



WHAT I WISH YOU KNEW

NARRATIVES OF LOW INCOME STUDENTS

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About this Book

According to a 2017 New York Times article, Kenyon is the eighth least socioeconomically diverse elite college in the country. 19.8 percent of students are from the top 1 percent of wealth, while only 12.2 percent of students hail from the bottom 60 percent.* As a student from a low income background, I was not at all surprised by this article. In fact, it validated a lot of the experiences and situations I had encountered while at Kenyon.

Drawing from a pilot study I conducted in the Fall semester of my freshman year, I designed my anthropology senior honors thesis to investigate the experiences of low income students, particularly their relationship with food. A presentation on my research design and findings will take place Thursday, March 28th at 11:10 in Hayes 109.

Within this book are excerpts from interviews conducted with 23 self-identifying low-income students in the Fall of 2017. These students come from a variety of geographical, educational, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. While the enclosed experiences do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of *all* low income students on campus, they do present a fairly holistic view of the variation and commonalities of opinions.

Although the quotes are presented anonymously within this book, it is crucial to remember the identity of these students. They could be your lab partner, your teammate, your roommate, a close friend, someone you awkwardly smile at on Middle Path. This booklet is not meant to merely be a form of entertainment. It is a tool for you to critically reflect on the ways in which your daily actions influence and shape the experiences of other students from underrepresented backgrounds.

It would be great if Kenyon had a larger endowment and could provide more scholarships for low income students to come to Kenyon, but that change is out of our control. However, we do have control over our daily actions. Every day we create and reproduce a Kenyon culture. How we talk about Peirce, what type of clothes we wear, and how we spend our free time all contribute to the infamous 'Kenyon Community'. It is our job as students to ensure that this culture, this community, is inclusive and welcoming to all students.

There is no easy solution to this issue, but it's important to start having conversations and recognizing that class inequality exists on campus. If nothing else, I hope this project can spark and guide those conversations.

*New York Times. January 18, 2017. "Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours."

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First Year Transition

I called my mom and I said, “**I don’t belong here, I’m not like any of these kids.** I don’t understand. Their lives are so different. They don’t understand my life and I’m not comfortable with that. They’re so much smarter than me” I thought they were smarter than me because they had more opportunities than I did. Which is not true. I’m just as smart as them, I just didn’t have those same opportunities. And so that was really big. And I didn’t feel like I fit in at all and I was uncomfortable with that. But I’m kind of a tough cookie, so I was like, I can do it. I still feel that way, but I’m also more open about it now

My first year I really didn’t feel like I belonged. I felt out of my league in education and background experience. I felt like I had not had as cultured as an experience. I came from a very rural conservative community. I hadn’t been exposed to these liberal ideas of how you should treat people, and I’ve since come to acquire those ideas myself, but it was just kind of new. It felt like everything was new, I was just in a completely different environment. And I guess now I do feel more like I belong, and that I

Freshman halls are interesting because it’s just random people you’re thrown in with. And I’m still friends with a lot of those people, but we’re definitely different. I was lucky, my roommate and I got along really well because neither of our parents had a lot of money compared to our other Kenyon cohort. So that was a nice thing to have in a roommate, that there wasn’t this big divide between us. I don’t know how that would have affected us had there been one, but I know that was something really nice that we could both relate to. **I think there is some type of comfort in that.**

First Year Transition

Freshman year in particular it was very jarring to meet other people's parents. I didn't notice class differences too much when I was talking to students because I guess I just wanted to convince myself that we were in the same environment and in all functional ways we were equals-- which isn't true. But it was jarring when **I met people's parents and I could see nothing in their parents that resembled the way my parents treated me**, and kind of treated this situation and environment. Because my parents have never made it to a parents weekend. So they haven't spoken to other parents. But it seems like there's a different language that other people's parents speak in, and the way that they kind of treat Kenyon as both an abstract thing and a thing that's here, and my parents don't share that. It's always been very apparent to me at any parent's weekend or time I'm out to dinner with my friend's parents.

