

**DIVERSITY DISPARITY:**  
**AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF EXHAUSTION & RESILIENCE**

by  
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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology with Distinction

Spring 2019

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank first and foremost my committee members Dr. Carla Guerrón-Montero, Dr. Georgina Ramsay, and Dr. Laura Eisenman. Without their help and guidance my research would never have come together. I would also like to give a special thanks to Stephanie Chang, Director of Student Diversity and Inclusion. She was an integral part of the formation of this thesis and was a fantastic mentor over the past summer in helping me shape my research.

Thank you to all of my participants, Alicia, Anna, Anthony, Blake, De, Deon, Jaide, and Kai. Without your transparency and honesty, this thesis would not exist. I appreciate all that you have done for me this past year and wish you all success as you continue your studies. I hope that in the future we can bring change to the university, and other institutions. As well as be paid for the work that we do. Lastly, I would like to thank the University of Delaware. My experiences, and those of my peers, at this institution were the catalyst for my independent research and that is something you cannot put a price on.

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## **ABSTRACT**

It is one thing for a university to claim that it is inclusive and promotes a diverse campus; it is another to experience that so-called diversity on campus. Is there a gap between the contemporary diversity agenda and the way diversity is experienced on campus? In this paper, I use auto-ethnography and ethnographic research conducted with queer and trans students of color at the University of Delaware to reflect on this and other questions about how diversity is experienced in contemporary higher education institutions in the United States. Previous work in this field has provided valuable insight into both the educational outcomes for students and sense of belonging that diverse learning environments create for minoritized students. Yet, often such studies do not address the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality. Along with this, majority of these works are written from the perspective of an outsider of student life, rather than a student themselves. Relatedly, barring a few significant studies, much of this research is conducted from disciplines outside of anthropology, which leads to the question of what specific insights might ethnography and other anthropological modes of inquiry give to the experience of student diversity? As I describe in this paper, my auto-ethnographic project, *Diversity Disparity*, remedies these gaps by analyzing how students with identities that intersect in race, gender, and sexuality perceive diversity in higher education, as told by a minoritized student.



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“What about **you**?” Anthony sat across from me, with hands clasped together and a smile on his face. We had made ourselves comfortable in booth. He is a senior (“Year-wise, not credits.” He jokes) art major at the University of Delaware I was very much aware of the confusion on my face.*

*“What about me?” Anthony snickered as if my question was a joke.*

*“Yeah, what about you? Has it happened to you?” Nodding, I finally understood what he meant.*

*“The first time I was called a nigger here, I was a Freshman. But, the first time I was a called a faggot I was a Sophomore. So, you know, they spaced it out a bit for me to deal with the trauma separately.” The two of us laughed, very much aware of the looks we were getting in the Perkins Student Center. Joking about racial and homophobic slurs are not commonplace in such an environment. But for us, two queer/transgender people of color, it is a part of our daily routine: get up, get dressed, be called a slur, laugh it off, and go to class. Then, when we find the time to get*

*together, we swap our stories, almost making the anecdotes into a game, trying to one-up each other with the most ‘traumatizing’ campus experience. Anthony sighs after our bout of laughter, leaning back in his seat. I do the same, pretending to wipe a tear from my eye which prompts another chuckle from him. I look at my surroundings, people have stopped staring at us now that we have calmed down from the hysterics. Sobering up, Anthony speaks once more.*

*“It’s sad that we can laugh about this...” he comments, “but, I guess that’s just how it be.”*

This interaction between me and my friend seemed inconsequential at the time, it was just a regular afternoon. However, recently it has come to mind as I have begun conducting research. Research on how queer/transgender people of color (QTPOC) perceive diversity at the University of Delaware. When walking around campus, there are multiple posters, flyers, and pictures for awareness about diversity. And yet, when spending time with my peers, I always hear a comment from them, contradicting the imagery posted around campus. Which made me question, why do we feel this way? What about ‘diversity’ do we find unbelievable? Ultimately, I wonder, what does it mean to be in a diverse institution when you are the diversity? This question has led me to pursue a thesis, one that would address how people like me, Queer/Transgender People of Color (QTPOC), understood diversity and existed on a campus that committed and advocated for such. Based on my own, and other QTPOC experiences I

will offer a narrative on the resiliency and exhaustion that comes with being a diverse body in an institution that exploits your diversity. More importantly, however, I aim for my thesis to give a voice to a demographic on campus that is often overlooked.

### **NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY**

I wish to clarify the decisions pertaining to terminology and profanity used throughout this thesis to avoid offending or confusing readers. Throughout my writing I utilize a term that, in some circumstances, is perceived as a slur. This word is “queer”. Over the course of history, LGBTQ+ individuals have created terminology that better defines the multiple sexual and gender identities that they may have. Words such as Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Pansexual, and etc. However, my demographic, queer/transgender people of color, have found that these terms are inadequate in describing who they are. Said terms are related to white culture and represent a sense of permanency to their identity. Thus, I, and my participants use the word “queer” as an all-encompassing term to "represent the complexities of sexual and gender identities while centering people of color" (Garvey et al 2018, pg. 2). The term queer will also be used alongside other words to describe one's gender identity and sexuality will be used. Cisgender refers to people whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth. This gender identity is considered the standard. In contrast, transgender refers to those whose gender identities do not align with what they were assigned as birth and nonbinary refers to those identify outside of the

binary. These terms are integral to understanding the identities of my participants and how that affects their daily experiences.

Along with the reclamation of the term “queer”, I also make the conscious decision to describe the QTPOC demographic as “minoritized” rather than “minorities”. While yes, we are, by percentage, a minority group on campus, the use of the term does not speak to experiences and problems that we deal with on campus. Minoritized brings attention to historic mistreatment, prejudices, and social factors that have affected people outside of the “normative” culture (i.e white, cisgender, heterosexual) (Smith 2016). The term speaks to the fact that QTPOC are "a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination" (Wirth 1945, pg. 347).

In regard to the profanity used within this thesis, I would like to address that my decision to not censor these terms are rooted in transparency and keeping the integrity of my participant’s words. When telling me their stories, my participants put their trust in me that I would keep their words their own and not deny them the chance to tell their story. My thesis is meant to articulate the feelings of a group outside the majority and to do so, I must write my work in a manner that honestly portrays their emotions and experiences.

## **METHODOLOGY & POSITIONALITY**

My thesis is an auto-ethnography. I aim to focus my research on how queer/transgender students of color perceive diversity and inclusion, and as I am queer person of color, I must include myself in the research. As Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis state, “If our desire is to research social life, then we must embrace a research method that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion” (Adams et al 2015, p. 9). Research is not objective, especially when done within social sciences. When conducting anthropological work, one must aim to gain the trust of their human participants, experience life with them, to better understand their culture. Due to my positionality and relationships with the community of QTPOC on campus, this is something I can easily achieve. Auto-ethnographic methods allow me to incorporate my own experiences into my research and acknowledge the relationship that I have with my participants. By studying my own culture, and how it not only affects me but also my peers, I can give a more insightful view of their stories.

At the beginning of my research, I started with approximately 15 participants. With such a high number of volunteers, I was eager to hear all of their stories. However, as they started filling out their surveys, many of them, 7 to be exact, backed out as volunteers. When I asked them why they all had the same answer: they were

afraid of the repercussions. Despite the constant reassurance that their identities would remain anonymous, those 7 people still did not want to be a part of my research for fear that what they say about the institution would somehow get out and they would be exposed, subsequently losing any scholarships, academic benefits, or campus jobs that they have obtained. Their anxiety was understandable and thus, I was left with only nine participants, including myself. I approached my research through conducting informal interviews and participant observations. I aimed for my interviews to be reminiscent of a friendly conversation. Focusing first on who they were as a person and their identities, I wanted my participants to be able to feel comfortable enough with me before delving into any sensitive material. My interviews lasted approximately an hour and consisted of my peers telling me about their experiences on campus, as well as their insight into what diversity meant to them, specifically diversity through an institution. Along with interviews, I spent time with five of my peers, conducting participant observation with them. Clifford Geertz nicknamed this data collection method as 'Deep Hanging Out', and accurately so. I spent time with my participants, living their daily lives with them, following them around to their classes, school/RSO events, and any other occasions that they were comfortable with me being a part of. Such an intimate method in data collection allowed me to witness nuances of their day-to-day life that they may have unknowingly omitted during their interviews. They allowed themselves to be vulnerable with me and I myself with them. This shared vulnerability came with the understanding that their trust would not be violated, and their stories respected. My participants and I acknowledge that through

my thesis there is no exploitation of our experiences but rather a chance to tell our stories through a member of our own.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Diversity is important. But, for who? When we speak of diversity and inclusion, who do we want to be affected? Who is the beneficiary?

When it comes to academic institutions, such as the University of Delaware, it's the students. For years, diversity has been a hot button issue in terms of higher education. Questions of how to increase diversity have been at the forefront as if one could assess 'how much' diversity is in an institution or not. As if, diversity is a tangible percentage that can be calculated like the number of students that are being admitted. If that is the case, if diversity can be and *needs to be* "increased" we must understand then what makes it important and why.

Why should we care whether a university has diversity or not?

Why should we work to create a diverse environment?

## **IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT**

The time students spend in college is a critical developmental stage. We are becoming individuals who will soon go out into the world, secure a career, interact with an array of people outside of our bubble. We are encouraged to get out of our

comfort zone, try something new, meet different people, make new memories for our older selves to cherish and look back on fondly. We are encouraged to exist in a diverse environment.

As psychologist Erik Erikson explains, late adolescence and early adulthood (i.e college age) are the prime periods through which an individual will form their sense of personal and social identities (Erikson 1946). Consisting of two elements, a persistent sameness in the self and sharing with others, the identity is best developed in an area of psychosocial moratorium, “a time and place in which they can experiment with different social roles before making permanent commitments to an occupation, to intimate relationships, to social and political groups and ideas, and to a philosophy of life”. (Gurin et al 2002). We, the students, are malleable at this stage. We are acquiring knowledge and forming our identities. By placing us in situations where we are able to come into contact with differing opinions, experiences, and lifestyles, we are able to construct a new identity that we may solidify in our adult lives outside of college. When a student goes to a university that has a social milieu different from their home life they are encouraged to experiment intellectually. Supporting Erikson’s concept of the ‘*psychosocial moratorium*’ was Theodore Newcomb, a sociologist whose study at Bennington College in 1943 deduced that those college students, and others, were affected by peer influence and would undergo change in their identity if presented with an environment differing ideas and attitudes (Newcomb et al 1967).



As Gurin et al explain in *Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes*, the environment of higher education institutions has the ability to be influential. Universities are the ideal settings for a psychosocial moratorium to occur. By admitting people of different backgrounds, lifestyles, and experiences, a diverse environment is created in the institution. Thus, allowing the students an atmosphere through which they can cultivate a sense of their personal identity (Gurin et al 2002). The changes that students undergo, the ones they experience as college students affect them years later, showing that the attitudes they cultivate during their university lives stay with them well into their adult lives. As Gurin et al state “a homogenous college ... impedes the personal struggle and conscious thought that are so important for identity development” (Gurin et al 2002). Without a diverse environment, students would not have the opportunity to challenge themselves and the lifestyle that had been accustomed to before admittance.

## DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Student development through diversity allows for us to become better in the future. A considerable amount of my literature review focuses on the fact that with diverse environments, students will become “democratic citizens”. As Gurin et al state in *The Benefits of Diversity in Education for Democratic Citizenship*, students who study in a diverse educational environment are “more motivated and better able to participate in a heterogenous and complex society” (Gurin et al 2004, pg. 19). Their work incorporates the theory of complex social structures from the sociologist Coser,

which states that complex social structures involve environments of unfamiliarity and are incongruent with our background. Her study resulted in the fact that students who were able to function in complex social structures were able to understand the social world and function as democratic citizens (Coser 1975).

