Dynamic Self Matters.

Our Commitment to Affirming You

Delaware State University
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council
Office of Human Resources

First Special Edition
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Delaware State University
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Greetings

Welcome, Hornet family, to the Special First Issue of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council’s e-journal, *Dynamic Self Matters*. The purpose of the e-journal is to stimulate intercultural engagement, improve customer service on our campus, elevate varying levels of support to promote cultural competence, and create an inclusive work environment for faculty and staff and a supportive equitable learning environment for students.

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Unit (DE & I) falls under the umbrella of the Office of Human Resources. The Diversity & Inclusion Task Force, now DE & I Council, has become an integral part of the University’s mission to embrace the multicultural diversity of our staff, faculty, students and visitors. The Task Force was originally formed to conduct a systematic review of diversity as an integral component of our mission and ultimately recommend and develop policy on how diversity should be incorporated and organized at Delaware State University (DSU).

Diversity, equity and inclusion are about the acknowledgment and respect of an individual’s differences, including, but not limited to, race, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, ethnic origin, physical abilities, or political or religious beliefs. Right before the pandemic, on March 3, 2020, we had a University-wide kickoff event to formally announce the University’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. Dr. Tony Allen executed a Proclamation which reads in part: “Delaware State University stands as one inclusive community. Working together, we share the common belief that we need to understand, accept and support multiculturalism and individual differences.”

Our newly formed DE & I Council comprises faculty, staff, students, and administrators committed to leading the University’s efforts in fostering diversity, equity and inclusion in all aspects of University life. The Council will look at best practices and place greater emphasis on communication and outreach. The Council will also work to ensure participation by all stakeholder groups. The responsibility for planning and implementation of programs directly related to the success of diversity initiatives shall be a University-wide endeavor. We anticipate that this level of participation will help institutionalize and bring a greater awareness of DSU’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

The DE & I Council will take a holistic look to see how diversity, equity and inclusion is reflected in our classrooms, in community spaces, in how we speak to one another, in the languages we hear spoken around us, in the opinions and thoughts of others, in the diverse ways we go about our work, and in and around campus. While this is not an exhaustive list, all of these areas are important and impact each of us in different ways.

The late Maya Angelou has said, “We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”
This quote is so fitting because each of us here at DSU is a part of the rich tapestry that makes our University one of the most diverse HBCUs in the United States.

On behalf of the DE & I Council, we look forward to working with our campus community to bring together faculty, students, and staff to engage in conversations about issues that positively influence diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education. We will continue to identify gaps and to be proactive in addressing the needs of the student population and employees.

Pamela Mosley Gresham, J.D.
Director of Labor Relations
Managing Editor & Chair, DE & I Council
Dear Campus Community:

Welcome to the Special First Issue of DSU’s DE&I Council’s e-journal titled, Dynamic Self Matters! Our mission statement is: “Our Commitment to Affirming You.” Our purpose is to stimulate intercultural engagement, improve customer service, elevate varying levels of support to promote cultural competence, and create an inclusive work environment for faculty and staff and a supportive equitable learning environment for students. My following story provides an idea of the e-journal’s overall objective.

In April 2016, I was in line at a neighborhood bakery shop patiently awaiting my turn to order my breakfast bagel and pay for my coffee. The shop was a delightful alternative to Starbucks for its freshly baked bagels, muffins, scones, and cookies. At quarter to eight, three customers were ahead of me and eight or nine snaked behind me. I sipped on hazelnut coffee and browsed through the headlines on my phone.

When my time arrived to place my order, I was suddenly elbowed aside by a middle-aged White woman who glanced down at me dismissively and began placing her order. The White matured-looking baker donned in her Chef hat looked at me then at her and said pointedly, “I believe that this young lady is ahead of you.” She nodded toward me and continued. “Now, if you would, please step back from the counter and allow her to be served. After which, I’ll be happy to serve you.”

“But I’m in a hurry and she can wait. Surely, you must understand that,” she declared haughtily and meaningfully. Her raised voice attracted the line’s attention and I heard indistinct murmurings behind me.

“I understand that this customer is ahead of you,” the baker replied curtly with a voice that brook no argument and continued, “Now, please set back in line.” Then looking at me, she inquired politely in a slightly softer tone, “Miss, how can I help you?”

I smiled my broadest thank you, placed my order, paid, thanked her warmly again, and left.

As I exited shop, a Hispanic man near the door greeted me, “Love this shop for treating people right. ¿Sí?”

“¡Sí!” I smilingly responded. What a beautiful day in my neighborhood!

In my car, I gratefully enjoyed my toasted blueberry bagel and allowed my soul to be nourished by understanding that two people just affirmed me and allowed me to rise above a negative one without my saying a word. I had no way of knowing exactly what motivated the aggressive customer to act so inappropriately, I mused as I finished my breakfast. In retrospect, she could have been a warning sign of the effects of Trump’s bellicose campaign language. Exiting the parking lot to head south on Rte. 72 toward Rte. 1 to campus, I wondered if I were a tall man—White, Black, or Brown—whether she’d have been so audacious.
I have reflected upon this incident many times, especially when people who rely upon breaking the rules to get ahead behave as though rule-breaking is their inalienable right. Their unacceptable behavior says people viewed as unimportant have little or no entitlement; they deserve to be deliberately ignored, stepped over, or shoved aside by those for whom the rules or laws do not apply. After all, “Only the strong survive;” they chant irreverently and disrespectfully. To which one can respond, “How is ‘strong’ defined?” The answer is certainly not those who attempt to gang up on others to have their own way. Instead, strength is realized and appreciated in people like the chef who refused to ally with or be intimidated by those who believe rules do not apply to them.

Contrariwise, an innate sense of right and wrong tells us all that for our community and society to work for our common good justly and equitably, rules matter. What works for our common good cannot be disregarded by those who believe such rules and laws do not apply to them. When those in power continue to flaunt wantonly their lack of true humanity, the rest of society has the responsibility to resist and hold them to the same standards, even while standards appear to be constantly shifting in the face of new movements and laws.

Here are examples. One, Black Lives Matters (BLM) has evolved from just voices of angry protesters into an international movement of people, including the Aboriginal people of Australia, calling for the universal respect for all human rights. BLM is now nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and should it win an extremely strong global message based upon peace, equality, and solidarity for international human rights will resonate.