Freshman year was definitely a very big culture shock. Especially because a lot of the people on my floor, and my freshman year roommate, had obviously come from a wealthy background. She was an only child and her parents were working professionals. That was the biggest thing for me. To come here and have people say, "My dad is a professor" "My mom is an architect." That seems to be the norm here. My roommate ended up moving out because she already knew a bunch of people in our class that had come from her high school. And she moved to be with them. And she left a bunch of things. Just in our room because she didn't feel like carrying them across the street. One day I went into her old closet and there were a bunch of down pillows in there, and she had left them. Like with a desk lamp. She didn't feel like carrying them, so I decided to keep them. And I still have them, and like, I don't understand how you can just afford to leave things around. And that's something I've noticed. People on campus seem to be very willing to just leave things. **They seem very unattached to physical possessions because they can just afford to buy something else and replace it**

First Year Transition

I remember being very self-conscious my first year at Kenyon. I felt extremely inadequate. I was able to do a pre-orientation program before coming here, and I remember showing up, going to this dinner, and everyone was talking about themselves through their experiences. They were talking about different artists they've seen, cathedrals they'd seen in Europe, different family vacations they had. Some girl was talking about how her uncle was famous and on a couple tv shows, and everyone was just really peacocking themselves. **But to talk about themselves, they were just talking about their privilege.** And I remember feeling so inadequate and like I had nothing to offer these people, because I was like: **If this is what you think I should think is important about you, I don't know what you'll find important about me.**

I remember another conversation that stands out really vividly. I was really interested in Art History when I was in high school, and I took AP Art History. I remember sitting around with four other girls, and they were talking about their favorite places in Europe, and I was able to keep up with the conversation because of that course I had taken. So I was asking about different cathedrals and if they had seen this place or that place, and they were like, "Wow, it sounds like you've been to a lot of places. **What's your favorite place in Europe?**" And I said, "You know, I've never been out of the country."

I just remember at least for my first semester freshman year that I didn't belong, and I felt really inadequate, but then throughout the year, as I was able to keep pace with other student's academics, and when I saw that I was doing better than other students academically it really made me think about that. This sounds kind of petty, but I remember in those first couple months, freshmen were still talking about ACT and AP scores, and I was like, wow, you went to a private school, all 60 of the people you graduated with went to colleges, most of them Ivy League, and I scored significantly better than you on all these tests. And that angered me, because then it's like obviously you're just here because you're rich and because of the prestige that is tied to your schools name. I think that was a moment when I realized that I have worked really hard, and I do deserve my place here. Like honestly, **some students here are hella-fucking-mediocre, and they're just here because they were able to pay for it.**

Fashion

You can really tell people's class background based on what they wear. Like salmon shorts! **Never in my life had I ever seen so many salmon shorts** before I got to Kenyon.

One of the first things I did when I got here, which is kind of weird, was to look up the brands of clothing that people had and find out how much things cost. There's these dumb little book bags that are shaped like sandwich boxes and **they cost \$70 a pop**. What are they-- Fajallakrabben whatever the fuck it is only has one pocket!

I dress in a particular way, and that's because I want to be taken seriously. So I've saved up for clothes and I've learned how to thrift and present myself in a way that's fairly Kenyon-esque, you know? And I think just being here is a marker of some kind of wealth.

A big part of why I wanted a job was so that other people wouldn't think I was poor. **I wanted to be able to hide it** and be like other kids and do the stuff they do. Walmart is where I buy all my clothes, and even Target is too high end for me. I was showering in the locker rooms, and this girl had blue marks from her sports bra, and her friends were like, "Where'd you buy it?" and she said Walmart, and they were like "Oh my god, that's a good indicator you got it from Walmart, it's just cheap shit." And they trash talked it and they don't realize what they're doing, but it makes me feel really shameful. I'm really proud to be a poor kid at Kenyon. I'm first gen and one day I'm gonna take care of my parents and not be worried about money and I'll have a degree, but when people say things like that, I'm like "oh my god, **do I look like I dress from Walmart?**" I just feel like I don't belong here, I don't want anyone to see it and confirm it.

Fashion

I've become more materialistic as I've been here. More than I ever have been in my life. And I don't know if it's being in this environment of people who have more, so **I want more**, but I never bought anything online until I came here.

A lot of Kenyon students co-opt poverty as a style. And it's like, they have the option to buy \$150 ragged urban outfitter jeans, but at the end of the day they can take them off and wear their fucking Canada Goose jackets. But those ripped Goodwill jeans are all I have. I can't take it off and pretend to be someone else.

There was this funny moment when my mom and I were touring Kenyon, and we noticed all the North Face jackets that people had. And my mom was talking about it to someone in my town, like "oh she won't have that north face jacket at Kenyon...." and then **one of the community members, after I graduated, bought me a North Face jacket.** It was really nice.



Food

People ask me to go out and I'm like "I have homework," and then they tell me to take a break from work, and I'm like "I don't have enough money." So then they offer to pay and **it just makes me feel like a charity case**. You don't need to pay for me, I don't need to go.

