This past weekend I visited my family out of state and caught myself otherizing my grandparents. To explain my situation I will start off stating that I am not the most religious person due to the fact that I believe heavily in science and the idea of things happening not for a reason or coincidence but because of actions and reactions. When I visited my very religious family I immediately began to otherize them and their beliefs on how things happen to people based on their faith. I highly disagree with this statement¨ I believe it is an idea that is slowly fading due to all the science and evidence now a days¨ so it was hard to try to understand their side of the thought process however I tried my best to see why they thought the way they did. And it came to me that many people that grew up in the past didn't have much evidence and science to explain to them why things are the way they are. In addition many people who are heavily religious use their religion to help them cope with life and the downs that come with it. So if religion is helping you cope with tough times and helping make you a better person than I understand why people rely on it. I still don't agree with this kind of thinking however like I said if it helps make you a better person than good for you.

Empathy and compassion were one of the first lessons that my parents had taught me, since I was a kid, I've always been a stubborn wanderer who never stopped asking questions and that led me to explore different parts of the world. I was born in Nepal but raised in India. I've seen people live in all kinds of conditions, however they never fail to put a smile on their faces and carry on with their lives.

It was back in India, when I was leaving for my hometown. Four-hour drive on the hills and one-hour flight to the city of Kathmandu might sound romantic and fun but it was not. Our car was swirling in those wavy roads through the dense forest with a heavy fog, which reduced the visibility for our driver, so we made a stop. I made a quick tour to a shop to buy some junk food and I met this man who was couple of years older to me. His name was Raj, and he owned a local store that sold miscellaneous products. I asked him how his business was, and he told me that it has been very difficult due to the local political turmoil. The funny thing was he was wearing the same Nike shoe as I was, and his was worn out and mine was not.

I was dealing with a lot of difficulties and personal issues at that moment, so was Raj, and I bet his problems were way bigger than mine because he had to take care of his family of four. I asked him what the time was because we had to get back on the road, and he replied, "The time is now my friend". Those powerful words still echo in my head until today. Despite of all the struggles he was confronting, I could sense his optimism towards life. We all have our own problems because we're unique individuals and life is not easy at times because it's not meant to be easy.

 But all of us can have those special moments, such as expressing gratitude with what we have, and life can change in a moment. Those aha moments trigger a shift in our perspective towards everything and everyone. Finally, the good news is that we can change and have those aha moments as many times as we like, just like Raj did when he was struggling to make money on a gloomy day.

Back in the day, I used to live in a tough situation with three other roommates. We would have lots of arguments and we all fiercely stuck to our own sides without ever learning to come to a compromise. It would have been very beneficial to know how to be empathetic and come to understand each other. Too late I learned how to place myself in their shoes. For instance, my roommates wanted to throw another party in our house – to invite their friends and have a good time. I was the one who did not want to partake in the activities. To them, I came along as the party pooper. I was a bit of a prickly customer when I argued for my position, so I'm sure it took a lot for them to keep a calm demeanor. I would think they felt frustrated with my reasoning and did not want to be having another argument about another issue. They just wanted to have a good time. My reason to stop the party was that I did not want to be the one to clean the house the next day. To them, I'm sure it sounded like a very silly reason. I see now that they were very respectful to address my absurd concern about chore division. They assured me they would take on the responsibility. I think they were happy to resolve the issue and the party went on as scheduled. And I cleaned the house the day after.