Two, according to the June 29, 2021 New York Times Magazine article, “The War on History Is a War on Democracy” by Timothy Snyder, should the new memory laws of five Southern states and Florida make further headway into our society, one effect would be reducing the horrors of Western chattel slavery and the Holocaust to be based merely upon attitudes and not systemic racism and the bigotry and hatred associated with anti-Semitism. He refers to the 1921 Tulsa massacre in Oklahoma, one of the states that has passed its memory law and writes:

Oklahoman educational institutions are now forbidden to follow practices in which “any individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish or any other form of psychological distress” on any issue related to race. (This has already led to at least one community college canceling a class on race and ethnicity.) The governor of Oklahoma has claimed that the Tulsa massacre can still be taught in schools. Teachers have expressed their doubts. Since the aim of the law is to protect feelings over facts, teachers will feel pressure to discuss the event in a way that would not give rise to controversy. Facts do tend to be controversial. (Pars. 31-32)

Hence, in Oklahoma the fact that a prosperous Black community was annihilated and hundreds of people murdered cannot be taught as history for fear of making some students uncomfortable. Snyder, however, would have us remember that when history is taught through the lens of both emotional and social intelligence that engender empathy and the awareness of the needs of our fellow-human beings, our democracy is healthier.
Three, new voting rights laws in some Republican-led states threaten the disenfranchisement of non-White voters, and we must organize to stop further erosion. Despite the cynicism of those who think and feel voting does not matter because nothing really changes, may those cynics be reminded that US history itself bears the fact that in the process of perfecting our union our nation has changed and will continue to do so. For example, the Nineteenth Amendment ratified in 1920 finally brought women’s right to vote.

Four, the deleterious effects of climate change are already impacting our lives regardless of where we live, whether in America or another country. Extreme weather conditions will continue to take a toll on all our lives, and unless we are united around efforts to survive Mother Nature’s onslaughts, we may barely survive.

Thus, in our diverse campus community inclusive of everyone with distinctive needs and interests, we cohere on the fundamental principle that each of us has the potential to reassure the other person that he, she, or they (singular for the gender non-binary) matters. This reaffirmation of each other is fundamental to our e-journal that seeks to publish your story or paper promoting our communal sense of well-beingness. Our community is only as strong as everyone’s sense of belongingness, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ableness, age, or identity.

The papers included in this Special First Edition provide a sense of the e-journal’s objective to reflect the views of these students who write about overlapping themes inclusive of identity, mental health, education, justice, and economic concerns. Your own story or paper can address any such topic or issue. See the page 9 “Call for Articles” for more details. Browse through these papers and be confident that like these students, your story, paper, or opinion matters.

We hope that you enjoy this Special First Edition and look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

A. Myrna Nurse, PhD
Editor-in-Chief
Call for Articles or Papers

Delaware State University’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) Council is excited to invite faculty, staff, and students to submit articles or stories to be published in its monthly e-journal, Dynamic Self Matters. Its mission is: Our commitment to affirming members of the entire campus community.

Your article or paper can be on any of the following topics:

• An intercultural experience. Note: an outstanding submission to be considered for the main feature
• Community service or work
• Travel experience
• Academic accomplishment or interest
• Sports accomplishment or interest
• Activism—internal or external of DSU
• Customer service at DSU
• Review of a book, movie, or documentary

Your article or paper adheres to the following format and requirements:

• 800 to 1,000 words. Note: an intercultural experience article is not to exceed 1,500 words
• Times Roman, 12 point
• Double-spaced
• One-inch margins
• Minimum grammatical, mechanical, and spelling errors
• Either MLA or APA Style of documentation: choose one and be consistent.

Please send your article or paper for consideration to be published in our next issue in the Spring 2022 semester no later than December 15, 2021 to: DEI@desu.edu.
Black women are born into spaces that do not champion their self-esteem. Race, gender, and class disparities have all affected the self-identity of Black women. These issues exerted on Black people as a whole can be traced back to the Atlantic slave trade. From the moment Black people were marched onto ships that changed the course of world history, Black people have carried oppression and would continue to bear that oppression, the darkest part of human history, for hundreds of years to come. That oppression coupled with the many stereotypes and gender-based myths would shape Black identity. Well-known sociologist Patricia Hill Collins explains oppression in her book Black Feminist Thought. She defines oppression as follows: “Oppression describes any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period, one group denies another group access to the resources of society” (4). African American women’s oppression has encompassed three interdependent dimensions. First, economic oppression exploited Black women’s labor for U.S. capitalism. Second, political oppression such as forbidding Black women to vote, excluding African Americans and women from being public officials, and enacting unfair treatment in the criminal justice system and educational institutions occurred. Last, the third subset of oppression Black women faced is the negative stereotypes attached to Black women’s image such as the caricature of “Mammy” or “Jezebel” that go back to slavery and are still evident in current media. Black women in modern society still fight to overcome this oppression. However, dismantling the oppression and engaging the fight for a more accurate self-identity is difficult as the narrative is so ingrained in the racist culture of Black self-identity. Black women are the only people who have to build their self-esteem from nothing else but themselves because they are not uplifted in the media or even amongst their people. Systemic oppression has directly affected Black women’s self-esteem through family, romantic affairs, and self. The academic research elaborates on the severity of these issues as well.

My personal experiences being an African American woman navigating America have been affected directly by this oppression. My impactful years of discovering self were defined by “America’s Myths” as author Charisse Jones would describe it in her book Shifting (2003). In Chapter 1, Jones talks about four myths in America that are placed on Black women: inferiority, non-femininity, criminality, and finally, promiscuity. These myths undoubtedly affect Black women negatively; however, the perpetrators of these myths come from Black women’s families. In an attempt to fight the oppression, I believe the family could do more negative than positive regarding Black women’s self-identity. The question I ask is: if Black families over-police Black women in an attempt to prevent misrepresentation, how does that affect Black female self-identity?

In 2008, I was a ten-year-old Black girl entering fifth grade. As a middle school student, I wanted to change my style and thought that my new grade was perfect to do so. At the same time, my mother, sibling, and I moved to a new neighborhood when my mother received a better job. I did not know much about my new school, but it was
predominantly white similarly to our new living situation, but I was not concerned as I was always good at making friends. The issue came when I decided on my hairstyle. I chose large, jumbo, box braids that swayed at mid-back length. I was immediately met with opposition. The comments I received from my family on my hairstyle included “too grown” and it made me look “fast.” My family criticized that the hairstyle worn by Black women and girls gave off a promiscuous image. Their response relates to the racist and sexist ideologies identified by Collins who writes, “Within U.S. culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal, and inevitable. In this context, certain assumed qualities that are attached to Black women are used to justify oppression” (5). These ideologies that have shaped the stereotypes ingrained in Black families cause Black women to see their Black girls wearing certain hairstyles as “jezebels.” Negative stereotypes applied to African American women have been fundamental to Black women’s oppression. Many times, it is a close family member who imposes her internalized oppression upon another family member. I settled the hair issue. Instead of my box braids, I sported a blowout where my hair was pressed as straight as the actresses on TV and looked just like my new peers.

Fast-forward a decade, white women have grabbed up the kanekalon hair and are parading it around in many notoriously Black hairstyles that they deem fashionable. I always wonder if they struggle with their families about their newfound looks. Would they have to defend their reputation or wonder how the world and aunties and uncles viewed them? The answer always ends up being probably not. I wonder how Black girls’ self-esteem would be if their identity was respected amongst the Black community, specifically their families. Black women do not get to un-experience the trauma and scarring caused by this. Black women are forced to confront their self-identity as negative until they are old enough to unlearn it on their own.

