

**Sharing Stories of the Brandeis Undergraduate Community: Looking at the Integration of  
a Diverse Student Body Through the Lenses of Unscientific Analysis and Theatrical  
Performance**

Alia Goldfarb  
Brandeis University  
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## 1. Introduction

*“The logic of words should yield to the logic of realities.”* – Justice Louis D. Brandeis

Guided by the wise words of Justice Brandeis, I shall share and give a detailed look into the experiences and realities of the undergraduate community of Brandeis University. Our community faces a variety of complex issues as it continually grows and becomes more diverse over time. Before I turn to these questions of diversity, I must introduce myself and describe my own approach to this topic: I am a female Caucasian, German-speaking, Swiss-American dual citizen of Jewish and Protestant heritage, who was raised in a home filled with spiritual symbols of Buddhism, Hinduism and Native American cultures. I grew up alongside my half-sister, who is of African-Brazilian/Swiss decent. In Switzerland, growing up bilingually is fairly common, but I had the tremendous privilege of even more exposure to various languages and became a true polyglot. For most of my life, diversity seemed a natural, undoubted and unquestioned element. Moving to the US, a country filled with tensions regarding diversity and attending Brandeis University, a place of constant learning, growth and questioning, I became sensitized to the complex issues of diversity and identity.

At Brandeis I received my first academic introduction to theories of systemic injustices and oppression revolving around diversity issues. The whole reason why Brandeis exists lies specifically in these historical issues. As the Brandeis mission statement declares, “by being a nonsectarian university that welcomes students, teachers and staff of every nationality, religion and orientation, Brandeis renews the American heritage of cultural diversity, equal access to opportunity and freedom of expression,” (Brandeis University Website). Since 1948, Brandeis has come a long way in terms of academic achievement, equipment, endowment and student diversity. The founders of the university created the institution to counteract the anti-Semitic

notions of other elite schools and enable the Jewish community to participate in the highest levels of academic achievement. Brandeis functions as a hub for Jewish intellectualism and academia in the United States. As former Brandeis President Jehuda Reinharz explained in Uriel Heilman's article for the *Jewish Advocate*, "Brandeis is a microcosm of world Jewry...We are seen today by the Jewish community as the think tank and action center of the Jewish community" (2). This important factor still influences the university's identity in many ways. The deeply rooted Jewish aspects of this identity can be seen in a variety of university programs, the academic calendar and its alignment with the most important Jewish holidays, the numerous Jewish investors, the large number of Jewish faculty and the predominantly Jewish student body. Given the prevalent appearance of the university's Jewish heritage, which shines through in so many ways, it is necessary to remind the reader that the institution was not founded as a religiously affiliated institution.

Over the years, Brandeis has begun to attract more and more students and faculty from non-Jewish backgrounds. The university does not only aspire to greatness within the Jewish community, but has steadily increased its presence on a greater platform. Thus, Brandeis remains critically aware of developments at other leading institutions, such as the constantly transforming diversity policies. As the United States Supreme Court aptly noted in a *Harvard Law Review* article, diversity in education has been a highly contended topic throughout the history of the US as a nation (572). Recently, questions of diversity seem to have a quickly increasing presence on campuses around the US. These developments mirror the realities of the professional world for which students are preparing throughout their studies. Students must be readied for a world that faces higher interconnectedness and global reach than ever before; thus, cultural sensitivity and

tolerance should be a high priority in any institution's curricular and extracurricular programming.

Brandeis has encountered a similar need for diversification and its consequential positive and negative aspects. In 2006, Brandeis instated the University Diversity Committee to aid with the development of updated diversity policies and post-admissions programming. This committee added the 'Diversity Statement' featured alongside the general Mission Statement listed above. According to this statement, among other aims, the University "endeavors to foster a just and inclusive campus culture that embraces the diversity of the larger society" (Brandeis University Website). This goal requires many years of hard work and thoughtful processing of constantly changing facts and numbers.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the statistics in regards to diversity at Brandeis don't seem to have changed too drastically over the past few years. According to the enrollment numbers from 2002, 84 percent identified as White, 10 percent Asian, 3 percent African-American and 3 percent Hispanic. In contrast to the more recent enrollment statistics from 2009-2010, only 47 percent identified as White, 11 percent Asian-American, 5 percent African-American, 5 percent Hispanic, 10 percent international and 23 percent did not report racial identity. Far more striking than the changes in numbers is the change in language and new divisions of identity labels. Evidently, the jargon revolving around diversity policies has changed dramatically and these questions are dealt with in a different manner. Nonetheless, the numbers have not changed greatly, which seems to be the trigger point as to why the university opened up its application pool. As Brandeis student journalists Wittenberg and Omoefe Ogbeide noted, "While the admissions office does not actively pursue applicants of color, it does strategically encourage applicants from different geographical locations that are racially diverse" (The Justice, 2011).

With such procedures, the university seems to hope to gain a more diverse student body over time. While I do not have access to the newest enrollment numbers, my sense from what I am seeing on campus tells me that these policies have worked alongside a few other factors. To reiterate, this is pure speculation and solely based on my personal observations, but it does seem we have an increase of racial and ethnic diversity on our campus.

While some schools struggle with these changes, numerous institutions seem to have found the shift to a more varied student body extremely beneficial, as argued in various legal debates such as *University of California Regents v. Bakke*<sup>1</sup> or *Grutter v. Bollinger*<sup>2</sup>. In these specific cases, both schools claim the increased diversification of the student body and the maintenance of this diversity adds mostly positive complexities to the community and academic environment. Given Brandeis' statement mentioned above and the underlying motivating notion of acceptance, the school has followed suit with most of these developments in diversity. However, the deep-set influences of Jewish identity and simultaneous quest for openness have brought up complex tensions within the institution. Regardless of the increasing statistical numbers in diversity and the university's good intentions towards minority groups, many complex difficulties arise and require further discussion. This statistical evidence on diversity questions calculated by university administrators, who do not necessarily have access to the experiences lived within the community, often does not reflect the full scope of highly influential experiences of individual students. This discrepancy gives rise to numerous questions of integration.

With these key aspects in mind, this paper discusses issues of diversity from three angles. First, it examines how the already established community and Jewish majority do in fact

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<sup>1</sup> *University of California Regents v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265 (1978)

<sup>2</sup> *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. (2003)

influence the reasonably diverse student body. Does this unique cultural factor ever create a sense of boundary, limitation and/or exclusivity within the undergraduate community? What exactly does the Jewish identity encompass at Brandeis? Where are the limitations of the Jewish identity and can it be harmful to the integration and diversification processes? What main struggles arise due to the deeply felt and acknowledged Jewish history of this campus?

Secondly, the paper will look into how Brandeis promotes the integration of minority students and attempts to nurture an accepting and supportive community. Specifically, how practical and useful are the post-acceptance policies? How effective are these special programs and events? How does our academic education fit into the social realm where we encounter questions of diversity every day? Should the university create more, less or simply different programming? How do students feel their effect? Overall, the thesis will illuminate certain tensions, which may have been dismissed as inconsequential. My writing will primarily focus on diversity issues based on ethnicity, race, national and socio-economic class, while acknowledging the undercurrent of other variables such as gender, sexual orientation, upbringing, cultural heritage and other such factors. As the university displays a group divide along the lines of Jewish/non-Jewish, I shall give this specific analysis a priority. Nonetheless, I will still discuss issues across other social boundaries. While discussing these theoretical aspects, I hope to shine a light on narratives occurring on the ground within our community. I aim to place the stories within the theoretical framework of my research, thus giving the matter the appropriate urgency and lessening the theoretical abstraction, making the issue a tangible part of our daily reality. I aspire to allow for personal experiences and private voices to be heard, while giving each narrative and its origin my highest respect and understanding.

The third and final aspect lies in a culminating theatrical performance dealing with individual stories and experiences. The tensions mentioned above and potential problematic situations will be brought to life through an original theatrical performance piece based on the true stories of Brandeis undergraduate students. This will hopefully lead to a discussion of how Brandeis can move forward in this next era under a new president and keep striving for the balance between maintaining and honoring its Jewish heritage and opening doors to increased diversity. Further, I invite the reader and audience member to join the conversation regarding the intersection of the quest for academic excellence and the fostering of a rich and varied student body.

I decided to research and write about this specific topic after encountering a number of these issues in my personal and academic life over the past four years at Brandeis. While I am a person of Jewish heritage, albeit not understood as Jewish by traditional Jewish law, I do not identify as religiously Jewish myself. I do acknowledge my cultural Jewish heritage and celebrate certain aspects of my upbringing. This fact about my own identity has led to numerous discussions about Jewish and non-Jewish identity with many of my peers. Additionally, I have witnessed many scenes of cultural insensitivity, ignorance, and, to some extent, even possible racism, sexism and homophobia. In my eyes, Brandeis has done a remarkable job at creating a reasonably safe environment that nurtures tolerance and acceptance. However, there still exist many issues, which must be addressed and thought about in a new light given the ever-evolving circumstances in which we find ourselves. This paper is not meant to accuse or seek blame; rather, it is aimed to point out potential social tensions in the community, which may have gotten lost among the many changes of the past four years. I hope to give ideas and suggestions for future programming options and help foster the dialogue between all of the various groups and



individuals. As many administrators, university officials, faculty and students realize, the time has come for Brandeis to acknowledge its current strengths and weaknesses and begin to move towards new levels of excellence.

## 2. A Microcosm of the Jewish Community

### 2.1 The Jewish Identity of Brandeis

With Presidents Handler (1983-91) and Reinharz (1994-2010), the university experienced drastically different approaches toward the definition of the University's identity, specifically regarding its 'Jewishness.' Handler's approach brought numerous advances towards diversifying the community, making it less white and marginally less Jewish. After her departure from the University, the school rapidly worked towards reinstating core Jewish elements, accumulating in Reinharz's implementation of several Jewish-related programs and traditions. Some university affiliates felt Brandeis had lost its "Jewish soul" under President Handler, whereas others felt that Reinharz' additions acted against the university's commitment to embracing minorities and differences. Students and faculty at Brandeis during this time have mentioned how the drastic changes harbored feelings of exclusivity, confusion and in some cases even hostility on both sides of the debate. Clearly, both approaches seemed highly controversial and agreeing upon a single way to define the university's relationship to its Jewishness seemed impossible.

Defining this identity is extremely complex and finding a single answer appears to be inconceivable. Further, the question of how to nourish and cultivate the Jewish heritage embedded in the mission of the institution has not found any conclusive answers. These two issues seem inherent to the community and the main causes of the difficulties the university faces. While these two questions are deeply linked, they do require separate analysis and should be addressed with equal care. To begin the discussion of all the elements necessary to create a

cohesive identity for the institution, we must look at the diverse makeup of the Brandeisian Jewish community itself. The various student groups related to Judaism extend from deeply rooted Orthodox Judaism to Reform Judaism to more politically inclined groups such as *Jewish Voice for Peace*, *bVIEW*, etc. This vast range of groups within the community that all somehow relate to Judaism have led to rifts between individuals. Brandeis has harbored a safe and encouraging space to voice and practice all of these beliefs and issues; however, the communication between the often oppositional groups has come to a halt. In recent events, such as the demonstrations against the Knesset visit on campus in 2011 or the debates over the Dor Guez exhibit *100 Steps to the Mediterranean* at the Rose Art Museum in the Fall 2012, the divides have become more apparent and the tensions are now felt by nearly everyone in the community - Jews and non-Jews alike. The boundaries are also experienced in the several ways different groups celebrate the Holidays and which traditions they choose to maintain on a daily basis.

Indubitably, the identifier “Jewish” has become far more complex than a single identity. While this term functions as the umbrella identifier for the majority of people at Brandeis, it no longer means the same thing to each “Jewish” person on campus. It appears, this ambivalence among the Brandeis majority has led to great confusion among the community at large. Despite the university acknowledging the need for communication across these cultural gaps, the dialogue to find common ground on these matters has mostly failed. Here I must acknowledge that there have been a few attempts and new student groups formed to foster such dialogue and peace, many coming to life over the past few months; however, these attempts are so new that I cannot include a full evaluation of their potential impact at this point. Nonetheless, misunderstandings, a lack of communication and even disrespectful treatment of peers have

come up frequently. The gaping social voids have spread beyond the involved groups and have led to many heated arguments and confusion among Jews as well as non-Jewish members of the community.

## 2.2 Honoring Jewish Heritage

At Brandeis, the many people of Jewish heritage bring a whole array of narratives from the Jewish history to the community. Some of my peers carry the stories of Holocaust survivors in their blood. Others bring the Jewish narratives and struggles stemming from the conflict torn Middle East. Yet others bring even older histories of Sephardic Judaism originating in Spain and the expulsion in 1492. As previously established, the University has a certain responsibility to honor these Jewish narratives and culture. Thus, the numerous Jewish programs, clubs and organizations on campus have a very important role in this undertaking. However, despite the school's awareness of this task, concern for the maintenance of Jewish culture prevails and surfaces in most discussions about regulations, educational changes and so forth. Some orthodox colleagues have mentioned feeling excluded at events where only non-kosher food is served. At the same time, the issue of cost and expenditure to include kosher food must be addressed. Kosher food often costs significantly more, which has become a point of dispute for meal-plans, on-campus food and event planning. Similarly, certain academic and co-curricular events and programs, such as performances or school dances held on Friday nights, inherently cannot provide a space for Shabbat-observing Jews to participate. Moreover, some Shabbat-observing Jewish peers have mentioned the sense of exclusivity by certain departments, such as the theater arts department. Students unable or unwilling to neglect religious responsibilities often find that they are unable to participate in any department productions as they do not allow for the observance of Shabbat and other similar responsibilities. Fortunately, student-run theatre groups

that accommodate religious responsibilities do exist, yet the productions differ greatly in caliber and quality compared to a department show. While I personally do not think it necessary to adjust the production system for religious observance in the department productions, I did find it important to mention such issues here as well. These factors must all be taken into account when creating an all-inclusive system for the undergraduate community.

