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Reflection Paper: Overview of *Our Beauty Matters*

Growing up in Odenton,Maryland caused me to hate being black. Odenton, Maryland was a predominantly white area. Having lived in Odenton, Maryland for five years; each year facing conflicts that caused me to hate my ethnicity. I remember third grade, an African American named Kenton Walker told me that black girls were ugly and white girls looked better. I remember a caucasian boy named Mitchell Love calling me a slave. He also told me I had “bad hair”. I remember so many occasions being in this neighborhood, where black girls were looked like as trash and not value. This is where I found myself hating “my black” and hating the way I looked. As I matured in age I realized that I was black, and I needed to love it. Knowing that one day, I would be the next “Oprah Winfrey”. I had to accept and love my black, because I knew society wouldn’t. This is the main reason why I pursued an HBCU; to be empowered by African Americans. Which I have been empowered. Recently, the SISTERS program brought in the founder of “Our Beauty Matters”. Our Beauty Matters is a foundation that seeks to empower African American ladies. The founder gathered us together and shared a part of her foundation with us. It was a nice experience.

During the *Our Beauty Matters* Workshop, there were two ladies. There was the founder, and her partner. After they introduced the foundation and themselves, one of them made a comment. She told all of the girls in the workshop that we would get deep into conversation, so everyone needs to keep what happens in this this room, in the room. I knew from there that this workshop was going to hit somewhere. We first started by talking about what “beauty” was to us. We also talked about how we are beautiful as African American ladies. Everyone had their different definitions. Following the discussion we watched a video. The video made me realize that there are other girls who struggle with their identity in being African American. After the video, everyone was able to relay their opinions. Watching the video wasn’t the area that empowered me. The activity where wrote down what we loved and hated about ourselves, then washing away what we didn’t like about ourselves in water. Though the activity was symbolic, it made me feel as if I really released everything negativity about me. What also empowered me was the discussion with my peers, and being able to discuss my issues with my identity and my securities, and hearing their input on it. They gave well advice, that I took into consideration.We talked and talked, the vibes were honest and real. It was like during each collaboration we tried to strengthen each other with our words and perspective. At the end I received a coffee cup, but more importantly a mission paper. This mission paper is basically a statement saying that I am the best, I will do the best, and I will achieve the best with God’s strength in my skin (paraphrased in my own words).

 In conclusion it wasn’t necessarily just the workshop that made me feel stronger about being African American. But it was the collaboration that took place amongst other African American young ladies that made me feel empowered.