Race, gender, and class disparities have all affected the self-identity of Black women. Stereotypes and myths are the biggest threat to the self-identity of Black women. Through academic studies such as Black Feminist Thought and Shifting, we can shed light on a hidden enemy: internalized oppression. Through personal recollection of coming-of-age stories, it brings Black families into scrutiny. I ask: how much do families affect self-identity with their own internalized oppression? Jones states, “Indeed, society’s stubborn myths continue to do tremendous damage to Black women. They often seep into their inner psyches and become permanently internalized, battering them from within even if they’re able, for a time, to wriggle free and live the truth” (4). Black women in modern society are still unlearning myths and garnering self-esteem, which goes to show how detrimental gender-based racism has been and still is.

Nia is a DSU Alumna who majored in Mass Communications. She currently works as a legal assistant in a law firm. She plans to return to college to complete her master’s degree.

WORKS CITED
As I begin to look over my life, I think about the experiences I have had, whether it is deciding what career path to take, or to continue competing in Track & Field after an injury, or my life as a college athlete. How did my values and beliefs contribute to those experiences and decisions I have made? My beliefs have helped to influence the person I have become as a religious student athlete and the person I will continue to grow into as I continue through life. Being a student athlete, during the Track & Field season I find it sometimes difficult to maintain a constant relationship with God. I want to attend church every Sunday, but having track meets every weekend often makes that impossible. At times, I feel like my relationship with God is hindered. I have found that through prayer and reading scriptures on the bus, I cope with not being able to hear the Word of God in church as much as I want.

Throughout my entire undergraduate career, my religion has been the foundation of so many things that I have encountered and have had to endure. As a member of the Track & Field team, I have been held to a higher standard than non-athletic students have. I awake at half past five o’clock to prepare for six o’clock practices that flow straight into my eight o’clock classes. As a first-year student, I struggled so much because I had never been asked to follow such a demanding schedule. Every morning, I listen to Gospel music that encourages me to make it to practice. I remember times I prayed that God would just let me make it to the end of practice. I prayed to give my undivided attention and pass my classes. Prayer provided the comfort and the motivation to keep going. In Blessed are the Crazy, Sarah Griffith Lund writes, “It is the day-by-day, hour-by-hour practice of lifting our worries up in prayer that brings about change. By taking our worries to God in prayer, we can free our minds. Prayer may not, in and of itself, cure disease, but it can be a balm, a comfort, and, most importantly, a way to survive” (7). Growing up in a religious home my mother instilled in me the importance of prayer and having a relationship with God. After years of going to church and listening to my pastor preach about having strong faith, I can appreciate the power of prayer to take me the distance. In Matthew 17.20, the writer states, “For I assure you: If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” This scripture played a significant role in my life after I pulled my hamstring during my junior year. This injury ended my indoor season early and completely took away my outdoor season. I was devastated and had many negative thoughts such as losing my full scholarship due to my partial participation, my hamstring not healing properly or fully, and the loss of my teammates’ respect. I had felt like a failure to the point I did not think God was there for me anymore. In church, I began to find my strength and self-identity as well. One sermon that really helped me emphasized how God allowed trials and tribulations to make an individual a better person. I began to see how my injury could make me a better version of myself. I completed rehab. During my senior year, I performed even better than before my injury. Both prayer and religion made me stronger both physically and mentally.
I also believe that my religion helped define who I am as a person. The Book of Proverbs describes how a wise man will live a righteous and prosperous life, while a fool will ultimately bring disaster upon himself. I try to do things in the way a wise person would. For example, I strongly believe in taking counsel from those who are older than I am. I find that in order to become wise you have to learn from your own mistakes and the mistakes of those before you.

Another example of how religion has contributed to my own identity would be how I treat others. Growing up, I have always been told to “love thy neighbor” or to “love thy enemy as your own brother”. This is so significant in one’s everyday life because not everyone will treat you with the same respect that you give. This circumstance occurred in the Old Testament with the story of Hagar. Hagar was an Egyptian slave used as a surrogate for Abraham and Sarah. Once Hagar became pregnant, Sarah began to mistreat her, causing Hagar to flee from the abuse. Situations like that have occurred in my life on the track, in the workplace, and even at internships where I felt like I wanted to run away from my problems. It is important to realize who you are and not to allow people to offend you so much that they can bring you out of your character. Therefore, instead of fighting hate with hate I choose to fight with love. Ultimately, Hagar believed in God’s promise to her and He never left her, even when she returned home to the harsh treatment of Sarah or when Sarah demanded that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. To me, Hagar signifies the power of God’s promises and how He continues to stay with us through every obstacle life gives us. Hagar survived much like women do every day, and I continue to identify with her.

My upbringing in a religious household has influenced my life in many ways. The power of God has brought me through so many obstacles that I know I would not have made it through on my own. My religious background has shaped me into being an individual of love, respect, and understanding.

Amber completed her degree in Biological Sciences with a concentration in Health Professions and a Minor in Chemistry. She is currently a second-year graduate research student at Delaware State University, obtaining her Master’s in Cellular and Molecular Neuroscience.

Works Cited
Throughout my life, I have constructed my self-identity solely from the influences of everyone around me. Everything started to move in a negative direction when my mother married a white man. We moved to Delaware when I was ten years old and my brother and I attended a predominately-white elementary school. I already knew that I did not fit into the “black” stereotype due to the comments I received from my biological father and his side of the family. I spoke too “white” and he told my mother that he did not want his children speaking too “proper,” as if speaking proper English, using large words, and not using slang was something only white people were able to do. He wanted us to abide by the stereotype that black people were “ghetto,” but my stepfather wanted the opposite.

When I moved to Delaware and went to elementary school, I struggled to make friends. I was always too “black” for the white kids and I was too “white” for the black kids. After I made friends with the white kids, I was called an Oreo. The term “oreo” has evolved into referring to African Americans who have “failed” to adhere to the cultural norms of “American Blackness.” This term made me question who I was and I grew to wish that I were white. Friends were not the only people who made me feel as if I was not “black” enough. I would also get “oreo” comments from my biological father’s side of the family. I would receive comments such as, “She is too white,” because I got good grades and spoke properly, or “You don’t even want to be black” because I preferred the suburbs to the city. Because that was how people viewed me, I felt that that was how I was supposed to be, a whitewashed black girl.

Accepting the comments was easy, but when I was put down in my own home, it began to have more of an impact. I was okay with not being the stereotypical black girl I was expected to be. However, when I tried to express myself, it started to become a problem that lasted multiple years. My mother’s white husband had a secret that he revealed once we all lived together. He was anti-black and tried to strip my black family of their blackness. He is what Derald Wing Sue would call an aversive racist. In Microaggressions, Sue states, “Aversive racists truly believe they are nonprejudiced, espouse egalitarian values, and would never consciously discriminate, but they nevertheless, harbor unconscious biased attitudes that may result in discriminatory actions” (9). This man stopped us from going to church. He would tell my mother that she was not really black because she looked like she was from “the Islands.” He stripped my mother of her headscarves and her dialect. He reacted in disgust whenever either she or I wore our natural, kinky curly hair out in public, making sure it was known that he preferred straight hair. This resulted in us both bowing down to the white man.
and trying to live up to his expectations. Yet he would say to my mother, “How could I be racist and I am married to you?” He would point out that my biracial brother was “more attractive” than my dark skinned brother and me because he had lighter skin. This took a toll on the self-esteem of us both, but it damaged me more. My brother was only six years old so he did not fully understand, but I was ten. As I grew older, I began to gain weight and my stepfather noticed. Every time he saw me look in a mirror, he would look at me in disgust and make comments about my size or that I could afford to miss a few meals. This resulted in me hating my body and eventually starving myself. Unfortunately, he was not the only one who made comments about my weight. They also came from other family members. From there on, I never thought that I was beautiful or worth anything.

