Diversity Statement

"The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image. If in loving them we do not love what they are, but only their potential likeness to ourselves, then we do not love them: we only love the reflection of ourselves we find in them."

— Thomas Merton, No Man Is an Island

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). These words always spark excitement and curiosity in my mind. I recall so many contradictions in ways of existence and being – those that are labeled traditional or nontraditional, normative or deviant, acceptable or unacceptable. These systematic social constructions created by those in power in my immediate and more extended social contexts tailored my limited worldviews on a range of phenomena, including my perspectives on diversity, my self-concept, and other resultant social identities. Yet, in retrospect, as detrimental as these experiences may have seemed to be at the time, they were all necessary for me to now be what I am and have been instrumental in paving my career path in higher education and my passion for DEI.

Growing up in a staunch, Christian home, very traditional ideologies informed my development of core values and resultant behaviors, further reinforced by my wider social communities, such as the church, school system, and friend groups. These entities that covertly and overtly exerted their hegemonic force, much aligned with their social responsibility as a critical part of society's development, created a system that allowed me to develop some sense of meaning, self-identity, and social identity. However, as I grew and interacted in more diverse contexts, I soon came to realize the inadequacies of these conceptions in allowing my most ideal self to become, for me and for others.

During my undergraduate degree was the first time I became very intentional about expanding my perceptions of diversity through exploring the research and theories on human sexuality. Throughout that degree, I was building knowledge on the nature-nurture controversy, which ultimately led to my senior research project that focused on how attitudes vary based on perceived sexual orientation. My subsequent service with GrenChap, the NGO that represents LGBTQ+ interests in Grenada, further helped to expand my definitions of diversity and solidified my perceptions of just how much we need culturally appropriate frameworks in advocating for social justice among underrepresented and stigmatized groups.

In my current work, I strive to continue representing the principles of DEI through my research and writing with strong emphasis on a storytelling, self-reflective approach. This informed the basis of my capstone project for my master's degree in which I proposed a conceptual framework that demonstrated the self-reflective work as the foundation to successful leadership processes in the pedagogical context. So many times leaders think that they are embracing ideals of DEI in work spaces and teams, but their actions actually hinder true values of inclusiveness among followers. The true meaning of how DEI is perceived by followers is not accounted for, usually attributed to narrow conceptions of what DEI means through the lens of leaders. My writing serves to uncover those covert

organizational social norms that are hinged on systematic, structural psychosocial inequities that form their ideals in traditional perspectives. My hope is for my writing to someday help inform organizational policy reform related to DEI.

Diversity describes the expansiveness of life experiences captured through dimensions such as race, culture, age, gender, sex, socioeconomic status, religion, and lifestyle. Inclusiveness represents how we create spaces to accommodate such diversity. Equity mediates the relationship between diversity and inclusion to inform how we develop and practice policy. Yet, the most notable is that these definitions vary so vastly and continue to evolve so rapidly. I only hope to continue evolving in parallel as our knowledge increases through empiricism. It is only then that we can truly foster unconditional positive regard and love for those who may not be what we are, create spaces and policies that support our diversity, and acknowledge how our life stories position us on the hierarchical distribution of power. I aim to keep my conceptions, beliefs, and core values rooted in most current, evidence-based methods to inform how I practice the ideals of DEI.