because I was seen as an outsider, was my Catholic, private high school. Before transferring to this high school, I went to a Baptist, private school where the culture held values [that] were quite different. Many families were middle class and working lower end jobs, and this mirrored my family structure; therefore, we shared the same values and were from the same culture. Once I transferred to the Catholic high school, I was immersed in a new culture that was full of values that were strange to me. Indeed, many of the families that had children there, were upper class and had nice houses, cars, and designer clothes. The spring before starting this high school, I went to an event that the high school hosted called the freshmen fire-up. While everyone around me was dressed in nice outfits, I had shown up in my middle school uniform, and the stares were enough to convey the fact that I had broken a norm of this upper-class school. Another piece of my middle-class life that broke a norm was my dad's truck that took me to high school for two years. While other students were brought to school in Mercedes, Land Rovers, and Cadillacs, I was brought to school in a rusting Chevy truck that was older than me. After seeing the other parents' cars, I began to make my dad drop me off down the street because I knew I was breaking this norm of the upper-class world, and I did not want to be embarrassed by this lack of a nice vehicle . . . If I was ever asked what my parents did, I would twist their job titles to make them sound more professional and hide the fact that neither of them went to a four-year college. Until

junior year, I lived in a double-wide trailer with my mom and a single-wide trailer with my dad. I was embarrassed by this, so I never invited people over to my house, and instead, I went to my friends' houses.

#recentering #notbrandname: Learning an important life lesson. I just keep trying to fit in instead of being myself. I have to learn to do me, regardless of what people think. #nologo

Alexa also reflects on identity fragmentation in families and friend groups. She describes it this way:

As I got older, many things began to happen in my life that were not necessarily good things. My parents got divorced when I was in fourth grade, and that started a whole new path and way that I experienced life. Since I was going back and forth between my mom's and my dad's, that also entailed having two completely different life styles. When I was at my mom's house everything was how it was before they got divorced, but when I was at my dad's it was completely different. He did not have very much money, or at least acted like it, and so everything at his house was very downgraded. A pretty crappy house, old junky car, and the things I wore were also a representation of this. I was not used to living like this, especially where I was from, so I was constantly worried about what other people thought of me and how this would affect my future. So, I began to act like I was part of the upper class and avoid all confrontation of the fact that my dad did not have much money. I wanted to fit in with all the other kids at my school and I was embarrassed when I came to school in off-brand clothing and was dropped off in a crummy car.

#shy #followingtherules: Sometimes I feel like I'm watching a movie starring other people. I'm tired of following the rules and waiting for other people to speak.

Chen describes how the cultural approach of one's family can affect the type of person that one is as an entering college student:

> I am the type who always follows the rules because, especially as a child, I was terrified of getting in trouble. The rule that determined how much I spoke had to do with when I was allowed to speak. It was the "don't interrupt me when I'm speaking" rule [that] I was given by my parents and teachers. I was told that was a rule I had to follow, so I tried my best to save my responses until after people finished talking. My problem with this was that no one shut up for long enough to let me say anything. I broke that rule many times. When it came to adults, though, I tried my hardest to not interrupt but I ended up with comments like, "you sure are a quiet one, ain't cha" or "cat got your tongue?" It did not take long for me to get used to those comments . . .
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> I misunderstood that not interrupting was a good rule for the classroom, or with adults I needed to respect, but it was more of a courtesy in regular conversation than a necessity. My silence was also questioned by peers and, when I had no good answer for them, they left me alone. Being on my own was fine with me, though it kept me out of cliques and limited the amount of friends I had. Silence became my way of excluding myself from cliques . . . Another rule that led me to being reserved was "don't take that tone with me" or "there's no need for those crocodile tears." I got these mainly at home. They were reminders that it was "always my decision about how I acted," as my mom would tell me if I got angry or sad. I know now that she was trying to teach me that my reactions should not be overdramatic and that it mattered how I responded, but as a child I believed she was telling me not to show what I was feeling. Through a process that took me years, I learned to conceal anger, sadness, and pain so well that my parents could hardly tell what I was feeling . . . I am not open about my opinions or how I feel. [This is] partially because I am naturally reserved;

it is also because I did not feel comfortable being open at home. It became easier to act like nothing hurt me than it was to voice how I felt . . . All this was not helped by the fact that I was a shy child. It is difficult to say if my childhood shyness was caused by my socialization at home and at school or if it was my nature . . . It is unclear, even to me, whether I was labeled quiet because of how I acted or if it was an expectation I learned to live up to . . . I was trying to get an answer to a question or ask something I needed without breaking the "don't interrupt me" rule which often was impossible . . . How was I supposed to not interrupt, but also get help from busy adults? Most of the time I ended up avoiding the problem or I tried to deal with it myself; it was not fun at the time but it taught me to be independent and solve my own problems. A downside to this was that I did not break out of my shell until junior high, and when I did, I still found it difficult to tell others what I needed or what I thought.