Eventually my mother made the decision to divorce my stepfather. We walked out of that divorce not knowing who we were, but knowing that is not where God wanted us to be. I continued to starve myself and see someone who was worth nothing in the mirror. My mother, brother, and I had to rebuild our family and figure out who we were. We resumed attending church, and when the pastor commented that she saw only sadness in my eyes, I knew that I needed to look to God to find out who I was. A few years after the divorce my mom asked me, “Who are you?” and I still could not answer her. I still cried every time I looked in the mirror and I felt like I did not know anything about myself. My mom reminded me every day that I was beautiful and that I had a beautiful soul. Slowly, I began to believe her and in our family without a man whose sole purpose was to destroy our consciousness awareness of who we were. If we were still in that environment, my family would not be as strong as it is now.

I never knew what it was like to feel whole, to be someone with a sense of self-identity. What I have discerned is that no one truly knows who she is on an intimate level, and my confusion regarding my identity is extremely far from abnormal. Life strips us of our sense of who we are and instead replaces our image with ideas of how we should be, what we should look like, and how we should live. It is only after these barriers are broken apart that we can truly discover the innermost parts of ourselves instead of letting others decide whom we should be. Now, my mother may ask me the question “Who are you?” and I can say more than I do not know. I am a proud black woman who is beautiful and loves to sing. I may speak properly, but that does not make me any less black. My black, proper-speaking voice is a beautiful reflection of me, and I dare anyone to make me believe otherwise.

**Works Cited**

**Who Is There for Me?** by Dustin Miles

Childhood creates the lasting memories of people, times of adventure, curiosity, laughter, love, and prime intuitiveness. It is when we are able to explore what we want to become and we have the passion to follow a dream. For the privileged, disabilities do not define a person or the benefits they are able to obtain in their closest relationships. Should not the same apply to those not born into privilege? People fight several invisible wars every day, the main one being psychological. I had to deal with not one, but both, parents battling their mental wars.

My father was African American and followed the stereotypical image of one who was rarely present during the adolescence years, and in the later years, his motivations were short-lived because he died of Cardiac Arrest at 43. My mother is Puerto Rican and raised almost under the entirely same conditions as my father. Theirs was a match made in pain. I learned in high school that my mother and father both suffered from bipolar and depression disorder, which according to psychologists complemented each other, nonetheless. Fast forward to the end of the 2000s when I was ten going on eleven, change occurred. I vividly remember the week of my parents’ initial split and the downhill spiral of our family life.

On the day that I learned of their separation, forever stamped in my memory, I was attending an after-school program at the Latin American Community Center and usually was picked up around six o’clock. The difference on that day when my mother got me was that we did not go home; instead, we drove to the woman’s house with whom my dad was having an affair.

With such realization, my innocence left that day. Then, reconciliation between my parents happened a year later and soon the birth of my now third sister, but if anything, things continued to worsen over the years.

My parents’ resentment toward each other trickled down to us. Going to school felt like freedom because of my ability to excel. However, home? It felt like plague I could not escape. Before this time, I never thought of school as an option to take seriously or even had had a conversation with a guidance counselor while in middle school up to this point in high school. These were years when we never took seriously anything regarding mental health. Not only was it not emphasized, but kids were unwilling to seek assistance because the very idea of mental health created fear. Fear of consequences. Fear of aloneness. Fear of unacceptance. I myself wanted someone to confront me directly and ask me if I had a problem. I was not an extroverted kid who was transparent with his emotions and could just tell someone what was going on. I was not a perfect student with model behavior. The resulting punishment from my adolescent mistakes seemed extreme. Simple confinement in my room. I was held down for a beating that resulted in being unable to sit down for hours with my mom’s ice packs that soothed the deep multicolor bruises on various parts of my body. However, I had to choose what side of the scale I was going to see because things only got much more physical, not just for me, but for my sisters, too. My oldest sister got the worst hand dealt. During these years, life felt intolerable, like I was living through some kind of deadly plague. My older sister felt it, too. My only motivation to bear it all was my sister.
Her strength consistently overshadowed mine: her will, her ability just to endure. She withstood what I could not have. When I envision myself in her shoes, I could imagine me breaking. However, she never did. Not a chance. She was much more of a fighter than I and brought a relentless fire and determination to survive. I guess that is her Leo side. My grandmother was born in August, as well, so I could see the flair spread down into the roots in my sister. Despite our home life, the one impression that I still have to this day that I still try and adopt is the universalism of the love my grandmother gives to family. Family is her underlying motivation for everything, whether in a conversation for minutes or an hour, and from those conversations one would very well understand where her values laid. It did not stop her from consistently trying to do things for everyone’s best interest though. It was this spirit that my sister also inherited: a determination to persist and live through “the plague” especially if it meant making an easier path for herself and the rest of us. She and I shared nights of frustration, crying, confusion, or simply asking “Why us?” We never found an answer. Instead, what emerged were her ways of level-headed thinking through positive affirmations and never forgetting the bond we shared with each other as brother and sister. She was the curve I needed to pull me away from the same fate as our parents, for me to see clearly that we were not a product of the same litter entirely.

Adolescent boys who suffer abuse at a young age have a lower chance to survive without a strong sister, mother, or grandmother. Even so, schools can do much better. Personally, the existence for mental health resources is not the same as availability or accessibility. In my final years of high school, social awareness of mental health definitely made itself apparent, in part because of the overall awareness of depressive teens, suicides, and drug overdoses affecting the area and local schools. Delaware Health and Social Services and Christiana Care now visit my former high school twice a year to present to students in the auditorium as well as making kiosk-like presentations. Acknowledgment of the issue and a plan to lower the curve is in effect, but there still is a societal stigma regarding mental health that is needed to shift. No student should ever have to wonder: Who is there for me?

A DSU Alumnus, Dustin states: “I love creating connections. I do a lot of reading on technology and science news and have an obsession with having the latest tech, too. Currently, I am in operations running COVID-19 testing sites as well as deploying nurses for any use to help others across the United States. I’m always traveling and aim to spread my impact on an even bigger scale in the future to aide those who are sick/suffering illnesses.”

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Anxiety is like being lashed down to a seat while looking at an open door. I will always remember the day I had my first anxiety attack. It was like a wave of emptiness that enveloped my entire body, making it hard to finish basic, everyday tasks. Experiencing this was confusing, dull, scary, and groundbreaking. I always thought mental health was a turn-on-turn-off switch, allowing me the option to adjust my own state of mind since I oversaw my feelings. What I cannot deny now is that occasionally I lost control to a parasite that overtook my body and threatened to destroy it. One such parasite was a taboo in the Black community that saw only the disgrace of mental health. Regardless of whether it was depression or anxiety, the established belief was, “Don’t even think about it.”