I work downtown at Tails Pet Boutique and this weekend at work was when my real life experience with empathy took place. In the morning I received a devastating text message from my mom stating that my Aunt had been struggling with alcoholism for a while now and was hospitalized with stage 4 liver failure. Unaware of her addiction my family was in shock. My family lives in Ventura, CA and my parents just so happened to be up there visiting this weekend, talk about perfect timing. All my parents told me and my brother was that they were on their way to my grandparents' house to figure out what was going on, then proceeded to say they were headed home. Which was good news to me considering if it was really bad they would have gone to the hospital as well. Then I received another text saying "Never mind we turned around and our headed to the hospital, it doesn't look good." Being away from family and receiving that text is absolutely devastating. I was on my way to work and my mom told me she would call me to update me as soon as she could. Time was passing so slow as I was patiently waiting for that phone call at work. My coworker took her lunch and as soon as she left, about 10 people came into my shop wanting help. As a couple was questioning me about dog clothing and size I saw my phone light up that my mom was calling me. As soon as I had to let that call ring while helping them, my tone of voice completely changed and I became very selfish with my time answering their questions short and angry. All because I wanted them to stop talking to me so I could take that phone call. At that moment was when I put myself into their shoes. My problems were not theirs and they could not tell what was going on in my life with just a look at me. I had to take a deep breath and put myself in their shoes. I knew they were questions my quick change of behavior and attitude. If I was them I would have given a terrible Yelp review on my customer service, but to me that phone call meant everything. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes is such an important action that you need to be able to do. I was not in the right state of mind or attitude to be helping these people and they could tell. As soon as I realized that, I pushed my problems aside and began helping them again as I was doing in the beginning. I gave them the politest customer service as I could because I knew that's what I would want if I was in their shoes. And as soon as my coworker came back, I

finished helping them and took that phone call as soon as I could. There is a time and place for every action, and me being rude to these customers was not the answer. The call was to inform me my parents were on their way home and that my Aunt was doing better. But in my head I had no idea what the phone call was going to be. I let my own issues get in my way of work. When I go into places I expect good customer service no matter where I am. This experience has really taught me to not judge abnormal attitudes from people on bad days. You never know what someone is going through behind the scenes.

This last Thursday was Valentine's Day, and the day I "otherised" someone. I am a server in a restaurant, so all day it was hustling and bustling with couples dining out for the occasion. Eventually the hosts seated this one man at my table by himself, I waited for someone to join him thinking his partner or friend was in the restroom. No one joined, so I figured they would come on in later. I greeted him and asked, "what drinks may I get started for you two?", and then I quickly realized it would just be him dining by himself that night. I also noticed that he was missing a finger, and I looked at it for about 2 seconds (2 seconds too long). In the back of my head, I remember thinking "okay, this isn't the ordinary guest tonight". Immediately, I could sense an awkwardness. This man has done nothing wrong, other than wanting to grab some dinner and eat out on Valentine's day. There was no reason for me to assume he would have someone joining him, nor for me to stare at his missing finger! Just because society views February 14th as the day for couples doesn't mean people should feel shamed for not participating in such Valentine-related festivities. Nor does it matter if he's missing a finger, I should've minded my own business and not have thought twice about it. I'm sure I made him feel uncomfortable and self-conscious. After realizing my unintentionally rude behavior, I too was uncomfortable. I tried to make it up throughout his dinner, and we both ended up warming up to each other, but this sort of thing lingers with people. I hope he doesn't begin to feel self-conscious when he goes out to eat alone. Because of this experience, I learned to think about what you say and remember not everyone has to conform to societal "norms"; people should have the freedom to live their life however they want to without others judging them for it.

The scenario I want to write about for my empathy intervention occurred last Sunday during my intramural basketball game. For a little background, I've played basketball my whole life, and have come to think that I am definitely more passionate about the sport than the average Cal Poly student. But the situation was that in the game, we had a comfortable lead of about 12 points. This was from a combination of all of us sharing the ball and playing together.

There were a handful of people on my team that I had just met that game, and one person in particular just came in the game and started shooting us out of the game. Our lead was fine at first, but then the other team started to get easy lay-ups, and the one dude on our team kept throwing up a junk shot when we were on offense. I regret that I told him that he hadn't made a shot all game and asked why he continued to just heave up shots making us lose the lead.

We ended up losing and I went home and then felt super bad about what I said. Here was someone who clearly had never played basketball before, trying to have fun playing IM basketball and I pretty much told him that we lost because of him. I thought about how I can still be passionate about basketball, but more about enjoying the sport versus stressing over winning every time I play.