#movingon #emotionalabuse: i think i'm done with this whole heartbroken thing. accepting what is. letting go of what was. believing in what is to come.

Michalyn explains how she weathered an emotionally abusive relationship and is finding her resiliency while moving on and beginning to heal.

After I finished my first year of middle school, I began taking my first clarinet class in school and I remember being so happy to be able to be a part of a larger group in school. I kept making new friends for the next couple of years until one day I met this boy. And it was during my last year of junior high that we began dating and we continued to date for two years. At the beginning things felt as though they were going perfectly. I spent almost every day with him and became close to him and his family. It

was not until the second year of our relationship however that things began to fall apart. He became emotionally abusive to me and began trying to push me emotionally to my limits by trying to upset me on purpose. Following that he began pushing me to convert because his family believed I was going to hell if I did not. I remember having a solid four months of crying every night because of how broken I felt and I tried to do everything I could to make him happy. I began to lash out at those around me because of how unhappy I was, which led my father to stop talking to me and hate the person I was with. I became engulfed by the pain he caused me, to the point I could not pull myself out. When the relationship finally ended, however, I began to heal. I stopped being horrible to those around me and started making new friends and living my life how I wanted, which was something I was not used to.

#notgettingit #saywhat: I just got a bad grade on an exam that I thought I was going to ace, and everyone says it was easy and understood everything. What gives?!

Connor never misses physics class, always takes notes, and tries to follow along with the lecture as best he can. A few days before the first exam, he joins a study group and quickly realizes that he is not getting the major concepts the same way his friends are. Everyone else seems to have somehow gotten the most important points of the chapters and lectures, while he took tons of notes on what seems unimportant now. His friends all quickly answer the problems with the correct information, while Connor is still digging through his notes trying to figure out what is relevant. He feels lost and wonders how he can sit in the same class with these students but not get what they did. Should he keep being a physics major if he is just not getting it?

SCIENCE: WHAT WE KNOW

All these students are confronting issues from their childhood that they must understand and come to terms with now that they are in college. Whether these are personal questions about identity and behavior, questions about navigating unequal class or racial structures, overcoming academic struggles, or healing from the trauma of an abusive relationship, challenges shape who young people are. Resiliency—or the ability to bounce back from these difficulties—will help them overcome these challenges. More than just "moving on" or "getting over it," resiliency comes more naturally with some understanding of the concept of social construction.

In a book entitled *Social Problems across the Life Course*, Lopata and Levy (2003)[1] draw upon the scholarship of Glen Edler (1974)[2] in describing the life course as a *social construction*, which refers to an issue, experience, or phenomenon that is actively shaped in response to different cultures, places, and social groups. This does not mean the life course is made up, or in some way not real. Rather, it means that the path we follow as we grow and mature is fashioned by the choices that people make, which are influenced by the markedly different ways that those potential choices can be understood and experienced. Understanding the life course as a social construction means focusing on the ways that human lives intersect with historical, political, economic, and cultural circumstances. Viewing people as within a life course development process means thinking about how people view different ages and age-related roles, such as transitions into adult roles as parents, college graduates, or professionals. Another way that the life course is socially constructed is through the major events that shape generations in distinct ways. For example, people who were adults before the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (or, in earlier generations, World War II or the Vietnam War) have a "before" and an "after" that sets them apart from people born after that time, or who were very young at the time of the attacks, and who thus only have an "after." Understanding this generational distinction means recognizing that individuals are shaped by their social environments. However, viewing the life course as a social

construction also entails the ways that people make free choices that shape society in turn. Moreover, the social construction of the life course emphasizes the interdependence of lives, and the ways relationships among people mutually shape each other.