Particularly for Black women, our story is one of tirelessness and strength. We frequently neglect to perceive that our mental health is considerably more than feeling despair or anxiety. It is not a sign of fragility, and it does not segregate society based upon skin color or sexual orientation. We ground our ideology in both family and religion, allow both to play enormous roles in battling and overcoming anxiety, as well as our understanding of mental health, and expect both to help us in times of struggle. Black women have been so successful in presenting themselves as resilient individuals who do not break that society now expects that we should have faith and get over it, whatever it is. However, Black women are people with feelings who do break now and again. It is fundamental that we uncover the absence of mindfulness of our mental health in our community.

In Sarah Griffith Lund’s book, Blessed Are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness, Family, and Church, she writes about when Scott, her brother, applied for federal disability benefits. When Lund and her mom first heard that Scott was considering applying to be on disability, they thought it was a sign that he was giving up. They were in denial that Scott had a disability that was severe enough for him to qualify. They wanted to believe that if Scott only tried harder, he would be healthy again. Qualifying for disability, in their eyes, was like a death sentence. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, approximately one in five adults in the United States experiences mental illness each year. The Black community is even less likely to search for treatment and when discovered, then it is bound to end treatment quickly. This is due in part to the stigma, lack of openness, and minimal help-seeking tendencies which can deter African Americans and other people of color from dealing with mental health problems. Similarly to Scott in Blessed, when I first approached my family, they were skeptical about whether it was acceptable for me to diagnose myself with an anxiety disorder. They believed if I prayed on it, this was something that could simply go away with God’s help. Although I am very faith-orientated, I was going to need more than a prayer to battle my anxiety.

In the Black community, many individuals misjudge what a mental health condition is and do not discuss the topic. This absence of information persuades that an individual’s mental health condition is a
sign of weakness or some sort of punishment from God. People, of course, do not want to appear weak or perceived as punished by God, which is deeply shameful. So, they suffer in silence. Lund shares that her father believed that his son’s behavior was caused by a malformed spirituality. He would explain such outbursts as demonic possession, and eventually claimed that Lund’s brother was not only possessed by demons but was himself a Satan worshiper. Many in the Black community likewise have trouble recognizing the signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, and this lack of awareness only worsens the condition of the person with the mental disorder. Some may consider sadness as “the blues” or something to snap out of quickly, like that on-off switch flipped with a finger. However, feelings of sadness that are associated with depression or bipolar disorder are not mental switches at the victim’s disposal, and too many in the Black community do not know this and need to. This lack of information about mental health issues, where to get help, and who are trained to provide such help are in critical demand. This is a major communal weakness. It cannot be solved by only sharing our declarations and using them as indications of solidarity.

Studies on mental health have shown in many cases Black women do not often go and seek medical attention. They feel that the quality of health care services they received originated from misperceptions and generalizations, not the truth of what their identity is. They also often feel that health care providers treat them differently, a problem that arises from insufficient Black women in the health care system to whom Black women can relate. This is one of the systemic barriers that keeps macro- and micro-aggressions alive: inappropriate or insulting comments and/or questions. These moments result in Black women feeling marginalized due to the lack of cultural sensitivity by health care professionals. Black women who seek help want a therapist who understands their issues. Thus, adequately trained therapists who exhibit their cultural competence fit the list of necessary resources for the Black community. Cultural competence involves, but is not limited to, familiarity with the stereotypical image of the strong Black woman, racism as trauma, and the stigmas of the Black community.

While prayer is significant, seeking professional help is just as important. Lund writes that prayer may not, in and of itself, cure disease, but it can be a balm, a comfort, and, most importantly, a way to survive. Our deep-rooted religious beliefs go all the way back to slavery, when religion was the one solid foundation we had during those times. Our ancestors then—like the Black community now—lived with depression, anxiety, bipolar and PTSD. Back then, there were not any of these names for those conditions. My faith has helped me battle my anxiety. Talking in prayer is like talking to an inner voice inside me who hears and understands me; it is peaceful. Nonetheless, I, and others like me, need professional help, too, and it should not be hard to find relatable professionals. The only switch I should have to worry about is which therapist I can turn to if an existing one turns me off.

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The Me in Mental Illness by Nia Pope

For the longest time, I could not remember a moment when I was not comfortable interacting with my aunt. She was like a second mother to me. She was present at my birth, a handful of my birthdays, and other milestones; and I could not remember a time that she was not there for me. It was not until I grew up that I began to see things always present in my life turn out to become not what it seemed to be. As a kid, most times it is hard to look at anything but the glass as half-full and not half-empty. As a kid, most times it is hard not to see that the eyes staring back at you were fighting a mental battle of their own. An invisible disability, the true structure of mental health disorders continues to be overshadowed and most times its victims go undiagnosed. The resources for mental health continue to remain absent or scanty, while mental health itself continues to run thick in the blood of many families, including mine.

As a young child, my aunt had her struggles, from destroying precious family photos to going mute for months without uttering a word to anyone. As she moved into her teen years, she had her struggles with weight gain, constantly gaining weight and losing weight at a drastic unhealthy pace, something she still battles to this day. By the time she hit her young adult years, she had experimented with drugs that continued to have her on a downward spiral into depression. Of course, as a child growing up I never really saw the side of her that was struggling and constantly trying to battle the heat of the mental illness that burned her every time she opened her eyes in the morning until the time she laid her head on her pillow at night. She always tried to keep my brother, my cousins and me oblivious and as innocent as possible. Growing up in a Caribbean household, my mother and her sisters had to battle self-esteem issues, depression, and mental health issues constantly. My mom and second aunt always claimed that the pressure of living in a Caribbean household would have driven them mad if they had stayed any longer than they had to. For example, pressures such as the expectations of good grades and contributing the household financially threatened their sanity in more ways that an average American raised teenager could imagine.

It was not until I moved to Delaware in 2006 to start a new life with my mom and my brother that I began to feel my relationship with my aunt waver for the first time in years. For a year, my family and I had been living with my aunt and my grandma in a three-bedroom house in Queens, New York, and for the first time in a long time I would not be able to have my aunt physically present with me every day, and she would not have me around for her.

As the years in Delaware went by, she would come down to visit every year, but every year I grew older, every year she came back to me looking and acting differently. She swung from mood to mood, carrying herself differently, talking and sounding differently. As I matured, it was then I saw that she was truly sick. Every time I was around her by myself, an uncomfortable feeling would wash over me and I would feel worms begin to form and squirm in the pit of my stomach. The less time I had to be around her, the less uneasy I felt. As my brother, my cousins, and I continued to age, we found ways to navigate the mental map that my
aunt forced on us to read whenever we did see or speak to her. We knew just how and what to say to keep her at bay without a trigger, and we knew the extents we had to take to keep her interactions into our social life separate.