People complain about Peirce food as a performance. They get a bunch of food and then say "uh, this is horrible" and then go make a sandwich. It comes from this place of, **"I'm above this food"**

A lot of people think Peirce is shitty. They take it for granted. But they're people that don't really have to worry about money or food. And if you are someone who complains about it-- I don't know, **people who have struggled with money and food in the past, usually their first reaction is gratitude**. Just as maybe the people who have always had food, and even really good food to eat, it's like, they feel they can say that it's below what they're used to. So they're complaining because they don't like it."

For some students, **Peirce is a godsend**. Be aware of that the next time you trash talk Peirce or AVI workers. I would never say something about the food, even if it was gross, in front of an AVI worker. Because that's their job and they're making food for you

I have friends that eat out all the time, especially at the VI. And they just aren't even aware that **they're showing off their wealth** or ability to eat out. When eating out becomes central to any type of socializing it's really difficult for me to maintain a friendship with people because it's expensive.

Food

I have certain friends that will complain about the food for a whole meal. And I say to them, the fact that we can actually have a good meal that's from local farms as opposed to getting McDonalds everyday is a privilege. **You should count yourself lucky.** And when they realize that the situation we are in food wise is what I consider to be privileged, then they stop complaining.

I think Peirce is good because it's unlimited. And it's not bad food.

It sucks to go to bed without eating dinner, it really sucks to not be able to eat food, or to get food that has no nutrition, like two sticky buns-- and that's a thousand calories of bullshit.

There's a couple of people here I've met who choose not to go to Peirce, and to me that's a sign of like, you're pretty wealthy if you can choose not to eat that food.

That said, I like it, I have no complaints. I'm very happy that it's all you can eat. I also think that what you eat is a very potent means of subtly communicating your wealth to other people, and I see that a lot here.

Kenyon students are unfathomably persnicketty about food

To be unappreciative of the amount of food put in front of you is ridiculous, you know? Regardless of whether you shelled out thousands of dollars for your tuition or not. I dont know, its really foreign to me. And I hear people say, "yeah, I paid so much money for tuition, and the food sucks" and I mean, I didnt pay that much in tuition, but the foods great

You know, there's definitely a difference between how low income people eat. They tend to eat fast food and that's very targeted in lower income areas. How quick and easy you can make something to eat **determines what kind of person you're going to be** or what kind of consumer is going to be targeted.

Food

When I first got here, I was overwhelmed by Peirce. I was like, wow, there are so many options, there are always healthy options, there are always vegetarian options, there are always always always so many different options. And hearing people complain about it sometimes...like, you don't have to eat that! You have cereal! You always have bagels, you always have deli, you always have salad. Like, we always have something to eat, so how are you complaining?

What are you complaining about?

There are so many people in the world who don't have food, you know? That's how I used to think. But then I find myself getting into that culture of complaining as well, and I don't like it.

I think other people have very high expectations for food. So if Peirce missteps on a flavor, they condemn them, or if something is overcooked or undercooked, **they're very harsh.**

I do like the food here, and I think I'm pretty unique in that. There's a whole lot of, "this food is disgusting!" "I hate this!" "this is gross" "does no one know how to cook potatoes?" and potatoes are the one thing that Peirce does really well.

I remember freshman year was the hardest to get used to all the rich people. There was a girl on my hall who transferred, and one of the reasons was because she couldn't stand to be around this many rich people. **She and I used to go to McDonalds together**, because we knew no one else would go to McDonalds with us and like, we'd sit there and talk about how frustrated we are with our roommates who aren't used to people not having money.

Food

People always want Peirce to be super super healthy.

Like, whenever there's grilled cheese and fries, everyone is like "classic Peirce, grilled cheese and french fries, **this is not gonna fuel my kombucha soul**" I get so irritated. It's mostly like, wanting these super healthy options and then also, individual catering. If one person doesn't like a certain food, they say, "I don't get why they serve this all the time" and expect Peirce to cater to their individual desires. It's a very privileged mindset of, "I want it, and I pay to go here so they better make what I want." And I'm just happy we have food. Like, that's cool, I don't have to buy groceries

Students expect this level of quality, and I hear this from people I know who are 1%ers talking about all of the fruits they would like to eat and all of the delicacies that they prefer. Or they say, why don't we serve xyz, why are they so bad at cooking? Like, they're just normal people who cook food, **they're not the 5 star chef you had at boarding school.**

There's a lot of bougie people here that **would never be caught dead at a Wendy's or getting greasy food** somewhere because they are very health conscious. They only shop at Whole Foods when they're at home, they go to Columbus to buy shit at Whole Foods and then come back to Kenyon. People need their vegan butter, and if they don't have it, they're very upset that Peirce doesn't have their vegan butter for one day.