In essence, there are two sides to the equation of the life course as a social construction: (1) the ways people shape themselves and society as they develop into adults, and (2) the ways society shapes what it means to be a person of different ages, and how transitions across life stages are understood within distinct cultures and groups. The key is to maintain the delicate balance between these two sides of the equation. Emphasizing one over the other often has negative consequences. In particular, at-risk factors for lack of student success and retention often fall within what are referred to as low "meta-cognitive" skills: limited ability to reflect on one's self, think about, and articulate the process one uses to make decisions. On the one hand, being too hard on oneself can be a problem, as students can underrate their ability to perform academic tasks, leaving them feeling powerless. In this case, students often hear feedback, however constructive, as confirming their negative self-image and confirming their belief that they are not smart enough to achieve. Yet, in reality metacognition is a far better predictor of academic success than intelligence, often referred to as IQ. One of the key factors in metacognition is having a growth mindset rather than a fixed one. A student with a fixed mindset views feedback and grades about low performance to be permanent; whereas a student with a growth mindset embraces feedback and treats a low-performance critique as an opportunity to rise to the challenge, to grow in response to learning. Indeed, if students view intelligence as malleable, rather than set, they exert more effort on academic tasks.[3]

Particularly important in effective social construction of college navigations is a concept called "grit." Grit combines several personality characteristics, including conscientious, self-control, and persistence. Conscientiousness is a person's ability to be organized, follow through, and be self-reflective. Self-control is the ability to resist the urge for short-term gains in pursuit of long-term gains. Persistence is the ability to overcome obstacles in order to pursue and achieve goals. As the combination

of these characteristics, grit is often described as combining passion with perseverance in pursuing long-term goals. Grit is more predictive of academic success than IQ. Indeed, gritty people maintain commitments to a variety of life goals, not purely educational. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of grit is that gritty people persist even in the absence of positive feedback. In fact, gritty people seek out long-term goals without achievement orientations, meaning they can pursue their goals without being reliant on others to give them continual praise for their efforts.[4]

Receiving praise for efforts exerted, rather than the actual quality of those efforts and their outcomes, can result in a sense of entitlement. "Academic entitlement" refers to a student perception that demands positive marks and feedback, regardless of whether the quality of work was deemed worthy of positive evaluation by faculty.* Students with academic entitlement view themselves as having a right to high grades with minimal effort and discomfort, often combined with an externalizing sense that faculty are responsible for awarding good grades, rather than providing students with constructive feedback for how to improve. When students have high levels of academic entitlement, they may demand that faculty change their grades, especially when they are close to the next letter grade, have completed extra credit assignments, or because missed classes hurt their scores. In some cases, academically entitled students can be overtly hostile, even belligerent, in confrontations with faculty, expecting professors to bend to their will whenever they are dissatisfied.

Academic entitlement is linked to externalizing behavior generally, including an external locus of control, which refers to viewing others to be the actors in any situation, rather than seeing one's own role. Often accompanying externalizing is blame deflection: seeing others as at fault rather than acknowledging how one has personally contributed to a negative

* Typical measures of academic entitlement include high levels of agreement with the following statements: "If I have explained to my professor that I am trying hard, I think he/she should give me some consideration with respect to my course grade"; or "My professors should reconsider my grade if I am close to the grade I want." These are the reverse of a mindset that says, "I believe that it is my responsibility to seek out the resources to succeed in college"; and "If I miss class, it is my responsibility to get the notes."

outcome. Students high in academic entitlement can view themselves to be victims of unfair grading policies, since they perceive that they received a poorer grade than they expected due to a problem with the faculty member's unjust grading policy, rather than a fair assessment of low quality. Alternatively, students with a growth mindset view poorer-than-expected marks as an opportunity to learn and improve in future endeavors.[5]