As mentioned above, President Reinharz always sought to honor the Jewish community and endeavored to do so by creating numerous academic programs and departments relating to Jewish issues. This method instilled a sense of responsibility toward the Jewish cause in both a cultural and academic sense. To name a few, under his leadership, the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute<sup>3</sup>, the Steinhardt Social Research Institute<sup>4</sup> and the Crown Center for Middle East Studies<sup>5</sup> were founded. Given Reinharz' relentless dedication to his mission of nurturing the Jewish heritage, some of my peers have argued that he may have gone too far in his enthusiasm for the creation of centers for Jewish study. Some have claimed Reinharz invested too much into these programs and let other departments falter without sufficient support and resources, such as various foreign language departments other than Hebrew. Such difficulties demand the university to create more precise definitions about how to most effectively honor the Jewish identity.

Honoring the Jewish heritage also brings up many discussions on the question of Israel/Palestine. Brandeis has become a platform for these discussions with the aim of nurturing healthy educational dialogue open to everyone interested in the issue. The university is committed to at least attempting to bring a broad set of views on the topic to the Brandeis

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<sup>3</sup> Originally known as the International Research Institute on Jewish Women. Est. in 1997

<sup>4</sup> Focuses on the development of new approaches to socio-demographic research and to understanding Jewish identity. Est. in 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Est. in 2005

community. Brandeis funds a variety of programs to allow for this, for example, Brandeis invites and supports Palestinian scholars and students to Brandeis through various scholarships and academic programming; the university funds a strong Middle East and Arabic studies department, as well as internationally renowned Peace, Conflict and Coexistence studies programs; the school supports many diverse Israel-related political student groups and a variety of religious groups on campus, and above all Brandeis has been engaged in a unique relationship with the Arabic Al-Quds University in Jerusalem for ten years<sup>6</sup>. Some may argue that these attempts at dialogue undermine the mission to honor Brandeis's Jewish heritage. Others may state that the school has not done enough for this dialogue to occur. Regardless, it seems clear that Brandeis is in a rare position to carry on with this conversation and play a major part in the future of the Israel/Palestine question in academia and on the ground.

### 2.3 A Non-Traditional Majority

As mentioned, the Brandeisian community embodies a microcosm of the larger global Jewish community reflecting many various aspects of Jewish culture and religion. Because of this, Brandeis offers one quite unique element within this miniature representation of the world: Brandeis is one of the few places in the world where Jews represent the majority of a community. Jewish majorities are rarely found in societies around the globe outside of Israel or smaller local communities. The paucity of such settings highlights the importance of the Brandeis setting and requires further discussion. Many questions arise dealing with how this may affect individuals, group dynamics and perceptions on social interactions. How does being a majority affect individuals, who are accustomed to representing a minority group? On the flipside, how does this situation affect those used to partaking in the majority (in this case, non-

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<sup>6</sup> Please note recent changes on BrandeisNow. <http://www.brandeis.edu/now/2013/November/al-quds-response.html>

Jewish Caucasians)? Does this unusual Jewish majority change social relations for others traditionally seen as minority groups already (here Hispanic, African American or mixed individuals)? How does the notion of ‘white privilege’ change and apply to ‘Jewish white privilege’ as seen at Brandeis? Such issues create a rather unique dynamic that is different from what comparable universities in the US have to confront in their discussions on diversity.

With these questions in mind, the university does a wonderful job at providing a safe space to practice Judaism and seek solutions for tensions within the Jewish culture and religion. Brandeis has both academic and extra-curricular programming and resources in place for such endeavors. To name a few, we have the department for Near Eastern and Judaic Studies, Hillel, a variety of religious services, kosher food readily available, the Hebrew and Yiddish Studies programs, etc. On numerous occasions, I have heard students articulate how comfortable they are with their (level of) Jewishness at Brandeis. In contrast, I have also experienced how inconvenient it can be if you do not self-identify as Jewish. In this setting, numerous assumptions between subgroups have emerged. For example, Caucasian students are mostly automatically thought of as Jewish, where all non-Caucasian students are seen as non-Jews. Further, some Caucasian (mostly the Jewish Caucasians) immediately label all Hispanic and African American students as POSSE, TYP or MLK<sup>7</sup> scholars and often regard them as somehow inferior both academically and socio-economically. Similarly, some entertain the idea that all Asian students do not speak English, study business or a hard science, and are very wealthy. I shall unpack these broad claims in later sections. Nonetheless, I must mention here that these assumptions are often false, especially in light of the continually increasing diversity at our school. Even at a school

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<sup>7</sup> Scholarship programs: Brandeis POSSE, Transitional Year Program, Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship

like Brandeis, where heightened social awareness and sensitivity towards issues of social justice are prevalent, derogatory behavior towards the “other” can be found on all levels.

This particular majority, based on Jewish heritage, brings up questions related to victimization, survival and rehabilitation of a historically oppressed people. These concerns may stem from personal experiences relating to the history of the Holocaust and other atrocities committed against the Jewish people in particular. This rich and painful history has rendered most American Jews unaccustomed to constituting a majority. Some American Jews now feel a responsibility and strengthened desire to participate in and maintain Jewish life, specifically when they find themselves having the opportunity to join the Brandeis community. Concurrently, others may take this lifestyle for granted or even begin to distance themselves from it. Some may feel overwhelmed by a perceived demand of having to participate in Jewish culture, while others may feel misunderstood in finding their own path in Jewish life. In discussions with peers, a number of my friends mentioned the intense pressure they felt to represent the Jewish culture. Some families seem especially proud to have children attending a culturally Jewish school. Other families think it irrelevant, while yet others may lack understanding for the student’s greater involvement in Jewish life than their lifestyle provided prior to attending Brandeis. These concerns can lead to discomfort and tension within the Brandeisian Jewish community and expand further into the macrosphere of the greater Brandeis community (the non-Jewish members). It appears that the nature of the university and its heritage easily provides a space where tensions may erupt. Certainly, the university is already aware of the issues its relation to Jewish culture can produce, as it has witnessed countless protests and rallies on these very issues. Nonetheless, I wonder if the university, as an academic environment and also as a community

makes all of its members privy to the pressures that they may encounter while finding their own paths at Brandeis. Clarity on this question may develop through the following discussion.

#### 2.4 Sentiments of Non-Jewish Students towards the Jewish Majority

The multifaceted diversity within the Jewish student body may feel confusing to many students. The cohabitation with non-Jewish students has illuminated further fascinating situations. Several of my non-Jewish peers have told me stories of their interactions with some Jewish people on campus. In some cases, they felt excluded or simply embarrassed by the lack of their knowledge about the Jewish traditions. For example, one female student told me about an encounter with a Jewish male. This encounter occurred within a semi-formal setting between campus club leaders, thus her first reaction upon meeting the young man was to shake his hand. Unbeknownst to her, he is *Shomer Negiah* – meaning he generally avoids all physical contact with non-familial women. While many Rabbis have interpreted the religious texts to suggest that where it would be rude of the *Shomer Negiah* person not to shake hands in this situation, this particular young man was uncomfortable and refused to extend the gesture. While the female student found this strange, she ascribed the incident to social awkwardness. Later on, a third person explained the situation in private and the girl felt both utterly embarrassed for her ignorance and slightly aggravated by this rule, which she felt to be inexplicably prude and potentially sexist. Similar incidents occur frequently in our community, and given Brandeis' history and affiliation, the Jewish tradition and cultural values have become 'mainstream' in some ways. Many forget that not everyone has the same education in Jewish tradition and beliefs. Some students therefore jump to the conclusion that everyone around them knows exactly what they are talking about when discussing topics like *Shabbat* or what it means to be



kosher; however, not everyone knows these expressions or how to behave in certain cultural situations. This can lead to confusion, exclusion and embarrassment for all involved.

Difficulties with integration in the Jewish community for non-Jews come up in another vital social element: dating. Apparently a number of non-Jewish individuals have experienced disappointing realities in our Jewish community. A significant part of this population will not date non-Jewish counterparts for religious reasons. This pertains especially to non-Jewish heterosexual females seeking relationships with straight males. Such circumstances have led to more uncomfortable conversations and heartbreak than we might see at other universities with a different social makeup. Some of my peers have expressed that they did not know about these customs or personal beliefs pertaining to dating before becoming a part of the Brandeis community. This has led to disappointment, disrespect, hurt and other tensions within the community. Moving away from just the question of dating, some peers have mentioned that they were not made aware of the significant impact the Jewish culture has on daily life in general before selecting to attend the school.

To return to the unique situation at Brandeis where a group traditionally seen as a minority has become the majority, the dynamics for all other social groups have changed as well. Some students of color have mentioned feeling strangely uncertain towards this change in social structure. One African-American student articulated that she had somehow felt more connected to Jewish Caucasians before coming to Brandeis, as she could understand the parallels between her own race's struggles through history and the Jewish people's battle. Interestingly, at Brandeis she felt much more estranged from the Jewish students; at Brandeis they seemed to be 'in power,' just like any other Caucasian that has advantages over her social status in the rest of the US. At the same time, she does see Brandeis as a place of hope. If Brandeis could establish itself

among the leading institutions of the nation while remaining deeply connected to a social minority, she felt other minorities could create similar levels of greatness in academia and in the world.

In a slightly different light, one interesting scene I became privy to dealt with the overconfidence displayed by two white Jewish males and the misappropriation of a tarnished verbal cultural marker. These two students were arguing over an unknown matter and getting rather aggravated. A female African-American student was standing just a few feet away overhearing their conversation. As the discussion grew louder, one of the guys shouted the expression “Nigga’ you wrong!” The African-American student heard this and was extremely offended. She decided to voice her opinion and harshly criticize the two boys and their inappropriate use of an extremely offensive word. The conversation ended with an unsatisfying impasse for all three. My interpretation of the situation is that the boys were not aware of the social implications such behavior may have. While not all African-American people may feel offended by such slang, some certainly are. This shines a light on the lack of sensitivity and high level of ignorance some students have on these issues – even at Brandeis. At the same time, I must acknowledge that there is another side to this issue. My friend made the following argument after attending a performance of George C. Wolfe’s *The Colored Museum* this past semester: “Isn’t the goal of our supposed multicultural education to make us feel more at ease with different cultural expressions? Why should we feel alienated from different sociocultural markers? I think it’s great that these understandings and differences are made more accessible for people from different social groups” (personal communication, March 1, 2013). To some extent I agree with her comment, but on the other hand I understand where people might get offended. Cultural code switching has helped bridge social gaps, but at the same time it remains unclear if this

appropriation of cultural codes actually signifies deeper cultural understanding; or is it just cool to sound ‘hood?’ One African-American student who acted in *The Colored Museum* indicated that there might be a correlation between how Jewish people feel in their own roles as victims historically and the Jewish people’s perception of the African-American experience. I have no proof to support this statement; however, this connection does not seem too outlandish to entertain. Issues such as white privilege, comparative victimization and the privileged savior-mode surface immediately. In discussing such issues we must remain sensitive to cultural relevancies. Fortunately, the university does provide some opportunities to bridge these gaps in more formal ways, such as class settings and intercultural gatherings. Ideally, these more formal experiences enable for greater learning without the potential harm that insensitivity can do.

This brings me to a more positive aspect of Jewish culture at Brandeis. Some students have also recounted stories of inclusivity and ways to learn more about Jewish culture. For example, Chabad always has an open invitation to everyone to join for Shabbat dinners and learn about orthodox traditions. Anyone can attend a religious service if they so desire. Most likely, there will always be someone in attendance who is more than happy to explain the different elements of such a service. The many leaders of Jewish clubs and organizations, the Rabbis, and other students heavily involved in Jewish life always seem to welcome newcomers and those who wish to learn more. However, some non-Jewish peers still mention their discomfort and a sense of intimidation when it comes to participating in Jewish activities. Unfortunately, I have also witnessed individual students who do not care about the integration of non-Jewish peers. Some do take their social comfort (based on Jewish affiliation) on our campus for granted and have no intention of aiding others to feel less estranged. Such cracks in our community necessitate further discussion, which shall follow in later chapters.

## 2.5 Realities of the Marketing Image

The scenarios mentioned concerning the Brandeisian social scene directly connects to the image Brandeis tries to market. Globally, Brandeis is a rigorous college known for its investment in social justice and its historically Jewish roots. Over the past few years, it seems the university has made efforts to nuance its public persona slightly to make the school more accessible to non-white, non-Jewish students. I myself chose to attend Brandeis for the promoted values of social justice, academic excellence and the extremely welcoming community I encountered while visiting. However, I realized fairly quickly that Brandeis is far more complex than this marketed image. Unfortunately, some of these complexities proved to be true challenges in our community. Of course, disappointed students can be found anywhere. However, the reasons behind such disappointment and disillusion at Brandeis seem unique as they most often seem to relate to the Jewish culture of the school. As the report on *Coexistence at Brandeis* (2002) stated:

Many minority students were not aware, prior to coming to Brandeis, of the extent to which Jewish culture characterizes undergraduate community life. They experienced feelings of confusion and alienation upon arrival. Some felt that they had been misled and perhaps even deceived. (Brett, Cohen & Yalen, 13).

Unfortunately, I have found supporting stories in my conversations with friends. A few of the students I spoke to have articulated precisely the same point mentioned above, even using the word “deceived” specifically. One of these, a non-Jewish, straight, middle class, female student told me:

Brandeis needs to stop pretending it’s something that it isn’t. Brandeis is super Jewish and it’s really annoying to see how they advertise misleading statistics and make it seem like Brandeis is only partially Jewish. It’s just not true and it’s part of the reason why I’m transferring. (personal communication, January 2012.).

Such harsh statements require further investigation. From my own experience, I can definitely empathize with this sentiment. For example the surprising phenomenon of food services shutting

down at strange hours due to Shabbat observance or the intense pressure I've felt to clarify my identity in regards to Judaism, etc.