The article *Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes* by Gurin et al focused on the University of Michigan's Intergroup Relations Program (IRP), a cocurricular program for freshman students that incorporate: the presence of diverse peers, discontinuity from pre-college experiences, equality among peers, discussion under rules of civil discourse, and normalization and negotiation of conflict. (Gurin et al 2002). The students involved in this program were found to have positive outcomes, learning skills such as: perspective-taking, non-divisiveness of difference, and perception of commonalities. By being around students of diverse backgrounds and experiences, they were able to disrupt their understanding of the world to understand the perspectives of others, thus, benefitting them in the long run to become citizens prepared to take on the diverse world outside of their university. The creation of a democratic citizenship is done when undergraduate scholars are given the opportunity to create, experience, and understand social connections with those outside of their own identities (Guarasci and Cornwell 1997). By creating an environment that disrupts the normative culture of the majority, educational institutions will better support the progress of their students becoming successful and respectable citizens once they graduate college.

Overall, diversity in the present is for the betterment of the future. Encouraging students to engage and learn in an environment that is distinctly different from their home life and/or past, gives them the opportunity to gain skills they would only have access to through diversity. As Gurin et al states, “diverse peers will learn from each other” (Gurin et al 2002). Thus, exposing students to diverse perspectives and experiences teaches them to become better prepared to participate in the diverse society that awaits them after graduation.

### SENSE OF BELONGING

Along with creating future democratic citizens, diversity allows for minoritized students enrolled to obtain a sense of belonging on campus in the present. Wanting to belong is human. It is a fundamental need directly associated with positive health and cognitive processing outcomes (Baumeister & Leary 1995). Therefore, the concept is integral in the success of college students. In regard to universities, the sense of belonging addresses whether students feel valued, accepted and included at their college (Strayhorn 2012). Sense of belonging deeply influences the cognition, affect, and behaviors of students (Hurtado & Carter 1997). Thus, students who think (cognition) and feel (affect) that they belong on campus have a higher percentage of participating in campus events and attend their classes (behavior) (Strayhorn 2012).

Sense of belonging is theorized within higher education through benefitting both retention and school belonging, specifically through Tinto’s model of individual departure and Finn’s (1989) participation-identification model. Addressing the

importance of students engaging and involving themselves in connections in and out of the academic institution, Tinto's model of individual departure is a theory stresses the importance for students have integrative experiences inside, such as participating in class discussions, (academic integration) and outside, i.e. being a part of RSOs, (social integration) the classroom (Tinto 1993). Through these dual integrative experiences, students will be more inclined to commit to their universities and in turn, their scholarship, raising their retention levels. Along with this theory, Finn's participation-identification model highlights that students who actively engage in activities are more likely to be successful in school (Finn 1989). This model acts as a cycle, students who participate gain better grades and thus, are prompted to partake in even more activities. While these theories are beneficial, they do not address the complexities of students' identities on campus, which is where diversity comes into play.

The concept of sense of belonging is derived from the formation of a campus climate. A product of both the environment and how individuals interact in and with it, campus climate is best defined by Renn and Patton in their text *Campus Ecology and Environments* as "the overall atmosphere of a college campus mediated by the extent individuals feel a sense of safety, belonging, engagement within the environment, and value as members of a community" (Renn & Patton, 2010, p. 248). The campus climate addresses how students perceive their place on campus, whether they belong or not. For minoritized students, campus climate can be a hostile one. As showcased within Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano's study *Critical Race Theory, Racial*

*Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates*, minoritized students, in this case Latine undergraduates, experience microaggressions on campus, making the campus climate non-conducive with a sense of belonging with the rest of the student body (Yosso et al. 2009). However, when diversity is involved in campus climate, and the student body encounters diverse individuals, there is more likely to be a sense of belonging achieved as Terrell Lamont Strayhorn surveyed in his study about Black men and how they ‘fit in’ at predominately white institutions (Strayhorn 2008). After analyzing the experiences of 231 Black men and 300 White men, his findings concluded that while Black men reported the campus as being ‘unwelcoming’ as opposed to their white counterpart, both races who socialized with peers of a different race or with different interests “were more likely to report high levels of belonging to campus” (Strayhorn 2008, pg. 513).

The research done on the importance of diversity is well and plenty. However, while these studies are beneficial the work is from the perspective of faculty members, people working for the institution. Even if they conduct research to better learn how students are affected diversity, they cannot truly understand how it impacts their life on a personal level. I also must address that the research available is lacking an anthropological perspective and thus, my literature review focuses more on educational and psychological understandings of diversity. Along with this, most of the literature focusing on diversity and “diverse” bodies, does not acknowledge the intersectionality of identities within students. How a queer student perceives and is affected by diversity is significantly different than that of a racialized one. Thus,

queer/transgender students of color will have a vastly separate experience due to their intersecting identities. I aim for my work to remedy this lack of representation due to my positionality as a queer, Black undergraduate researcher and by focusing my studies of diversity on people like me, rather than the institution.

## Chapter 2

### **LIFE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE**

#### **RACIST RELATIONS**

Growing up in Newark, Delaware meant that the University of Delaware stands as the de facto epicenter of my city. Standing as the largest university in the first state, with approximately 23,000 students (18,000 of which are undergraduates) (IPEDS), the University of Delaware has been a staple in my life. From Old College to Perkins Student Center, anthropomorphic hens and apathetic students adorned in blue and yellow were the hallmarks of both my childhood and adulthood. I always knew I would attend this institution. I humored the thought of going out-of-state but, the University of Delaware was the default. It was my comfort area, home base, safe space. I lived here all my life and knew everything I needed to know to be a student. Or so I thought.

Before I can address how diversity affects diverse students (specifically QTPOC) at the University of Delaware the historical context from which it was developed must first be understood. The University of Delaware has a rich and colorful history as a scholastic institution, however, there are key components to its past (and present) that provide context to the climate in regard to diversity today.

Established in 1743, the University of Delaware was founded by Francis Alison, a Presbyterian minister, as the Newark Academy (Office of Communications and Marketing). However, it was not until 1833 did the Delaware legislature and the

construction of Old College did Newark Academy become Newark College, which in turn became Delaware College in 1843. From 1859 to 1870, Delaware College took a hiatus but, with the Morrill Land-Grants Acts, the institution was able to reopen in 1870 (Thomas, Grace Powers, ed. (1898)). Renamed the University of Delaware in 1921, it took four more years for said establishment to become coeducational with the merging with the Women's College of Delaware (Manser, 2014). While the university was allowing students, both male, and female, to attend it still maintained its existence as an all-white institution, a factor that would persist well into the late 1900s.

Similar to the former Confederate states, Delawarean schools practiced segregated education during the twentieth century. Race in Delaware, in terms of education, was affected by the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896. Issued by the Supreme Court, it stated that “segregation was constitutional as long as the facilities provided for black students were equal to those reserved for whites” (Ware, 2002). In respect to this, the Delaware Constitution, a year later, mandated that “white and colored children” should be educated in separate facilities (Delaware Constitution of 1897, Article 10, Section). While this was deemed sound in theory, in practice it was anything but. Schools for African-American children were under-funded and paid for by taxes for said racialized demographic. Along with this, public high schools for Black students were non-existent south of Wilmington (Gadsden 2013). Regardless of these Jim Crow education laws, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) during the 1930s worked to put an end to segregation. Lawyers of the association calculated that



As Brett Gadsden states in his text *Between North and South: Delaware, Desegregation, and the Myth of American Sectionalism* the first initial instance of the movement for desegregation in Delaware was in 1939. Ira S. Edwards, a Howard High School graduate, a resident of Wilmington, and African American wrote Walther Hullihen, the president of the University of Delaware at the time, requesting information about their opportunities for Black students pursuing Electrical Engineering (Gadsden 2013). Edwards request was met with a letter written by Hullihen himself which stated:

“I am afraid I cannot tell you where you, a colored citizen, can get a college course in Electrical Engineering in Delaware unless the College for Colored Students at Dover is planning to establish such a course. [Delaware] has not been able, or willing, to provide all forms of education for either white or colored students. No white or colored students can secure state-supported training in law medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, mining, forestry or many other such professions or vocations. I hope provisions will be made for all of these in so far as there is any significant demand for them” (Gadsden 2013, pg. 24).

While educationally, the University of Delaware lacked the programs to accommodate Edwards, it also lacked the ability to enroll Edwards. Black students were barred from attending the University of Delaware at the time, forced to attend

Delaware State College, where no graduate courses were offered (Gadsden 2013). Edwards's letter spurred the University of Delaware to justify their policy of segregation. While legally, the institution was obligated to stay 'all-white', many believed, including Hullihen, that Delaware's conservative culture would negatively impact "any violation of the color line" (Gadsden 2013). This climate was addressed during an interscholastic athletic competition as well. Ralph W. Robinson inquired whether African-Americans could be given the opportunity to be involved. Hullihen, once more, advocated against this notion, believing that with the involvement of "negro contestants" would directly hinder admittance to the event. The people of Delaware, in his opinion, were "much less liberal, friendly and generous than that of the people of the south" (Gadsden 2013). Despite this, there began a push to desegregate education in the state.

One of the most notable figures of desegregation was Louis Lorenzo Redding, a Delawarean civil rights activist and lawyer. Having graduated from Brown University, he soon earned his law degree in 1928 from Harvard University (Gadsden 2013, pg. 28). Even though he bore the weight of his racialization, he began his official practice, becoming the first African-American lawyer in Delaware, remaining as such for twenty-five years (Gadsden 2013, pg. 30). His practice would play an integral part in the 1950 case of *Parker v. The University of Delaware*, a pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* equalization suit (Gadsden 2013).

At Delaware State College (DSC, now Delaware State University) a student strike addressing the discontent of Black students broke out. With a list of grievances

that criticized student programs, curriculum, and administration, the students “marched in front of Delaware Hall, the recitation building and Conrad Hall” on February 8, 1949. With poor food, inadequate facilities, and denial of classes promised to them, these Black students advocated for a better educational environment. Furthermore, the students spoke out against the president of the institution, Howard D. Gregg. Charging him with nepotism, intimidation, and exploitation of student labor and criticizing his management of DSC, the students stated him as becoming “the very symbol of corruption” (Gadsden 2013, pg. 36). Delaware State College was separate but, not equal. With its failure to meet professional standards, the institution soon lost its accreditation with the Middle States Associates (Ware 2002). This, in turn, leads African-American students with little to no option for higher education.

Black college students and the NAACP pursued a campaign to desegregate the campus of the University of Delaware. A letter was written by Reginald Stanton Tynes, a student seeking to apply, to Governor Carvel stating:

“Of the four classifications of students at this institution, the seniors are of course more affected by this recent action of the Middle States Accrediting Association, than the rest, and we felt that the state of Delaware owes us an accredited education, and since it has failed in its duty to provide us with the same, we feel some action should be taken in the matter” (Gadsden 2013, pg. 40).

Along with this, more students, under the guidance of Louis L. Redding sent requests for applications to Charles W. Bush, the director of admissions at the time in January 1950. Irving J. Williams, one of these students, even went in person to the

admissions office to request his application. However, these DSC students were still denied the chance to be enrolled. Even though one student was able to obtain an application, Daniel Moody, he was later written by Bush that “as a colored person he .... Could not be admitted to the University of Delaware” (Gadsden 2013, pg. 41). Bush’s letter referenced the *Plessy v Ferguson* ruling, a policy that was now being utilized to justify the continuation of segregation and validate rejecting the Black students aiming for admissions into the university (Owens 2018).

Redding went to the press with these decisions, condemning them publicly, believing that the University of Delaware abstained from the opportunity to desegregate. With that being said, a lawsuit was soon to follow. Redding contacted the president of the Board of Trustees, Hugh M. Morris, pointing out the inadequate educational environment for these students in comparison to the University of Delaware, arguing “equal access to education of this same quality cannot constitutionally be denied to or withheld from citizens of the state solely because of their race or color” (Owens 2018). His aim was for the students to have their applications properly handled in a timely manner due to the approaching Fall semester (Gadsden 2013). Morris and the rest of the Board of Trustees held a meeting for Redding’s letter. However, once more, the 1948 resolution that solidified the “separate but equal” ruling, was used as a means to confirm the rejection of the African-American students. With this decision, Redding, along with Jack Greenberg, another NAACP lawyer, filed a lawsuit, and represent Brooks M. Parker and nine other

Delaware State College students who were denied admittance into the University of Delaware (Owens 2018).

