



8-2015

The Complexity of Balance

Kathryn Halford '19

Illinois Wesleyan University, khalford@iwu.edu

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Recommended Citation

Halford, Kathryn '19, "The Complexity of Balance" (2015). *First-Year Summer Reading Program Essay Contest*. 1.

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The Complexity of Balance by Kathryn Anne Halford

Marie Curie famously said, "Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less." Her point is simple: to further make strides in this complex world, people must be willing to embrace the unfamiliar rather than blanket it with ignorance. However, the ease with which we are able to define the unknown in our own inaccurate terms often trumps the struggle of immersing ourselves in topics we find foreign. As a result, an extensive lack of true understanding exists regarding a crucial topic: People. Forget about the mystery shrouding calculus or the universe, and focus on the neurons firing between the ears of Donald Trump. An atheist. A devout Muslim. How can people live in the same world or country or zip code yet see life in profoundly different ways? More confusingly, how is the person most alien to you fundamentally the same? In *The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner's Semester at America's Holiest University*, Kevin Roose sheds light on the mystery surrounding people who, in reality, are not all that different from us.

Through reading *The Unlikely Disciple*, I believe that the primary aspects crucial to thriving despite an unfamiliar environment are endeavoring to understand the people around you while maintaining one's core identity. In short, the transition to college (or any new environment) demands balance. I need to be willing to dismiss my preset ideas and beliefs to allow other people to share their ideals, especially those outside of my realm of comfort, while maintaining the views essential to my identity.

Open-mindedness is crucial regarding understanding others' beliefs and why those beliefs stand. Roose describes the necessity (and difficulty) of preventing prejudice from seeping into his experience at Liberty, saying, "I did want to see what Christian college was like, with as little prejudgment as possible. I knew that wouldn't be easy—you can't neutralize a lifetime of bias

overnight—but I wanted to try my best. If I went to Liberty, it would be to learn with an open mind...” (11). All incoming college students will encounter people who confound our preset ideas. However, we will not be trying to rewire our brains into remaining unbiased before we arrive on campus because, unlike the transition from Brown to Liberty, most college students are not moving from one polar opposite to another. Perhaps we should prepare ourselves, though, because it is easier to hold on to prejudice when its presence is less obvious. Racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination can easily exist in subtle forms. We need to start with an awareness that we do not see the true reality of world and the people within it. To fully grow through my experiences at Illinois Wesleyan, my goal is to be a better informed person, not to maintain and reinforce my ignorance. I want to broaden myself, my perspective.

Understanding the complexity of other people is a challenge in itself, but even more difficultly, the process must not entail losing your own identity. Empathizing with others is a part of the human experience and key to growth, but empathy should only deepen your knowledge of your views or tweak some of the details. I want to understand the world from foreign perspectives, but I do not want to lose the core of my own beliefs, because my views have validity, too. In the face of the Dr. Dekkers of the world, I need my open-mindedness to have limitations. I do not desire an identity that indecisively morphs in the face of every intelligent mind or eloquent speech. My convictions will be questioned, and I will need to have a voice and response of my own.

At Illinois Wesleyan, there will be many people who I will want to disregard immediately or accept too eagerly. I will grow and change in ways outside of my control, for it will be difficult to maintain such open mindedness without feeling as though I am losing aspects of myself. I know, however, that there is worth in standing your ground on your own beliefs rather

than latching on to the most recent thought spoken aloud. Understanding others does not need to take a toll on my own identity. There is a delicate balance in defining yourself while allowing there to be fluidity. I need to find my place between rigidity and shapelessness. Somewhere in the middle lies my voice.