In the Classroom

I feel like there's the expectation that there are films or books that you should have read, but obviously you haven't because your high school library didn't have that book or something. Especially as an English major, that's something that people talk about a lot. They'll reference a book or something that's in the classical canon and I don't know what it is. Or they'll talk about theory and stuff, or things they learned in AP classes. **My education was not the same as yours.** There's definitely the sense on campus that we're all starting from the same base line when we get here, and that's definitely not the case. My education had a lot of definite holes in it. Our public education system is very poor where I'm from.

Professors often say in classes, "Oh you Kenyon students have a certain lifestyle, you wouldn't understand poverty or income inequality or something like that" A lot of times when we talk about it, **there's the assumption that everyone in the classroom is wealthy,** and then the resident low income student has to be like, "oh, wait, I do get that, let me explain it for you."

I don't directly tell people I'm poor. It's not like I waltz into the room and say "hi, hello, I'm the lower 12%," but it comes out implicitly in conversation. And then when the backlash happens, I will sort of jump in like, I don't have this much money. For example, in an unnamed class, sophomore year, with mostly white seniors, this one boy was talking about how after graduation he was going to do this Patagonia biking thing across central America, and he was like, "yeah, it's gonna be so cool, and it's only \$5,000" and you know without thinking, I sort of jumped in and said, "only \$5,000?" and the entire class, including the professor turned to look at me and chime in, "oh no, but that's such a good deal-- you could be paying loads more for this thing" and **I just feel very shut down and like, in my head I want to tell them, "that's a solid four months of income for my parents", but I don't and I just feel shitty.**

In the Classroom

Especially in classes, I've definitely had to question my own knowledge or experience. Like, I feel like I am maybe not as prepared for classes as others are, like they had a better high school education, that maybe... **I'm always hesitant I guess to speak up unless I'm really confident in what I have to say.** Not that I think anyone is really gonna judge me or say anything, but there's still that pressure to seem intelligent.

Coming to these classes, I got a D on my first Bio test and I was just like, I'm not prepared to be here. **I don't know if I consciously wanted to drop out,** but there were things that were really stressing me out, and then last year my cousin died of a heroin overdose and it was in fall, like when things start hitting the fan pretty much. It's a lot easier to feel like this whole school thing is pointless because you've just come from summer and it's like, okay, I could be working a job or, there are other options I guess.

There is less of a conversation about ambitions or aspirations, or even a recognition of potential in a low income family. And I didn't know until the summer before my senior year of high school that college was really even available to me or that I wanted to explore that opportunity, so all my college search and thinking of myself as someone who could have that future was all very rushed and frantic. So, when I got here, there was a feeling of, everyone else has had this expectation, maybe their whole lives, I only just had this for a year, so **the self that I am bringing to Kenyon is a less developed self,** and I felt the effects of that a lot. And I think I'm still feeling the effects of that, but to a lesser extent, and I'm more aware of it and how to use it constructively.

Social Interactions

I've never been asked so many times before I came here, "what do your parents do?" And it's uncomfortable to realize that some people's answers to that question are doctors or lawyers or art gallery owners. And like, my dad was a taxi driver growing up and my mom worked in cleaning services or factories. **I don't know how to answer that question without people judging me.** I feel like they're expecting a prestige answer but it's not there. I'm not gonna make it up or bullshit the answer, but it just makes me feel really uncomfortable.

I definitely made a conscious effort when I came on campus to camouflage the fact that I was from a low income family. And **I don't think many of my friends know that's where I come from.** I don't feel comfortable talking about this with someone who doesn't completely understand, because there's just such a disconnect.

I dont tell too many people,
"Hey, Im poor as shit."

Everybody wants to think they're average, that they're middle class. They don't want to feel guilty for having money.

I've had some friends I've lost here, not because I got tired of their blindness to their privilege, but I think they distanced themselves from me because **they got uncomfortable with the fact that my life has never been easy** and every year I've faced new hardships with my family. And I don't know if that made them uncomfortable, but they've distanced themselves, and that's the most hurtful thing, when people won't even try to engage with this conversation.