The lawsuit argued that as state institutions, Delaware State College and the University of Delaware while separate, were not equal. Thus, these students had a right to be admitted into the University of Delaware (Owens 2018). A three-day trial was conducted, one of which that included testimonies from officials at both institutions' students. A visit to Delaware State College was also conducted by the judge, who found a "gross disparity" between the institutions. Delaware State College had an obvious disadvantage as an institution and with this evidence, was in clear violations of the *Plessy* ruling.

To remedy this situation, the University of Delaware was ordered to desegregate. But, only after considering avenues through which they could appeal the decision (Ware 2002) The students were allowed admittance into the University of Delaware, which was a step up from their past ruling that Black students could benefit from the education at the institution through a scholarship program. A scholarship program that allowed them to attend University of Delaware affiliated programs outside of the state (Gadsden 2013).

## **QUEERPHOBIA**

Along with race, the University of Delaware has been under fire for problematic treatment of people outside the heteronormative culture, specifically when the University was under the presidency of Edward Arthur Trabant in 1976.

Richard Aumiller was not only a former graduate student in 1972 through the Department of Theatre at the University of Delaware, but he was also the Manager of the University Theatre and was hired for the 1975-1976 academic year (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). In his attendance as a graduate student, Aumiller was a part of the Registered Student Organization (RSO), The Gay Community. After his hire as a faculty member, he was approached by students to serve as the faculty advisor of the RSO, which he voluntarily accepted (Orledge 2018). Aumiller, himself, was a homosexual man and soon became a notable figurehead for the acceptance of homosexuality on the University of Delaware's campus.

May of 1975 found the University of Delaware with a reporter from the Philadelphia Bulletin newspaper attending a meeting hosted by The Gay Community. In July of the same year, the newspaper released an article on homosexuals in Delaware titled "*Gays Battle Prejudices, Keep Low Profiles*", with quotes from Aumiller incorporated (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). The article opened with the following text and quote from Aumiller:

"What does teenage America want to know about homosexuals?' asks Dick Aumiller, manager of the University of Delaware theater, as he and 20 other Delaware gays drink coffee in the basement of one of the school's dormitories.

"'They want to know if we are sick and if we can be cured,' he adds, relishing every cynical word that rolls off his tongue." (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977).

Understandably, this article gained the attention of president Trabant who in turn, contacted Provost Campbell. He wanted Campbell to explain to Aumiller that "his private life was his own business, but it had to be private, and if he did anything to cause embarrassment to the University that something would have to be done." (PX-15) (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). In October 1975, another journalist, this time from the Wilmington News Journal, was conducting research on the Gay Community of the University of Delaware. Ms. Janice deBlieu, the journalist, interviewed Aumiller in his office at Mitchell Hall and attended a meeting of his RSO. Aumiller was transparent with his opinions on homosexual issues and gave his consent to his real name being published in the article along with his statements (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). This situation would be duplicated once more in November of 1975, with The Review on campus, with Aumiller, once more, publicly discussing his sexuality and the problems The Gay Community had to face on campus (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). Even though he was not defining himself as a spokesperson to the homosexual community, his transparency and willingness to speak out made him as such.

Once more, this caught the attention of Trabant. In response to the News Journal article in November, Trabant dictated a letter to the Chairman of the Board of

Trustees at the time, Samuel Lehner. While he explains that he does not “care what Mr. Aumiller does in his bedroom”, he believes it to be an “affront to the University” that Aumiller would speak publicly about homosexuality to the extent that he had, and that the university is at risk of having more “gays” recruited (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). Aumiller’s openness threatened the campus, in Trabant’s opinion. If he, Aumiller, becomes an advocate for the homosexual community, then more of said demographic will be attracted to the campus, being near the students (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). For Trabant, homosexuality would be harmful to the institution.

Remedying this “affront”, as Trabant stated it out to be, was done through confronting Aumiller for his words. Aumiller justified his position, explaining that the articles took his comments out of context and assuring Trabant that he did not and would not have any sexual relations with anyone affiliated with the university (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). Trabant called the situation a “conflict course”. He stated that “[sic] Delaware is like a small pond, and a small wind can raise large waves on a small pond.” Majority of the state did not share a positive view on homosexuality, and thus, Aumiller’s outspoken support could be a detriment to the academic institution, while also being an affront to Trabant himself (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977).

One month after their meeting, December 10, 1975, president Trabant decided not to renew Aumiller’s contract for the upcoming 1976-1977 academic term stating the reason of which being that “Aumiller had placed himself in a position of advocacy



of the homosexual lifestyle for the undergraduate" (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). In short, Aumiller's sexuality and advocacy for such threatened the integrity of the University of Delaware and thus, he must not be affiliated with the institution. In retaliation, Aumiller three-part grievance, believing that the non-renewal of his contract violated his "academic freedom" policy and was unjust (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). However, while the University's Arts and Science Senate Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility ruled that Aumiller's grievances were just, they were further overruled by president Trabant, as he was the final step in the grievance process.

When the situation went to trial, it was found that Aumiller's civil rights were violated. However, Trabant faced no repercussions for the incident; he was neither fired, nor penalized by the University of Delaware. Instead, the ruling was for him to simply pay Aumiller five thousand dollars, along with the money from the university (Aumiller v. University of Delaware 1977). Instead, 19 years later, Trabant would have the university center named after him in 1996 (Orledge 2018). A homage to his legacy. His views against the homosexual identity did not seem to be a detriment to his character. Instead, it was overlooked.

## **CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

### **'NOOSE' INCIDENT**

These incidents of racism and queerphobia are not surprising. Even today, these problems still persist. In the Fall of 2015, my Freshman year, I attended an

impromptu Black Lives Matter (BLM) march on The Green in front of Memorial Hall. The turnout was large, everyone dressed in black, incorporating an open mic for students to share their stories of racism and experiences on the University of Delaware's campus. The protest was in response to three objects hanging from a tree on The Green the night before. Three objects that were, at first, identified as nooses (fig. 1).



Figure 1  
“Nooses” Hanging on Trees by Mitchell Hall

We, the student body, were made aware of this through a UD Alert email the morning after:

UD Police are investigating a racist display found outside Mitchell Hall tonight and it is being investigated as a hate crime. Anyone who saw anything suspicious in the area between dusk and 10 p.m. is asked to

contact police at 302-831-2222. Members of the community are reminded to walk in groups at night, use UD bus transportation or the UD Police walking escort service. Additional information will follow on the UD home page.

However, the acting president at the time, Nancy Targett, released a statement that Tuesday night, stating: “We are both saddened and disturbed that this deplorable act has taken place on our campus ...” (Horn et. al 2015). The incident had come just one day after another Black Lives Matter protest that I was a part of on campus. A silent protest to object against Katie Pavlich, a Fox News commentator who labeled the BLM movement a “violent hate group”, that was invited to speak in Mitchell Hall (Horn et. al 2015).

After further investigation, the ‘nooses’ were found to be paper lantern remnants left over from an event over the summer from a random student who had taken them down to decorate her room (Duchon 2015). Even though the wires were not ‘nooses’, our reactions (the, primarily, Black student body) were valid and understandable due to the political climate. As Mariano Castillo, a CNN Reporter wrote in his article *No Nooses at University of Delaware, Police Say, But Anxiety Persist*, “the concerns at the University of Delaware reflect ongoing racial tensions in the country. American college campuses have not been spared from racist incidents or discussions over how to address them.” At Duke University, the same year, a student had hung a noose on a tree near a student union while at the University of Oklahoma, fraternity members were being punished for “using the N-word and referring to lynching in a chant” (Castillo 2015).

While the idea of a noose being hung on campus was terrifying it was nothing in comparison to the onslaught of racist remarks online on the (now ‘dead’) social media application, YikYak. An anonymous messaging app for college students, YikYak was popular during my Freshman year. Students could post whatever they want, whenever they want, without the repercussions of anyone knowing it was them. This anonymity, however, ironically revealed the real face of UD’s students. After the release of the official statement by Targett:

"Thanks to tips from students who responded to our earlier call for information and the investigative work of University of Delaware Police, it has been determined that the three noose-like items found outside Mitchell Hall were not instruments of a hate crime, but the remnants of paper lanterns from an event previously held on The Green," (Duchon 2015).

YikYak became filled with racist anonymous comments and jokes, making light of the situation. Invalidating the reactions of scared students and making them out to have overreacted, a running joke on the app was to compare other items around campus to nooses (fig. 2).

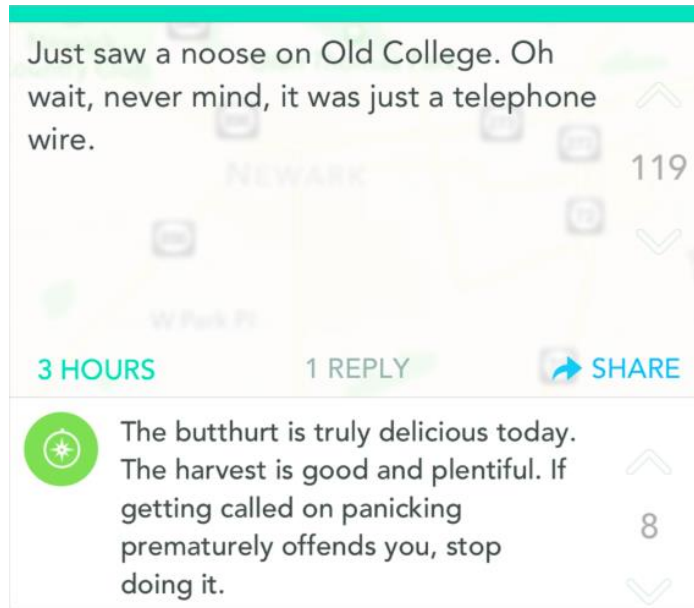


Figure 2 Screenshot from YikYak

Others bitterly grew heated, their comments growing aggressively racist as if growing bolder due to the anonymity (fig. 3).

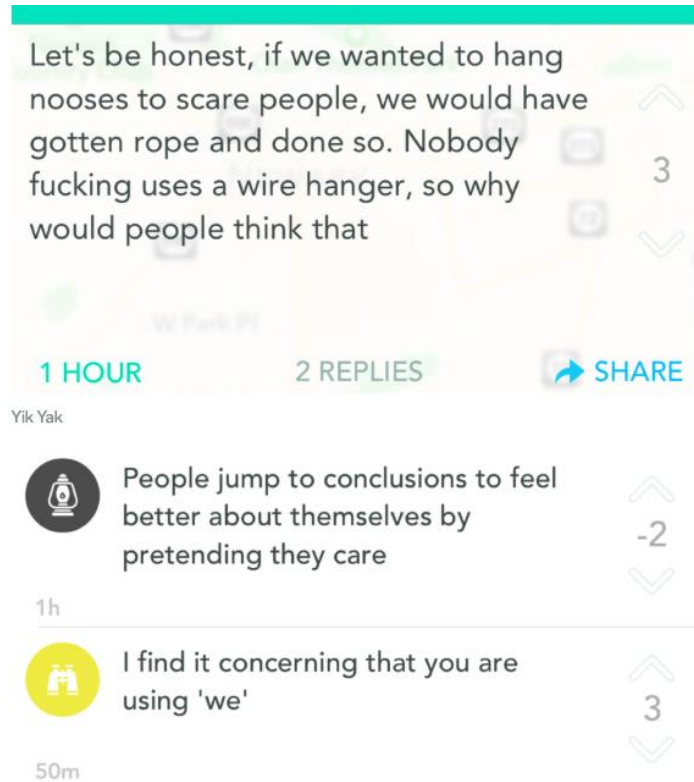


Figure 3 Screenshot from YikYak

However, like any controversy, the tension the ‘Noose’ Incident brought, died down. But it would only be a year until the next controversial issue would arise.