In combining grit with academic entitlement, the key for students is to develop a growth mindset that balances an understanding of the self with the feedback of others. A healthy balance achieves a moderate understanding of the power of one's self. Students should view themselves as capable of persisting through conscientious effort—grit—while understanding the importance of feedback from others. Having a self-concept as a worthy person, who is smart and capable, is crucial for taking feedback constructively, rather than becoming offended over self-perceived entitled rights, or alternatively being debilitated by self-doubting confirmations of low worth. Students need to learn to cope with less-than-perfect grades, and other forms of feedback regarding low-quality performance. Another important resiliency skill in college is to seek out feedback from faculty. Resilient and growth-minded students request to meet with faculty, not to complain or demand grade changes, but rather to learn why they received the marks they did and acquire strategies for improving on subsequent exams and assignments. Especially helpful in fostering these skills in college are mentoring and research assistant relationships. In fact, students with the lowest levels of ability benefit the most from additional forms of academic engagement, returning even more significant returns to academic outcomes than those who began with higher levels of ability. Hard work can pay off, if students are willing to couple their hard work with responsive changes based on feedback from expert others, such as faculty. The most important first step is acknowledging personal responsibility for a student's own learning. The second step is to take responsibility for seeking out opportunities to develop from others.[6]

One way for students to accept personal responsibility is to reflect on the ways they have been socialized in prior experiences to view themselves in certain ways. Families, prior school experiences, friend groups,

and social media all socialize people to view their self in certain ways. As an example of this kind of self-reflection on self and other expectations, **Chen** reflects on how gender expectations affect her self-interpretation, saying that "I fall on the masculine side of the scale when it comes to how much I express my emotions, even though how I express them appears more feminine." In doing so, she refers to a reading by Emily Kane (2013)[7] entitled " 'No Way My Boys Are Going To Be Like That!' Parents' Responses to Children's Gender Nonconformity." Kane emphasizes the likelihood that one's own gender identity is influenced by one's parents. At the same time, Kane emphasizes that children are not merely passive recipients of gender socialization by parents and society. Rather, children are active agents in forming their understanding of gender in relation to the ways their parents (and others) socialize them. Furthermore, parents often socialize gender in unconscious ways, based on what they were taught as children, but they too can become conscious of their actions and think critically about what ideas they want to pass on. Likewise, the fact that Chen is becoming aware of the ways she does and does not fit into gender stereotypes regarding emotional expression means that she has the opportunity to more actively shape her femininity, and to begin to harness her ability to mold the impressions others have of her.

Donna Gaines (2013)[8] studied a more extreme example of how society shapes what it means to be an individual: teen suicide pacts, when a group of teenagers decides to end their lives together, simultaneously. Gaines attributes these atrocities to intense forms of societal neglect, in which the individuality of teens is ironically both ignored, in terms of personal care and compassion, and simultaneously informally controlled, through strict expectations regarding acceptable teenager behavior. Teens who do not conform to society are considered deviant, separated, removed from contributing to society—labels that produce angst and despair. When social messages about and to teenagers convey these types of labels, it is not entirely surprising that some respond by actualizing their removal from society by ending their lives. This is not to condone, approve, or encourage teen suicide. The point is instead to move beyond the impulse to villainize such teens by attributing their actions entirely to individual deficits.

Surely there are individual imbalances, but also to blame are the societal imbalances that impact these teens' behavior. Removing free will and choice from teens, or from anyone, places the emphasis too squarely on the role of society and disempowers individuals from seeing the ways their own choices matter. On the other extreme, viewing personal choices as reigning supreme is also dangerous and places too much responsibility on individuals. For example, one of the students in chapter 6, **Jacob**, reflected on this reading by saying, "Labeling is a powerful influence that society can put on a person; this power is seen in 'Teenage Wasteland' as kids who are negatively labeled as 'burnouts,' 'druggies,' and 'troubled losers' are forced into feeling that suicide and 'crash[ing] to the bottom' of the social world were their only options in life (Gaines 2013: 7,11)." Likewise, one of the students in this chapter, **Chen**, refers to this reading in describing her socialization:

> Teenagers are labeled by adults and their peers, and it can be unclear as to whether they were labeled because of the way they act or [if they instead] act how they do because that is what is expected of them (Gaines 2013, 13–14). . . . *Those types of interactions I had with adults shaped the way I interact with others by socializing me to be more reserved* [emphasis added]. . . . When someone gave me a label, I found a way to fit into that role . . . Had I been socialized in a different way or given different labels during my childhood, I would have become a different person.

Chen is reflecting on to what extent she is making choices that reflect her personal desires versus acting in ways that mimic what she was taught to do. However, this is not an either–or choice.

