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Diversity Statement

One of the most significant experiences in my life that shaped my understanding of the value of diversity, equity, and inclusivity was when a close friend revealed to me that she had been an undocumented immigrant for all the years I had known her—more than five years. I was heartbroken to discover the extent of the struggle, isolation, and fears that she and her family had to face, every day, for as long as I had known her. What was most heartbreaking was realizing that my friend withheld this secret from me because I did not make her feel safe enough to share this burden with her. I wish, to this day, that I had been a safer person and a better friend. And yet, I not only respected her decision but understood and agreed with her choice to keep her secret from me. I would have done the same.

Those many years ago, I was a naive young man whose many privileged identities and experiences enveloped him in a shroud of false understanding about the ways of the world. My comfortable upbringing, private school education, and limited exposure to hardship had shielded me from histories of systemic injustices, institutional and societal inequities, and the very real discrimination that still persists throughout American society today.

It took me many years—many hard-earned experiences witnessing the real suffering of those most impacted by racism, prejudice, and systemic marginalization—to see beyond the illusions and myths of a “perfect,” color-blind, and completely fair and equal American society, to the truth of what it is.

Today, as a person and a mental health clinician, diversity is an essential value in my life. I continually strive to see beyond myths and illusions, and into the truth of the real and lived experiences of the many. I believe that actively appreciating and integrating a diversity of ideas, identities, experiences, and perspectives is crucial to my growth as a mental health professional and as a person. Indeed, because of my privileged upbringing and identities, today I consider diversity, social justice, equity, belonging, and inclusivity to be some of my most important personal practices, professional endeavors, and lifelong commitments. They make me the best clinician that I can be, and a more caring and compassionate human being. I am deeply committed to cross-cultural humility as a vital ingredient to equitable standards of care in mental health counseling.

In my personal life, I’m an active participant in self-studies of socio-cultural and political issues and their histories; an explorer of various cultural traditions and celebrations; an attendee of social justice-oriented events, panels, and discussions, and a seeker of educational experiences centered around diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Last year, I attended a handful of events that enriched this spirit and dedication of mine. I participated in Salve Regina University’s Multicultural Education Week—and was privileged to go on to interview one of their guest speakers, Joseph C. Ewoodzie Jr.,

the Vann Associate Professor of Racial Justice at Davidson College and the author of *Getting Something to Eat in Jackson: Race, Class, and Food In the American South*. I attended a book launch event at Moses Brown School in Providence, Rhode Island with Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be an Anti-Racist*, and cartoonist and professor Joel Christian Gill, to celebrate the debut of their graphic novel, *Stamped from the Beginning*, with an in-depth dialogue on anti-racism in practice, which was inspiring to behold. I also sat in the audience of gender non-conforming and trans rights activist Alok V. Menon's poetry-comedy show in Providence, Rhode Island; I have been a fan for years.

My personal practices of valuing diversity also include reading books from BIPOC authors in a 2:1 ratio to those of White authors—the latter of whom are over-represented in both publishing and media representation—to proactively diversify my exposure to stories, voices, perspectives, and identities in ways that naturally enrich, educate, inspire, and humble me as a human being.

I have also been privileged in recent years to interview a variety of experts and authors on issues of racism, anti-racism, systemic inequality, and other intersectional topics for a personal passion project and podcast that was enjoyed by thousands of listeners. Guests included author Y-Vonne Hutchinson, CEO and founder of ReadySet, one of the country's most extensive diversity, equity, and inclusion training firms; gender economist Katica Roy; Yseult Profliet Mukantabana and Hannah Summerhill, co-authors of *Real Friends Talk About Race*; and Marta Tellado, president and CEO of Consumer Reports, among others.

I owe further credit and gratitude to my Holistic Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Salve Regina University, which has thoughtfully integrated numerous projects, assignments, and conversations on racial justice, equity, accessibility, and cross-cultural humility into its curriculum. As part of one recent academic assignment, I observed an accessibility gap in how mental health services are rendered to clients at my internship site. In turn, I have developed a social justice-oriented project to develop and implement a new system to standardize clients' preferred name pronunciations, to better honor students' identities, cultures, and personal and family histories.

In a time in America where we are witnessing a dedicated and fervent pushback against so-called “wokeness” and DEI initiatives in workplaces, I am all the more committed and unapologetic in my dedication to diversity as a core tenant and central practice in my life, as well as a professional. I hope your organization not only agrees but abides by the belief that these values deserve our strongest defense and our heartfelt action to make real, every day.

Sincerely yours,

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