## MILO YIANNOPOULOS

My Sophomore year, after the ‘Noose’ Incident, the University of Delaware was once again having tensions rise. This time, however, it was for allowing the University of Delaware Republicans club and the Delaware Federation of College Republicans invite Milo Yiannopoulos during his “Dangerous Faggot” tour. A former

political commentator of the alt-right conservative movement, he is infamously known for his inflammatory queerphobic comments, despite being gay himself.

Yiannopoulos was hosted in Mitchell Hall on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016 despite the backlash from the student body (Orledge 2016). The chairman of the Delaware Federation of College Republicans at the time, Andrew Lipman, was noted in *The Review* as the main organizer of the event, having reached out to Yiannopoulos himself due to the members of his organization requesting he be brought to campus (Orledge 2016).

Understandably, the days leading up to his talk were rife with student protests. A petition had even been submitted to the university administration, signed by multiple campus organizations (18 separate RSO leaders) to prohibit him from coming to campus and speaking (Orledge 2016). Major controversy struck when posters advertising for his talk, ones not endorsed by the UD College Republicans club, were being posted around campus and Mainstreet (fig. 4).



Figure 4 Advertisement for Yiannopoulos Event

With headshots of Michelle Obama and Caitlyn Jenner, some of the posters included a common transphobic slur while another simply stated “TRANS = MENTALLY ILL” and had to be taken down by the Newark Police Department. Regardless of student efforts, Yiannopoulos’s event went on as scheduled, his talk littered with shock value statements such as equating transgender people to being “damaged” (Brent 2016).

Even though we could not stop him from coming to campus, my peers and I organized a ‘Trans Profest’, two days after his talk on October 26, 2016 in front of Mitchell Hall. My good friend, TJ, was the main organizer, having spent the night before creating a banner, reminiscent of the transgender flag, with the phrase ‘PROTECT TRANS STUDENTS!’ painted boldly on the front (fig. 5).





Figure 5 Our 'Protect Trans Students!' Poster

For us, the QTPOC and LGBTQ+ community, this was a time to celebrate positivity and our transgender friends and loved ones, rather than expend energy fighting against the hate speech that had already been given a platform. An all-day event, numerous people came to visit us, donating food, beverages, even blankets as we stood outside, urging people to come and celebrate trans students and acknowledge their existence on campus by either joining the pro-fest or signing the banner. With chalk, we wrote reaffirming statements such as “Trans is Beautiful”, “Trans people are deserving of love and respect” on the brick pathway. While born out of transphobia, our event was able to be a reprieve from the negativity that had been on our campus just days before, acting also as a way to bring attention to the needs of queer students on campus.



## Chapter 3

### **WHAT MAKES A DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT AND WHAT DIVERSITY IS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE (I.E I AM THE DIVERSITY)**

Beforehand, I posed the question of what makes diversity important and the research is clear, diversity matters. But now, I must pose a new one: What is diversity at the University of Delaware?

Historically, academic institutions predominately enroll white, heterosexual\*, cisgender\* students, creating a homogenous environment of learning. Thus, for an institution to be able to obtain diversity, i.e. create a heterogeneous environment that allows students to develop into democratic citizens fit for the adult world, they must enroll the opposite into their academic establishments. The normative culture that inhabits the University of Delaware, perpetuates this homogenous environment. With an undergraduate population of 18,334, the University of Delaware has a white percentage of 70.8% as of Fall 2017. This makes the population of people of color amount to only 29.1% (University of Delaware Facts & Figures). Due to this high percentage of white students, the University of Delaware by definition would constitute as a predominately white institution (PWI), a university in which white students account for at least 50% or greater of its enrollment (Brown and Dancy 2010). And while it is nearly impossible to gauge the gender identities and sexualities of students, it is known that within the state of Delaware approximately 4.7% of adults identify as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual. Furthermore, only 0.64% identify as

Transgender in the first state (Flores et al. 2016). Thus, it is safe to assume that within the University of Delaware, the majority of students would align with heterosexual and cisgender identities along with whiteness. Due to this dearth of LGBTQ+ students on campus, UD can also be considered a Traditionally Heterogendered Institution (THI), a concept introduced by Preston and Hoffman in their 2015 article *Traditionally Heterogendered Institutions: Discourses Surrounding LGBTQ College Students* as a means to “understand how colleges have historically been shaped by and for cisgender, straight individuals.” (Preston and Hoffman 2015).

The opposite of white, heterosexual, and/or cisgender peoples are people of color, queer peoples, and/or transgender individuals. They must enroll people like me and my participants. In short, *we* are the diversity. *We* make the diverse environment of the University of Delaware, and like other academic institutions, the University of Delaware cares deeply about the upkeep of said diversity. Similar to other institutions, The University of Delaware has a list of value statements that are open to the public. These values are what the institution holds near and dear, promising to uphold and enforce throughout the institution and the student body. Among these values, is diversity and inclusion:

“We welcome and value different backgrounds, perspectives, and learning experiences; this is essential for educating global citizens, developing knowledge and advancing and enhancing our world.” (University of Delaware Values 2019).

This value statement shows up multiple times in multiple places on campus. Places such as the Center for the Study of Diversity, Center for Black Culture, and LGBT+ Programming. It acts as a major component of the University of Delaware's aim to make the campus more diverse and inclusive and is a part of the Inclusive Excellence Action Plan, a program created to address the struggle with diversity, equity, and inclusion the institution has faced within its history (University of Delaware Inclusive Excellence 2019). Obviously which such an emphasis on diversity initiatives and with goals such as: 1) increasing the racial and cultural diversity of students, faculty and staff, 2) creating a climate that encourages the University community to respect and 3) appreciate individual and cultural differences and promoting equity for people of different backgrounds throughout all areas of University life (University of Delaware Inclusive Excellence 2019), it would suggest that the University of Delaware is the ideal place for diversity and that there is no problem.

However, there is.

For part of my research, my participants filled out a survey form that acted as a way for me to gather preliminary information about them before their interviews and participant observation. My survey questions focused primarily on identity salience and how they perceive their existence on the University of Delaware's campus. Identity salience speaks to how much a person understands the different facets of themselves (e.g. racialization, sexuality, gender, etc.). It refers to "how prominent,

significant, and important identity is to oneself or in one's perception of others". (Hogg and Jackson 2010) As my research pertains to diversity and how it affects diverse bodies, I wanted participants who had a greater understanding of what it means for them to be minoritized bodies at both a PWI and THI. My participant intake form was created as a means for the select volunteers in my study to give me information pertaining to their emotions and sense of belonging on campus and with their own identities and for me to gauge their identity salience.

Thus, the first part of my survey focused primarily on my participants' race, gender, and sexuality. On a scale of one to five (one being "Strongly Disagree" and five being "Strongly Agree"), I had my participants rate how much they related to six different statements. Ranging from "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic and/or racial group" to "I have often done things that will help me understand my identities better", I was able to gauge how much my participants related to their intersectional identities. The vast majority of them, 75%, had high identity salience, their ratings of the statements ranging from "Agree" to "Strongly Agree".

The second portion of my survey pertained to how my participants felt on campus, whether or not they felt a sense of belonging, safety, or even represented. Gaining this kind of data allowed me to structure my interview questions about the University of Delaware in a way that would produce the most pertinent information from my volunteers. With statements in the survey such as "I feel comfortable and/or safe on campus" and "I feel the campus caters to the needs of my identities", I had my participants, once more, rate on a scale of one to five, how much they agreed with the

aforementioned comments. This section of the survey allowed me to not only understand if an individual participant had somewhat negative and/or positive experiences on campus but, gave me the opportunity to find commonalities between my participants and how they felt on campus. While 100% of my participants “Strongly Agree” with the statement “I have a group and/or organization of people like me on campus”, their answers about whether they feel comfortable, represented, or as if the campus caters to their needs stayed with the range of “strongly disagree” to “undecided”. Combined with rating these eleven statements, I asked my participants to supply me with a brief reaction statement (no more than a paragraph) on how they felt about the Diversity and Inclusion value statement:

Blake, 22 years old, Black cis-female and queer stated: *“I feel like this statement is very performative. I think they may welcome people from different backgrounds, but it stops there. There aren't many resources in place to ensure the safety of people who are marginalized and who suffer from different forms of oppression every day. I think the school environment does a terrible job addressing diversity and a great job at keeping those who are marginalized down.”*

Anna, 21 years old, Chinese, cis-female and bisexual wrote: *“It sounds like a generic diversity statement. I’m not sure I agree if the university does enough for its queer students though, especially queer POC. I know friends who have trouble getting help and being listened to. I also don’t always feel welcome on campus, so that’s funny.”*

Jaide, a 21-year-old, queer, Black noted: *“It’s not enough to just say things we need to see action when these beliefs are put to the test. A blanket email or statement is not showing us that they care.”*

Alicia, 21 years old, bi-racial, cis-female and bisexual stated: *“I agree completely with this statement, however, since this statement was published by UD, I completely disagree. I don't think my campus really welcomes all backgrounds-- It only goes as far as the international student population. Delaware has a MASSIVE minority population. Why has every minority group been so poorly represented at the University of Delaware?”*

Kai, 19 years old, African-American/Native American, non-binary and bisexual wrote: *“This is a unique mindset to have and exhibit and it's sad it's not universally taught to be a common attribute. I doubt this kind of mindset even exists here, and in America and if practiced at a company it's almost a guarantee that not everyone has this same exact mindset, but probably only agrees with bits and pieces of it. I doubt a mindset such as this will ever truly exist to its fullest extent this day in age considering compassion and open mindedness it's not always instilled as we grow up. I wish this mindset existed universally.”*

From their survey answers and the reaction statements, it's clear to see: the value statement is insufficient. But, why? During their interviews, my participants gave me in-depth insight into their reaction statements, explaining what was going through their mind when writing them. One such participant, De, a 21-year-old non-binary, Afro-Latina Biology major believed that the statement was a trap. A way to lure in prospective students:

**Me:** *So, I asked you to give a brief reaction to this [the University of Delaware's Diversity and Inclusion value statement] and you said “It's a trap. They don't value*



*that. But I mean, yeah, the statement is true. Just don't say "we" if you don't mean it."*

*Can you explain that?*

*De: Well, when I read that statement, I thought about going on a tour.*

*Me: A tour?*

*De: Yeah. It feels like they have to talk up diversity. It's almost like when you're on a tour, they'll put every group that they can think of essentially. Like, you know, "Oh we have this, and we have this, and we have this." And it's like trying to, like, sell the point that we are diverse, but then you come here and it's like, there's no promotion of it anymore.*

Deon a 21-year old, Black trans-masculine, queer Sociology major claims that the statement is proof diversity becomes the burden of diverse bodies. He and other QTPOC are the ones putting in the effort:

*Me: So, I asked you what comes to mind when you read this [the University of Delaware's Diversity and Inclusion Value statement], and to provide a brief statement and reaction. You said, "We rely heavily on the experiences of students of color to create the diversity and educational experiences for UD and as a student of color it's exhausting." please explain that.*

***Deon:** I set up panels, talk to like various groups, get people in from other organizations, from other places in Philadelphia or like Jersey, just to come talk to us and talk to the campus. That [work] is all students of color who were like, “We need this for the entire community, for everyone at UD”. And like, eventually that gets exhausting.*

Finally, Anthony, a bi-racial, trans-masculine, pansexual art major took the time to breakdown what the statement to him. Explaining to me the message he read in between the lines:

***Me:** I asked you to give a reaction to this [UD’s Diversity and Inclusion Value statement] and write a few sentences on what you think this means and, what comes to mind. This is what you said: “This sounds like diversity isn’t for me, it’s for the school to look good. It also says to me that they don’t intend on following up with underrepresented students, just inviting them to campus without providing care.” Can you explain your answer?*

***Anthony:** I mean it’s the way it’s worded, it just doesn’t feel right. It’s like, it’s not for that person or for those people, it’s for the university and it’s for other people in the world. It’s like (Anthony puts up quotation marks) “You and your stuff is better for everyone else.” But my question is what is good for me and for us? You know, who are*

*[the people] who this diverse label applies to. Overall, diversity is for white people because being white is the standard and anybody else who isn't white, cis, or straight is considered diverse. It's not for me. And that is, it's not super clear. It's very sneakily implied in there [the value statement], but it is implied and that's how I feel. And that bias is from my personal experience here and I can recognize and respect that, but I don't care because I am here and that means I know really what's up.*

The University of Delaware's Inclusive Action Plan and value statement speak to appease, address, and create diversity at an institutional level. The diverse population, more specifically the queer/trans students of color community, do not feel that these initiatives are for them, even though the University of Delaware states that it has a diverse environment and is making efforts to uphold its value statement. With that being said, if the University of Delaware preaches diversity why does a portion of its diverse population feel this way about their practices? Where does the disconnect between the institution and the student body come from?