A balanced perspective centers on recognizing that all personal choices are part *agency* (exercises of free will to be and do what one wants) and part *society* (informed, shaped, or controlled by social groups, cultural norms, and shared experiences). Focusing on this interplay, especially in the ways young people transition into adulthood, is key to having resilience in the face of adversity. Sometimes college brings difficulties, as does life more

generally. Some college students experience the hardest moments of their lives during college, either through their academic pursuits or through relationships with their families and friends. Other students experience some of the best and most rewarding moments of their lives during college. Many students experience a combination of the best and worst. To navigate these dynamic times, young people must exercise resiliency, recognizing both the ways their personal biographies shape their current choices *and* the ways they can retool the person they are becoming and write their own personal and professional stories.

ADVICE: WHAT WE (CAN) PROVIDE

#outsider #identitycrisis #recentering #notbrandname What resiliency looks like will vary tremendously by the individual and their specific challenges and circumstances. Students like **Aaron** or **Alexa** can focus on the issues of re-centering and identity they describe. One challenge that Aaron mentioned was the difference between his upbringing and that of his peers:

> My lacking in skills was due in part to the different childrearing techniques that my parents used compared to my classmates. My parents leaned towards more of a[n accomplishment of] natural growth technique, where I was the one in charge of my free time. Indeed, I was in some organized sports, but not in as many as my classmates were in, as their parents used concerted cultivation (Lareau 2013; see chapter 3 for a summary). Because I lacked these things, I experienced many embarrassing moments that began shaping me into an upper-class look-alike.

A professional counselor or other university support staff could help Aaron and Alexa to transition from allowing their high school identity to define their college experience and into exploring new opportunities and groups that college provides. The transition to adulthood involves

thinking critically about prior social experiences and considering whether the dynamics of the past remain relevant in new social situations, such as college. Trying to fit into groups in which one feels unaccepted is tiring, and that energy may be better spent on finding new social groups that provide acceptance. Sometimes that requires changing the people with whom one associates, and other times it simply means changing the dynamics of interaction among the same group of people. In either case, we caution students like Aaron and Alexa against reliving their high school experience on campus. Often college provides opportunities for a fresh start and the chance to break old patterns.

We also advise students to seek ways to reflect upon, understand, and live *their truth*. This starts with understanding that in college, there are going to be people from the upper class. Yet there are also going to be students who are middle-, working-, or lower-class. Students do not need to feel pressured to fit into one group or another because it is possible to go between groups, to make friends with someone who is more well-off and with someone who is not. Aaron and Alexa could reach out to other people who identify the way they do. Instead of trying to "keep up with the Joneses," much less the Kardashians, we advise students to think critically about what they are capable of, given their social circumstances, and how to comfortably align their lifestyle with their long-term plans. If students like Aaron and Alexa let their real, authentic personalities come through, they will find friends that like them not because of what they do or do not have but because of who they are. This is the way to embrace the social construction of the life course, and to embed personal biographies into current social interactions in ways that create positive support channels and which help students become the people they desire to be. While students are no more able to change their structural circumstances or history than the rest of us, college life does give them the opportunity to make choices and move forward.

#shy #followingtherules We remind **Chen** that emerging adulthood is a period of identity exploration, when young people are becoming independent of their parents but are not yet financially self-supporting. It is a time when young people can explore the possibilities for their road ahead

and make important life decisions. Both in terms of day-to-day living as well as long-term trajectories and outcomes, emerging adults have freedom to choose and decisions to make. For some people, such decisions naturally give way to clear pathways to achieve their desired outcomes: a major leads to a career, which leads to financial independence, and that in turn leads to establishing an independent household and later building a family. For others, such as Chen, these waters may be murky and harder to navigate, at least initially. When this is the case, and particularly when emerging adults lack social connections to a supportive community, they can experience this period as unstable and disconnected.

These problems are especially acute when students are living far from home or are the first in their family to attend college (like Chen), so their parents do not have experience navigating higher education. For Chen, the many decisions and choices could lead to confusion, a lack of direction, and feelings of isolation from those whose plans seem clear. Alternatively, the questions she is considering could also be compatible with having a reasonably clear plan for college and career. She is at a crucial juncture then, a point at which reaching out to the right people can make all the difference. If Chen were to reach out to a professor or another trusted supportive adult, the best research-based advice she could receive would be to get connected in an effort to find her voice. Some way, somehow, she needs to start making her campus her home. Many students do not realize what a wide array of resources there are for finding places where they can speak out and fit in on campus, especially for finding fellow students who may be underrepresented at the university. However, we guarantee there are other people like Chen on her campus; she and others like her must only work to find them.