The student mentioned above refers to statistics and how Brandeis claims that only around 50 percent of its student body is Jewish (based on the Brandeis University Diversity Survey 2007 and enrollment data 2010-2011). From my personal experience I can say it certainly feels like a far larger number. While I cannot support the following statement with numerical data, I do presume that the figures of these statistics may not represent the reality of the community. It appears that these statistics are based on self-identification of students and if/how they fill out demographic surveys in their applications. As it should, this allows for each individual to identify however they please. Knowing that I personally rarely check the "Jewish box" when answering such surveys, I could imagine there being a discrepancy between the numbers on file and the sentiments on campus. Conceivably, others with similar familial background may identify as non-Jewish as well, despite their Jewish heritage. Thus, the numbers cannot possibly reflect the full scope of people who may have been raised in Jewish culture or are in some other way affiliated with Jewish life. Regardless of these students' self-identification, depending on their upbringing, they may still contribute to the general Jewish characteristic in our community. Even though I don't self-identify as Jewish, I myself am an example of such a person. I shall list some ways in which I do contribute to the University's Jewish character: 1) my knowledge of Judaism, which comes up in conversation on a daily basis, 2) the fact that I went on Birthright, 3) my very Jewish name and 4) my commonly understood 'Jewish looks.' Certainly there are additional factors. As I discussed with a few non-Jewish students, all of these cultural markers add to the overall Jewish feel on campus.

Additionally, the statistics and marketed information about Brandeis tends to overemphasize the existing diversity on campus. Brandeis does embrace a fair number of non-Jewish students and is constantly aiming to further diversify its community. Nonetheless, the numbers remain on the lower end and fact is, the University unmistakably still feels very white and Jewish. Admittedly, over the past year and a half I have witnessed a slight increase in non-Jewish students. Unfortunately, it appears the university has been so eager to diversify that its integration programming and the diversity sensitivity/awareness in the student body cannot keep up with this influx of diverse students. At the same time, I must commend this positive trend towards diversification of the community.

### 2.6 Celebrating Diversity

On a brighter side, Brandeis has put forth tremendous effort to try to embrace and support the diversity of our student body. Elements such as the ‘Diversity Statement’, the University Diversity Committee, the Brandeis Pluralism Alliance and the position of Racial Minority Representative on the Finance Board all display the University’s commitment to aiding a more racially and ethnically diverse student body. Similarly, the Intercultural Center (ICC) at Brandeis provides another space to explore diversity. The Center offers various events and programs and functions as an umbrella organization for eighteen cultural organizations and clubs. The ICC supports various cultural events such as *Culture X*, *Mela*, *Lavender Graduation* and various workshops, etc. *Culture X*, one of the best-attended events on campus, aims to celebrate the Brandeis diversity through the artistic media of performative art. *Mela*, a production hosted by the South Asian Students Association, focuses on South Asian performances. The *Lavender Graduation* celebrates the accomplishments of the community’s LGBTQ, Ally and Intersex graduating seniors and graduate students. Speaking to the Director of the ICC, Monique

Gnanaratnam, and recognizing all of these efforts the ICC makes, I learned just how vast the ICCs reach in the campus really is. Interestingly, I am not sure this is a well-known fact on this campus. It is possible that the ICC is a heavily underused resource in our community, especially by the white/Jewish student body, who may benefit from more exposure to a diverse community. Brandeis sees a great variety of multi-cultural events over the course of the academic year. Events such as Anthropology Club's *International Food Gala*, *Holi* (South Asian celebration and welcoming of Spring), *Diwali Festival* and *Russian Culture Week* show the breath of this celebration of diversity. Further, the plethora of student-run clubs funded by the university relating to cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is striking given the size of our university. Out of the 200+ clubs listed, over 30 directly promote the diversity on this campus; even more groups somehow relate to the question in a more distant manner. Allowing for such a variety of clubs to spring up and nourish this diversity clearly suggests a large interest and promise to enrich diversity at Brandeis.

### 3. Integration of Minority Groups

#### 3.1 Bringing in Minorities

Brandeis offers a number of programs, scholarships and extracurricular activities, which attract a fairly diverse student body. The well-informed and very helpful International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) and well-maintained international relationships have attracted a fairly large amount of international students as well. The ISSO provides a number of services to support these incoming students, who often experience difficulties with language appropriation and culture shock. Further, specific programs such as Transitional Year Program, POSSE and Martin Luther King Scholars tend to bring in a much more diverse group of students than Brandeis customarily draws. To explain these programs briefly, according to the Brandeis

website, TYP allows for students to gain access to elite collegiate education despite lacking AP or honors courses in their previous education. These students have proven their academic and leadership ability in other ways, but would normally be overlooked in a traditional college application process. Due to the minimal preparation for higher academia, the TYP program adds a preparatory year for selected students to facilitate their transition into the collegiate setting. Contrary to popular belief at Brandeis, only some of these scholars are students of color. The selection is not based on race, ethnicity or socio-economic status per say; however, the program does target schools in areas with fewer resources. These locations tend to be more socially diverse and thus the program brings a more diverse group of students to the Brandeis campus.

POSSE works similarly and provides selected scholars additional support in form of advising, group workshops and retreats to aid their development throughout their college education. POSSE focuses on urban youth from highly socially and racially diverse areas such as Atlanta, GA, New York, NY and Los Angeles, CA. In 1968, founding President of Brandeis, Abram Sachar, created the MLK scholarship for African-American students. The MLK scholarship was originally solely available to black students, however has been opened up to students of all backgrounds in recent years. Given its historic relevance, it does seem to draw mostly students of color, but has definitely brought in other students in need and deserving of such a prestigious scholarship. Additionally, scholarships like the Sylvia and Joseph Slifka Israeli Coexistence Scholarships, which Brandeis awards to two Israeli citizens (one Jewish, one Arab) introduce another sort of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. Similarly, the Stroum Family Waltham Scholarship granted to gifted students from the local high school allows for yet another group of highly diverse students to enter Brandeis. While all of these programs invite a moderately varied student body, a number of these may also bring a new set of problems.



Earlier on, I mentioned some of the prejudices and stereotyping I observe on campus. It goes without saying that such assumptions do not instill a sense of cohesive community, inclusivity, compassion and empathy. Some minority students have described the Jewish community as exclusive, neurotic and even racist. Interestingly, the potentially derogatory comments and stereotypes go both ways; I have heard a number of students belonging to a minority voice similar negative comments about Caucasian Jewish students. While I have found that most Caucasian non-Jewish students do integrate themselves over time, some of the non-white non-Jewish individuals seem to face more difficulties with integration. Does this relate to the majority in place acting in exclusive ways towards minority groups? If so, is this done on a conscious level or simply due to ignorance and insensitivity? Or could it lie in the fact that a considerable number of non-majority individuals have come to campus through a specialty program such as MLK, POSSE or TYP or as international students, all of which promote intense internal group work? Through this group work there may be a sort of self-segregation occurring among them.

### 3.2 Self-Segregation and Potential Harm

While I do not have numerical proof for this segregation occurring at Brandeis, I will rely on my own experience on campus to speak about the kind of group distinction I have witnessed over the past four years. In general, groups tend to form naturally, mostly based on shared interests, living area, class year, etc. Here we see a striking formation of groups based on religious, ethnic, and racial factors. Walking through the dining halls at Usdan or Sherman, the potential self-segregation can be seen on a daily basis. You will find the African–American table, the ‘Asian’ table, and the kosher tables; these all stand out against the majority of all white, religiously ambivalent seating selections. Such segregated groups can be found on any college

campus, yet I must address them in the Brandeis context. I attempt to investigate a few of the possible causes behind the observed segregation and analyze why this development is so striking from a Brandeisian viewpoint.

As one university official suggested in an informal conversation, there may be a combination of elements at play forming these social bonds. He sees one potential reason lying in the often subconscious abrasive behavior some Jewish community members exhibit. As a reminder, I quoted a student in an earlier chapter expressing a very similar sentiment. This abrasive behavior may stem from false assumptions or thoughtlessly using inherently misappropriated or derogatory vocabulary. Similarly, some may simply not realize how certain religiously based activities may feel exclusive to less informed students. It also seems several of the religiously based organizations on campus assume quite a high level of knowledge of the Jewish faith, which can be intimidating towards non-Jewish peers or those less involved in Jewish life. Further, from my own experience I can say it seems somewhat difficult to find a place within the Jewish community for those of mixed religious backgrounds. The ambivalence of mixed religious affiliation seems to baffle more religious students. Such elements alienate those not immediately involved with Jewish life and may inhibit the intermingling of groups to some extent.

The other potential reason the same university official mentioned was the issue of seeking the known and familiar to construct a more comfortable environment. This specific element consists of two parts: First, certain group gravitation may occur due to the close bonds most programs such as MLK, TYP and POSSE create amongst the students. Workshops, retreats, in some cases communal housing situations, and the specific classes offered solely for selected students naturally promote a sense of strong community within these groups. It is also true that a

majority of these students are students of color, although there is diversity among them as well. Their experience at Brandeis can be quite different than the rest of Brandeis realizes, creating even more solidarity among these program students. Secondly, two other university officials found that the self-segregating may be occurring mostly subconsciously as individuals seek out the familiar. It appears that a fair number of our students of color tend to come from areas where they are part of the local majority. Thus, other students of color seem more recognizable in terms of lifestyle, language and other shared cultural markers. Numerous studies suggest that finding comforting and familiar groups as a personal support system can be of great benefit to minority students in regards to their success at college (Sedlacek and Singley, 2009). As Fisher and Hartman suggest from their overall findings, forming tight bonds among similar cultural lines can aid minority students, clarify their own identity and work together to overcome negative racial/ethnic stigma. While these groupings seem to point to certain tendencies, these boundaries and dynamics naturally have more complex layers to them. Many students do cross cultural, racial and ethnic borders despite portraying an inclination towards specific groupings in certain social settings.

While this self-segregation may aid students to some extent, as the studies above explain, it can also harm an individual's educational development and affect the larger community negatively. Specifically on the issue of African-American and White students, Fisher and Hartmann found that, "although sticking together has its benefits, it also inhibits the willingness or openness of black students to interact with white students." (124). Extending this idea to ethnically isolated groups, this cultural and language-based separation can greatly impede various important integration processes. Particularly, language acquisition and developing appropriate social roles in the academic setting are hindered. Regarding language proficiency, if

students spend most of their social time with others from the same language background and continue to speak this language for the majority of their time at Brandeis, the development of English language skills cannot move forward sufficiently. Regardless of University programming to aid these students with their language capacity, if a language is not practiced outside the classroom, the student is far less likely to master the language. Naturally, such behavior cannot be prohibited or controlled by the University, nor should it. However, I wonder if there may be ways to engage students of different backgrounds more in the larger community so they may feel more comfortable to build relationships in a more mixed group. Unfortunately, these differences exceed the social gaps and do trickle down to an academic level as well, which brings its own challenges to our university.

### 3.3 Potential Gap in Academic Achievement - International Students

Brandeis is an elite institution; therefore, despite the admissions office's goal to accept only the most capable students to keep up with the curriculum, a wide range of academic performances is to be expected. Intriguingly, some of these differences seem related to issues of diversity. First, Brandeis has seen a steady increase in international students over the years. The ISSO statistics from 2012-2013 show an increase of 329 undergraduate students since the academic year 2000-2001. While many international students may struggle with the English language to some extent, it appears that many do become more comfortable with the language by the time they graduate. However, there seems to be a strange discrepancy between students from Asia and students from elsewhere around the globe. Some students struggle with language acquisition throughout their Brandeis education and do not succeed at mastering adequate writing skills even by the end of their senior year. This seems so prevalent that it has become a well-known stereotype across campus ranging from the undergraduate to the PhD level. How

does this occur when all students are asked to take the TOEFL<sup>8</sup> exam or its equivalent when applying? Additionally, Brandeis offers and even requires non-native English speakers to take certain classes to improve their language skills. Brandeis has various helpful resources and programs in place. One such example is the Gateway Scholars Program, which is designed to aid non-native speakers to enhance their English skills. Despite such efforts, some students still fall through the gaps when it comes to their fluency and language skills. The ‘Asian-Language problem,’ as many in our community call the stereotype, seems most prevalent in students studying the more numerical based hard sciences or economics. I have witnessed this unfortunate reality numerous times as well. While I think it is fantastic that we have students from all over the world, I do not understand why it appears that a number of these students do not have to perform at quite the same level of language as others. I myself, effectively an unrecognized international student, would never get by with such lacking language skills.

As an example, I will offer the story of a third-year student from China. We were assigned as partners for a joint sociology paper. I soon realized that he could not adequately write his section. He had told me about his disappointing experience with the language classes he had taken at Brandeis and how he still felt ill-prepared for all course work that required more writing. This student usually avoids taking any non-numerical classes; this specific course would merely fulfill his social science requirement. This mode of operation seems to be a trend among foreign students. Granted, many of them may just want to take science or economics classes out of pure interest; however, being a liberal arts school, Brandeis requires students to take classes from other fields. Additionally, Brandeis expects its students to act as sensible, well-rounded, highly educated and diversified citizens of the globe. So how can Brandeis allow for students to

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<sup>8</sup> TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language

focus so narrowly and not extend their academic achievements past the most basic requirements? This begs the question: can these students slide by academically simply because they focus on studies that require less writing? What does that say about the value of a vast liberal arts education from Brandeis? I have just a few statistics, which may support these inquiries.

These are based on the statistics collected by the ISSO for the year of 2012-2013, which lists a total of 497 registered international undergraduate students. Of these, over 50% have not yet declared a field of study. Interestingly, when looking at the declared majors, I did find a higher concentration in the fields mentioned above: 16% economics, 14% sciences (including psychology) and <5% International & Global Studies and other fields. This survey does not explicitly detail the nationalities of each declared student in these fields, thus I cannot back the argument relating to Asian students mentioned above. Regardless, given that the majority of international undergraduates do come from Asian countries (25%), conceivably, there may be some correlation between the high concentration of Asian students and the relatively high concentration in specific areas of study. I would like to state that these numbers do not prove any connection or directly support the arguments made above. I merely wish to review these numbers and invite for further discussion on the topic. Given the stereotypes and speculations flying around our community, such clarifying conversation may be tremendously beneficial to the community.