My self-intervention this week was to empathize with my roommate in a situation we have recently had conflict about. My roommate and I share a small room, bathroom, kitchen and living room in an apartment complex near campus. We have gotten along very well for the past two years of living together and are very respectful of each other in our apartment. We share cleaning tasks and all the costs of living in the apartment (utilities, purchasing household products, etc.) are split equally between us. Recently, my roommate started dating a nice guy who attends Cal Poly. I like her boyfriend and we get along well, but he recently was "cut-off" by his parents, meaning he could not afford his apartment in SLO anymore, and had to move in with his Grandmother in Morro Bay. Because of this, her boyfriend has to commute 25 minutes to get to school and back. At the beginning of the quarter, I told them I was fine with the boyfriend staying over at our apartment for three nights out of the week. However, as the quarter got busier, and he was at our apartment more and more, I felt myself getting frustrated with the situation and being bitter about someone using the resources that I was paying 50% for without contributing. After receiving a utility bill that was $20 higher than the same month last year, I decided to bring it to their attention and ask if he would only stay over twice a week and not hang out in the apartment when neither of us were there. My roommate and I argued about the matter, myself reasoning that I did not want to pay the same amount for having a third roommate 43% of the week, and her reasoning that his situation is unfortunate and we should do what we can to help. I have been trying to empathize with him in that I would not be happy with commuting a long ways late at night after class, or waking up extra early to commute, when I could stay at an apartment close to school and walk. I also empathize with my roommate in that I would want to be able to hang out with my boyfriend as much as possible, and it would be nice to have him stay with me for part of the week. After seeing things from their perspective, I am trying to be less greedy in regards to resources and what I pay for. This is hard for me to do, since I am struggling myself to balance work and school, to pay for basics, and like most college students, just getting by, but I do consider that I have the support of my parents in housing and part of my tuition. However, I think that there are ways to better his situation and plan for the commute. If I were him, I would trade my on-campus job for one near home, find someone to carpool with to reduce transportation costs, and plan my class schedule with commute in mind.

I feel that I most "otherized" a guest speaker with a different stance than me during the past week. This speaker was an executive in charge of a petroleum association and I study Environmental Management, so it was easy for me to assume they would be my natural enemy. During her speech, I spent almost as much time thinking of how she may be trying to mislead us as I spent actually listening to what she had to say. I think that if I had listened to her views with more of an open mind and then later critically evaluated the talk and asked clarifying questions I would have better understood why her association acts how it does and what their motivations are. I think the same could be applied to either party in this area of conflict as both petroleum companies and environmentalists often think the other side is not willing to compromise or discuss when there may actually be room for a deal. I think this was an important realization for me and that a more empathetic approach may be needed to move forward in our modern world in politics, economics and the environment.

I decided to ride the bus to the school last Wednesday. I normally bike to school everyday, but it was raining so I decided to take the bus. This particular bus is filled with 99% Cal poly students and it was pretty full because of the rain so I got one of the last seats. I ended up sitting by a homeless woman. I knew something was wrong because she seemed super mad that I sat by her and was yelling about the Cal Poly students and kept saying "blessings" over and over again. She looked at me and mumbled something that I could not understand. At one point, she started to hit herself. I quickly realized that she was not mentally stable. She got up at the next stop because of her anger towards the Cal Poly students and yelled at another male student for a while before exiting the bus. While at first, I was scared to be sitting by her, I began to think about why she was doing that. I realized that maybe she was frustrated that the entire bus was filled with students that get to go to school and learn. It must be hard to be homeless and see a bunch of students getting to go to a school like Cal Poly so they can eventually be able to afford their own place to live and get a job. She does not have the resources to get the care she needs to live a healthy life. I also began to think that if I was ever in trouble, I would get my parents to help me and I always have my parents to rely on. I am privileged in that way and I understand many people do not have that. This woman most likely has no one to rely on and can't get any help.

I have an employee at work who has a tendency to make people angry, including me. He will send me emails asking questions I covered in the staff meetings or inform me of information I already know. He also has a way of asking that gets under mine and other's skin. To us it seems insensitive.

Well this week I was having to write evaluations for my staff in preparation for the evaluation meetings we will have. This forced me to really think about him as an employee and what he is thinking. He ultimately just wants to help make the department better and inform us of what went wrong. He is upfront about issues he has with scheduling and while I would rather his availability had been correct when I was scheduling, I can understand that schedules can change last minute and he is just trying to communicate issues early so that there isn't a crisis situation the day before or morning of. He can't make the staff meetings due to a conflict out of his control so he is going to miss some things that may not make it into the minutes. Now I still think he has a long way to come when he communicates with people; but it was good for me to take a step back and calm down and understand where he is coming from.