Social Interactions

Um, I've done my own experiments on how people talk about class. You know how people table in Peirce? And ask for money? A lot of times, they say, "Hey, you wanna donate?" And I'm like, "oh sorry I don't have any money." And they say, "no cash? You can venmo or do credit card." And I'm like, **"no, I don't have money."** And they just become very uncomfortable and silent with that truth. It doesn't bother me, I actually kind of find it funny, but like exposing people to that is entertaining because--- we know how to deal with and talk about racial inequalities, it's something that we've learned here. But we haven't learned the other side of Kenyon SES exists. So it's mostly a silence. Or a defense of, "I'm not like that, my family...I get financial aid too!" and a lot of times I ask them, if I know them, how much does your family make a year. Like, if we're having a discussion, and they say, "I don't know" and I mean, that alone is an indicator that you really have not struggled. Which is fine and being middle class at Kenyon is also probably hard because you have kids with yachts and stuff.

But I guess like, **people trying to say, I'm not one of those snobby rich people.** Is something that shows how people are uncomfortable. Or people also try to relate to you, where they're like, "well one time I had to take out a loan" "I go to the thrift store" "I love buying stuff on sale" and I'm like...cool. When it got trendy to thrift, I was so hype, because like, I was so embarrassed growing up. My mom would give me \$20 at Goodwill for school shopping, and I was so nervous. And now it's trendy. Like, "Oh! Did you buy that at the thrift?" And I'm like, "Yeah, but not for the same reasons you did." People get mad sometimes. And defensive. They say "it's not *my* fault I grew up with money." And I'm not saying it's bad, I'm saying you have to recognize you're privileged. And it's the same thing with saying, "you're white, you're privileged" and people are like, "uh, me? I'm not privileged." People are very defensive.

Social Interactions

The conversations...that's how you can really tell someone's socioeconomic status. Because **it depends on the problems that they're talking about.** If it's problems that are like, 1% problems, I mean, why are we worried about that? I genuinely don't understand. I think that's the only time that socially I can feel uncomfortable. Like, when someone is talking about something that is really a tiny issue compared to what you're going through.

I'm not really willing to buy alcohol or whatnot because I just, I can't do it. Like, I wanted to go see a movie with my friends last night, but I couldn't so I'm just gonna pirate it later because it's free. So it's definitely a socially exclusive place, but that said, it also forces me to think in creative ways about how to view certain things, and if you're with people who can understand that and appreciate that, it can be really fun. Like, **finding ways to do normal things without spending money is kind of an enjoyable task--in the right context.** But it can also just really suck when you can't afford to go see family, like my parents can't come out for family weekend, I can't afford to go home.

I think relationships with my friends are perfectly normal until topics of money get brought up. **A majority of my friends are definitely the upper 1% that pay full tuition to go here.**

They're very well off. Both parents are lawyers or doctors. And our friendships are fine but do get awkward when it comes down to things like spending money. Like it's a weekend and people say, "I have to get off campus, lets go shopping." And I mean, I'll go with you, but I'm not going to buy anything. **And they look at me weird, and say, why aren't you going to buy anything,** and it's like, I can't afford to buy anything! Or like, on weekends if we host a party and they ask me to pitch in for alcohol, I can't really. My house is doing a present exchange for Christmas, and I'm like, "hey guys, I love you, but I can't get you presents. I have to get my family presents before I get you presents." It doesn't strain our relationship, it's just awkward for me personally to bring it up.

Student Entitlement

On one hand, I feel a lot of frustration often with how students from upperclass backgrounds interact with the world around them and the way they view the severity of different issues. I feel like a lot of people share privileged experiences they've had to try to get people to like them, and I know there've been a lot of moments where I've been like, I haven't had these travel experiences, these experiences at concerts or doing other activities, so where do you see my worth stemming from if you see your worth stemming from these privileged experiences? So I think socially it's frustrating, but then the reality of the situation is that I know I have the aid package I do because other people are paying full price. And I know that's a negotiation.

People who have gotten everything they've ever wanted their entire life tend to be a little bit more stuck up about things and picky.

They think the way they do because of how life has treated them. **Being able to worry about social issues is a privilege.** When you're worried about putting food on the table or seeing if your house is gonna have heat or electricity during the winter, that's much more important on an individual and personal level than equalizing the whatever movement of LGBTQ people. And I'm not trashing these social movements, but that's why not everyone can be a part of them.

Student Entitlement

I think in terms of food waste and the way people take all the cups, like that to me, all of that points to your entitlement and your wealth. You don't think that those are dollars, those are dollars that your family spent, or someone else's family spent or your parents had to take out a loan to afford to be here. Food waste and the way people treat the cups and plates to me says a lot about their own wealth and like, how they don't respect Peirce or the people that work there or the cost of it all because they don't think in terms of money, ever. They don't have to. And again, I think that's the difference between a low income and a not so low income student, is like, **you understand the cost of things and then act accordingly** and respect others accordingly, and then others don't.