#### 3.4 Potential Gap in Academic Achievement – Other Program Scholars

In a wholly different light, programs such as TYP, MLK and POSSE have brought a great deal of diversity to our campus. However, they do not come without tensions and struggles. These programs enable gifted students, many of which may be overlooked by conventional collegiate standards, to attend a prestigious university like Brandeis. Some of these students are

first generation college students, stem from difficult socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, or simply did not have the opportunity to attend academically richer high schools. Regardless, all of the selected program students show tremendous promise for excellence, if they are given the proper support and resources. However, as can be imagined, these factors bring rather complex dynamics to the community. While Brandeis tries to support all of these students and aid them in their transition to a higher academic institution, some scholars still fall through the cracks.

Recently, I was working with a female African-American TYP student in her third year. While she provided brilliant insight, she showed large deficits in her writing skills. I began tutoring her for a few months and worked through her papers step by step in hopes of helping her develop her writing abilities. By the end, she did acquire a much more nuanced understanding of the material and had accumulated a host of new vocabulary for future use. Unfortunately, this is not the only encounter of this nature I've had over the years as a UDR and TA. Additionally, numerous faculty members from various disciplines have told me that this is not a unique case. While I know TYP students have specific classes to prepare them for the rigorous course-work, they seem insufficient for some individuals. Similarly, POSSE scholars have access to additional resources, yet I have witnessed analogous deficiencies in this group as well. Some of these students may already exhibit self-consciousness and insecurity in their academic performance (such as the individual mentioned above). Unfortunately, some POSSE and TYP scholars do not succeed in the ways their peers with more preparation in high school and at home can.

From this angle of the discussion, we cannot discredit the importance of familiarity with the university system and academia at large. As Professors Collier and Morgan found in their research, mastering the role of college student adequately is far easier for someone with previous experience in academia, such as a third generation college student. By 'mastering the role of the

college student' they mean the following: A student has learned both the course material adequately, and also knows how to interact with professors and complete their specific requirements. This functions not solely through academic achievement, but requires understanding of the university culture as well. The student's accomplishment in this regard, or lack thereof, directly translates into their actual level of capacity and performance. Acknowledging Collier and Morgan's finding, it seems evident that a first-generation student has much more knowledge to acquire from the start than some of her or his peers.

All of these new demands and overwhelming new information can foster anxiety and self-doubt in any first year college student. This anxiety seems amplified for the non-traditional college student like a TYP scholar. Additionally, the existing preconceptions regarding these scholars' potential lesser academic ability often heightens these concerns. These can lead to more worries and ultimately even lower performance. Regrettably, a number of more fortunate students from backgrounds with more academic opportunity, also commonly referred to as 'regular admits,' frequently voice such negative attitudes and preconceptions in public - often within earshot of those directly involved. It seems plausible that such negative behavior can create deep tension and rifts between various social groups on campus.

### 3.5 Ignorance and Racism at Brandeis

Despite Brandeis' continuous quest for justice, social transformation and truth, the school is not void of racism and ignorance. Regrettably, a surprisingly large number of my peers call themselves racist. I shall share the story of a male acquaintance that frequently behaves in a variety of racist ways. His favorite thing is to comment on how the presence of racially diverse students on campus bothers him. For example, he frequently asks why Brandeis "has to help those poor black kids and takes away our funding to help those illiterates" (personal



communication, February 2013). He frequently remarks in equally insensitive and derogatory ways. Similarly, the various times I have heard (mostly white) students say things like “I just wanted to be with that Asian hot chick,” or some girls saying things like “I really just have jungle-fever and want to know what it’s like to be with a black dude.” Granted, some of these comments may be made in jest, however by far not all of them. I must insert that this behavior is not always intentional; some act out of complete ignorance or out of pure unawareness toward the harm they may be causing. Having studied a deeply interdisciplinary field and having taken classes in a multitude of departments, I have seen the power Brandeis has to educate its students on these issues. Racism awareness and education are seen throughout the school. Thus encountering racist, ill-informed or oblivious individuals in the Brandeis community always comes as a shock. How can students attend this school and achieve high academic successes over the course of four years and remain so blind and unknowing about issues of the world? Granted, I will admit the school cannot force the students to understand and learn about such issues if they turn a deaf ear to the vast material available to them.

Often, racism or ignorance here seems to stem from misinformation, disinterest, and jealousy (over grades for example). Such behavior can demonstrate internal distress (grades) or function as a defense mechanism. Unfortunately, it can also display straightforward aggression toward specific groups of people. So far, our community has been fortunate and has not witnessed any racially motivated hate crimes. Nonetheless, the seemingly minor level of aggression in passing comments can be harmful enough and must be addressed. A university so committed to social justice should combat even the most minor inclinations towards such behavior. Regrettably, in my research and in speaking to peers, I found that this very basis of our

university has come under scrutiny. Many minority students<sup>9</sup> have mentioned that they felt the university's quest for social justice was merely an aloof blanket statement to heighten the interest in the university on a global scale. As an activist myself, I cannot say that I find this to be completely true. Nevertheless, I do find the school has faltered in some areas and continues to weaken over time. Specifically the following issues I have found lacking: The issues revolving around the community's education on cultural differences, deeply questioning the Jewish white privilege and supporting the vibrant LGBTQ community with meaningful resources.

The first two issues directly bring us to these problems of ignorance, naiveté and racism, which I have discussed extensively above. The third issue regarding the LGBTQ community has come up multiple times over the past two years. While I do not wish to bring in a larger discussion of the multifaceted LGBTQ community on campus, I must look at a certain pressing matter briefly. For the past few years, the position of the program coordinator for Sexual and Gender Diversity at the ICC never had full financial support. Just this week I learned that the position has officially been dropped. According to Sam Mitz' article in *The Justice*, the current program coordinator Jessamine Beal will be leaving Brandeis at the end of the semester and the position will not be filled for the new year (The Justice)<sup>10</sup>. The majority of the community well beyond the immediate LGBTQ students is outraged that this invaluable resource has been shut down. While the university generally is tremendously accepting and supportive of LGBTQ rights, this decision on the administrative level leaves behind many negative feelings and open questions. It also highlights the fact that even on our campus homophobia and discomfort with certain aspects of LGBTQ life do exist. If the university administration cannot find ways to

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<sup>9</sup> In this specific case I shall include students identifying as queer despite not dedicating further writing on their situation at Brandeis.

<sup>10</sup> As of the Fall semester 2013, the position of Sexual and Gender Diversity Coordinator has been refunded and filled.

support and fund official resources like Beal's position, then how is the community supposed to continue learning and become more accepting in this regard? I find this development rattling and wonder how the university will proceed in this regard.

#### 4. A Closer Look at University Programming – Feedback and Suggestions

##### 4.1 The Jewish/non-Jewish Integration

Most of the issues and questions raised in prior chapters revolving around Jewish life on campus may not be easily solved. However, I shall make an attempt to think through a few of these complexities and suggest a couple of ideas on how to navigate these challenges. I shall return to my beginning question regarding the Jewish majority. To avoid the confusion I spoke of earlier, both within the Jewish community and regarding the integration of non-Jewish community members, the university can take several steps. First and foremost, a unified understanding as to how the institution wishes to approach the question of Jewish identity must be found. In discussion with faculty, students and administrative university officials, the most common solution discussed creates an open and mutually inclusive parameter. The ideal parameters for the university's position towards this identity should be flexible, yet well-defined and encompass most/all of the various beliefs. Simultaneously, they should realistically demand some compromise from all parties involved to ensure more cohesion. It appears this could allow for the most democratic and fair understanding of the university's identity. This also stresses that all students, faculty, staff and university leadership are educated about these various aspects. Further, any future university presidents should have certain guidelines to follow, which should be ascertained in some sort of leadership committee.

While I am no authority to give a truly multi-faceted and fully informed recommendation, I can shine a light on some steps the university could take:

- The University should attempt to clarify the presentation of its Jewish identity. Further, the school should make more encompassing and honest statements about this identity to incoming students.
- The University could think about formulating a declarative statement on its position regarding Israel. In my understanding this would be an all-accepting and open-minded approach, whilst not decidedly taking a side in the conflict. Rather, the university might express its commitment to healthy questioning and empathic response to the various parties involved. While this may be common sense to some, I have not found any definitive statement of this sort published by the university.
- The University should find a more decisive path to honor its Jewish heritage. Preferably, this could be done without sacrificing funding and resources for liberal arts programs/departments not directly related to Judaism or the sciences, through which a lot of our funding comes in. I do believe this aspect is currently being discussed in the Strategic Planning Steering Committee established in 2012.

Such elements may help eliminate misunderstandings towards how various presidents incorporate the Jewishness of the community without straying too far from middle grounds. It may help to avoid hugely fluctuating situations such as Brandeis experienced with the changes between Presidents Handler and Reinharz. This definition may need to be broad in scope to encompass many various ideals and allow for communication, diversification and compromise. Despite the risk of seeming vague, a broader definition may be essential to promoting these values.

Further, education on customs and traditions of various cultures represented at Brandeis should play a key role in our social lives. As Judaism is a major factor at Brandeis, proper education on Jewish customs may alleviate some of the awkward social tensions felt in the community. Brandeis could find ways to introduce educational programs during orientation or throughout the year for non-Jewish and Jewish community members alike. In the same vein, teach-ins and diversity programming including basic educational sessions on the most essential traditions of other prevalent religious and cultural groups on campus should find a place in co-curricular programming. For example, Community Advisors could co-lead residence hall events

integrating the various cultural traditions represented in their residence halls. While the informative multi-religious updates and info-emails from the Chaplaincy try to explain the major holidays, many of the subtle day-to-day things are forgotten. Evidently, Brandeis does already have some such events and resources in place; however, they seem to lack impact. I presume issues of attendance, interest and commitment to understand may be the underlying issues. Perhaps other forms of creative educational programming could facilitate a more organic learning in this regard and have a greater effect than informative emails and sit-down lectures.

In regards to the vast number of academic programs regarding Judaism and Jewish culture, I would not suggest adding any new programs. Rather, finding a way to integrate the various programs under the same institutional and systemic umbrella could provide easier navigation through all of them. Facilitating the communication between these academic programs and the student-run programs and clubs could help in blending the gaps between them as well. Allowing fluidity between these programs and clubs could provide a more positive and beneficial academic and social environment in general. Welcoming greater diversity and open doors, minds and hearts honors the university's mission of *tikkun olam* - healing the world. By integrating students from all backgrounds into the Brandeis community, a diversified academic environment can lead to new levels of excellence. It would not diminish the university's responsibility toward the greater Jewish community and it would not weaken the sense of honor the university seeks to provide towards the greater Jewish community and culture. After many discussions with peers, faculty and staff, I come to believe that open communication and education on all sides of the conversation are essential to creating a safe and inclusive community. Integrating some of the ideas mentioned above or similar efforts could help nourish understanding between various Jewish groups on campus. Further, these efforts may aid the

dialogue on the Israel-Palestine conflict and facilitate the integration of non-Jewish students in all of these questions. Overall, these examples may strengthen the general feeling of community and support and allow for Brandeis to achieve new levels of excellence in its community.

#### 4.2 Language Proficiency & Writing Skills

My personal interactions with Brandeis students from various backgrounds, has shown me two further issues the university faces. One difficulty lies in mastering the English language for non-native English speakers. The other deals with the issue of mastering the level of writing skills and eloquence of English in academia. Despite the available resources, it appears not everyone can master the English language and necessary writing skills over the course of four years. I do not have much information on how the non-native English language classes are taught or how students are prepared for the course work specifically. Similarly, I have little insight on how additional preparatory classes for TYP students work. Working with the notion that these specific resources for students can be improved, I wonder what else could be done to ensure more success for students. Perhaps even more integrative and creative teaching methods could be applied, should these classes already promote such teaching styles. While all of these resources are important, specifically writing and writing courses tend to bring on fairly high anxiety levels. I wonder what might be done to help students feel more comfortable with their writing and facilitate their approach to the language. Finding some sort of joy or at least a certain security with writing in English could help students tremendously and ultimately allow for them to exceed as more well-rounded and educated students/citizens.

With this in mind, I have spoken to a number of TYP students who find writing even on a most basic level to be their biggest challenge. The problem here lies in the fact that many of these students do turn to more writing-heavy studies and often struggle tremendously with the

workload. A number of these students have mentioned their battles with low grades and dealing with academic probation mostly due to poor writing skills and academic language proficiency. Specifically in subjects such as sociology or anthropology, where certain writing skills are of essence, these students have added barriers in place, making their success in college far more difficult than for the average student. The available resources seem insufficient for these students. Admittedly, some students may simply not be able to perform at this high academic level with such a steep learning curve. However, I suspect there may be more that could be done to further help these students transition and successfully complete their studies. Factually, these students' limitations and insecurities in their writing and communication skills hinder them on a daily basis.

One such student of African-American heritage told me about the high expectations she feels she must meet in her classes. Some professors understand the constant catch-up game she has to play to keep up with peers and attempt to aid her in her learning process through positive feedback and helpful tips. On the other hand, some professors disregard her background entirely and judge her rigorously, giving her negative feedback or just poor grades without further commentary. While Brandeis faculty should critique her work meticulously, they should also do so constructively. This student has told me multiple times how difficult she finds it to learn from such instructors who do not know how to approach the situation. This particular student also mentioned that she sometimes felt like certain professors judged her more harshly than her peers.

Similarly, an African-American POSSE scholar stated in one conversation, "I feel like I constantly have to prove myself," (personal communication, n.d). One specific experience she told me stood out for yet another reason. This POSSE student had just managed to comprehend and use new vocabulary she had picked up from academic readings for a specific class. She tried

to utilize this new knowledge in her midterm paper. The professor gave her a fairly low grade for a decently constructed paper, which the student could not really fathom. She asked for pointers on how to improve and the main note she received focused on how the paper no longer “sounded like her” because she had used more sophisticated vocabulary and construction. Ever since, the student has become even more insecure in her writing and felt her efforts were rejected and insufficient. Such behavior from leaders and faculty does not aid students in developing their skills and comfort with writing.