The main group of people I tend to see as "others" are conservatives or religious people. Having been raised in a very liberal state, my political leanings are strongly Democratic. I am also a scientist, and I need evidence to believe that something is true, so I consider myself an atheist with no religious affiliation. Because of this, I find I can't relate to the beliefs and lifestyle of religious conservatives. I find many of their beliefs homophobic, misogynistic, and restrictive to scientific advancement. I especially feel this way when they enact laws that force other people to follow Christian beliefs, such as anti-abortion laws, banning gay marriage or banning the teaching of evolution in schools. However, this quarter, I have been taking a philosophy class on religious fundamentalism, and I have learned a lot about their point of view. With globalization, people of different religions have been living in closer proximity, especially in America. With so many beliefs coexisting, no one religion can claim to be the one true faith. People have a choice about what they want to believe, or they could choose to be atheist, and this is a threat to religion. Advances in science often contradict what is said in the Bible, for example the theory of evolution, and this causes the religion to lose credibility. Globalization and scientific developments cause religious people to hold on to their beliefs even more strongly. Religion is important to a lot of people. It provides a sense of community, and answers unanswerable questions like what happens after we die. If I think about it that way I understand why people hold on to their beliefs.

This week in my anthropology course, we watched the documentary *Virunga*. This documentary is about the work being done to conserve the national park Virunga—home to a large portion of the remaining mountain gorilla population—while facing political instability in Congo and oil surveys by the company SOCO. In the movie, there is a scene where a reporter is investigating a SOCO worker who is trying to further the instability in Congo in order to remove focus on them exploring the national park for oil. This worker claims that it is all business and in the process dehumanizes the Congo people.

At first this scene made me really angry about the lengths oil companies are willing to go to make money and at the workers for going along with it. After a minute, I started to think about this worker's point of view. To him his work is "all business", and he does not see how anyone could be upset about the destruction of a national park and gorillas. He goes on to speculate the presence of gold in the park, convinced this is the only reason anyone would defend this park.

This speculation made me realize that this worker had developed a narrow view of the world. In this view, there is hardly anything more important than driving economic success. If one takes on this view, it is easy to see how one could overlook the destruction one is creating in order to make more money. In fact, this man could even see his actions as a good thing: actions that will result in a better world (better meaning more money) for all parties involved. While this view might be difficult to accept, it is clear that the world we live in likely produces similar minded people. Instead of villainizing this man, we can instead look for the driving forces that lead to companies and individuals who so easily overlook the destruction they are causing. This analysis is certainly less destructive than villainizing individuals and is an analysis that could be easily overlooked if one did not attempt to empathize with these individuals.

This week, my friend was telling me about how she lost her aunt to cancer. During the conversation, she was telling me about her grieving process, the things she was feeling, what triggered her, etc. I have never lost someone very close to me. As she was telling me her story, I couldn't relate or agree with anything because I haven't had that experience for myself, but I was empathetic towards her. I placed myself in her shoes and saw things through her eyes and tried to imagine going through what she has gone through with her aunt. Even though I can't relate to her, I think she appreciated me trying to connect to her and think about/look at things from her eyes. It was actually very hard for me to do that, though, because of the fact that I can't relate. I learned, though, that while it is hard for me to do, it is so necessary to try. My friend needed me in that moment and I had to do the best I could to feel what she was feeling, and my feelings are nowhere near as extreme or sad as hers, and it is unbelievable to think about. I think that it is so important to try to be empathetic towards the people around you, especially the people you love, because it just opens up your eyes to the things people go through and deal with that you can't even begin to think about going through yourself. It helps you learn a lot about who they are and what they are capable of, and it is honestly pretty beautiful.

I have found myself in a lot of situations lately where I have seen someone else or a group of people as "them". All of these sceneries come from the place I work at. I work at a company that is fueled by students but ruled by older staff. A specific example for one, is when multiple of us students -who have worked for this company longer than most of the managers- voiced concerns over a project we were told to complete. We were ignored and shut down just to spend days on the project for our concerns to become reality. That moment felt especially like an "us" vs. "them" moment. Had they actually listened to our concerns they would have seen that we were basing our beliefs off of not only experience but off of physical science! I felt defeated, knowing I was going to put in days of work just to have to undo it when it didn't work.

