

Photo by Garrett Garma/WSSU
Jehmu Greene, from left, the Rev. Marcia Dyson and Erica Alexander on the campus of WSSU earlier this week.



Hillary supporters try to balance playing field at Obama-kind WSSU

BY LAYLA FARMER
 THE CHRONICLE

Three prominent African American women spoke on behalf of presidential hopeful Sen. Hillary Clinton Tuesday afternoon, in a forum dubbed, "A Conversation about Democratic Unity."

Actress Erica Alexander of "The Cosby Show" and "Living Single" joined Jehmu Greene, a former president of Rock the Vote and Rev. Marcia Dyson, an author and tireless supporter of the Hillary Clinton Campaign, at the event held on the campus of Winston-Salem State University.

"Universities in general have always been a place where freedom of thought and freedom of speech are highly regarded, but it is also tempered with respect and civility," commented Provost Pedro Martinez. "Today, we have an opportunity to be able to show and to participate in that process."

The event was sponsored by WSSU's Student Government Association.

"At the Student Government Association, we definitely want to make sure we provide students with the opportunity to hear from all sides of the spectrum," SGA President Robert Stephens said of the organization's motivation to host the program.

Though billed as a conversation about Democratic unity, most of the women's comments were centered around the New York Senator and why they chose to support her.

Alexander began the discussion by sharing a little of her personal story with the audience.

"This election is very personal to me because half of my family does not have healthcare ... My mother went back to school in the 80s and is still paying down student loans," she explained. "I started looking for political solutions for some of the continual problems inside my family."

Hillary Clinton stood out as the best solution for those problems, Alexander told the audience, which was largely

populated by Barack Obama supporters.

"I look for elected officials to have policies that can affect a change or help in my life," she said.

Greene says she was only a teen when she first met Clinton, and told her about her family and her own political aspirations. When the two met again years later, Greene says the Senator still remembered her story.

"She remembers and fights for and connects with people she meets from all across the country," Greene commented.

No stranger to the political game, the former Rock the Vote leader says she dug deep and considered both Sen. Barack Obama and Clinton's messages before coming out in support of Clinton.

"I did my homework, I researched these two candidates, I looked at their plans, I focused on the issues that had driven me, as an 18 year old, to get involved in the political process," she related. "After doing that research, it was a clear choice and it was an easy choice."

Marcia Dyson has become a familiar face in Winston-Salem

of late. The outspoken supporter of the Clinton campaign has visited the Twin City at least three times in the weeks leading up to the May 6 primary race.

Dyson spoke passionately about the senator, and her contributions to women, minorities, and the environment, which Dyson refers to as "the civil rights issue" of the 21st Century.

"Hillary Clinton is the only candidate who has said a long time ago that women's rights are human rights," she declared.

In the end, all three women said they would support the Democratic nominee, even if the nomination goes to Clinton's opponent. Dyson urged those in the audience to think about the choice they face as voters and make an informed decision.

"I'm hoping that you will be a thoughtful voter," she said. "I'm hoping that you will get engaged, not for the candidate, but for yourself, because they are your employees."

Bipolar

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whelming; imagine what it must be like to feel like you're constantly crawling in your own skin, unable to find an outlet for your energy!

A person suffering with mania may also experience delusions of grandeur (unrealistic thoughts or expectations about one's abilities or powers) that may cause him or her to act in an uncharacteristic manner. A manic person may spend more money than he or she can afford to spend, engage in risky behaviors such as sex and alcohol/drug abuse, or behave aggressively. They may make unsound decisions about very important matters, as their cognitive abilities are suffering. Clearly, these symptoms and the actions they produce can be extremely self-destructive, though a person suffering from mania will frequently deny that anything is wrong. These behaviors can impact their life, career, and reputation. It is important to note, too, that some people with bipolar disorder do not experience "full-blown" mania, but rather suffer from a moderate form called hypomania. Hypomania will develop into mania in some individuals if it is not properly treated.

The other side of bipolar disorder is depression. We have talked about depression in many other People's Clinic articles, so I won't dwell upon it here. As you may recall, depression is characterized by a persistent sad or "empty" mood; feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and/or helplessness; loss of interest in the things that used to bring pleasure; difficulty concentrating; irritability (note that irritability can also be symptomatic of mania); oversleeping or insomnia (not being able to sleep); and, frequently, thoughts of death or suicide. Whereas mania involves increased energy, depression is just the opposite: people frequently feel "slowed down." Depression hurts; it is very real, and it is not something that the person can "just snap out of."

Myths about Bipolar Disorder

A survivor once told me that someone in whom she confided went to a friend of hers and said, "Watch out for Mary. You don't know how long she'll be stable." (Names have been changed to protect the innocent.) The good news about bipolar disorder is that it is very treatable, and there is no reason why a person being properly treated can't live a normal, stable, and productive life.

I've also heard someone say about a person with bipolar disorder that that person could just "snap and kill us all"; this isn't true! Research shows that a person with bipolar disease is no more likely to be violent than a person without it. Again, with proper treatment, survivors can hold jobs, function in society, and hold positions of authority.

How can we handle stigma in a positive way?

The most important thing to keep in mind when trying to address any stigma is the importance of education. Stigma is a natural response to things we don't understand, so learning about these things can help us address our own biases as well as help others see theirs. If you don't understand an illness, ask questions from a qualified health professional. You can also do research on your own to educate yourself. I would recommend starting by visiting the NIMH at www.nimh.nih.gov, as this is a trusted source of information for the public. The American Psychological Association (www.apa.org) also has a great deal of trustable information. Keep in mind that, while information about the disease is widely available on the Internet, many of these sources are not scientific or reliable. Your local bookstore also holds information about bipolar disorder. Authors such as Dr. Kay Redfield Jamison provide intimate, in-depth accounts of their experiences with the disease.

If you think someone you know or love suffers from bipolar disorder, it is so important that you encourage them to seek help from a qualified mental health professional. Medication and talk therapy are both crucial in treating this disease, and the sooner an individual gets help, the better his or her outcome will be. The last thought I want to leave you with is this: if someone you know and care about suffers from the disease, your support is so important. Support networks can help survivors of bipolar disease live full and productive lives and are often key in maintaining good mental health.

— Contribution by Jaimie Hunter, MPH

For further information, questions or comments about this article, call toll-free 1-877-530-1824. Or, for more information about the Maya Angelou Research Center on Minority Health, visit: <http://www.wfubmc.edu/minorityhealth>

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