After hearing such stories, I find it imperative that the university takes a closer look at how TYP and other students of less traditional academic backgrounds are making their way through college. I spoke to a number of influential staff members in this regard. Surprisingly, most of these administrators had never heard of such stories during their close work with these kinds of students. One program director thought these stories may just be blown out of proportion or just a few isolated cases. Even so, I do not believe these narratives should be ignored. Further, I wonder if an entirely different reason for program directors and staff not hearing about this may be at play. Thinking back to the idea of ‘mastering the college student’s role’ in Collier and Morgan’s article, perhaps some students simply do not know how to reach out to the proper resources and people of interest. Further, I could imagine that such students; in particular first generation college students may not know how to navigate more abrasive encounters with professors. At Brandeis, students commonly speak up against injustices in the classroom, but these students may not know how to or not even recognize the injustice. Here I would suggest including these question in the preparatory classes, workshops and retreats for students who may need this additional information.



At the same time, I must also take a moment to admit that some students simply cannot catch up and succeed at Brandeis. Brandeis has elite standards and numerous regular admits cannot complete their studies either. Students facing additional academic difficulties due to their upbringing will definitely struggle even more. Given that I do not have the full details on the various resources and programs offered in these cases, such as workshop structures, etc. I cannot say if anything can or should be changed. Nonetheless, my experience in leadership positions and as a friend has shown me that these cases do not occur in complete isolation. This begs the question if we could not do more and develop further programming.

#### 4.3 Promoting Acceptance, Understanding and Empathy

Reducing ignorance and oblivion in regards to social understanding and acceptance is an uphill battle. However, Brandeis has a responsibility to educate its students on these day-to-day matters. I must acknowledge that Brandeis has a very good starting position for this quest given its mission as a university and its available resources. So, what move can Brandeis make? For one, I do believe Brandeis must be aware of the potential exclusivity the elite Jewish community can exhibit. To address this behavior mindfully, we must acknowledge that such negative attitudes can result from the frequently witnessed self-victimization, perceived need for self-protection and fear of repression often seen in Jewish people. This defensive behavior can continue even in a safe space where the Jewish group is the majority, as it has become a part of Jewish culture to some extent.

In a slightly different light, one facet of this ignorance and prejudice may actually originate from a point I usually mention positively: the achievement of new levels of excellence. Excellence or the striving toward excellence can harbor many perils in regards to a community such as our own. In academia, some academics are so caught up in the quest for new findings,

research, publishing and personal achievement, that some can possibly lose sight of humanity. This is precisely the point where academia notoriously faces criticism: academia is cold, out of touch with reality and humanity, and lacks empathy and compassion. Brandeis has put a lot of energy into creating a community, where empathy and compassion have become an essential part of the university's promoted identity. Yet, our continuous endeavor to excel limits many in our community in this regard. The rigor of our education frequently forces students to focus solely on their studies. Numerous students (and professors) I know personally seem to have lost touch with the essential human experiences and relationships we should be nurturing as well.

I see such behavior expressed on a larger institutional level, such as the fact that classes were not put on hold during the vigil held in honor of the victims of the Boston Marathon Bombing just a few weeks ago. A vast majority of students had to attend class or even take exams after the deeply felt trauma and shock our community had just witnessed. While I find that President Lawrence is a deeply caring and charismatic leader, which he conveyed very believably over this traumatic time, somewhere in the administration it seemed unclear that this moment of reflection was very much needed in the community. I find it curious that professors would ignore the President's invitation to the vigil and carry on with classes regardless of the recent events. Many of my friends and I still struggle with the fact that the university, as a community, did not stop its daily activities even for a moment to truly connect as a community. If the university cannot make that stand, then a lot of learning has been lost for many students. It appears the university promotes individualistic goal-oriented ideals over deeper human connection and caring for self and others. While this is of course the culture we live in, given Brandeis' unique commitment to social justice I would expect the university to act differently.

In this discussion I recognize some key elements, which may help to change the realities of intolerance and bias at Brandeis. These ideas go far beyond the theoretical knowledge I have gained in my classes as a Peace, Conflict and Coexistence Studies major. I encounter them frequently in my intercultural and international work in peacebuilding. These notions are multilayered. First, we must recognize the need for humanization of ourselves and the other, meaning we must have compassion and empathy for ourselves, accept our own human imperfections and learn to do the same for those around us. Secondly, as stated multiple times, proper education on differences is vital to nurturing communal understanding. Lastly, learning to truly listen to those around us has great value in strengthening a community. As our university already participates in leading research and classes in ‘altruistic’ fields such as conflict resolution and compassionate listening, our community should find ways to benefit more from this insight found on the higher academic level. We already have a fairly wide range of programs in coexistence, PAX, Peacebuilding and the Arts and other university features such as the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, but they appear insufficient in realizing the university’s potential in this regard.

Our university should be a leading force in changing the world’s paradigm on competition and power, yet how can we do so if we perpetuate these exact same expectations in our own community? While Brandeis has enormous potential and just about all of its students display great talent for leadership, we still need to learn to work together and achieve greatness together, rather than focus on individual achievement. This sometimes requires mediation and compromise, which Brandeis does not teach all too frequently at this point. These excellent students must learn more about inter-connectivity and human connection before we can go out and intelligently and respectfully change the world. Without this acknowledgement, Brandeis

will continue to instruct more of the same capitalist and narcissistic leaders the world already faces daily. In respect to Brandeis' original mission statement, this is a far cry from its goals. I suggest investing in further programs to help educate students on basic human connectivity, global cultural responsibility and relativity in creative and relevant ways. With my additional theatrical piece I would like to offer a specific model as a suggestion for one such educational event idea.

### 5. Applied Theatre: Explorations of Diversity in Form of Theatre - *Diversity*

*“Theatre is a form of knowledge” - Augusto Boal (Rainbow of Desires)*

His sagacious words and teachings have transformed my experience of all things theatrical and performative. While I have always had a sense that the arts have great potential for far more than simple entertainment, it wasn't until I heard of Boal and other practitioners truly realizing this potential. Discovering the world of applied art, theatre specifically, has formed me in deeply impactful ways. Thus, my primary goal when beginning a thesis was to find a way to involve theatre in the project. Under the umbrella of the Senior Thesis Festival hosted by the Brandeis Theater Company at Brandeis, I had the opportunity to look at these same questions discussed above with a far more creative approach. The goal of my research is to open doors to discussion and shed light on unpublished realities of our community. The way I facilitate such encounters best is through performative media, such as theatre. Thus I decided to utilize the vast knowledge I have accumulated over the course of my studies at Brandeis and begin my own applied theatre project. Not only has the theatrical production allowed me to find a vehicle to express my accrued understandings, but it may also function as a model for further educational programming and explorations of the Brandeis community.

To begin this process adequately, I had to discover a select group of people to work with over an extended period of time. I found 10 brave, creative and passionate souls to help me in bringing our personal narratives and communal experiences to the stage. These 10 undergraduate students all come from various backgrounds and exemplify the precise sort of diversity we wanted to look at in our community. The original ensemble consisted of: Ra Malika Imhotep '15 (Posse Atlanta; African-American of Ghanaian decent), Brontë Velez '16 (Posse Atlanta; Black-Latina), Anne Chmiel '15 (white, Christian from Long Island, grew up in a Jewish community), Charlie Madison '15 (white, Jewish, gay male), Rasheik Trammell '13 (black, MLK scholar, gay male), Iyvon Edebiri '13 (African-American of Nigerian decent), Jess Plante '15 (white, Christian, female), Maya Grant '13 (black, female), Wei Ying Lim '16 (Singapore, Christian, female), Rozi Levi '13 (Turkey, Jewish, female)<sup>11</sup>. Unfortunately, we lost Ra and Jess along the way, yet ended up with a solid group of 8 tremendously talented and passionate individuals.

I selected these 10 people through the common audition process, which all senior thesis projects under the festival participated in. In the auditions I sought out performance potential based less on traditional talent or skill but on genuine expression of self. Instead of holding callbacks I decided to interview each candidate and asked questions surrounding their investment in social justice, diversity and awareness of issues relating to diversity on our campus. In a second step, I tried to engage in preliminary conversations with each one and tease out what sort of story they had to tell. Lastly, a major factor that influenced my final decisions lay in my attempt to recreate a microcosm of the Brandeis community as authentically as possible in my ensemble. Naturally, I could not recreate this microcosm perfectly, given the nature of the festival as a whole, where we were sharing actors and had a limited pool of participants to work

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<sup>11</sup> The ensemble asked me to use these identifiers for this section.

with. While I left my expectations open and invited non-actors and actors alike to participate, I did choose the individual participants with a vague artistic vision in mind. Ultimately, I knew these 10 students I had selected had a sincere interest in exploring questions of diversity in our own community and wanted to dive into these conversations in a creative way. Some of these students are known around campus for their involvement in social justice issues and/or exquisite artistic talents. Others seemed less obvious selections; however, I knew they each had a valuable voice to share in this process.

### 5.1 The Process

We began meeting in November to facilitate our group work and begin building trusting relationships within our group before we could start the real creative process. During the last few weeks of the fall semester, we met three times for a few hours and played a variety of community and team building games, engaged in traditional and non-traditional theatre games and exercises and began creating shared memories – an essential part to any production of this nature. In January we continued to meet for a few hours a week with the focus of further nourishing the ensemble’s internal bonds. Additionally, I held one-on-one interviews with each participant to talk about the more private aspects of their stories they had decided to share. I felt this was important to help the individual students to express their stories and focus in on what they really wanted to tell. Concurrently, this intimate process also allowed me to gain better access of their personal background, narratives and talents they wanted to showcase. I then helped them bring these conversations into the group through a variety of creative exercises. These group practices sparked complex and extremely important exchanges in our group. We would end up discussing various situations and stories for hours, while educating each other deeply and learning to really listen. The group as a whole began questioning the various aspects

of diversity at Brandeis and how the school deals with social justice as a whole. The work inside our ensemble began to trickle outward as each member started taking these conversations to the community, talking to their friends and asking some really tough questions. From what I could see, each ensemble member did this with an open mind and heart and the best intentions to learn and minimize the risk of harming others.

As a facilitator it was tremendously fascinating to watch these people of different backgrounds and ages to dedicate themselves to this topic. In the beginning, some participants already had extremely creative vision for their stories. Others, on the other end of the spectrum, could not conceptualize their stories on stage whatsoever. The most fascinating aspect of this process was the wide range in confidence levels I found in the ensemble. In general, the students of color had a much easier time voicing their opinions and finding ways to express these creatively. Conversely, in speaking to Anne and Jess, I learned that they both felt intimidated by the passion and power the students of color exhibited. They felt they didn't have anything valuable to contribute, as they had never witnessed the kind of discrimination and struggle some of the other students had brought up. I could understand this intimidation and sense of having a "less-worthy" narrative to add to a community. Nonetheless, the ensemble was able to work through such issues as a tight-knit group, supporting each other through these moments of sharing. Navigating through these challenges with each individual and then the group as a whole was a great learning experience for everyone participating. After many conversations and creative stimulation, we finally came up with the key points and stories we wanted to share in a completely collaborative manner.

The creative elements came out of a variety of methods and games, which sparked innumerable ideas. I based my choices of exercises on the developed practices of Boal, Jonathan

Fox (Playback Theatre), Anne Bogart (theatre director), Michael Rohd (Hope Is Vital) and numerous other practitioners. Additionally, I have drawn from my more traditional acting/performance training I received at Brandeis, including Suzuki. As everyone brought a variety of talents to the table, we explored several expressive media, ranging from monologues over movement to drawing and beyond. The entire process was based on trial-and-error and followed a very loose strategic plan. We simply had to go with the flow of what was happening and what we came up with. As the facilitator and director I did make a few executive decisions and helped steer the group away from things that simply were not working or went too far off topic. I had a few guidelines by which I made these decisions:

- Does this issue relate to topic of diversity at Brandeis specifically?
- Is this a genuine and authentic story?
- Can we express this narrative authentically?
- Are we pushing boundaries but remaining mindful of not doing harm?
- Is this idea possible to do with the resources we have?

These questions helped us keep things in perspective and relevant to our nebulous goal. Of course, discussion of injustices or repression at Brandeis led to a broadening of the topic to a greater scale outside of the Brandeis discourse. While these broader explorations are necessary for a better understanding of how these issues pertain to Brandeis, I did want to remain within the relevant context of our community. Including artistic expression and creative investigation the group was able to bring these very personal stories into the ephemeral space of the performance. While we sought to communicate our stories in a most authentic manner, we also utilized the theatrical and performative notions of abstraction and aesthetics to aid us in processing these narratives. We took Anne Bogart's following words to heart: "It is possible to channel the gnawing anger, irritation, and frustration into an act of creation" (20). In these final creative steps the solo-voiced storytelling transformed into a multi-layered aesthetic experience.



Ultimately, the tools of abstraction, dramatization, stylization and humor make stories more approachable for the audience, while adding compelling texture and detail to the narrative. Keeping in mind this desire to create high-quality artistic expression, the ensemble ultimately created a truly powerful performance piece out of this challenging and meaningful collaborative work.

## 5.2 The Challenges

Of course this process did not advance completely seamlessly and we faced numerous hurdles down the line. I shall mention just a few of the most influential challenges that brought me as a facilitator and director to push my capacities to a whole new level. The first challenge occurred when the entire Senior Thesis Festival group realized that sharing actors/production staff amongst various thesis projects was not a good idea. Ultimately, I ended up acting as the sole production staff to my show, as I lost my stage manager to her own project. Additionally, I also encountered the problem of facilitating my own work while simultaneously participating in another senior thesis as a lead performer. While we did manage to get through it all, there were days we all thought we would simply fail. That being said, scheduling any rehearsals for *Diversity* was one of the most difficult tasks I have ever encountered. Clearly, I had picked my ensemble well, as each member displayed the typical Brandeisian traits of drive, passion and over commitment. This brings me to the challenge of losing two people to other such commitments. Over the first few weeks I realized that both Jess and Ra simply could not be fully present. Given that I was already working with a minority of American white students in the ensemble, I felt that losing Jess could really hurt my project. I feared that we could no longer authentically replicate the microcosm I was trying to build. Having to ask Ra to leave the project was equally difficult, primarily because she is one of the most vocal people on campus when it

comes to issues of diversity. Eventually, we did work through both of these difficulties quite beautifully, thanks to the rest of the ensemble dealing with these issues in very mature, creative and cooperative ways. A similar, completely unforeseen problem occurred just a week before the festival opened. Brontë had double-booked herself and could not be at Brandeis for our final week of rehearsals. This led to fairly frantic last-minute changes to the production. Fortunately, the ensemble was able to accommodate these changes and support each other in working on the new material we threw together just days before opening night. Each individual was ready to pick up the loose ends and work hard to create a stunning performance. Despite changes made two days before we opened, they were able to dive into the final product with fearless hearts and minds. I credit this ability partially to the deep connection felt in the ensemble, which we had worked so hard to sustain. The sense of importance and responsibility outweighed the actors' nervousness about the last-minute alterations and they all rose to the challenge quite exquisitely.