Connecting to the content of chapter 3, Stuber (2012)[9] documents that "social class shapes students' experiences within the experiential core of college life, structuring their abilities to navigate their campus' social and extracurricular worlds. Indeed, privileged students typically arrive on campus with sophisticated maps and navigational devices to guide their journeys—while less privileged students are often less equipped for the journey" (p. 12). Thus it is natural for students whose parents did not

attend college or who come from a working-class background to fluctuate between feeling enthusiastic and feeling lost. Importantly, scholars of higher education remind us that *college is a process* that involves more than educational outcomes. Students are also acquiring social networks, along with cultural tastes and attitudes that carry over into professional life. Since cultural competencies vary at the outset of college, they inform the choices that students make while in college, which in turn shape life after graduation, carrying over to decisions about careers and family.

As Stuber (2011) points out, although the ability to confidently navigate campus life leads to the reproduction of economic, social, and cultural capital, higher education also provides a means to contest existing economic hierarchies. Doing so requires not simply choosing a major that theoretically guarantees a given job, but also attending to both curricular and extracurricular ways to find their voice and learn what works for them. Indeed, this aspect of college life makes it doubly important for people like Chen to seek out opportunities to connect to groups and find some way—social, cultural, academic—to participate more in campus life. For Chen, learning how to speak up will steer her toward goals and an outcome that fits her interests and desires. Students who have specific goals that they are able to articulate and put into action are much more likely to achieve those goals, and the resulting sense of accomplishment or self-efficacy leads to further success (Mirowsky & Ross 2007).[10]

For this reason, Chen's expressed concern about labeling is reflective of not knowing whether she has control or feeling unable to see how the path that she has chosen in college will lead to long-term success. As Chen points out, it is not clear if she was labeled "shy" due to expectations of her family or a result of her true personality. She indicates that "[t]his is similar to dilemmas the teenagers Gaines studied dealt with in their town. Gaines found their major problem was that they were told 'to be decent human beings when nobody [seemed] to respect them or take them seriously' (2013: 12)." Since increased self-direction leads to greater success, Chen will reap longer-term rewards if she seeks out resources to help her define a path and break free of the label she had in high school. We advise students like her to think critically about how to stand firm in articulating

what they value. Not every situation requires a response, of course, so Chen should still exercise her keen observational insights to understand what is going on before speaking.

We also advise students like her to view college as providing the opportunity to improve social skills. Seek challenging situations and find ways to offer comments and opinions when comfortable. This will build confidence and begin to crystalize passion and purpose. Importantly, students like Chen need to know that it is alright to ask for help. "Be quiet" is not a rule in college, unlike in Chen's past, and people on campus value hearing from students. As higher education professionals and faculty, we do not get annoyed when students ask us questions. Rather, asking questions is expected and welcome on the university campus. Another key opportunity in college is the chance to find groups of friends that can build confidence, and for Chen, this confidence is a critical part of resilience. It may start with being around people who have similar interests. As quiet students speak up among friends, they gain the experience for speaking up more generally.

#movingon #emotionalabuse As for Michalyn, we advise her to seek counseling. The experiences she has been through require professional counselors to understand, and there is no sense trying to go it alone. Most campuses have a counseling and psychology center, often within the health center, that provides students professional help with learning to manage negative emotions. Once Michalyn gains assistance in lessening the intensity of her experiences, she will be better equipped to focus on what they mean for the life she is shaping. She is rightly engaging in relationship management and realizing that some relationships are not good for her, and she is beginning to seek positive relationships. That is wonderful, and we advise students in similar situations to do the same critical evaluation of themselves and their social interactions.

At the same time, there is a broader issue that needs to be addressed: Michalyn's intense focus on the expectations of others. This risks tipping the delicate balance, described in the science section, too heavily toward the social control of others at the expense of the role of the self. Students

like Michalyn would do well to achieve a better balance between the two, and to guard against only living in ways they think will fulfill the expectations of others. Professional counseling would help to address this overarching issue as well as promote healing from the emotional abuse in Michalyn's recent past.