Why is there a diversity disparity?

## Chapter 4

### **EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS (A.K.A “It just be like that, I guess.” – Anthony)**

To gain a better understanding of the diversity disparity, there must first be an acknowledgment of the experiences of queer/transgender students of color. In both participant observation and interviews, my peers were willing to share their various stories of their time on campus. As mentioned previously, I refuse to censor both my words and the words my peers as I promised them total transparency and honesty when relaying their stories. With that being said, the following narratives do contain expletives, slurs, and threats of violence against the narrator. The inclusion of these words is meant to further one’s understanding of the realities that QTPOC experience, myself included.

#### **DEON**

It is 2:30p on a Friday. I wait for Deon, my friend and participant, after his final class of the day. Sitting in the windowsill of the stairwell of Gore, I watch as students make their way down the steps, looking out for him. He is not hard to spot, a Black, queer, and trans-masculine individual in a sea of white bodies will always stand out. As we leave Gore Hall, the building bustling with students as they either leave a class or enter a new one, he directs me away from the green telling me that he wishes to take the long way back to the dormitory. We pass by the Amy E. Dupont music

building and other University of Delaware affiliated structures, the environment around us becoming less congested with students as we make our way further into the surrounding neighborhoods. We chat about his classes and I make note of the lower timbre of his voice since we had last talked. His face lights up and as we pass the Biden institute, he excitedly tells me about his “T” anniversary coming up (i.e. the anniversary of being a year on testosterone). We make our way farther off-campus, and Deon points out houses, telling me what it is about their architectural designs that he enjoys and wants his future home to have.

Deon prefers the long route. The time he spends through the neighborhoods off-campus allows him to be in solitude, a small reprieve away from the large student body that often obstructs the calm. For many queer/trans students of color, campus can be an overwhelming place. The environment can become unsafe, especially for someone who looks like Deon. In his interview he listed off select places on campus he felt as such:

**Deon:** *“Places I don’t feel safe? Umm, any frat or sorority party and/or house.*

*Walking down the street, especially when the sun sets. Um, you know how like, when you go to Ivy Hall apartments and from Perkins to Ivy Hall is a long stretch and there’s this giant ass frat house and there’s a park on the side?”*

**Me:** *“Yeah?”*

**Deon:** *“There. What else? Um...and, Bathrooms. I think that’s it.”*

As we walk even further into the residential areas, inhabitants of neighborhoods (i.e. elderly white couples) watch us but Deon seems unfazed. His demeanor is calm, and he is relaxed, obviously not feeling at risk as he does in the environments he had listed beforehand. I question him about this, trying to understand why he feels unsafe at UD. Eventually, he begins to tell me a story of a specific time he felt such danger on campus:

“One time when I was Freshman, I was skateboarding to an event during the early evening, it was still daylight. I was on the bridge that connects North Campus and Ray Street and I had my headphones on sorta. You know like, half-on, half-off so I can still hear people and my surroundings. Anyway, these dudes in like, stereotypical ‘We’re going to a frat party’ wear, were at the end of the bridge. When I got to the end I heard, “Yeah! You better go, you nigger!”, with the hard ‘R’. And I was like “Bruh?” because it was essentially broad day light. And I was skateboarding! The whitest thing I could have been doing? The most assimilating form of transportation! Anyway, I was like, “I don’t feel safe here”. I didn’t even do anything, I wasn’t even close to them. I just passed by them.”

He begins laughing after I asked him how he knew they were talking to him. “Unfortunately, we go to a PWI and because of that I was the only Black person around at the time and like...when you’re the only Black person and someone says the N-word, you kinda just know.” We finally made our way out of the neighborhoods, Deon directing me to his dormitory. Bringing up the story has visibly upset him, and he still makes comments as we approach north campus. “I didn’t even do anything, you know?” He sighs. “All I did was pass them and they call me that?”

Deon’s story is, unfortunately, not unique. While he told me his encounter with a racial slur, I was reminded of my own experiences, specifically a time when I was a Freshman.

### **BENÉT**

Fall semester had just begun and I was still getting acclimated with being a college student. I was living on my own for the first time, trying to make friends, and suffering through my CHEM 103 course, similar to any other first year. Along with all this, however, I also had the privilege of easily getting a job in the Morris Library circulation area. Being a student worker was not difficult, majority of the time I ended up doing my homework for the three hours of my time there, and I looked forward to each of my shifts.

My shift that day was from 6p-9p. Despite the lateness of the work period, the sun was still out, working overtime to make me feel the September heat during my

walk to work. I enjoy the 20-minute walks from North Campus to Morris, using the time to listen to music and enjoy the lull in my busy schedule. I remember the campus was full of students leaving their final classes at the time, and I felt only a slight tinge of jealousy at them being able to go back to their dorms while I was just starting my day again after classes. When I passed by the Mentor's Circle my right earbud gave out, slightly bothering me because they were new. I texted my roommate if she could pick me up from work to buy new ones. I believe if my earbud hadn't given out, I wouldn't have heard what was yelled when I was finally at the bottom of the Morris Library steps.

“NIGGER!”

At first, I was in disbelief. I thought to myself, *No one would call me that. It was probably a joke.* But as I looked around, I realized how out of place I was. I was Black. I was only one of two Black people in the area. So of course, it had to be either one of us. I was unsettled as I looked up at the other Black woman in the vicinity. She had heard it too, her eyes wide with disbelief. Looking down at me, giving me a confused look, her brows furrowed as if to ask, “Do you know who yelled that?” I shook my head and we both continued looking out onto the green, watching as white students walked by. I looked around frantically, trying to pin the voice to a face. Trying to see who yelled at me. Trying to figure out who called me a racial slur. But there were too many students to single out just one, it could have been any one of



them. I wanted to catch my breath, better understand the situation. But I couldn't, I was running late for work.

I still don't know if I was target of the slur but, that day University of Delaware ceased to be my 'safe space'. Instead, I learned to become accustomed to such treatment. Having the ability to brush off these incidents comes with being a QTPOC. You learn to roll with the punches (i.e. random acts of harassment/violence) because you do not have the time to dwell on such issues. One of my participants, De, a genderqueer Afro-Latina, knows this all too well.

### **DE**

In late February I find myself waiting for De outside of Morris Library. At this point, it is early in Spring semester, students are bundled up quickly running into the building for warmth. De arrives five minutes later, apologizing for their lateness and slightly out of breath. We finally enter the library and I direct them to a room I reserved in the lower level. They excitedly sit down but are visibly tired from their class before. Today is the day of our interview and as I set up my equipment, De looks over the consent form, a giggle coming from them.

"This is so official." They joke.

I agree, sitting across from them with my laptop open and ready to go. The interview, like the others, starts off slow, De getting comfortable with the situation and answering my preliminary questions of “How are you?” and “Where are you from?” Regardless of our slow start, rapport between us is built easily, and soon De is apologizing for how much they are talking. I assure them, however, that their talkative nature is anything but a hassle. As the interview progresses, we begin to delve into their campus life. I bring up their survey, and how they rated the phrases pertaining to how they felt at the University of Delaware, specifically the statement “I feel comfortable and/or safe on campus”. In their survey, said statement was ranked as a 2 or “Disagree”.

***Me:** Why did you say you disagree with the statement, “I feel comfortable and/or safe on campus?” Why do you feel that way?*

***De:** I was actually thinking about my queer identity when I answered that. Mostly because, um, I have been like singled out for it and have had some nasty stuff said to me.*

***Me:** Oh, like what? If you don’t mind me prying?*

***De:** Of course not! That’s why I’m here! Um...my sophomore year I was walking to class and I was trying to cross the street and I was like one step from the sidewalk and*

*I accidentally stepped on the back of the guy's shoe cause he wasn't moving fast enough for me to get through between him and the person behind him.*

**Me:** *Okay.*

**De:** *You know, because it gets crowded out there. And so, I accidentally stepped on the back of his shoe and he turned around, he raised his fist at me and went to almost like, like...*

De stops talking and raises their fist in the air choosing to show me the punching motion that the random stranger had threatened them with.

**De:** *He wanted to punch me. But, he didn't. Instead he just, raised his fist and said, "You fucking faggot, get out of my way." Just for accidentally stepping on the back of his shoe. And then, I literally ran.*

They take a moment of silence for themselves, the anecdote obviously upsetting them. After a few seconds, they collect themselves, nodding to let me know they are ready to go on.

**De:** *I've had to run from multiple people. My Freshman year I was out kind of late at night, just walking and I was at that little staircase that kind of connects the Little Bob*

*to Mainstreet. Anyway, I was like, dressed masculine, I had my binder on, and I was wearing like men's clothes, and passing by this group of guys and talking on the phone. Everything seemed fine but, I guess they heard me talking? And, my voice, it just sounds pretty feminine so it's pretty much a dead giveaway that I'm trans...that I'm queer. But, yeah, they heard my voice and then they threw their drinks at me. Most of them were empty, which was good though. I never actually said anything to my friend on the phone about it cause you know, she heard what was happening and she was like, "Are you okay?" And I was like, "I don't want to talk about it. I really just want to get back to my room."*

Deon, mine, and De's experiences, while separate from each other, share a specific commonality. All of these events bring insight into an important factor that affects the experiences of the QTPOC community: hypervisibility. As stated beforehand, the normative culture of the University of Delaware is white, heterosexual, and cisgender. Being a QTPOC at a predominately white and traditionally heterogendered institution means that I, and others in my community are noticeably different, i.e. we stand out. Stand out because of our racialization. Stand out because our queerness. Stand out because of our separation from the majority (i.e. the white, cisgender, heterosexual population). Thus, when in public we have the predisposition of being vulnerable to harassment because we cannot blend in. However, our identities can also force us to experience the opposite effect: invisibility.