In the book Blessed are the Crazy by Sarah Griffith Lund, I relate a lot to her situation in the sense that the silence of mental illness has to be broken. In her story, she uses the term “invisible disability,” in which she relates to her brother’s mentally health and the stigma of his being labeled as “disabled” (Location 791-93 Kindle Edition). I relate to that because there is a stigma behind not only disabilities, but mental illness, and there should not be. In the end, I hope that my entire family along with myself will be as optimistic toward working with my aunt and her mental illness.

To this day, I still wonder about what would have been the outcome if my aunt’s mental health were diagnosed and treated properly early on in her life. I wonder what the outcome would have been if our entire family had stayed in New York instead of moving to Delaware. Would she have had more support? I wonder what would have been the outcome if she had finally had a child of her own. Would the child have cured her? Would she have been more susceptible to treating her mental illness if she had someone to look after? Would my family be different if my mom and aunts did not have to grow up in a family with such a rich Caribbean culture? The more I think about all of the different possible outcomes and ways that her life could have been different than how it is today, the more I come to realize that although mental illness runs thick in the blood of my family, it runs thick in the blood of others, also. The only way to combat mental health awareness is to pray and talk about how families like mine can implement more resources to help this invisible disability.

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Nia states: I’m completing my degree in Mass Communications with a concentration in Digital Media and Film. Upon graduation, I hope to move to Atlanta, Georgia, to pursue my dreams of producing films and TV and work with great directors like Tyler Perry and Ava DuVernay. I’ve always had a passion for all things Mass Communications, so expanding myself outside of my little state of Delaware and exploring the world through the eyes of multimedia is ultimately my next step after graduating.
According to Forbes, “[A] single mother in 2014 earned $36,780, while a married couple with one or more children under eighteen earned an income of $111,278” (Mathur par. 5). Statistically, most single mothers make significantly less than most married or two-parent households. The economic hardships that most single parents experience can lead to many mental illnesses such as depression, stress, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. As a black woman who has been raised in a single-parent household, I can relate to this economic disadvantage. Although there are many children who are raised by single parents and endure economic hardships, most are fortunately supported by their family members. The privilege of having a supportive and loving family can help some single parents overcome any financial hardships and mental illnesses.

For as long I can remember, I grew up watching my mother work her hardest to provide for me, so that I did not feel the absence of my father. My mother placed me in private schools in my neighborhood to have a quality education. Subsequently, I was oblivious to the financial hardship my mother was experiencing keeping me in these schools. I remember at fourteen years old it was time to begin applying for high schools; since I was so accustomed to attending Catholic schools, I only cared to apply to private high schools. I visited this private high school with one of my classmates and I fell in love with the school. I felt the high school was perfect for me; the only problem was that the tuition was $10,000 a year. I ended up being accepted and I decided to introduce the school to my mother. My mother was slightly apprehensive about the tuition, but she saw how happy I was about being accepted and decided that I could attend the school.

After I completed my freshman year at my dream high school, my mother informed me that I would not be returning. I remember feeling very hurt and confused. I gained an amazing group of friends, loved my teachers, and loved the curriculum, so I could not imagine having to leave the school. Unbeknownst to me, my mother was struggling to afford the school tuition and was receiving financial assistance from some family members to afford my attendance. I later transferred to a public high school in my neighborhood. It was a huge difference in comparison to attending private schools. I never experienced having to go through metal detectors every day, not being able to bring my cell phone, or seeing constant physical fights between students. I felt angry at my mother at the time because I simply did not understand her struggle.

As an adult today, I feel ashamed for feeling angry at my mother at the time and not appreciating the sacrifices she has made for me all my life. I was unaware of the sleepless nights she endured wondering how she was going to pay certain bills or her feelings of depression. I ended up adjusting to my new high school, making new friends and feeling completely contented. I now understand and appreciate the hard decisions she has made which had my best interest. I learned to appreciate the love and support I received from my family because they were not obligated to help my mother, but they did.
In *The Memo* by Minda Harts, she discusses the hardships women of color have to endure to achieve equality in the workplace. She writes, “And just because we don’t hold many leadership positions like our white counterparts doesn’t mean we don’t have the capacity to lead. Women of color are like the heart and kidneys of the workplace—you can’t function without us!” (4). This statement further reiterates that women of color have to work twice as hard to get half as far. It also helps me appreciate my mother’s choices for wanting the best for me, so that I can have better opportunities in life as a woman of color. Opportunities are not easily given to us. My mother immigrated to the United States from Jamaica as a teenager and was forced to live on her own from the age of nineteen. She worked two jobs to maintain herself in college, but due to her financial hardships, she was only able to obtain an associate degree. Very few people in my family have a higher education. This motivated my mother to provide a better opportunity for me. I believe this shaped her belief in providing the best education for her child. For most parents, their goal is to ensure that their children become better or more successful than they were. Parents set higher expectations on their children, whether by achieving a higher education or setting stricter rules.

The way parents raise you strongly molds the person that you become in the future. I believe there is a significant link between economic insufficiency in single parents and poor mental health. Without the proper support from family and loved ones, single parents may more likely begin to feel isolated, depressed or have feelings of anxiety. I was fortunate enough to have a supportive family to help fill the void of an absent parent, but some are not as fortunate. Having a supportive family can be vital for promoting good mental health and providing unconditional love. Although most single parent households have more financial disadvantages than a two parent or married household, the lack does not mean the child will not become a prominent leader in society.

**Chyanne majored in Biological Sciences with a concentration in Health Professionals. She plans to become a physician assistant specializing in cosmetic dermatology.**

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Educational inequality has been a prevalent and recurring factor for many decades. Educational institutions and the importance of education have become essentials to the concept of individuals’ obtaining social success. However, multiple factors contribute to the success rate in connection to the education system. Although institutions provide individuals with the access to an education, not everyone has access to the same quality education. I encountered both inadequate and adequate educational experiences. As an African American woman, I believe in the importance of education. Historically, the existence of slavery and its systemic restrictions have prevented African Americans from obtaining an education that ensured their social success that is equitable to Caucasians. Unfortunately, restrictions and limitations are still placed upon African Americans today. According to Angela Davis, “Black people were forced to play the same old roles carved out for them by slavery” in the past and into the present (54). For decades, African Americans, especially African American women, have fallen victim to the dominant ideologies of society.

Prior to selecting Delaware State University as my institution to continue my educational journey, I attended Western High School (WHS). WHS, located in my hometown of Baltimore, Maryland, is the oldest public all-girls high school in the United States. Since Baltimore is predominately African American, I never thought of my educational experiences as being inadequate because of my race. Although I was granted the same access to education as students from neighboring schools, I did experience inadequacy due to other factors. One of them regarded institutional funding. I remember wearing blankets in school because my high school could not afford heat. Nor did Baltimore City have the funding to fix it either. My high school also did not supply us with books. We were solely responsible for purchasing the books for some of our courses. In this regard, our educational experiences related to classism, with learning impacted by what we could not afford.