In order to enhance her personal resiliency, we would advise Michalyn to make a list of the positive aspects in her life that affirm the positive feelings she is having now, as she begins to establish her personal freedom. Even after moving beyond negative emotions of past trauma, counseling services can provide regular check-ins on progress toward building the better life that Michalyn desires. Those efforts will help to restore her sense of personal agency over her social experiences. Ultimately, she can invest those skills in thinking about what kind of professional path she wants to carve, and what steps she needs to make toward it. For Michalyn, resilience will be an involved process, but well worth it.

#notgettingit #saywhat Interpreting Connor's story requires returning to the content of chapters 1 and 2. Recall that emerging adulthood is a time of instability, of "shifting choices," according to Arnett, where emerging adults "know they are supposed to have a Plan with a capital *P*."[11] Connor's trouble with zeroing in on the important concepts in class, and his difficulty focusing, may be signals to reconsider his Plan. The Plans of most emerging adults are subject to numerous revisions, and the goal of further development during this life stage is to learn from each set of revisions. We urge Connor to visit an advisor to discuss the academic challenges he is facing. Adept advisors would deepen Connor's awareness of the numerous career options available on campus, and the fact that faculty in roles besides the typical "doctor, lawyer, engineer" paths are likely able to relate to his experience. The advisor could offer Connor examples of other courses that he could take in order to assess whether he is on the right career path. After selecting some courses to explore whether those subjects would make more sense for him and better captivate his interest, the advisor could also encourage Connor to connect with the faculty teaching those courses, and to meet with them during office hours to ask

about how they became interested in their career path and in their field of study.

We advise students like Connor to talk with others on campus about their experience feeling lost in a certain class and later finding other classes that animated them. Doing so orients students toward career paths aligned with who they want to be and what they want to do, instead of following a plan created by others. Instability during college should not be read negatively; rather, it is part and parcel of possibility and exploration—the liminal phase, where young people create meaning and discover identity. Connor's feelings of being lost, confused, and even scared are normal. Many advisors can relate to his experiences, and it is often the case that advisors did not at first know the ultimate goal of their own career path. The major lesson is that Connor can bounce back by embracing college as a time to gain exposure to the wide array of career options and to learn from people who hold positions that interest him.

We also advise students like Connor not to write off the professor of the course that is challenging them. If he reaches out to the professor of his physics class, Connor may find that there are ways for him to better connect with the content. Sometimes students literally show professors the notes they are taking during class to ask for specific feedback on whether they are absorbing the right content. This method, in contrast to a general statement like "I'm lost," can be an effective way to get concrete help from a professor. Some students do not realize that they can gain more individualized instruction through professors' office hours. Meanwhile, other students come by regularly to take advantage of this personalized "tutoring," which then bolsters their understanding of classroom instruction. Plus, there are many university courses for which additional tutoring is available, often provided by students who excel in those topics. If Connor takes advantage of these resources, he will gain an important life skill that stays with him beyond the immediate goal of doing well in that particular class. He will learn that the first impression of a social circumstance does not have to be the last: he can be resilient amid confusion.

TOGETHERNESS: WHAT WE (CAN) SHARE

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

Troy and Aaron. Troy and Aaron have never met before, but both attended the welcome meeting for a student organization focused on environmental awareness on campus. During an icebreaker activity at the beginning of the meeting, Troy and Aaron are paired up and expected to introduce themselves. They share with each other that, coincidentally, they both chose to attend this meeting because they are determined to try out new interests and experiences during their first year. They joke about how it seemed kind of silly to be doing that, but now they feel better that someone else is doing the same thing!

As the meeting goes on, they continue to talk about their experiences so far. Troy mentions that he felt like a fraud at the very beginning of the year because he left an entire friend group back in his home state and began a new life here at college. He talked to one of his instructors about it, and the instructor helped him see that this was a normal, positive process of "letting go." Aaron immediately relates, and he shares his experiences of transitioning from a Baptist, working-class high school to a more affluent Catholic

high school. He went to his advisor, who, like Troy's instructor, encouraged him to engage fully in the college experience. They both say that they are starting to feel more balanced, and they comment to each other about the energy and good vibes that come from going home to see old friends—and how, after going, they look forward to returning to their new friends.