My mom worked for cleaning services, and I would see her come home and she would be so exhausted and tell me stories about people who were horrible at her job. So then everyone here in maintenance and all that, I always stop and talk to them and I'm kind and I don't leave messes. I always think ten steps ahead and do things I know other students don't do, like just to make sure I don't leave a mess or clean up. I've heard people say, **"oh, it's fine, it's maintenance's job."** and I'm like, no, that's somebody's parents, you're making their day worse and their job harder, you don't need to-- that's not their job. They already have tasks and you're making it harder. I think a lot of Kenyon kids don't have to think about that. And I don't want to generalize, but I just don't think so. I've heard a lot of stuff on this campus and I'm just like...you're lucky. **You're lucky you get to do that**, you're lucky you don't have to think about that, you're lucky that stuff doesn't affect you, but, that's all I have.

Student Entitlement

There's this entitlement on campus that I just think is so connected to wealth. The other night, these lax bros who live in my NCA building were high and drinking at 2am on a Wednesday night. And they set off the fire alarm, and we all had to leave at 2am, and I had to work at 6:30am the next day.

My roommate went over and yelled at them and they came over and said, "sorry guys, sorry" and we're like, it's cool, I mean, it's a small thing in some ways, but people taking Peirce cups or parking where they want and getting tickets because they can just pay them off, like **little entitlements that students have that they don't see as being blatantly rude**. And they can be rude because they can pay for those things I guess, or you don't think about how your money is being spent. And those are things that I see because of my status and because my friends and I all have the same income level.

I see entitlement a lot in the NCAs this year, about how you walk through the NCAs and see people sitting outside in a ring. Not to generalize, but some bros with their shirts off, and they're all white, and I walk past that and **it just feels weirdly aggressive**. And my friend and I were like, "why do we feel that way?" and you know, I just think it's because we are constantly going to class, we have a job, constantly negotiating things, and to see people just out in the open, doing literally nothing and playing loud music...I think visibility is definitely tied into markers of class for me.

Student Entitlement

Some students really think they're hot shit because they're here, but you're really not. **You're a mediocre student, and you're here because you could pay for it.** And I think there are some students who are here because they drove themselves crazy working throughout high school. And you know the other thing that most socioeconomically challenged students know is that they were not only working their asses off in school, but working their asses off to keep a job to help their families, We had to work so much harder to get into this school and to be here, but yet there are other students who walk around campus with their noses stuck in the air-- thinking they're the hottest shit to ever be on this campus, and I'm like, you really did nothing to get here, and I mean, I guess that's a place where I can have a quiet pride, knowing that I earned my spot here. But it is kind of frustrating just knowing how oblivious students are.

I just know I've been asked to do a lot of emotional labor for students who feel like they're going through really hard times, and I just don't see the severity of the issue. For example this past semester, I had a friend who was beside herself because she realized she could no longer do the equestrian team because she was too overworked with school. And at the same time I was dealing with my family's eviction, and it just...it's not that I don't want to be empathetic to the experiences that privileged students find difficult, but like...**I wish that these privileged students were aware of the everyday hardships that minority students are going through.**

Student Entitlement

I was hanging out with one of my roommates, and she had friends over one night, and her friend was telling a story about how she had worked a minimum wage job in New York for the summer. Her friend said the phrase, **“I think it was really good for me to live that sort of life for a while”** and like, it’s little things like that where students think it’s a tourist thing or they think it’s fun. Poverty is romanticized a lot of times. And it’s like, oh a starving artist, or I’m young, I’m not supposed to have money. And with students who have actively lived like that for their entire lives, it’s very condescending and really alienating to hear things like that from people. I definitely feel like that’s the vibe that Kenyon has. I don’t feel fair generalizing every high income student on campus, because obviously there are going to be students on campus who are very cognizant and want to help, but the general idea on campus, especially because we don’t talk about this issue, is that lower income students aren’t really understood in the right way, and if they are paid attention, it’s being looked down upon. Or as a charity case instead of like, this is a thing I’ve had to deal with.

My family gets super bad anxiety talking to people that are wealthier than them, and that’s why no one had visited me at Kenyon. I mean, my brother came to pick me up once and literally, this is crazy...he picked me up, and these boys passed my brother and they talked shit about him. I heard them talking shit about my brother. And I felt so bad about it and I felt so much shame for Kenyon. And like whatever, they’re bros and okay they’re gonna do whatever and they talk shit about everything and people do that everywhere. But it was something about like, **my brother’s been here for half an hour and someone’s already pointed him out, you know?**

What I Wish You Knew

I wish we talked about socioeconomic diversity more, that everyone knew that poor students actually exist on campus. Like, we're not all rich fuckers. People don't talk about that, they don't want to self-reflect.