However, my gender is the main reason I experienced inadequate educational experiences prior to college. Although individualism was a theme I took away from high school, traditionalism still overpowered it. Limitations and restrictions were applied to us. For example, because it was an all-girls institution, the microaggressive mandate to always “act” like a lady was heavily enforced. We wore white wedding gowns to graduation because the white wedding gown was a part of our tradition and represented the purity that women have always been traditionally pushed to maintain. We also were overly sexualized for simplistic things and that essentially impacted my level of comfort. However, being forced to wear a white wedding gown at graduation really helped me discover who I was as a person. Some students did not want to abide by tradition to wear the gown and instead some women wore white suits. Some of my former classmates either did not feel comfortable wearing dresses or identified themselves as less feminine and more gender neutral. As a result, I witnessed some of my peers experience discrimination because they chose individualism over traditionalism. They did not get to participate in graduation. When I was
younger, I could not fully understand why. Now that I am older, I can see how tradition impacted an inadequacy of education and what I witnessed helped to motivate me to discover my purpose and shape who I am today as a nonconformist. My purpose is to enforce individualism over traditionalism in all aspects of life. According to Minda Harts, “You have to learn to be your own advocate” (23).

As an African American woman, I understand now that I have no advocate, yet I have to be my own advocate. I have no choice but to be, and in many ways I have always been my own advocate. Because of this, others may identify me as rebellious. However, I do not view it that way. Self-advocacy is a “skill” and that is how I identify it. I am not waiting for anyone to dictate who I am and wish for others to be equally free, and that is not being rebellious. It is taking a stand for oneself and one’s self-interests. This self-awareness has become the most beneficial skill that I have obtained in my educational journey. This skill was shaped in the adversity that I have experienced: to be warm in a cold classroom, to have access to learning tools my school could not provide me. These lacks may have been caused by someone’s beliefs that Blacks are undeserving. To demand better was regarded as being rebellious of or oppositional to authority. Well, so be it. Having decided to be my own advocate, I cannot conform to or be accepting of limitations placed upon me. While these specific experiences from secondary-level institutions helped shape my identity, however, my college educational experiences solidified how I identify today: a self-advocating Black young woman. When applying to colleges, I knew I wanted to be in an environment where I would not have to encounter forms of microaggression—a term learned in college—as I did at an all-girls high school. I had intuitively become aware that the world saw me first as a Black person and second as a Black woman. This was confirmed when Delaware State University allowed me the opportunity to study abroad in Europe. There, people treated me with inequality based upon my being Black and American. Prior to traveling abroad, I had a theory on the way the world views African American women, one that I could test at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). I believed that the educational environment of an HBCU is the most accepting of all individuals. Attending an HBCU allowed me to fully tap into my individualism, simply because everyone here was his/her/ their own unique individual. I experienced new cultures and new forms of freedom that allowed me room to fully flourish and develop. I feel as though my high school educational experiences tried to restrict me and place an identity on me. However, college allowed justice, equality, and freedom for its students to be who they wanted to be. Then, in Europe, I experienced racist and cultural biases that expanded my understanding of traditionalism and individualism.

Overall, inadequate educational experiences can alter the identity of students. In order to ensure adequate learning for all in educational institutions, institutions must now promote individualism instead of traditionalism. Most times, people have difficulties transitioning, especially when it comes to change. However, I am optimistic. There is always hope for change. If individualism or the concept of students discovering their identities was to be enforced in secondary-level institutions over traditionalism, then I believe that is the first way to initiate equality in academic learning. I remember more of what made me who I am today because of my experiences, in opposition to the subject material bound by a traditional, authoritative curriculum.
Destiny graduated with a Bachelor of Science Honors (Cum Laude) degree, majoring in Forensic Biology minorig Chemistry. She plans to pursue her advanced studies in Forensic Science.
The abuse of power is something with which almost all minorities are familiar, not as the abuser, but as the victim. This theme can be recognized through the abuse of enslaved African women, beginning during the early days of chattel slavery and continuing to the present with the disempowerment of Black females who are undervalued and stereotyped. Those advocating for a just society can take a closer look into abuses of power that are highlighted in the lack of support of justice for adolescent females. Adolescent females of color and White females experience justice differently. Adolescent females of color are disproportionately affected by poverty, the gender divide, and racism while their White counterparts are not as negatively affected to nearly the same extent, in relation to not only criminal justice but ethical justice as well.

The grips of poverty have had reigns on individuals through every aspect of history. Poverty affects more than just financial situations; it trickles down into family dynamics, social perspective, and introspection. As illustrated in Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women’s Equality in African American Communities, Beverly Guy-Sheftall speaks about the story of her mother and other Black women working for White, affluent families. Guy-Sheftall writes:

"We were aware of class differences within Black communities. Although no woman in either of our families worked as a domestic, we each recall seeing lines of Black women waiting at bus stops to go off to work in the homes of white people; and we remember hearing that many Black women who worked for whites were subjected to sexual harassment by the men in those households and suffered inhumane treatment by the women. Each of our mothers explicitly taught us that we must respect all Black women and be sensitive to their different economic circumstances." (4)

This quote illustrates how Black adolescent girls received the injustice of believing their potential is limited to becoming housekeepers for their White counterparts, while White adolescent females grew up in homes where their mothers had more job opportunities. Furthermore, Guy-Sheftall goes on to explain that she was taught to not judge other Black families based upon their economic standing, almost normalizing the poverty in Black communities. The injustice served to Black adolescent females was partly dictated by the young women’s economic status.

The gender divide also played a large part in determining the justice, or lack thereof, served to Black adolescent females. Guy-Sheftall includes excerpts from Ruth Simmons that further explain the gender divide and how it played its part in her household as a young girl. Simmons writes:

"My mother served him, as one would have in the old days. We all paid homage to him in this very typical African American Southern household in that time. Girls were expected to be of service to men. They were not expected to have independent lives. It was not proper to harbor goals independent of what our husbands wanted or independent of what the men of the..."
family dictated. All the emphasis was placed on the boys, on what they did and what they could achieve. Girls were expected to get married and raise a family, but little more than that. The expectation was that we would preserve our place in the social order and support our men. (4)

The theme of men being superior to women can be found through all races, but an emphasis is placed on Black women to remain in their subjugated domestic place. It is not a competition of who is oppressed more, but Black women are faced with more intense misogyny and sexism than their White counterparts. This motif of Black adolescent girls who are forced to endure subjugation is embedded into their childhoods, which is a grave injustice. The girls are expected to just become wives or mothers: nothing more. They are deprived of the same rights as men who are simply seen as superior because of their masculinity. They are handed less opportunities that will allow them to become leaders, pursue higher education, and be the head of the household.

Racism and sexism are the foundation of almost all injustice experienced by Black adolescent females. Black women’s voices have long been silenced by men and Whites, according to Patricia Hill Collins in Black Feminist Thought. Collins points out that Black women have been historically relegated to society’s lowest rung on the ladder and her contributions have been dismissed as having little social value. Guy-Sheftall explains how the role of Black women in the feminist movement was swept under the rug and hidden from the public. She further argues that there was an “erasure of Black women in popular and scholarly histories, television documentaries, and magazine articles in retrospectives about the ‘second-wave’ women’s liberation movement perpetuates the myth that we were absent from the development of contemporary feminism rather than being critical to its formulations (2).”