### 5.3 The Performance and Reviews

While I always believed this piece could be extremely powerful, I began the process without any expectations as to what we, this busy ensemble, could do in a fairly small amount of time. The final performance product completely surprised me in how genuinely the actors were able to perform after the many challenges and scares we met. Not only was the piece authentic, but also of excellent aesthetic quality. I have never before had the privilege to work with fully designed lights for this kind of production and I can say it definitely added to the experience. To clarify, most often, I work with groups without any support or resources. Most of my work has taken place outdoors on the streets or in gyms. This definitely was a very different experience in that regard and required some re-thinking on my part as a director and facilitator.

Overall, it seems the audience also acknowledged these qualities as we received excellent reviews. The two brief talkbacks after the shows brought up precisely the topics we wanted to engage in with the audience: for example, questions pertaining to the frequency of the events we had just portrayed, questions regarding our artistic choices, and debates on how social justice is actually perceived at Brandeis, etc. Unfortunately, we did not have time to dig deeper into those inquiries, but I was happy to see that they did enter the space with numerous important administrators, staff and teachers in attendance.

Later on I did get to speak to many audience members, ranging from students to family and these rather important guests mentioned above. Elaine Wong and Jamele Adams, two deans highly invested in the question of diversity at Brandeis and members of the diversity committee, have been extremely supportive and invested in seeing the show grow further. They absolutely loved the performance and felt it was truly important work that should somehow have a longer lifespan than the festival could provide. We are now in conversation about including this work in a larger way over the next few years. Similarly, staff and faculty working with the Ethics Center also found the piece tremendously impactful. Even students, not only the ones invested in the quest of social justice, gave me very positive feedback. Admittedly, not everyone understood every single aspect of the highly abstract and stylized performance elements. For example, The Justice article by Jessie Miller (April 15, 2013) may have not gotten to the full depth of the production, but even this theatre critic seems to have picked up on most of the key points we tried to convey. For a student newspaper, which is known to be lacking in terms of in-depth analysis of artwork, this is high praise in my eyes.

Despite these excellent remarks, we did have some confused or even negative assessments. Surprisingly, one of my professors, an individual known for his progressive and

liberal attitudes, actually did not understand the full scope of the piece. Some of his comments make me wonder if he understood any of it. To illustrate what I mean, I shall turn to his question he asked in the second talkback: He asked if the “rap” performed towards the end of the show was a collaborative piece as well and commented that he felt it did not fit the rest of the production. First, I must correct his use of the word ‘rap.’ He was referring to Brontë’s solo performance of her spoken word piece; culturally and artistically, these two forms of artistic expression are understood as separate entities. Secondly, his visible discomfort and misunderstanding of the piece alluded further to his uninformed understanding of the vignette. Unfortunately, these comments further proved the point we were trying to make about the ignorance regarding cultural differences on our campus. I cannot hold his ignorance on proper artistic and cultural terms against him, given that I believe he has had fairly little experience with highly diverse academic/artistic settings. However, I have witnessed this same ignorance permeate his lectures, which further shows me where we still have a lot of work to do. The other less positive reviews I got came from family friends, who really do not understand abstract artistic expression. This too is something I cannot really criticize them for, but it did make me question if we might have been too artistically ambitious in some of the vignettes. Should I have a chance to revise or redo any of this production, I will certainly take this aspect into consideration depending on the kind of audience we may encounter.

#### 5.4 The Vignettes

Below I will describe some of the backstories and development to each vignette we presented. I will add the full script to the appendix for a more detailed understanding of each of these vignettes.

*You’re not even Jewish (Anne’s Story)*

Anne had been worried about not having an impactful enough story to share when we first began. However, I felt her narrative is just as important in our community and conveyed this sentiment strongly. Given her background as a Christian white girl growing up in a highly Jewish area of Long Island, she felt pretty much at home at Brandeis. She has gotten so comfortable that she sometimes forgets her non-Jewish upbringing, as she often seems to know more about Judaism than many people around her. In fact, people often assume that she is Jewish. This situation required further investigation, but ultimately ended in an open-ended question.

*Transition: College Talk (ensemble)*

I came up with this transition as more than a simple cover-up of a set change. I felt we had to strengthen the college setting for the audience. We did so by allowing the audience in to overhear the typical conversation a Brandeisian might have on any given day.

*What it means to be Jewish (Rozi's Story)*

Interestingly, Rozi was the only ensemble member who could knowledgably bring Jewish tradition into the conversation. While Charlie is of Jewish heritage, he does not practice Judaism. Thus, we relied mostly on Rozi to engage in this element of diversity. Of course she is Turkish and has only encountered American Judaism while attending Brandeis, so her view is quite different from what American Jews on campus might say. This fact triggered our curiosity. What does it mean to be Jewish at Brandeis? In a secondary aspect, this vignette also helped fortify the Jewish identity in our microcosm of Brandeis on stage, as we did not have a physical representation of the American Jewish identity for the majority of the show.

*Transition: Languages (ensemble)*

This transition developed in conversation about how students love to bond over shared languages. At Brandeis, we can constantly pick up snippets of conversation in various languages from all around the world. The multi-lingual cast was able to represent this in some small way.

*What defines you? (ensemble)*

The scene came up in a conversation about scholarships and programs and how they sometimes become a label of identity. Unfortunately, many assumptions are made revolving around these programs and scholarships. In this scene we tried to shake those preconceptions by assigning the most surprising and unexpected scholarships to each ensemble member.

*I am male (Charlie's Story)*

Charlie's story brings us to the world of theatre at Brandeis. In the undergraduate community there hasn't been much room for colorblind casting or "gay theatre." Unfortunately, we couldn't come up with a creative way to address the issue of colorblind casting. Nonetheless, we needed to find a way to question how we deal with actors who do not want to fit into the heteronormative mold often seen in more traditional plots. While Brandeis enjoys exploring some of the less traditional plays, there is very little in the way of gay theatre. Why isn't there room for a gay man to be the star of the show without getting the girl? Why can't he get the guy instead?

*The Asian (Wei Ying's Story + ensemble)*

Wei Ying is a visual artist and discovered the stage for the first time here at Brandeis. In *Diversity* she found a powerful way to express her frustration over the stereotypes and negative preconceptions she faces on a daily basis in our community. In conversation with her, she explained that she felt like these insensitive remarks were made out of sheer obliviousness to how their actions affected others. This is how we chose to have her sitting by herself merely

overhearing the conversation and reacting to it on her tablet in an artistic outlet. In a secondary conversation, we discussed the very real issues of having peer-review partners or TAs with limited English skills and how that affects us as students. Our priority lay in trying to blend in both sides of the debate in an artistic and satirical yet meaningful way.

The artwork she came up with on her tablet originated from a group conversation on an entirely different topic. It concluded with Brontë mentioning how she felt she was surrounded by ignorance and insensitivity and how she constantly felt she wanted to metaphorically “screw in a light bulb and turn on the lights.” This metaphor stuck with us throughout the production, which is why Wei Ying incorporated it into her design. On a side note, the light bulb also ran through the theme of our poster and advertisement for the show and is still a relevant joke within the group.

*Brandeis Goggles (Rasheik’s Story + ensemble)*

This topic came out of conversation with the whole group about the complex dating scene we observe at Brandeis. Religion, race, ethnicity and social-class play large roles in our dating world just as much as anywhere else. Additionally, the question of exoticism and adventure in our society at large appeared very relevant in our conversations. The idea of ‘Brandeis Goggles’ was not our creation, but has been a part of the Brandeis social scene for years. In this scene we tried to weave in the various issues that come along with the topic ranging from body shaming, sexual exploration in multiple aspects, and homosexuality, to the issues of dating Jewish/non-Jewish students. Satire and over-dramatization were much needed to do this tastefully and authentically.

*Black Bird (Bronte’s Story)*

Originally, this piece was far more group-oriented and meant to be performed by the entire ensemble. However, given Brontë's absence and the fact that the piece didn't come into existence until just before Passover break (Brandeis' spring break), we were forced to minimize the vignette. Brontë had written the poem herself, thus it felt more organic for her to perform it solo. Throughout this process she was grappling with issues of identity as a student at Brandeis, her responsibility to own her inherited identity and what her identity means in the greater world.

At first, I was worried about how such a strikingly different piece would fit into the overarching narrative. However, once I saw it for the first time the day before we opened, I loved how powerfully it stood alongside the other vignettes. I liked the image of a single person performing in contrast to the more hectic scenes of the show. Brontë's writing and performance was genuine, complex and deeply meaningful, ideals we sought throughout the play. I will admit I personally do believe that this vignette stole the show in some ways, as its aesthetic and performative quality was just absolutely exquisite. Personally, this did not bother me, but I have heard mixed reviews. Interestingly enough, these more negative reviews came from individuals who couldn't really understand the full breadth of Brontë's poem. Of course it is something to keep in mind for future work.

#### *The Oreo (Iyvon's Story)*

Iyvon began her process by telling us how she was often called an Oreo growing up. Her family lives in a predominately African-American area, where she grew up surrounded by Ebonics and other traditionally African-American cultural markers. However, her father was determined to have her speak 'properly,' as he put it. Given her education at a highly diverse art high school, where she excelled as a student, she further felt the impact of mostly white (or 'proper') education. This was enhanced once she came to Brandeis. She often feels conflicted by



her two-part identity and has taken the Oreo comment to heart. After having seen the new marketing strategy for Oreo's, which heavily revolves around picking a side and could easily be construed as a racial metaphor, we had to dive into an artistic expression of this issue. Highly abstract and satirical, the scene revealed a lot of tensions Iyvon feels as a very successful student of color at Brandeis.

*The Identity Onion (ensemble)*

Originally, we had an abstract movement/word piece in this scene's place, which Brontë had come up with in her explorations on identity. With Brontë away, we came up with something new that still spoke of similar issues. We discussed the issues of mapped on, taken on, accepted and unaccepted identity labels in a highly stylized, abstract form. As the scene featured no dialogue, the vignette relied on movement, imagery and music to set the emotional and aesthetic experience. Everyone else in the scene (and Iyvon's character in the beginning) is on stage in just basic black garments, revealing very neutral representations of self. Iyvon really wanted to highlight the issue of "stripping down to the most true self" by coming out on stage without her wig, which she wears every day.

I felt this was extremely powerful and transformative for the group and perhaps the audience as well. Hearing the feedback on this scene, I feel we succeeded for the most part. It raised many questions, many audience members understood the transformation occurring on stage and many resonated deeply with the message of the scene. Of course, a few voices from the audience did not grasp the essence of the vignette and were confused by the abstraction.

*Transition: Finding of Self*

This movement piece partially came out of the necessity to give Iyvon time to transition into the next scene. However, we also found that we needed to give every ensemble member the

time on stage to construct his or her own identity and meaning, while somehow interacting with the message of the scene before. Still in basic blacks, they moved around the space, taking on various emotional qualities in their movement. Returning to a neutral state, the idea was to have them explore the most basic human instincts and qualities in the aesthetic ephemeral space.

*The Brandeis Machine (ensemble)*

The Machine idea came out of the well-known improvisation exercise. Beginning with our first meeting in November, it became a part of creative exercise repertoire. With different prompts in mind we went through a variety of these machines. Finally, my one-on-one meeting with Ra before she left the project gave me the inspiration for this culminating piece. To her, Brandeis often feels like a machine and the students are the gears and pieces that make it work. I ran with this image and ended our performance with a representation of this well-oiled machine. From the outside, an observer may not be able to see the inner workings of the machine and only sees the smooth outcome of what it produces. For this final, beautiful image I had the ensemble melt into a statue (another improvisation and applied theatre exercise), guiding them with a specific prompt: one hand had to touch another ensemble member, while the other elbow had to touch another person. Finally, an “outsider” character (me) would come on stage and observe this beautiful community and end the performance on an uplifting note. Despite all the issues and questions we see and were brought up throughout our play, when it boils things down to functionality, we are a well-working and beautiful community. To be honest, Brandeis does a much better job than other places in trying to find a space to positively construct relationships across diversity gaps. I hope I was able to acknowledge this in some ways through this last short piece.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, the conversations, interviews and creative processes throughout this exploration have been filled with challenges, great learning and personal growth. I can only hope this learning can be extended into our community and help Brandeis in this time of transition and restructuring. As a future alum of this university, I truly hope to see Brandeis grow further and truly become an international leader and exemplar when it comes to the topic of diversity integration on the collegiate level. Brandeis has great potential and already has done a lot to meet this challenge, yet there is more to be done.

The greatest insight I take away from this inquiry is to learn to balance academic excellence and hard work with keeping an open mind, heart and soul. We have to remember the people we work and live with while we bury ourselves in our books. Our greatest focus should be to teach compassion, empathy and the will/ability to fight for our moral convictions. Only then can we act as mindful leaders in the world. Naturally, I also learned a lot about facilitating applied theatre projects of this kind. I have taken various classes covering this topic over the past four years, but only limited hands-on experience like I had here. This opportunity taught me to think creatively, work around mishaps and problems, find creative solutions and trust the people I am working with. Further, my belief in primarily focusing on strong ensemble work and true connection in a group as a vital asset to this sort of work has become even greater. I look forward to pursuing this field and utilizing all that I have learned as I enter the world outside of Brandeis. To reemphasize Boal's knowledgeable words and a belief I carry with me through my work, "Theatre is the most natural form of learning, and the most primal, since the child learns to live by means of theatre, playing, acting characters – and, through the other arts, looking at himself and painting, singing and dancing." (2006, 37)

## 7. Appendix

### Diversity – Alia Goldfarb & Ensemble

Scene: You're not Even Jewish (Anne)

*Anne meets her friends in Usdan/Sherman for dinner where they are already sitting at a table. Everyone has tiny foods. Iyvon has no food yet.*

ANNE

(taking off jacket)

1) I hate that we're here on break. 2) I do not understand why my room has to smell like marijuana or cigarettes 100% of the time. Why can't the stoners below me just smoke outside?!