## ANTHONY

For his interview with me, Anthony chooses to spend the hour and a half in my dormitory. It is February, the beginning of the Spring semester, when he takes his seat across from me at my desk and he already has an air of stress surrounding him. He shrugs and says, “I’m so tired” when I ask him how he’s been, a languid smile gracing his lips. I nod in validation and say, “Mood.” Anthony is a longtime friend of mine, having known him from my Sophomore year in college. I already know he identifies as trans-masculine, biracial, and is a local first gen student, and thus, the beginning of his interview is less about building rapport. Out of formality I ask him about himself, and he relays to me the information I am already aware. It is not until I ask him about his thoughts on being a diverse body at the University of Delaware that our conversation breaches new, more intimate information:

*Anthony: Just ...it's not welcoming. Um, I feel ostracized. I have to actually like leave a building to go find a bathroom that I'll be safe there. Like run across the fucking green to do that in the middle of class. And that takes up my time. That's pretty hostile. And that's just an example. It's all so hostile. Like, just the general feeling of unwelcome not being, there's no way I feel like to be at home at UD if you're a person of color or queer, trans, um, all of the above and poor, it's not welcoming.*

*Me: Okay, so you don't like the environment that you're in. But can I ask you what*

*does it feel like or what do you experience as a diverse body in this campus? Like how do you feel? Only if you want to talk about it.*

**Anthony:** *Um, I dunno if it's regular? But, for me, (Anthony points to himself) where I come from. You have respect. You say thank you. You say, excuse me. If somebody makes eye contact with you, or you at least acknowledge somebody's presence and if you need to, you move out of the fucking way. If you're walking in the middle of a sidewalk and all of those things, I'm like, "I know you see me cause I'm a big bitch and I know you hear me because I'm a loud bitch." So, I'm like, you're purposefully trying to ignore that I exist.*

**Me:** *Okay.*

**Anthony:** *I feel like that is an unconscious method of trying to show me out, push me away. And it's so common. It's like so underneath that people don't even realize they're doing it, but it's just so hostile here ... There are a lot of micro aggressions and like sneaky underlying things that people will say about me, to me, or like to other people about me, or just the way that they act when I'm there, they'll like cut me out. Like, that's why I really hate doing group work or anything that's like turning to a partner because I get turned away from. (Anthony claps his hand after each word for*

emphasis) *Every. Single. Time. And it happened twice today and I'm getting really upset because that is upsetting.*

**Me:** *Do you want to take a break?*

**Anthony:** *No, it's fine. I'm just thinking about today how it happened twice and I'm like, I just get backs turned to me and like the hand goes up and you know, the blind gets pulled down and people are very quick to cling to the people who are like them. And I understand that because I am marginalized, but it's not marginalized people who are doing it, its white people.*

The lack of acknowledgment of their existence is a common theme between my participants, specifically Jaide who confides in me a story in which their identity becomes completely erased by another.

### **JAIDE**

Jaide and I meet in their dormitory in late January. A snowstorm is brewing outside as they let me into their room, a weather phenomenon they warn me about in case I need to leave early. They are dressed in comfortable clothing, cartoons playing on their television screen, and their curls tied up in a messy bun. As I sit down in a chair, they apologize for the mess, quickly moving things around. I hand them a consent form for their interview, and they sit down on the couch next to me, reading

over it as I take out my equipment. They sign quickly, eager to get the interview started.

“Is it weird that I’m kind of excited?” They ask me, hands folded across their legs, prepared for the first question. I laugh, appreciating their excitement for my project and soon I start recording. Unlike my other participants, Jaide does not take long to warm up to answering my questions. Through my preliminary questions, I find out that they are first generation student who came to the University of Delaware for the in-state tuition, similar to the rest of my volunteers. “It’s all about that funding.” They joke once more, and I laugh, agreeing with the sentiment. The conversation quickly turns to their identity. Jaide prefers the gender identity non-binary and the term queer for the sexuality as they view these words as all-encompassing of their identities. Their body is visibly relaxed during this portion of the interview, Jaide has uncrossed their legs and is now sitting back in their couch, a comfortable position of rest. Their body language is reminiscent of their survey where they ranked the statements “I am comfortable with my sexual identity” and “I am comfortable with my gender identity” as 5s (“Strongly Agree”). However, when I ask if they have ever had a time when their identities were not recognized, they tense up. We sit in silence for a few seconds, and Jaide repositions themselves on the couch, legs tucked underneath their body before speaking.



***Jaide:*** Um, yeah. One specific time that like is burned in the back of my brain is when I asked the professor to call me by my preferred name and use my preferred pronouns. And she said “No, your mother named you something for a reason and I'm going to call you by that name.” And I was like, yikes. I need to immediately remove myself.

***Jaide:*** I was like, okay. I know my birth name is something that's really beautiful and meaningful and like everyone was like, wow, it's so unique and like, I know, but like, don't, don't call me that please.

***Me:*** May I ask what type of class it was?

***Jaide:*** It was an HDFS class. Humans development and Families Sciences. So, that's even worse.

***Me:*** So, when that happened and I'm sorry to sound like a therapist, but how did you feel? Like, what went through your head when that happened?

***Jaide:*** I... I felt disrespected. I didn't know how to feel. I wish I could say I didn't feel safe, but it was...it was not a matter of my safety because she just didn't care.

The lack of respect for Jaide's identity is not an isolated event. In fact, many QTPOC have parts of themselves overlooked by the majority. Whether it be their race,

sexuality, or gender, the people of my community struggle with all facets of themselves being acknowledged when on campus. While not as direct, a similar event bout of erasure happened to Blake.

### **BLAKE**

Blake hugged me when I met up with her inside of Trabant. She had just finished a shift in the office of her RSO at Perkins and had agreed to get lunch with me as part of her participant observation. The two of us make our way to a kiosk, placing our backpacks down, and sitting down next to each other. We catch each other up to speed on our lives at the moment, surmounting to the agreement that we're both tired and ready to graduate already. Our chat is amicable, Blake telling me about their classes and office shift. It's obvious she's popular and heavily involved in campus life, stopping mid-sentence every so often to point out a friend she knows or to wave 'Hi' to a passing acquaintance. All people of color, majority of them being Black. I jokingly imply that she knows everyone on campus when once more a person stops by our table to say hello to her. She shrugs, giving me cheeky look when they leave. Their popularity, however, is understandable. Blake has been a key component of numerous clubs on campus, even going so far as being involved with diversity work and committees. Blake is visibly comfortable with me. Relaxed, leaning back in the chair as she munches on waffle fries from Chick-fil-a. *My* waffle fries from Chick-fil-a. I side-eye her as she reaches for another, letting it go and taking one from the pile as well. Once more people come up to our kiosk, two Black students, to chat with Blake.

When they leave, she begins slightly jumping in her chair, her demeanor becoming bubbly.

“What’s up?” I ask her, wondering what has gotten her so excited.

“I’m just happy to see so many queer Black people? Like, I got to see you and all my other friends, and like, just seeing a lot of QTPOC is nice! In classrooms and the dorm, I’m like usually the only person of color. And then in Black spaces, I’m usually the only queer person. So, today was a nice change!” She explains. I nod to show I understand and that I found her reasoning relatable. By now, Trabant is becoming less crowded, lunch time having passed by and students leaving to go to their late afternoon classes. The loud chatter has died down and Blake and I can now speak to each other without having to yell over others. I take this opportunity to delve deeper into their past comment.

“So, what’s that like? Being the only Black person or the only queer person?” I ask.

“Um, it can be hard ...” she begins. “This one time, while I was with my RSO, we were playing games and then all of a sudden somehow the KKK came up and like everyone started...like making jokes? I was the only Black person in the room, everyone else was white. Like, someone made a joke about it and then everyone was laughing. And it was like probably one of the most uncomfortable things... I don't think people recognize that I was the only Black person in the room and that I have a

bad history, obviously, with the KKK. They probably...they were just thinking about themselves, not really thinking about the identities that I have and how problematic that joke could be.”

## ANALYSIS OF BEING BOTH HYPERVISIBLE & INVISIBLE

### CONSTRUCTION OF WHITENESS

To address why and how hypervisibility and invisibility occurs for QTPOC, one must understand the specific conditions that create these experiences. Race, gender, and sexuality are social constructions. As Berger and Luckmann argue in *The Social Construction of Reality*, “Reality is socially defined. But the definitions are always embodied, that is, concrete individuals and groups of individuals serve as definers of reality” (Berger and Luckmann 1966, pg. 134). The ‘definers of reality’ are those who maintain the most control in a society, those who are able to dictate the what realities should be embodied based on the “historical products of human activity” (Ibid.) Within the United States, the ‘definers of reality’ are white, cisgender, heterosexuals, their ‘historical products of human activity’ being America’s colonial history. The contemporary social constructions implemented in United States society today find their foundation in the formation of racialization in the past. Said formation is best understood through Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration. Structuration is best understood as the creation and reproduction of social systems based on the synthesis of structure (rules and resources) and effects of agents (groups or

individuals), i.e. “the duality of structure” (Giddens 1984). Structures exist both internally, in the memory traces of the agents, and externally, through the social actions of the agents, which are based on their memory traces.

Structuration is developed through Giddens’ three structural dimensions of social systems: significance (symbolic orders), domination (resource authorization and allocation), and legitimation (normative regulation) (Guess 2006, pg. 663). Teresa J. Guess employs these theories in her text *The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence*.

“The history of the structuration of America’s racialized society began first with the growing signification (interpretive rules) of whiteness. Interpretive rules or ‘race norms’ informed social interaction in American colonial society. The second stage of this process is observed in the domination (control over allocative and authoritative resources) of the social system of “racialization” by white actors. Domination over the life chances of non-whites was accomplished through the economic disadvantage associated with slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow and continuing forms of discrimination based on “race.” The last dimension of the structuration of American race relations refers to the legitimation (normative rules) of white-skin privilege. African-descended Americans learned the normative rules of ‘racial etiquette,’ which dominated social interactions between blacks and whites for most of America’s history as a nation.” (Guess 2002, pg. 663)

The creation of racialization combined with both the domination of ‘white actors’ and the legitimation of racism against people of color are the components that create the concept of whiteness. Whiteness then, in turn, becomes normalized and embedded within society through institutions, such as slavery or Jim Crow laws, that perpetuate strategic mistreatment of people of color.

## **HYPERVISIBILITY + INVISIBILITY ...**

Hypervisibility and invisibility depend on the normative culture of whiteness. Whiteness is situated as being the standard and to inhabit whiteness is to not have, nor need, consciousness of said identity. For example, “White writers” do not exist, they are simply, writers. However, writers of color are identified through their racialization (“Black writer”, “Native American writer”) because they are not the norm, not the standard (Reddy 1998). While the term ‘whiteness’ implies a focus on racialization, many scholars believe that there is direct association of ‘whiteness’ with heterosexuality. To quote Richard Dryer from his essay *The Matter of Whiteness*, “Whiteness generally colonises the stereotypical definition of all social categories other than those of race. To be normal, even to be normally deviant (queer, crippled), is to be white.” Any identity that is set as a standard in our society (e.g. cisgender or heterosexuality) is associated with whiteness, and in turn, becomes the norm.

With this normalization, whiteness soon becomes invisible to those inhabiting it. In *Invisibility/Hypervisibility: The Paradox of Normative Whiteness*, Maureen T. Reddy explains that “whiteness and heterosexuality seem invisible, transparent, to those who are white and/or heterosexual; they are simply the norms.” (Reddy 1998, pg. 55). With whiteness being the norm and being ‘invisible’ to those inhabiting it, it forces those who do not align with whiteness to experience the consequences of deviating from the standard. The consequences of being both hypervisible and invisible. Since our identities are not the ‘standard’ and we cannot, in anyway, blend in nor align with whiteness, we have to bear the burden of this lack of conformity being too obvious. Thus, in situations of hypervisibility, where my participants and I have been harassed with identity specific slurs, it is not technically our person being attacked. Instead it is our identities. However, during instances of invisibility, such as

Jaide's professor refusing to use their preferred name or Blake's peers forgetting their Blackness, it is the case of whiteness being so pervasive, so normalized, that those who perform whiteness do not have to acknowledge anything outside of its parameters.

**...= DEHUMANIZATION:**

Invisibility and hypervisibility, however, are not mutually exclusive. While the anecdotes my participants relayed to me do imply as such, more often than not, these two concepts coincide. As hypervisibility forces QTPOC to feel vulnerable in the culture of 'whiteness', invisibility denies them the respect and acknowledgement of their existence from their peers. The two work together, making QTPOC feel isolated from the rest of the student population and thus, making them feel like they do not belong on campus:

"It makes me feel so shitty. And like being a senior, I know my college experience would have been so different if I would've gone to a different school that actually recognized the struggles of being marginalized identities. But I feel like our school doesn't. I have to think about that every day, the fact that I don't relate to any of these people. It definitely brings down my mood every day." (interview Blake, March 7, 2019).

"There's a level of ignorance from my classmates about people different from them. I definitely do not feel at home, I feel much more isolated ... I'm just not recognized for anything, for any of my identities but, at the same time, I am." (interview Anna, February 16, 2019).

"People stare at you and it just makes me... I just feel so displaced, just so uncomfortable." (interview Alicia, February 6, 2019).