The figure created that represented a strong, independent woman for the public to admire was a White woman, when in reality, it should have been women from all races. These circumstances perpetuate the idea that the liberation and representation of women in society was solely accomplished by White women, depriving Black women, and in particular adolescent females, the opportunity to look up to a powerful, Black female figures who were not their mother or grandmother. White adolescent females did not experience this as the injustice was committed by other White women. This permitted them the opportunity to have numerous White female role models.

The three circumstances that determine whether an adolescent Black female will receive justice are poverty, the gender divide, and racism. The abuse of power is a consistent theme in relation to all three factors. The abusers are people, including White women, who fail to see how their various ideologies contribute to injustice. Both adolescent females of color and White adolescent females deserve equal opportunities that become stepping stones to a more just society.

Naomi is completing her degree in Mass Communications: Digital Media Production.

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Embracing the Values of the International Students by Dr. N. K. Rathee

Diversity is a crucial component to the success of any academic institution. The presence of international students in classrooms provides not only cultural diversity, but also fosters global understanding and awareness, which are vital components to most universities’ mission statements. Universities often strive to create a learning community that values an inclusive and supportive environment for all their members. International students have a valuable role to play as they bring with them new perspectives, new concepts, and worldwide experiences. While envisioning 21st-century education, integrating the diverse sectional and intercultural dimension seems to be quite essential to fulfill the true purpose of four pillars of learning (Delors et al. 1996).

In 2019, approximately one million international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, constituting about 5% of the total student body. Every year, international students contribute more than $45 billion to the U.S. economy (Hanson, 2021). While most of these students pay full tuition, only few receive scholarships, hence their tuition revenue helps keep the cost of education lower for domestic students (Kong, 2019).

The question arises, what motivates the international students to study in U.S. in spite of the rigorous challenges they face? The assumption is that these students seek an experience that can enhance their personal and professional skills for lifelong success and service to the society. (U.S. News, n.d).

When I look back to find the reason for me to come to the United States, it was to explore the world, attain professional growth and personal fulfillment. When I asked my son, he said his dream was to access the quality higher education that can propel him to top tier career opportunities and lead him to the personal identity development.

Some other reasons why students come to the U.S. are: The American universities are bastions of cultural diversity and offer optimized classroom experience, excellent support facilities, and a flexible academic environment to cater the diverse needs of the students (Kong, 2019). America’s growing global influence in terms of both soft and hard power (Lave, 2003) has made the United States a popular country of opportunities.

Although no specific theory has been developed regarding the gains of international education, some theories support the validity of positive gains of such an education. (Bono, 1971; Patton at al. 2016; Biggs & MacLean, 1969; Olivier, 2021; Mezirow, 1979). This article explores the key benefits and notable positive gains that the international students bring to the universities in the USA.

International students are an increasingly relevant and vital source of cultural diversity. They enrich the campuses with their cultural heritage, and ethnic experiences, which are beneficial for the American students who interact with these students.

1. Cultural Enrichment

International students bring a novel and diverse viewpoint that can benefit the students, staff, and professors. They bring unique cognitive
agility to the institutions that may not otherwise exist in academia, especially in disciplines where international approaches are highly valuable.

Institutions can benefit from the perspectives and awareness of a diverse student body when considering new topics or fields to explore. The Situated Learning Theory argues that learning is a function of the context and culture in which it occurs. Learning also requires social interaction and collaboration and is often unintentional rather than deliberate (Bono, 1971). Without an understanding and appreciation for other cultures, we risk reinforcing stereotypes that paint broad strokes across large groups of people without considering the unique environment and background of the individuals.

2. Promote Global Awareness
Through their different interests and goals, these students promote global consciousness by participating in diverse student clubs and by their involvement in university-wide activities that celebrate cultural diversity. International students add new insights into the ways to solve problems that broaden the understanding of diverse concepts and comprehension of the complex issues. DeBono’s Lateral Thinking Theory posits that developing novel solutions to problems requires different ways of looking at things to encourage new ideas (Patton et al. 2016).

3. Research Advances & Academic Pursuits
International students bring along with them the unique talent that can provide significant contributions to an institution’s research programs through cooperative projects, and partnerships in their home countries. These opportunities allow them to develop skills while supporting their academic pursuits as well as their peer group and the other members of the community. As per Kolb’s theory of concrete experience, they engage in “full and unbiased involvement in learning experiences.” Their reflective observation and contemplation of their experiences help them in abstract conceptualization as “idea formulation and integration,” and active experimentation as “incorporation of new ideas into action” (Biggs & MacLean, 1969).

4. Immersion in Entrepreneurship
International students often develop an understanding of multiple marketplaces due to their time spent in their home country and abroad. Such experiential learning is equivalent to personal change and growth (Oliwer, 2021). Their entrepreneurship is an invaluable asset to the institutions and multi-businesses looking for fresh ideas, new markets, and an inventive approach. Their creative involvement through internship provides them with a greater ability to connect with foreign consumers or investors at international levels. Their multicultural background helps them develop innovative thinking and solutions to problems. Some of America’s most successful entrepreneurs, such as Tesla’s founder Elon Musk (Who Is Jerry Yang? Everything You Need to Know, n.d.), Yahoo’s founding CEO Jerry Yang (Mezirow, 1997), Google CEO Sundar Pichai (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.), Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella (Satya Nadella. Stories, 2021), and GEANCO Foundation CEO Afam Onyema (Moore, n.d.) came to the United States as immigrants or international students.

5. Maintain A Competitive Edge
International students make the U.S. academic institutions more competitive globally. Their presence affects all aspects of campus life: from the classroom to research labs, libraries to cafeterias. With new experience and explorations, they transform their lives which contribute to the transformation of the university environment. Transformative learners move toward a frame of reference that is more inclusive, self-reflective, and integrative of experience (Mezirow, 1997). Further, their diverse vibrations improve the social experience for everyone.
However, international students have reported many challenges such as understanding the American culture, navigating campus life, language barrier, transportation, living accommodations, health care, and academic difficulties. Understanding and addressing these challenges can support the students’ transition effectively.

Since diversity is inevitable, the best possible alternative for the institutions is to embrace it wholeheartedly and make full adjustments to make it happen by providing an educationally rewarding academic experience. A safe and inclusive environment that inspires and encourages their participation, exploration, and collaboration to contribute to their skill development can be very helpful. Successful integration manifests satisfaction, thereby enhancing commitment to positively influence a student’s decision to persist at a particular institution (Tinto, 1993). Thus, International students are very valuable in the terms of their contribution. Effective advisement and communication, culturally responsive instructions, equitable access to the resources, social integration, and authentic administrative support, can make a huge difference in their academic experiences and the campus can be facilitated to reap maximum benefits of their presence.

We, at the Delaware State University, welcome these students with an open heart and offer them the resources and inclusive environment to help them flourish and succeed – because “It All Matters.”

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Works Cited