Troy admits that he can identify more with the affluent private school from which Aaron graduated, but he also talks about how he is happier now that he is in college where it is more diverse. Aaron agrees, and he says he is happy to be at a place that is not full of just one kind of people. Both find it reassuring to talk with someone who has experienced the stress of leaving one community and having to find their place in a new one. Their joking and positive energy continue, and the two of them decide to attend an art exhibit on campus—something neither of them would have considered doing in high school. Here's to new experiences!

Derrick and Michalyn. Derrick and Michalyn have not met before, but they become lab partners in Chemistry 101. During class, they enjoy having some good-humored conversation, and they tend to do well on their assignments. Much to their surprise, they end up running into each other at a "Healthy Relationships" seminar offered by the campus wellness center. They begin chatting. Derrick mentions the girlfriend whom he followed to college only to have her break up with him. Michalyn reveals that she was in an abusive relationship. They are both shocked and, most importantly, *relieved* to know that someone else who seems to "have it all together" in class has also dealt with some difficult relationship issues. They decide to go for coffee after the event.

Derrick "fesses up" to Michalyn, letting her know that at the beginning of the semester he was miserable and struggling academically. He tells her that he actually failed the first chemistry exam. After that, he relays, he explained to his instructor why he was doing so poorly. The instructor told Derrick that it was very common for students to fight through heartbreak, and that he would eventually learn to better compartmentalize so he could maintain his grades. The instructor also suggested that he go to a seminar about healthy relationships. He is in a much better frame of mind now and has made an A on the last two exams.

Michalyn, fascinated by Derrick's story, says that she was in absolute despair at first. She opened up to an RA during an event at her residence hall, and that is who suggested she begin attending this seminar. She says that she too feels better now, but both of them complain about how several people minimized their experience. People told Derrick to just get over it, that he would have many more girlfriends. Michalyn got similar advice from a few people who didn't understand her full story. But once each had talked with some more supportive people on campus, they realized that their struggles were valid. Thankfully, they also realized they had the power to control their own life experience, especially while in college. They agree to keep each other honest and help one another make their own choices and not let others affect them as much. In the spirit of taking charge, they decide to be spontaneous and attend a comedy show on campus, because they see a flyer for it at the coffee shop. And why not?

Bryce and Chen. Both Bryce and Chen needed a one-hour elective, and both ended up taking "Finding your Voice," a discussion seminar focused on assertiveness. Bryce chose the course because some older friends told him to (they said it would be easy). Chen chose it because her advisor thought it would be a good experience for her and recommended that she take it. Early in the semester, Bryce and Chen are paired with each other as part of a role-playing assertiveness exercise. The instructions involve choosing a role for your partner to play, and then conducting a respectful but assertive conversation with that person on a particular issue. Both Chen and Bryce end up choosing their parents, and that coincidence gets them talking.

Chen talks about growing up in a world of strict parental expectations, and Bryce immediately responds with stories about his own experience of never-ending expectations to live up to. They find the activity to be very worthwhile, and both admit that the course is turning out to be a great experience. They commiserate about how hard it can be to speak up to your parents, but how great it is to be in college, where they can really become who they want to be. They make plans to have some respectful but assertive conversations with their parents the next time they go home. To their surprise, they realize that they both secretly love Japanese anime.

As a symbol of their new assertiveness, they make plans to attend a comic exhibit on campus that same evening.

FURTHER READING ONLINE

- To learn more about the concept of resiliency, we suggest reading this article: Henderson, Nan, November 2, 2012, "What Is Resiliency and Why Is It So Important?" Resiliency in Action, retrieved from https://www.resiliency.com/what-is-resiliency/.
- There are also several quizzes available online to test one's level of resiliency, such as this one that can be completed automatically: Siebert, Al, "Resiliency Quiz—How Resilient Are You?" Resiliency Center, retrieved from http://resiliencyquiz.com/index.shtml; or another that can be tabulated manually: Henderson, Nan, November 2, 2012, "The Resiliency Quiz" Resiliency in Action, retrieved from https://www.resiliency.com/free-articles-resources/the-resiliency-quiz/.
- A related concept, called "grit," has gained recent attention. To read more about grit, visit Angela Duckworth's website for her book, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*: https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-book/.
- In addition, visit the research tab on Angela Duckworth's website to learn more about how the scale was developed and what it helps to explain. A grit scale quiz can be completed and tabulated automatically here: "Grit Scale," retrieved from https://angeladuckworth.com/grit-scale/.

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