Not having a sense of belonging on campus easily transfers over to how students perceive themselves on campus. Since QTPOC don't feel as though they belong, then they do not perceive themselves as part of the campus community. They do not feel as though they are 'people' and that they have to put in extra effort for the recognition of humanity.

"I feel like everybody is staring at me, but nobody cares to acknowledge that I really am a person. Like, I'm hyper-visible and invisible at the same exact time. We are not seen as equals to others. I'm everything except that ... a person." (interview Anthony, January 25, 2019).

"College was to be like your 'fun years', a place where you explore, where you find yourself and all that. Not a place where you're supposed to be fighting for your life every day. It's been so exhausting going to school here. I've been fighting every semester and it's just so tiring." (interview Jaide, January 30, 2019).

The community as whole is dehumanized on campus. However, if QTPOC don't feel as though they are people, don't feel human, then what are we?



## Chapter 5

### **Symbolic Capital**

As I have noted, the University of Delaware cares about diversity. This is obvious through its Inclusive Excellence Action Plan. Along with this, in 2017, the University of Delaware was presented the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity* magazine. A national honor, the award was created to recognize and celebrate academic institutions that “demonstrate an outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion” and was awarded to 79 other universities and colleges (Hall 2017). The criteria for consideration include the following:

- New staff positions, rich programming, scholarships and community-based partnerships focused on attracting underrepresented and first-generation undergraduate and graduate students and ensuring their success and persistence to graduation;
- New resources dedicated to the recruitment, retention and advancement of a diverse faculty;
- Trainings, courses and mentoring programs to bolster hiring and retention of underrepresented employees and encourage respect for and appreciation of individual differences; and
- Mechanisms for ensuring continued diversity planning and accountability

As Lenore Pearlstein, publisher of *INSIGHT Into Diversity*, explains, “The HEED Award process consists of a comprehensive and rigorous application that includes questions relating to the recruitment and retention of students and employees — and

best practices for both — continued leadership support for diversity, and other aspects of campus diversity and inclusion,” (Hall 2017). Despite being a PWI and a THI, the University of Delaware’s diversity initiatives and its commitment to the pursuit of diversity is commemorated and recognized even outside the institution. But, if the diversity is award worthy, why does the QTPOC community feel like they aren’t a part of the student body? Why doesn’t the community feel like they are people, what can we be considered on campus?

## **DIVERSITY AS MERIT**

Diversity in institutions has become commodified. Pushkala Prasad and Albert J. Mills’s *Managing the Organizational Melting Pot: Dilemmas of Workplace Diversity* critiques that diversity within organizations is a form of showcase “a setting that facilitates the most advantageous arrangement and display of certain objects” (Prasad and Mills 1997, pg. 8). Sara Ahmed, in her book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, outlining that the practice of diversity is also a showcase, becoming a performance indicator (Ahmed 2012). Thus, universities will aim for excellence in diversity because it acts as a way to measure how well the institution is doing.

“Diversity becomes what the university does *because* they care about excellence; as a world-class institution, it can afford not to care what people look like. Diversity can even take the form of an indifference to difference. Not as well how the language of diversity is exercised as the language of merit” (Ahmed 2012, pg.109).

If this is the case, I argue that diversity becomes exclusively about the ‘merit’ it can bring to the university. Diversity becomes a badge of honor and is, essentially, symbolic capital for the university.

One of the forms of capital from Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, symbolic capital is often referred to as the resources available on the basis honor or recognition. Defined as “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (Bourdieu 1989, pg. 17). Symbolic capital is the legitimated form of the other capitals and thus, any capital has the ability to go through a conversion to be “recognized as legitimate “currency” or assets” (Lawler 2011). For symbolic capital to work, however, there must be recognition of value within the asset. For example, educational credentials are symbolic capital because they represent legitimate prestige and are recognized as such:

A credential such as a school diploma is a piece of universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital, good on all markets. As an official definition of an official identity, it frees its holder from the symbolic struggle of all against all by imposing the universally approved perspective. (Bourdieu 1989, pg. 21-22)

Capital in the form of honor or prestige are furthermore constituted as scarce and thus, the pursuit of symbolic capital is about the privilege of the ‘natural’. Symbolic capital “disguises its own status as capital” (Lawler 2011). Through this disguise, it takes on the appearance of ‘natural status’. Instead of acknowledging the work put in to acquire honor or prestige, the bearer of symbolic capital is seen as acquiring it from their innate character (Lawler 2011).

Diversity can be constituted as symbolic capital due to the fact that universities and colleges have the chance to be commemorated for having a diverse institution. While diversity is impactful for colleges and is shown to have positive influences on the student body and their scholarship, its affect increases the credibility of the university. By obtaining the HEED award and focusing on excellence, the University of Delaware's diversity becomes simply an element of the university that increases its prestige as an academic institution. Diversity becomes a badge of honor. On that account, if diversity is symbolic capital, then I must come back to my question: What QTPOC are considered on campus?

### **QTPOC AS RESOURCES**

**(A.K.A: "Your overall function while being here is just to "be that person that's not like the white people" – Anthony)**

Even though symbolic capital is disguised as a "natural status" (Lawler 2011), there still needs to be resources put in place for one to obtain said status. For instance, while a diploma or other educational credentials are considered symbolic capital because of the legitimate prestige it holds (Ibid.), for a person to obtain the degree, they had to put in the work (i.e. resources). Thus, for a university to obtain the symbolic capital of diversity, there must be resources put in place to create the diversity. With that being said, at the University of Delaware, the QTPOC community is just that, a resource. A way for the university to increase its excellence in diversity and thus, acquire the honor that comes with being named a 'diverse institution'. I came to this conclusion through the interview of my participants. When asked what diversity was at the University of Delaware to them, my peers relayed to me that, for

them, it was 'superficial'. They felt that their existence on campus was just to make the university 'look good'.

"It's just, the acceptance of you being here is enough diversity for them. Okay. Like, you just being here is like "See we've accepted them!" but like they don't really accept you, they just kind of like admit you and then throw you to the wolves. And then when they need us, they put us to the front of pictures and say "Look! look at our diversity. These are our diversities." You know? It feels forced. It is forced. It's like you're, you're given this opportunity to be in the forefront and you're like "Wow, they really do care about me". But it's really only to use you to make them look better" (interview, Jaide, January 30, 2019).

"Someone asked if I would be willing to be in this video, a diversity video, because I'm brown and queer and because, you know, I'm just, "not normal". And I was like, "Oh God, no." It makes me uncomfortable. "You know, you're picked out when we're needed. But then you're put to the side." (interview, De, February 22, 2019).

As Anna relayed to me in her interview, this type of diversity is for outsiders of the university, to show people that the institution is 'diverse':

**Anna:** I mean, it's just like pandering. It's kind of just like, oh, "we're diverse and we represent like diversity and we're all those good things." And then it's just, it's just no. It feels very superficial and very like, we're just saying this because it's on brand.

**Me:** On brand? Like what do you mean by on brand?

**Anna:** Well that's what colleges go for. You want to have this sort of perceived, um, diversity. No one likes to be told "You're very white centric." We have these statements and it's just performative. It's kind of just saying it to get that social quota of, "Oh look, we're good. And we did enough" But, really did you?

Majority of my participants, along with being students, are also involved with identity-specific RSOs and committees on campus that thrive to cultivate an environment on campus. A common theme for all of them was their self-awareness to how much effort and work they put into the university to create a space for themselves. Create a space where they can finally feel the sense of belonging lost to them. However, while they put in this effort, they are also tasked with being educators on campus. Being the ones to go out of their way to make the majority population understand their identities and acknowledge their existence on campus.

"I'm teaching my experience. Like for a lot of people I'm probably like the first trans masculine person that they've ever really come in contact with or like the first poor person they ever come in contact with. So, it's me kind of having to be like "Hey, you can't call people slurs!" Or "No when you touch my hair because it's curly. That's a microaggression." I've been teaching people that having these identities; being black, being queer, being trans, it's not other worldly. I'm just a regular person who's living their lives who just so happens to identify this way and just because I do does not make me any different from any other person." (interview, Deon, February 1, 2019).

"Essentially, diversity means we're there for white students to get an educational experience while still getting to be the dominate group. I feel like we are here for a good college experience for the white population of students, but I don't think anybody's actually ever getting it." (interview, Alicia, February 6, 2019).

“Sure, you're here and you're getting an education, but your overall function while being here is just to "be that person that's not like the white people" so that they can see another person that's not like them so that they can go out in the world and say like "I'm cultured". For their success. Not for my own.” (interview, Anthony, January 25, 2019).

Blake’s interview gave me insight into the work she must do with her RSO and how taxing that can be on her and other QTPOC students:

**Blake:** *“It feels like a burden but it's like rewarding in the end. But then it's also really tiring that we have to create these spaces for ourselves over and over again and then like we're relied on to like help educate people as well. Um, when they should be educating themselves and we should be given resources instead of having to like give ourselves to other people.”*

**Me:** *“What do you mean, ‘give ourselves to other people’”*

**Blake:** *“When they're trying to educate people on our campus about diversity, it's on the backs of people of color, queer people...us. Like we're the ones having to give ourselves and let people in and share our experiences and be vulnerable with them. Just in order for them to learn something when honestly, um, like Google?”*

For my participants and I, the bulk of diversity work is put on us. For us to experience a sense of belonging, and feel comfortable on campus, we must first work to make the rest of campus understand us. Work against hypervisibility and invisibility to teach

them about ourselves. Through panels, workshops, events, classroom presentations, QTPOC are on frontlines of promoting diversity. We are the firsthand educative experience the majority of the student population gets when diversity is involved. The University of Delaware's resource in its pursuit of becoming excellent in diversity.

**Chapter 6**  
**A NEW KIND OF BURNOUT**  
**(A.K.A.: "The burnout's real, it's a lot" -Blake)**

Being a QTPOC is difficult, especially while in college. Dealing with being both hypervisible and invisible while also having to be resources for our university to be diverse is taxing. These experiences create a distinct college experience for us, a specific form of 'burnout'. The concept of a burnout is defined by American Psychological Association as "physical, emotional, or mental exhaustion accompanied by decreased motivation, lowered performance, and negative attitudes toward oneself and others". (American Psychological Association 2015). Such a condition can easily happen for college students if they do not manage their time and become overworked by the amount of stress that college can produce. The condition of a college burnout manifests over months, even years, and is caused mainly by assignment overload (Cushman and West 2006). A burnout can easily be



managed before it takes hold of a student through sleeping, acknowledging one's work limitations, taking breaks in between workloads, and asking peers/faculty for help (Cushman and West 2006). However, for QTPOC it is not that simple.

When tasked with not only having to deal with college work but also, harassment on campus for one's identities, *and* being a resource to teach the majority about diversity, QTPOC end up feeling overrun, overworked, and overwhelmed. Along with this, many of my participants face financial struggles and thus, must work part time jobs to keep themselves on campus. While these feelings can be addressed and managed, as stated beforehand, for QTPOC, however, that is not the case. The work being done by our community is important to us, despite how taxing. Even though we lack a sense of belonging on campus, we aim to better it for future QTPOC being admitted to the University of Delaware and thus, we continue to do work. Not because we want to but, because we have to. We continue this work because we are a resilient community. Despite the harassment, the lack of acknowledgement, and the burnout, we focus on creating an environment for ourselves to thrive in:

“I think people just don't want to try anymore. I think people are tired. People are tired of trying so hard and people are tired of getting yelled at and people are tired of just everything. And I think people are instead of engaging or disengaging in are like, get me out of this. I'm not, I don't want to be a part of anything anymore due to harassment by everyone.” (interview, Jaide, January 30, 2019).