It's hard when you feel that, at this college that's very wealthy, you feel like a spotlight is on you. You feel like people will figure it out, and that's how I feel. Not that there's anything bad with it. It's just internal. I think a lot of people say 'oh, he seems very Kenyon,' but I've struggled with feeling like I belong here.

My freshman year I was definitely embarrassed of being poor, but that's developed into defiance. This past year especially, I'm like fuck you. I know that what I have to share is going to make you uncomfortable, and I'm going to share it precisely because it will make you uncomfortable

People have a difficult time conceptualizing white poorness, it's hard to explain, because it wasn't really a part of my identity before coming to Kenyon, by being here it has become a part of my identity because it's something that I've had to defend and fight for and make public even if I didn't really want to

What I Wish You Knew

I want high-income students to know that sometimes we feel like we don't belong because it's so exclusive here. Certain habits that are natural to them fall into things that we had to learn and are learning because we want to fit in. Like, buying things that aren't necessary. But it does seem funny that people...like, now that we fit in so well people aren't even aware that we exist. Many affluent Kenyon people don't understand that there's so many people on campus who look like they belong, but then feel that they don't really belong here

People assume that if you're white, and you go to a school like this, you're full pay. But I was homeless until I was 17 and my mom makes \$10,000 a year.

Being in this institution with all of its evident wealth is pretty alienating, especially when everyone acts like its normal. And I do not think it is normal.

Things that people think of as fairly mundane tasks at Kenyon like speaking in class or applying for Study Abroad are so much harder when you don't have money or have never been in an environment like Kenyon before.

Just because we're low income doesn't mean we're lesser. Our experiences are valuable and we shouldn't feel like we have to hide them away so you aren't uncomfortable.

What I Wish You Knew

If rich students feel guilty or ashamed about their privilege, they should do something about it. You don't need to feel attacked or ashamed when people bring up problems they face. Don't pity people who are less wealthy, and own up to your privilege. Use it for something better than stealing shit at Peirce.

Money has been on my mind my whole life. I never had that blissful ignorance of childhood. I always knew that I couldn't want things. I have to pay for college by taking out loans. Every part of my life has revolved around not having money.
Literally everything.

You shouldn't assume people have money and the same experiences as you, because statistically speaking, you're the 1% for a reason.

I wish people knew that money isn't correlated with intelligence or will to succeed. Being low income gives you a different sort of voracity.

It would be nice if wealthier students could empathize a bit more, but in a mature and productive way. Sometimes I talk about my experiences with people and they immediately get upset and they don't know how to react. It's okay for things to be difficult and for me to struggle, not everything has to be perfect all the time. I just wish they would listen to me when things weren't perfect.

What I Wish You Knew

I've worked really hard and I'm not trying to cheat the system just because I have a scholarship. I hope people understand that this isn't just a hand out, I have to work for what I have.

Most of the time I'm stressed out by things that aren't even related to school. Financial stress is huge, especially when I think about my mom at home and worry if she has enough money to buy food and if I can pick up some extra shifts to send money to her.

I kinda wish rich students knew that the poor students on this campus work a hell of a lot harder than they did. And I'm not saying there aren't rich students who didn't really apply themselves in school, I'm sure that's the case, but I feel like there's a misconception that everyone who is here put in equal work to be here. And the students who have significant aid packages and hear about the experiences of affluent people know that's not the case. We aren't equal. Not only did poor students have to work really hard to maintain grades, but you had to be the perfect person. You had to work a job to help your family or support yourself, you probably also had to do significant volunteering or be involved in other activities to have a rounded application or whatever. And I just know, from what I know about the backgrounds of my richer friends here, they just really didn't do a lot in high school. They went to private schools, seeing that these schools were just a pipeline for kids before them into schools and they could do the same. So I wish rich kids knew that. It would be nice if rich kids were more empathetic or understanding of the hardships that marginalized people are going through.

What I Wish You Knew

Many Kenyon people don't understand that there's so many people on this campus who look like they belong, but then feel that they don't really belong here.

There have been so many sacrifices made just so that I could be here. I don't have the opportunity to party and take college for granted. I pay tuition, and maybe it's not as much as what other people pay, but it's a really big deal for my family. If we fail a class or something, that's not just a personal failure, we're letting our whole family down and all these sacrifices will be for nothing.

