



“Having always imagined myself in a fairly slim minority, I suddenly saw that I was in a vast company. Difference unites us. While each of these experiences can isolate those who are affected, together they compose an aggregate of millions whose struggles connect them profoundly. The exceptional is ubiquitous; to be entirely typical is the rare and lonely state.” - Andrew Solomon

In our work with students, we often walk with them through experiences of difference. While difference exists on a large spectrum of personal experience, we all at some point in our lives have had an experience wherein a portion of our identity did not align with an expectation or external perception. Our work in residence life allows us the opportunity to engage students around their experiences of difference and to point them in the direction of campus resources. This work also allows us to engage our own difference and identity formation. This workshop is based on large categories of difference that you may encounter in your work on a college campus.

### **Instructions**

In a small group of 5-8 RAs and HRAs, develop strategies, dialogues, experiences, empathy tactics, and resources that you would utilize in the given scenario. Take fifteen to twenty minutes to do this. Following your discussion, be ready to give a brief overview of your scenario to the rest of the group, along with a summary of the things you discussed. Feel free to bring up any questions your group may have had during the course of your discussion; the goal here is to explore how we can best walk through experiences of difference with our residents and peers as well as to dialogue the challenges we may encounter in the face of difference.

### **Scenario**

You have a resident, Taylor, who was born biologically female and who identifies as male. The term transgender is an umbrella term that includes behavior that departs from the norms of gender assigned by anatomy at birth (Solomon 599). Taylor is struggling with both familial and peer acceptance. In an effort to begin building a network of support, Taylor comes to you.

### **Leading Questions**

- How do you initially invite a dialogue about difference?
- What tangible things can you do on your hall to ensure that residents feel they can approach you with their experiences of difference?
- What potential strategies could you discuss in order to help Taylor feel more connected to peers?
- What on campus resources exist that you could refer this student to?
- Are there other resources you would like to exist on campus that you feel would serve this student?

- What resources, personal or professional, would you utilize in dialogues with Taylor?
- What questions do you have for Taylor about this experience?
- What elements of this Taylor's experience challenge your own experience or perceptions?
- What experiences have you had that can help you relate to this Taylor's experience?
- What other questions, comments, or concerns do you have?

\* All scenarios adapted from case studies and stories taken from the text, *Far From the Tree*, by Andrew Solomon.