IYVON

What I do not understand is why all those Jew kids have to eat on the trays.

MAYA

Because they keep Kosher. Didn't you ever read the sign in Sherman?

IYVON

What does that even mean?

ANNE

Everything you eat has to be blessed by a rabbi and you can't have meat and dairy in the same meal. You can't have pork or shellfish either. Or any animals that are considered dirty by the **Torah**. There are other rules too.

IYVON

That's dumb. Why can't you all just eat what you want?

ANNE

Don't be so prejudiced. It's just a religious observance. Why do you always give up eating chocolate for Lent and then never make it the 40 days?

*Bronte walks to the food line. Indicated by a table with pans on it.*

IYVON

Hi, Can I have a bacon cheeseburger?

SERVER (WEI YING)

We're not serving pork at the moment.

IYVON

All right. So I can't have pork chops?

SERVER

Nope.

IYVON

A simple chicken quesadilla?

SERVER

Nope.

IYVON

Can I have any meat or anything else to eat?!

SERVER

Well, we have Hebrew National Hot Dogs, Kosher burgers, Falafel and Pita with Hummus or Bagels and Lox.

*\*\*\*Charlie and Rozi start singing\*\*\**

IYVON

What is happening now?

ANNE

They're praying before they eat.

*\*\*\*Bronte starts singing "I'm Every Woman"\*\*\**

MAYA

Jesus Christ! Stop it! You are so rude!

IYVON

\*scoffs\* I don't understand Jews. In my class the other day the professor was talking about a special decorated top that they make for some holiday.

ANNE

A dreidel?

IYVON

yeah whatever, that. We played with that one night when we were taking shots.

ANNE

How can you be at Brandeis and have no idea what a dreidel is? This is like right before winter break when you saw Morris's menorah and asked what it was. It's not just a candelabra.

IYVON

Oh that thing we use for Kwanzaa...RIGHT!

ANNE

I just think it is important to know at least a small bit about all religions, especially since you go to a university where almost a majority of the people here are Jewish.

RASHEIK

*\*screaming from the back of the theater cutting Anne off at the last minute\** BUT YOU'RE NOT EVEN JEWISH!!!

\*\*\*Long Pause\*\*\*

**Anne:** So?

*Blackout*

Transition

*While transitioning everyone is having superficial conversations with each other talking about classes, parties, food, people...Set up: One table is set with three chairs down stage right. Rozi takes off her "Jewish" clothing revealing her Turkish T-Shirt.*

Scene: the Jewish Identity

*Light up on Rozi, center stage. 4 characters in shadows waiting. 2 sitting at the table in a freeze (Wei Ying, Iyvon).*

ROZI

I come from this faraway land of people not-like me. Don't we all come from that land? There is something about us that is REALLY not like everyone else - where we come from. I don't know, maybe that's just Brandeis. And then you come to this magical place called college, and that one thing that made you who you are starts to expand. And that one thing that makes you who you are unfolds to a greater concept, and now you are just confused.

Obviously, the biggest definer at Brandeis is what we all expect: Jewish/Judaism/Jews and all that jazz.

50% of the school has Jewish roots, we have kosher dining halls, kosher pre-packaged food, kosher options for free food, kosher options for expensive food, huge purim parties at the Chabad house—also known as, second Halloween, jews Judaism, jewish things...

that is exactly what the land I come from is not.

It is 99% Muslim, but Brandeis almost feels 99% Jewish sometimes- but what kind of Jewish? – let's keep that in the parking lot for now, we'll get to that.

I remember the excitement I felt when I saw people walking in kipas on their heads and eating kosher hamburgers at a regular dining hall. Ironically enough, I didn't keep kosher here. I didn't do much that would be considered religious, or spiritual here either!

The stereotypes I came across are so prevalent, and I am not beyond them, really. You can overhear some people say the following:

*The four come forward into their light and one by one leave after their statement.*

CHARLIE

(a little depressed)

It is so Jewish I feel so much less Jewish here (*says it while taking of kippah, wearing a tallit inside*)

ANNE

(motivated)

It is so Jewish I feel like I need to do Jewish things. I should explore my roots? Birthright, free Israel trip? (*maybe wearing a birthright tshirt*)

MAYA

(confused)

It is so Jewish here I feel like I am Jewish, maybe I should be more involved with Jewish life. Maybe BOO, or show up to Chabad, maybe the Purim party? Well let's be real, I'm actually not involved in any of those at all.

RASHEIK

(enthusiastic, energetic)

I learned so much about Judaism! ...like let's go to Shabbat this week at Hillel!

ROZI

There are so many ways of being Jewish here, but none of them are how I was Jewish at home. You know, these are all stereotypes, and I think every individual is different. That being said, you know we could get into this big conversation about how home is different than Brandeis, but I want to tell you about how Brandeis is different than anywhere else.

*Taking a large roll of paper (on stage)*

Here is a list of Jew-related Organizations on campus: BOO, BUCO, BRO, BaRuCH, Generations, Mitzvah Corps, Sunday's Bread, BSI, Ba'note, B'yachad, Hillel First Year Council, Hillel Theater Group, Jewish Fella Acapella, Manginah, Holocaust Remembrance Committee, Klal Hillel Pluralism Initiative, Shalem, let's include the Israel related ones bVIEW, BIPAC, J Street U, BZA....

*putting the scroll away.*

Well maybe that Sephardi group is partly me, but I am not completely American Sephardi, so that is a little different, and where it gets confusing...  
Once I accepted that I don't feel completely connected to any organization, I tried to start a Turkish Club, but not all things Turkish are me.

I am a Turkish-Jew, a Jewish-Turk, and once I came here, I suddenly became a Brandeis student who started exploring her own place in the Jewish Community at Brandeis. Sounds a little funny, why would I do that? Jews are Jews! Well, not quite.

There are the ultra-orthodox Jews, and the modern orthodox Jews, and the conservative Jews and the conservadox Jews, and the reform Jews, and the reconstructionist Jews, also Jews, who were one thing at home but then started dating a non-Jew, stopped keeping kosher, or started wearing skirts or pants, and said it is not important what label you have, you can just be a Jew.

*lights up on the table, Rozi begins to walk to the table to stand at the head of it.*

Then, there are the Sephardi Jews, and the Ashkenazi Jews. Most Jews here are Ashkenazi, so every service you go to will include a lot of singing “nai nai” and sometimes, non-orthodox prayers will include some English, or have no Hebrew at all.

*At the table.*

What is funny is, I can go right back to the Passover dinner table in my home in my city and in my country, and feel so strongly about being Jewish;- that one label, that one identity I have that many people are not in my home-land. I’m comfortable praying in the way I was raised with

*(Prayer – Wei Ying carries the plate)*

*Rozi stops the prayer and returns to center stage, sitting down:*

Then I come back to Brandeis and suddenly my whole idea of identity collapses almost instantaneously and I no longer know what to stand by. So honestly, who am I? Who do I belong? Does that matter? And what does that mean?

*black*

Transition:

*People saying things in various languages as they set up the 8 chairs and take away the table. It can be phrases like “How are you?”, “What were you up to today?” or random things!*

Scene: Hello, I have a Scholarship

*All 8 actors will have chairs and line up. Lights up when they are seated.*

WEI YING

Hi, I’m an MLK Scholar. No, I’m not black.

RASHEIK

French Wien Scholarship....

ANNE

Hi, I’m a POSSE Scholar. I’m white, upper middle class. So what?



BRONTE

Hi, I receive a named Alumni and Friends scholarship. The Barbara and Howard Stern Scholarship. It defines me as an elite student here.

CHARLIE

Hi, I'm a TYP student. You can't tell, can you?

IYVON

Hi, I'm a Sorensen Fellow. I worked with communities in Nigeria/ Thailand.

ROZI

Hi, I receive the National Merit Scholarship. I'm American. You didn't know?

MAYA

Hi, I'm a Slifka Scholar. Yes, of course I'm Israeli.

ALL

(monotone)

What defines you?

Transition into Scene: I am male (version Solo)

*Charlie is the focus of this transition. Clearly anxiously and audibly preparing for an audition downstage right. The rest of the cast is setting up a table with three chairs. Rasheik, Maya and Wei Ying sit at the table. Full lights up, Charlie enters their space.*

CHARLIE

Hi my name is Charlie and I'll be auditioning for Grease.

ROZI

And which role will you be auditioning for?

CHARLIE

Danny Zuko.

*moderators chuckle*

Okay... Can I start?

RASHEIK

Whenever you're ready.

CHARLIE

“Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends. And now, for you gals and guys, a few words to the wise. You Jims and Sals are my best pals. And to look your best for the big contest, just be yourselves and have a ball. That's what it's all about, after all. So, forget about the camera and think about the beat. We'll give the folks at home a real big treat. Don't worry about where the camera is, just keep on dancin', that's your biz-”

WEI YING

That sounds great so far, thanks. We were wondering if you could do it more like a big, strong, man? Think about Danny Zuko- in Grease he's this cool, suave ladies' man who can make a girl swoon with the wink of an eye. Makes sense?

CHARLIE

Sure, of course, I'll try it more like that.

“Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends. And now, for you gals and guys, a few words to the wise. You Jims and Sals are my best pals. And to look your best for the big contest, just be yourselves and have a ball-

ROZI

Can you do it again? Really feel it in your body. Square your shoulders!

CHARLIE

(rhythmically)

Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends.

RASHEIK

Chest out!

CHARLIE

Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends.

WEI YING

Wide stance!

CHARLIE

Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends.

ROZI

Head up!

CHARLIE

Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends.

WEI YING

Plant your feet!

CHARLIE

Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends.

RASHEIK

Less HANDS!

CHARLIE

Thank you, fans and friends and odds and ends.

RASHEIK

Can you do it less like a fag?

ROZI

You might as well be trying out for Sandy or really any girl part.

WEI YING

At best you're gonna get Principal McGee.

CHARLIE

*Breaking the fourth wall*

Really? Really? You were wondering if I could do this role more like a big strong man? When I'm onstage, I must assume the role of the "big man," the man with bulky shoulders and brooding walk. I must speak with authority, because the "big man" knows all. Sometimes I get cast as the dorky sidekick...

*sidekick enters (MAYA). They mirror humorous movement. Maya "beats" Charlie over the head, winning the clown competition.*

But I'm not always in a funny mood! So other times they cast me as the villain.

*Anne enters as the evil villain. She ends up stabbing Charlie.*

But what if I want to be the ingénue?

*ingénue enters (BRONTE?), she outdances him*

full of vibrant young demureness. I want the graceful, smooth shyness of the ingénue, but the "man" on stage mustn't be meek.

*ingénue disses me, becomes a statue.*

Why can't I just be the male hero of the story? (*Charlie "flings" himself at Rasheik*) I want to get the guy and not the girl!

*End.*

Transition Scene into “The Asian”

*WEI YING grabs her tablet from the Stage Left box and takes the stage block on down on a chair downstage off-center left. She begins to “draw” - this appears on the back wall, while the others are transitioning. When RASHEIK and IYVON enter from stage right, lights up. They begin their banter while wandering around the stage and sit down stage right, up stage of WEI YING.*

RASHEIK

Did you see the new kiddies?

IYVON

You do realize that was *you* last year.

RASHEIK

Yeah, well, whatever. I swear, they’re so freaking awkward you can *tell* they’re freshmen the moment they open their mouths. - frisbee line

IYVON

Or from their enthusiasm. Somebody needs to put a friggin’ cap on that – it’s just spilling *everywhere*.

RASHEIK

You do realize that was *you* last year.

IYVON

*Improvise a sassy response.*

RASHEIK

I’m serious. You were bouncing all over the damn place during that party on the Great Lawn.

IYVON

Yeah, well (*cough*) screw you. I was getting to know lots of people. Unlike *you*.

RASHEIK

It’s not my fault that chick ruined everything.

IYVON

Nono, she ruined *your* night. I was all ‘*whatevah, gurl*’ (*finger snap.*)

RASHEIK

She was feel’n some type of way, and it wasn’t even my fault! It’s not like I was looking for a fight. I got better things to do.

IYVON

Mmm (*non-committal*)

RASHEIK

Hey. *Do* you remember that night?

IYVON

About how she went all teary-eyed on your ass and made you feel like a complete douchebag for reasons you still don't quite understand? You mean *that* night?

RASHEIK

Yes. (*unamused*)

IYVON

Mmhmm. Sure do. Where was she from again?

RASHEIK

*Singapore.*

IYVON

Yeah. One of those really small, unknown places. Of course, you then guessed she was from... *where?*  
(*Ribbing*)

RASHEIK

China. But *come on*, you know where I'm coming from, right? They *all look the same*. How was I supposed to know? How am I supposed to know every single fuck'n country in Asia?

IYVON

Look, this is gonna keep happening. At some point you're just going to get used to it. You're not the only one with these Asian problems, okay? Remember my TA from last semester? I didn't know what he was saying – *Ain't nobody knew what he was saying half the time!* We wondered a lot why they got him to be a TA when no one could understand the man. I mean, I already have no clue what the heck these terms are, I don't need you to make things sound even more *incomprehensible!*

RASHEIK

Or in UWS...?

IYVON

Oh, sweetie, don't even get me started.

RASHEIK

Peer reviewing?

*Unanimous shuddering.*

IYVON

Gawd... like, *no offence*, but if I need help on my essays, I'd probably need it from someone whose first language was English *at the least*. Seriously. And *again* with the accents, I had so much trouble trying to figure out what she was trying to tell me.

RASHEIK

Girl, let me tell you when I found out who my lab partner was, I had a total 'Ohdearlord' moment. (*pause*) Until I actually heard her speak. I could *not* believe how she spoke perfect English. And I'm talking British English, *Queen's English*, perfect pronunciation, phonetically perfect sort of English. She'd never even lived abroad before!