Everything about my experience at Kenyon has been shaped and colored by gratitude. Wealthy students seem to take things like, college in general, and all those opportunities and resources for granted. Because like, I don't really get to go to a health center at home, that all fades away for me. I don't get counseling at home, I don't have a car and I can't really go places. I think a lot of people just take this whole experience for granted, and that hurts me a lot because it makes me feel like I don't belong, I don't have anywhere else to go, this is the best my life has ever been, but people are complaining about everything. I've never once taken the opportunity to be at Kenyon for granted, even when it has diminished me, because I don't *have* to be here. Being here is a blessing.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Kenyon Students

- Don't complain about Peirce.
 - Also, stop stealing cups, plates, and other dishes.
- Be mindful when planning activities and outings with friends. Think about how much money these activities require-- is everyone *really* able to pay for it?
 - This is especially important in situations involving alcohol-- is your main form of entertainment dependent on the ability to buy alcohol?
- Reflect on conversations you have with others. Do a lot of your conversations revolve around your travel experiences, concerts you've been to, food you like, clothes you buy? What other ways can you get to know a person besides talking about these things?
- LISTEN to low income students when they talk about their experiences and challenges. Don't question them or try to invalidate them. Don't try to make yourself look better by saying "Oh, I buy stuff at Goodwill" or "I'm not *that* privileged." Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing and don't be afraid of having difficult conversations. The most important thing is that conversations about class take place and you aren't afraid to recognize your privilege.

Low Income Students

- Don't be afraid to share your experiences with people or call your friends out when they're classist. We need to have conversations about socioeconomic inequality, but unfortunately, they probably won't take place unless you start them. Your experiences and background are valuable, don't feel like you have to hide it.
- Ask for help. Seek out resources and support from Kenyon. Talk with your Community Advisor, a professor, or go to the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. There are resources to help you with most situations, you just need to look for them.
- Join programs available to low income students like REACH. Or, maybe form your own group for low income students. Having a group of friends that understands your experiences is invaluable.

Kenyon Faculty

- Course syllabi should include a section on financial resources available through ODEI, including funds to help purchase textbooks.
 - Discussions about syllabi should also include definitions of certain terms such as “office hours.” For many students who have never been in an academic environment like Kenyon, they may be unsure of what office hours are and how they can be useful.
- If you are from a low income or underrepresented background yourself, share it with students if you’re comfortable doing so. It can be very powerful for students to see people with their experiences in positions like yours.
- Be mindful when making generalizations about the Kenyon population. Though many Kenyon students come from affluent backgrounds, statements such as “most Kenyon students don’t know this…” or “you guys have probably never experienced…” can be very othering for students from low income backgrounds.
 - This also extends to comments about what type of food/clothes/stores you find desirable or appealing. If the comment is rooted in your class privilege, recognize where it stems from.
- When appropriate, incorporate topics such as socioeconomic diversity at Kenyon or Knox County within your curriculum.
- If you ask students to attend events outside of class, be mindful and flexible about work schedules

Please join me **Wednesday, March 28th at 5:00pm** for a panel discussion about Class and Community at Kenyon. I will also be presenting my full research project **Thursday, March 29th at 11:10** in Hayes 109. These will be opportunities to engage in discussion about this topic and ask any questions you may have.

Acknowledgements

This project would be nothing without the voices of low income students. I am incredibly thankful to all the students who took time out of their day to sit down with me and share their thoughts and experiences. Because of them, we get to explore and understand a side of Kenyon that is often silenced and diminished. Thank you for your courage in sharing your story. I hope the process was as rewarding for you as it was for me.

I would also like to thank:

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Professor Sam Pack, who first encouraged me to pursue this project my freshman year. Thank you for helping me see the importance of work like this, and for equipping me with the skills to bring this project to fruition. I am forever thankful for your support.

My lovely friends, who have heard me talk about this project for months on end and offered interesting insights and perspective. Thank you for listening.

ACCESS

What kind of students attend Kenyon

Among the lowest
 About typical
 Among the highest

		IN THE N.C.A.C.	IN OHIO	AMONG OTHER ELITE SCHOOLS (PUBLIC AND PRIVATE) COLLEGES
Median family income	\$213,500	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Average income percentile	85th	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Share of students from top 0.1%	2.9%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
...from top 1%	20%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
...from top 5%	48%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
...from top 10%	61%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
...from top 20%	75%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
...from bottom 20%	1.7%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Source: New York Times, January 18th, 2017

“Some Colleges Have More Students From the Top 1 Percent Than the Bottom 60. Find Yours.”