In my opinion, the manager was trying to assert dominance and prove their authority. I am sure it is hard to be challenged by people so much younger- who he believes to be much less experienced. I think what I learned is that I need to understand how I come off to people. Being challenged by people a lot younger probably didn't make the managers feel inclined to listen to us. While we have experience, we could have approached it more from a manner of the science. Showing the evidence first and explaining why we knew/believed it wouldn't work would have been a much better approach. While I still believe we should have been taken seriously in the first place, I can see that we didn't approach the situation in the best manner. We were frustrated, worried, and feeling disrespected and that affected how we handled the situation. I think in this situation, both parties needed to take into account how our approach would affect the other.

The other day I was feeling very frustrated because I had an extremely busy week and my room mates decided we should have 30 girls over on Wednesday night to celebrate "Galentines day". While I am all for female empowerment, I had an important presentation in my 8 am class the next day and wanted the night to practice and rehearse at home. My immediate emotion was to be angry--I felt as though my room mates were not respecting my space. Then, I remembered this assignment and tried to put myself in their shoes. Once I did this, I realized that maybe I was over-reacting and that the house is their space as well as mine. As my other 5 roommates all wanted to have people over, I realized that it was just as much their right to have people over as it was mine to want to study. In the end, it made me realize that most peoples thinking tends to be selfish but removing yourself from situations and thinking more objectively can help to see the situation more clearly. I ended up studying at the library and they had a fun party, a win win!

I otherized someone at the Front Porch the other day. He walked into the room and I judged his physical appearance and mannerisms. He sat down, sipped coffee, took out his laptop, put it back in his backpack, played with the billiard balls, and then left. I couldn't figure out his purpose for being at the Front Porch and his aimlessness irked me. I thought, "What is he doing here?" As if his being in the Front Porch was different than my being. Honestly speaking, I was creating negativity out of thin air. He was simply in a space that anyone has equal access to occupy and, in reality, wasn't doing anything to bother anyone. How can I judge him for bothering me on the basis of my own ineptitude? This thought pattern is problematic because it simplifies his whole

humanity down to merely a tool for me to critique myself without any responsibility to respond. I can't claim that I know what he was experiencing, but I know that I projected my anxieties onto him and that is unfair. It's honestly really hard for me to think from other's perspective without projecting learned biases in my interpretation.

I can think of hundreds of "otherizing" experiences that have happened during my life. Coming from a somewhat spiritual background (and also having a strong background of knowledge in psychology), I try to make an effort to empathize with people every day. This could be in the form of forgiving a shitty driver, withholding judgement of strangers, or even mediating when I see miscommunication.

That being said, I'm not perfect, and did not always strive to have compassion for others. One memorable reflection I had was during middle school, when I was first learning how to be self-aware. I was bullied by a group of students, whom for obvious reasons I decided were terrible people. Eventually the bullying, and my hatred, reached a boiling point- and for my own health I had to reconsider my perspective. It's the first time I can remember stepping back like that, to analyze a social situation critically. I was able to ask myself, "Why did they hurt me? What influences them? Do they understand what they're doing? Are they victims too?". This reflection didn't make me like those people more, but it did help me manage the situation better, and eventually move past it.

As I learn more about other people, it becomes clear that we can't learn every single person's intricacies and motives, but we also can't make blanket claims about them based on a few actions we see them make. My solution has been to try to keep an open mind and assume the best of people. Finding middle ground, even with people I initially dislike, has helped me grow and understand the world better. And when I can't find middle ground, as happens sometimes, I still come away with an interesting conversation, and a new perspective on the human condition.

In the context of climate denial, I see empathy as being a very useful tool. In California (and especially in San Francisco, where I grew up) we're in a social bubble very distinct from most of the U.S. Sometimes we forget that many people have different morals, finances, risks, or education than we do, which influence their views and actions. Empathy gives us the ability to start a constructive conversation from the other end of the table.