“Having to do all of that work. Then getting nowhere with administration not listening to us. And then on top of that, having to give ourselves to people, helping educate them on top of all the struggles that we were already going through because we're marginalized, and we have all of those identities and then having to worry about school. It's definitely...I've definitely...it makes me feel defeated and being a senior, I have been involved in trying to like actively to talk to administration and get these resources that we're asking for but now I'm just like, “They're not going to listen.” We tried really hard in the past and after a while you just become defeated. Like, you don't want to keep going because they're not going to listen to you anyway. But then you still have to deal with shit every single day because of it, so you have to keep going. So, I feel pretty defeated. The burnout's real, it's a lot.” (interview, Blake, March 7, 2019).

“College is hard, and so are the expectations. Then a lot of us are poor, and First Gen. So, there's a lot of pressure to do well and to do better than...to do twice as good as the people around you. Then there's the blatant hatred and violence that is on campus and that people like me experience every day and have to emotionally process and keep going. Like, we have to be like, “Okay, I'm going to put that away and cry in my dorm room later, but I have class in five minutes so I have to go” because I feel that extra push, like a weight on my shoulders to do that and then to also do that for everybody else. It's like a lot of it is not just for me, it's for others. But I don't want to come here to enrich the university. I want to come here to enrich me and my life and myself and I.” (interview, Anthony, January 25, 2019).

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE**

At this point in my thesis, I aim to bring insight into how to remedy this situation, i.e. the fact that QTPOC are burnt out and are not able to manage these conditions. However, my community already knows what they need, and have already narrowed down their numerous suggestions to four main objectives: 1. Get past diversity and focus more on inclusion. The University of Delaware already has a

diverse environment, thus, the institution should focus more on creating an environment conducive with QTPOC and other minoritized students, so that they can also feel a sense of belonging on campus, 2. Educate the majority population. As stated before, QTPOC work hard to help the student body understand and recognize the daily struggles of the community, however, that is taxing on them as they are still students. Many of my participants suggest that, similar to the mandatory alcohol abuse and sexual harassment modules for first year students there should be one about race, gender, and sexuality. Along with teaching students how to safely drink and be cautious of sexual predators, the university should make it a priority in teaching them how to be respectful and mindful of identities that are outside the majority population, 3. Support from administration. The QTPOC community on campus are still students. Even though they go above and beyond with their school work and campus involvement, there is only so much power they can wield on campus. Thus, if real change is ever going to manifest on campus, we need the support of the administration, people with power, to make our campus experience one that does not force us to experience a burnout. And finally, 4) Money. All of my participants addressed that their financial situation is less than adequate and that in between going to class and being a part of committees and RSOs, they work part-time jobs. They need money to support themselves on campus, to make sure they can afford to keep taking classes, ensure that they have a place to live for the year, to ultimately graduate. However, conducting diversity work takes up a great amount of time for them, many

lose out on shifts because they need to be on panels or facilitate workshops to teach the rest of the student body about their identities. As Deon stated:

“Do you know how frustrating it is for every year to be like, yeah, I'm on the board for two groups. I'm also an intern. Also, I work part time and I'm a part of this group that helps underrepresented students and then for them to still turn around and be like, “Yeah, you can't go to school”? Every year. Every semester. That's frustrating as ever that makes me not want to do anything because of the fact that they're like, “We don't know if we're going to let you in the next year.” That's bull, I do too much for this place. I've been working for this university since day one.” (interview, Deon, February 1, 2019).

By paying these students for the diversity work they do around campus, the University of Delaware is allowing for them to have the chance to stay on campus, the chance to be recognized for all their effort and hard work that they put in to creating the diverse environment that our institution cares so much about.

## **CONCLUSION**

At this point for me, the University of Delaware is no longer my safe space. No longer my comfort zone. Now that I am a senior, soon to be graduating, I realize I had disillusioned myself about the campus, saw the institution through the eyes of a visitor. However, now that I am older, have first-hand experience of the campus life and how they treat people like me, I understand that I am still just that, a visitor. Even though I have found my place at the University of Delaware with other QTPOC, I still

do not feel completely a part of the institution. When I see people donned in blue and gold today, stating proudly that they are “Blue Hens”, I feel no connection. Instead I just feel the burnout. I am tired, like all of my participants, and ready to move on from this chapter of my life. And yet, I cannot. I must still do work to create diversity, to ensure that future generations of QTPOC will know that despite not feeling a connection their university, there will always be a space on campus where they do not feel like a visitor, where they feel like they belong because diversity is important, this much is true. But, when diversity becomes the burden of the diverse population, it loses its significance. The University of Delaware has done a quality job in its diversity efforts. However, there is more to be done. As Anthony understands it, diversity is like a meal. Each component of diversity initiatives and policies is to feed people and thus, each component should be rich with nutrients. However, in regard to the University of Delaware’s diversity he says, “if that's your meat and potatoes, we're going to starve bitch” (interview, Anthony, January 25, 2019).



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**‘DIVERSITY DISPARITY’ INTEREST FORM**

**'Diversity Disparity' Interest Form**

**Survey Flow**

**Standard: SURVEY INSTRUCTION (1 Question)**

**Standard: Reasoning Block (1 Question)**

**Standard: Student Recruitment Block (11 Questions)**

**Standard: Block 3 (1 Question)**

Page  
Break

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## Start of Block: SURVEY INSTRUCTION

Q21

Hello and thank you for expressing interest in this study!

About me and this study:

My name is Benét Burton. I am a queer African-American undergraduate anthropology senior. I am seeking participants for my senior thesis on how Queer/Trans Students of Color perceive diversity on the University of Delaware's campus. If you are a UD student, identify as a person of color, and are a part of the LGBTQ+ community, then I am interested in interviewing you!

The purpose of this form is to collect preliminary information about you. I will use the information you and others provide to select participants for this study.

If selected: If you are selected to participate, then I will schedule with you 1) two interview sessions that last approximately 60-90 minutes each and 2) ask if I will be able to shadow and observe your everyday student life during times you deem acceptable. Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed and I will share with you full and summarized transcripts of our conversations. For the observations, it would only happen if you consent to my observing you.

If not selected: If you are not selected, then I will immediately remove any information you have provided on the interest form.

Informed consent: This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Delaware. Your completion of this form and participation of this study are completely voluntary. If you are selected for the study and agree, then you will receive a printed copy of a consent form to sign. The information you enter on this form and share in interviews will not connect to your actual name or other identifying

information. A pseudonym will be created, and I will keep all information strictly confidential.

For any questions or clarifications on this form or on any aspect of this study, please don't hesitate to contact me at [benetlb@udel.edu](mailto:benetlb@udel.edu)

Thank you!

Benét Burton

End of Block: SURVEY INSTRUCTION

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Start of Block: Reasoning Block

Q22

Why am I doing this?

For years, academic institutions have focused on the advancement of the majority (white, cis, straight, etc.). However recently there has been an increase in the admissions of marginalized demographics into higher education. Incorporating diversity into an academic setting has proven to be beneficial to the student population. However, most studies don't focus on how diversity initiatives affect 'diverse population' and their student life.

Which is where my research comes in.

I want to be able to give marginalized students, specifically Queer/Trans students of color, the chance to tell their stories about being on campus. Visibility and recognition of QTPOC experiences in academia are important. Not only does it foster encouragement to succeed in these spaces but, it allows others to acknowledge the need for change in higher education. With this study, I hope to give you the chance to let the voices of QTPOC be heard.

End of Block: Reasoning Block

---

Start of Block: Student Recruitment Block

Q1 Please enter your first name and last name in the form below.

☐ First Name: (1)

---

☐ Last Name: (2)

---

Q25 Please enter the pseudonym you wish to use for the project in the form below.

---

Q9 Please enter your email address in the form below.

☐ Email Address: (1)

---

Q3 Age:

---

Q2 Gender Identity:

---

Q18 Sexuality:

---

Q19 Pronouns:

---

Q5 Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:

☐

White (1)

☐

Black or African American (2)

☐

American Indian or Alaska Native (3)

☐

Asian (4)

☐

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)

☐

Other (specify) (6)

---



Q20 Year in School:

- ☐ Freshman (First Year) (1)
  - ☐ Sophomore (Second Year) (2)
  - ☐ Junior (Third Year) (3)
  - ☐ Senior (Fourth Year) (4)
  - ☐ Fifth Year and Above (5)
- 

Q7 Academic Major:

☐ Major (1)

---

☐ Minor (2)

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Q11 Please leave any additional information that you would like us to know in the space provided below.

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End of Block: Student Recruitment Block

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Start of Block: Block 3

Q23 Thank you for completing this survey!

If you have any questions feel free to contact me at either  
benetlb@udel.edu or (302) 588-8866.

End of Block: Block 3

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## PARTICIPANT INTAKE FORM

# Participant Intake Form

## Survey Flow

Block: Default Question Block (8 Questions)

Standard: Block 1 (0 Questions)

Page Break

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q8 Hello!

If you are receiving this survey form then you have been selected to be a participant in my research project, thank you so much for applying! This survey form is for me to collect additional information about you as a participant. Please have this completed and submitted before your interview session. For any questions or clarifications on this form or on any aspect of this study, please don't hesitate to contact me at benetlb@udel.edu Thank you!

Benét

Page Break

Q1 Please enter your first name and last name in the form below.

---

Q2 Please enter your pseudonym in the form below.

---

---

Q4 Education levels of parent(s)/guardian(s)

---

---

Q4 Where in this current academic year will you be living?

☐ On Campus (1)

☐ Off Campus (2)

---

Q5 On a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale, please answer the following:

---

Strongly  
Disagree  
(1)

Disagree  
(2)

Undecided  
(3)

Agree (4)

Strongly  
Agree (5)

I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic and/or racial group (1)

☐☐☐☐☐

I am comfortable with my sexual identity (2)

☐☐☐☐☐

I am comfortable with my gender identity (3)

☐☐☐☐☐

I understand what my sexual, gender, race and/or identities mean to me (4)

☐☐☐☐☐

I feel a strong attachment to my identities (5)

☐☐☐☐☐

I have often done things that will help me understand my identities better (6)

☐☐☐☐☐

---

Q6 On a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale, please answer the following:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Undecided (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I feel comfortable and/or safe on campus (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have an enjoyable campus experience (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a group and/or organization of people like me on campus (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel represented on campus (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel the campus caters to the needs of my identities (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 The University of Delaware has a set of value statements that can be found in numerous organizations on campus. The Diversity and Inclusion value statement is as follows: **“We welcome and value different backgrounds, perspectives, and learning experiences; this is essential for educating global citizens, developing knowledge and advancing and enhancing our world.”** What comes to mind for you when you read this? Please provide a brief reaction to this statement (1-4 sentences):

---

End of Block: Default Question Block

---

Start of Block: Block 1

---



## INTERVIEW GUIDE

### Interview Guide

Date of Interview:

Location:

Name of Participant:

Research Questions:

1. How do minoritized students perceive diversity on campus?
  2. What are minoritized students' perception of institutionalized efforts of diversity?
- 

### Interview Questions

- Tell me a little about yourself and why you're interest in this study.
  - Prompts:
    - Where are you from?
    - How did you come to choose the University of Delaware for college?
    - How would you describe yourself?
    - How would other people describe you?
- How would you identify yourself?
  - Prompts:
    - Race
    - Gender
    - Sexuality
- Which of your identities is most important to you?
- How do your identities work together?
- Tell me about a time you've been recognized for your multiple identities.
- Tell me about a time when you've not been recognized for your multiple identities.
- Do you see yourself reflected on campus?
  - Prompts:
    - Where on campus do you feel your identities affirmed?

- Where on campus do you feel the opposite?
- How would you describe the University of Delaware?
- What does diversity mean to you?
  - Prompts:
    - How do you define diversity?
      - What do you think diversity is (a verb, noun, adjective, etc.)?
- What is diversity at the University of Delaware for you?
  - Prompts:
    - Explain your reaction statement to the UD Diversity and Inclusion Value statement to me
    - Describe the diversity you've seen on campus?
- What have you done in the past to understand diversity on campus?
- How can the university be more welcoming to QTPOC?
- What have you experienced, as a QTPOC, in terms of diversity on campus?
- At this point time, would you have chosen UD if you had the chance (with financial stability, travel expenses, etc.)?