IYVON

At least you had an Asian partner. You know they're all good at science.

RASHEIK

Yeah, so once I got off of the whole *English* thing I was happy because I knew I was gonna get that 'A' without doing much work.

IYVON

Yea Buddy!!

RASHEIK

But no! I'm thinking this bitch about to get my work done, but she not even real Chinese. She from Taiwan or something like that.

IYVON

Honest mistake! Black hair, 5-feet, Chinky eyes, chopstick having, Mercedes Benz driving, panda loving, chain smoking, Tokyo-drift playing, eggroll eating, Moulin looking wannabes, pet dragon owning, karate chopping, kung-fu fighting...

(*WY image goes black, [FUCK THIS] appears on screen. WY turns around and snaps at them. "Well all you chocolate people look the same to me too." Stalks off. )*

Transition

*Set up for Brandeis Goggles .... two chairs, center stage up-stage center.*

CHARLIE (*wearing a hat*)

I was at that party last night and I hooked up with like three girls. Granted, I was really drunk...they were too, but you know how that goes?

RASHEIK

Actually no. I haven't had one of those crazy nights where I hook up with three random people. It's easy for straight guys, isn't it? (half joking)

CHARLIE

Not easier than it is for gay guys. You guys breed like rabbits, except it's not breeding...(pause)

RASHEIK

well actually...just forget it. It's not like that at all. Maybe it is like that for some people, but I don't think there is anyone who's my type on campus.

CHARLIE

What do you mean? It seems like there are a million gay guys. You just don't have your brandeis goggles yet.

RASHEIK

My what?

CHARLIE

Your brandeis goggles. I would let you borrow mine, but I'm heading out again tonight and I think I'm going to need them. (pulls them out to show them off). I don't leave the house without them. You know better than to show up to a party sober, well showing up without your brandeis goggles is worse.

RASHEIK

ok. Then where do I get them?

CHARLIE

Got mine a frat party. I don't know where gay guys get theirs though. Hold on a sec, I'll let you see mine. Look around and look well. Most people look average right? (hands p2 the goggles) Now look again. People look different right? Full-fledged hotties? Ok. I need them back.

RASHEIK

This changes everything. I can hook up with white guys, Asian guys, Indian guys, mixed guys and have no genuine attraction for any of them? This is great! I can do anything!! I just need a pair.

*focus on other side of the stage on the side looking out, highlight, find light SR!  
Line of couples, breakign up by handshake and put goggles on the table. Wear identifying shirts. This happens while Iyvon speaks.*

IYVON

Anyone looking for a pair of brandeis goggles? I'm graduating and besides I'm in a monogamous relationship and have no need for them anymore.

RASHEIK

Thanks. (*The break up starts here.*)

*RASHEIK crosses the stage to CHARLIE (no cap)*

RASHEIK

Hey, we're in the same class right? IR or Anth or one of those intro classes. I don't think we've met though. My name is Rasheik.

CHARLIE

Cool, I'm Charlie.

RASHEIK

Would it be cool if we could study together? I'm starting to freak out about this mid-term we're taking in a week. (pulls out a book)

CHARLIE

Sure. I thought I was the only one freaking out. I didn't want to be *that* person (acts ridiculously dramatic)  
"MOMMY, I GOT A B+ IN AN INTRO CLASS!! A B+...mommy, am I dumb?" (laughing)

RASHEIK

you're funny...and cute.

CHARLIE

really? I think you're cute too.

RASHEIK

You have really nice eyes and you have a really cute smile

CHARLIE

You have a really good style and nice lips....

*the two kiss...*

*CHARLIE's goggles fog up and he takes them off to clean them. He doesn't particularly like what he sees, so he hurriedly cleans his goggles and puts them back on.*

*On the other side of the stage:*

*The Break up scene in the background is no longer happening. The other two couples (Rozi & Bronte/ Anne & Wei Ying) will come on stage here and bring their chairs to their positions. "Relaxed Freeze" there.*

RASHEIK

You are so smart! That comment you made in class turned me on so much and I was like "That's my Charlie". So hot!

CHARLIE



(still wearing goggles). You're so hot. Let's make out.

*Rasheik takes Charlie's goggles off.*

My GOGGLES!!! I need those!

RASHEIK

its fine. I don't wear mine anymore and I still think you're beautiful and talented.

*Leans in to kiss p4 and is stopped with a hand to the face*

WEI YING

(enamoured)

Your eyes are beautiful. The way they sparkle...(looking enamored)

ANNE

Your eyes are just...you know, plain, so...Umm

MAYA

I could run my hand through your hair all day.

ROZI (as a male)

(nervously)

well yours...can we change the subject?

RASHEIK

Your lips are such a gorgeous red

CHARLIE

(explodes)

Look, I think you're nice and you are attractive for a black dude but this can't work without my goggles.

What are you expecting? Love? Marriage? I can't leave campus with you, my goggles don't work off campus! What would people think?

CHARLIE, ANNE, ROZI

(simultaneously, monotone)

we are too different. People wouldn't understand. My family wouldn't understand. You are beautiful to someone. Let's be friends.

RASHEIK

- you just wanted to see what it's like to be with a dude!

WEI YING

- you wanted that hot Asian girlfriend...

MAYA

– needed to have the exotic trophy!

RASHEIK, WEI YING & MAYA

I am different. People don't understand. My family doesn't understand.

MAYA

My hair...

RASHEIK

My skin...

WEI YING

My accent...

TOGETHER

...are beautiful to someone. Let's co-exist.

Transition into Bronte's Poem

*Bronte will stand center stage while the others move the chairs to the back wall.*

*Bronte is reciting the Poem by herself. Everyone else will be off stage!*

BRONTE

To the man who asked after the colored museum...

“Maybe if you include more white people in the little black theatre you do have on campus, white people could get a better understanding of what it means to be black.”

And to the girl who said...

“You people just aren't accessible. You always look angry.”

And to the person who told me at the Phi Psi party...

“You're really pretty for a black girl.”

And to the journalist who told me...

“Well maybe if black people would stop being lazy and just get off their ass...”

And to the guy who told me in Usdan

“You're in Posse and from Atlanta?! But you talk so pretty!”

And to one of my best friends who likes to throw around...

“Nigga! Nigga! Nigga!”

When he’s drunk.

And to the people who have asked me...

“So are you black or Puerto-rican?”

And look where we are now  
Comparatively victimizing the other  
Because mental enslavement  
Just isn’t the same as seeing chains  
Erode the black off of our skin

I thought when I got to Brandeis,  
I would denounce even more of my identity

Wash off my reflection being a riddle.  
Scrub the ghetto off my tongue.  
Clean off the feeling of being a footnote.  
An afterthought.  
Something left in the margins.

Rub the dirt off my skin  
The mixed off my face.  
Forget that I was the smallest part of a larger story.

I didn’t want to remember that I was  
Small  
Inferior  
Brown

Thought I would want to sprout wings  
Strap halos across my shoulders  
Ascend to the heavens  
Embodying all things white and holy

I didn’t know when I got here  
I would be faced with so many mirrors

People reminding me of why I need to stand in my skin  
 People telling me I can go ahead and fly  
 Although since leaving my mother's womb  
 My wings have been tied in knots

They say that birds born in cages  
 Think flying is impossible

I have seen it most in black birds

Backs arched like their skin  
 Is still waiting to be whipped  
 Head and sky become the most attractive of all magnets  
 Hand and hand facing upwards like arrows

Like I have to shoot a prayer up somewhere  
 Because when you play with pain daily  
 Faith is all your hands know how to hold onto

Everything else is just sand  
 Just dust in the wind  
 Just ocean

How our history was dissolved  
 To unseen reparations  
 And fabricated emancipations

How when I tell a girl here  
 That black people are still facing the ramifications  
 Of slavery  
 She believes I am joking

Her teeth as sharp as the tips of KKK hoods  
 In my head  
 They laugh like jackals  
 And look like jackasses

People here think the more recent their pain  
 The more validated the cause

But the luxury of forgetting  
 is afforded  
 to those who have seen compensation

We were promised forty acres  
 And a sterile animal  
 As if that could counteract 400 years  
 Of sin  
 Stained  
 As white as the blank memory of our ancestors

We have no history to return to.

We were beaten into dependence.  
 Do you think welfare is any different?

How can I handle something in a “civil” manner  
 When my people fought for a war  
 That wanted to keep them as capital?

I’m sorry if you think history doesn’t become cyclical  
 If we don’t answer to it.

They say  
 that the caged bird sings

But I hear it cry  
 And often scream

Because they whipped our throats  
 Into knowing how to exclaim

Would you be able to whisper  
 While the skin on your back unraveled?  
 I wish they would peel back our brains  
 and see how our mindsets are still being lynched  
 The faint leftovers of rope and friction  
 Noosing our thoughts

With pants sagging  
 We still know how to sway  
 Like strange fruit

Poplar trees are now our school systems  
 and auction blocks are just called sports drafting

Black president should affirm a “post-racial” society  
 But no glass ceiling has been broken

If anything it is only a little less opaque

What I have been trying to tell you

BRONTE

Is that just because someone opens the cage  
doesn't mean the birds  
will suddenly know how to fly out.

Transition

*Lights up once Ivon is seated on the chair; Maya & Bronte are at the table SL and Rozi, Charlie and Anne are sitting down SR. There is a box of oreo's placed on a stage block (same location as in the ASIAN)*

WEI YING

Hey girl! What's up?

IYVON

Nothing much. I'm about to put in work on this packet of oreos.

WEI YING

Aww yeah. Which team you on?

IYVON

What do ya mean?

WEI YING

Cookie or cream?

IYVON

I can't choose. I just eat the whole oreo.

WEI YING

But there has to be one side you prefer---cookie or cream?

IYVON

Nah...not really. I just eat the whole cookie.

MAYA (interrupting)

Did someone say cookie?I am all about that cookie.

IYVON (confused)  
well yeah...Oreo's are great.

MAYA  
I mean of course, that cookie is delicious. But really just the cookie.

IYVON  
I kind of like the whole thing The whole Oreo.

MAYA (shocked)  
What? Nah, girl, you can't. That's just wrong!

*IYVON tries to interrupt and claim that both are great together, but MAYA won't let her.*

MAYA  
Of course the cookie is the better part. You just throw the creme out. That disgusting stuff isn't good for you. its all in the cookie. Just EAT the cookie! Hell, what are you doing girl?

*RASHEIK is passing by*

MAYA (to him)  
Brother, come over here brother. This poor girl has been so miseducated. She was thinking about eating the cream! Can you imagine. Foolish!

RASHEIK  
Who taught you that? Don't you eat that creme. Cookie's the best part. the ONLY part. Cookie's got style.

MAYA  
yeah, no one holds you down like cookie. The cookie supports the whole thing. The cookie supports you!

RASHEIK  
(motioning the struggle as MAYA ends)  
The cookie is more filling...more satisfying.

MAYA  
yes, enjoy the chocolaty rich flavor...

CHARLIE  
(taking IYVON by the hand)  
come with us. We know you want that sweet sweet cream.

ANNE  
it's just luxurious creamy white deliciousness.

CHARLIE

No crumbs and messiness.

ANNE

pure sweet delight - not a dark speck on it, nothing dirty about it.

*cookies interfering:*

BRONTE

*(taking a hold of IYVON's other hand, trying to lead her back)*  
 you don't want any of that fake chemical sugar stuff - it's so bad for you!

*(beginning to overlap in a more aggressive fight over IYVON)*

MAYA

you have to stick with the cookie, the complexity of the crumbs

ROZI

No, you want to enjoy the white cream.

ANNE

white is clearly better

CHARLIE

even our blackbox theater is white!

ROZI

Even Michael Jackson turned white.

BRONTE

And died!

RASHEIK

stay true to yourself - the cookie is black like your skin

ROZI

cream is white like your brilliant teeth

MAYA

black like your hair!

ANNE

white like your words!



RASHEIK

Don't abandon your heritage - all about the struggle

ROZI

be part of the crop of the creme

IYVON

(breaking free and rushing forward to the smaller table)

I WANT MY DAMN OREOS

(stuffs herself with oreos)

*lights down.*

The Identity Onion – transition

*IE runs of stage to undress, WYL pushes chair back, BV takes table, MG grabs plate, RL takes plate off, CM takes off stage block with oreo box. AC brings on shoes from the box SL. TAYLOR brings on the mirror. Simultaneously, RT grabs the violin and begins to play. Once everything is away, they undress their layers. Ideally this happens with some sort of half light.*

Onion:

Rasheik plays “little star” on the violin SR, Iyvon comes out and sits down in front of the mirror. **As people dress her they stand against the back wall.**

MAYA begins with the dress (leave to get hair).

ROZI Skirt.

BRONTE wei ying's shirt

CHARLIE shirt

ANNE shoes

WEI YING scarf

MAYA Hair.

IYVON adds lipstick and other items of clothing. Accepting her identity. (happy music from violin). She leaves.

Transition to Machine

*Rasheik continues to play the happy tune; Taylor will take the mirror off. Everyone else turns their backs to the audience again. Rasheik puts down the violin and IYVON joins the line. When everyone is here, WEI YING begins the machine. (half light?)*

Scene: Machine

Machine begins with Wei Ying sitting on the floor back center stage “coffee.” Rasheik enters and kneels beside her on her left and begins clapping. Charlie kneels beside her on her right and sings “la.” Bronte enters and stands behind them saying “beauty.” Rozi enters and stands to Bronte’s right “Plan this, plan that.” Iyvon steps in behind her motioning a cell phone saying “busy, busy, busy.” Anne fills the left gap with “faster, faster, faster.” Maya completes the machine with “need help?” Alia gets up in the Audience. The cast becomes a statue “filling the gaps.” ALIA will enter from the audience and observe the statue saying “What a beautiful community.”

END SHOW.

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Rasheik Trammell '13 in Diversity - "The Brandeis Goggles"  
Photo credit: Michael Elfman'14.



Rozi Levi '13 in Diversity - "What it Means to be Jewish"  
Photo credit: Michael Elfman'14