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A Student Conduct Administrator’s Journey to Wellness

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A STUDENT CONDUCT ADMINISTRATOR'S JOURNEY TO WELLNESS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

A Student Conduct Administrator's Journey to Wellness

By

Corie Amanda Marie McCallum

Advisor: Konstantinos Alexakos

This dissertation research chronicles my experiences with emotions and learning as a student conduct administrator throughout the arduous process of investigating, becoming, and transforming by engaging sociocultural theory. Grounded in Authentic Inquiry (Tobin, 2006), this research centers my lived-experience and nuances the role of emotions in student affairs and especially student conduct practices. Throughout this dissertation I address themes surrounding reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1992), emotions (Turner, 2002) (Collins, 2004), and self-care. Each chapter is interpretive and impressionistic and represents my thinking as a researcher and conduct administrator. Throughout the chapters I narrate salient events and experiences in my student conduct practice as I interpret what is happening and why it is happening.

This is a manuscript-style dissertation with four distinct chapters that can be read alone or in conjunction with each other. Two bookend chapters, chapters one and six, summarize where I have been as a researcher and scholar and where I am going in in regard to future research respectively. The final chapter, chapter seven, I wrote as a postscript after my oral defense. Chapter two was previously published in *The Business of Education*. It establishes the foundation of student financial aid and the macro-level structures in place the prohibit students from accessing higher education equitably. The work in this section represents the beginning of my

trajectory where I focused on examining macro-level educational structures. It also signifies my departure from traditional research that aligns with post-positivism and frames my thinking after a tumultuous first-year experience in the doctoral program. Chapter three explores the use of heuristics as shapeshifting tools for building awareness and ameliorating emotions in student conduct work and is a forthcoming section in *Transforming Learning and Teaching: Heuristics for Educative and Responsible Practices*. Chapter four is an impressionistic tale that explores issues of trauma, emotions and boundary-setting through event-oriented inquiry to explore a "spike" in the curve during a student conduct interaction. Chapter five delves deeper into ameliorating emotions and wellness challenges that I experienced during the COVID19 pandemic. Also, in chapter five, I explore the impacts of self-care and wellness regarding food as a coping mechanism. In chapter six, I close the dissertation with a review of changes in practice I am making going forward and insight into the systems of support that made this research possible. In the final section, chapter seven, I respond to feedback I received during my oral defense that clarifies my stance on teaching and learning.

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Thank you to Dr. Joel Spring and Routledge Taylor & Francis Group for publishing chapter two, in *The Business of Education: Networks of Power and Wealth in America*[1].

[1] McCallum, C.A. (2017). Exploring federal financial aid networks: Who cares and why? In Spring, J., Frankson, J.E., McCallum, C.A., & Banks, D.P. (Eds.), *The business of education: Networks of power and wealth in America* (pp.105-117). Routledge.

Thank you to Kenneth Tobin and Konstantinos Alexakos and Brill | Sense Publishing for including chapter 3 in their book *Transforming Learning and Teaching: Heuristics for Educative and Responsible Practices*[2].

Crucial to my survival in this program were several iterations of Research Squad—amazing folks with endless talent who helped shape my research, my writing, and me. Specifically, JoAnn, Anna, Theila, Shequanna, Leah, Corrina, Vanessa, Katelin, Amy, Luis, Francie, Lisa, Carolina, and Mariatere, your feedback was instrumental to this process.

I want to say thank you to my City Tech family, my lunch crew, and so many others who worked with me while I completed this degree. Without the support of the wonderful people with whom I work regularly, this process might have taken even longer, if that were possible.

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To my friends, Kim, Claire, and Bryson and plenty of others, but you three undoubtedly listened to me complain the most and I want to say a special thank you to you all because I know I wouldn't be who I am or where I am without y'all. And to Dr. Yetty Marquez-Santana, you were literally my inspiration. Thank you.

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And, for me, Corie, and all the versions of myself that have worked for this. My biggest flex is doing what I said I would. Girl, bye! You did it!

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[2] McCallum, C.A (2021). Student conduct administrators and emotions: Managing emotions by developing a self-care practice with heuristics. In K. Tobin & K. Alexakos (Eds.), *Transforming learning and teaching: Heuristics for educative and responsible practices.* Leiden, NL: Brill | Sense Publishing.

PREFACE: GROUNDING THIS DISSERTATION

In the fall of 2014, I decided to take a non-matriculant course on emotions that I thought would be interesting. A close friend and mentor, Mr. Lento, reminded me that CUNY offered tuition waivers for employees and that I should consider enrolling in at least one course to gauge my interest in the Urban Education doctoral program. He made an excellent point that if I did not enjoy it or I was no longer interested, there was little risk involved. I began this journey with Mr. Lento's soft nudge and took my first course, *Emotions in Research.* My first steps toward becoming a researcher were set in motion. Not only did I meet my advisor who would see me through the process, but that course would set the tone for my doctoral journey and become the overarching theme of this dissertation. In fall 2015, I was officially accepted into Cohort 15 and began my doctoral studies at The Graduate Center.

Those first steps were critical. Taking a chance on myself by enrolling in a non-matriculated course, applying to the program with a hope and a prayer, and being accepted were all things that seemed to align perfectly for me. But, my elation would be short-lived. When I arrived for my first class with my cohort, a faculty member in the program said I was in the wrong place—that I chose incorrectly by pursuing a Ph.D. in Urban Education because I am not a "teacher." She mentioned that because my career and training was in Student Affairs, maybe a different degree, more focused on practice, would have been a "better" choice for me. I wish I had ignored her comment. Unfortunately, for a short time, I believed her.

The faculty member's sentiment stayed with me for a while during the first year and, perhaps, she was correct in some respects. I adjusted slowly and took longer finding my footing than traditional teachers. I shrank into myself a bit more and at times relegated myself to the margins from insecurity over my lack of pedagogical experience. I carried that outsider feeling with me throughout the first year. I made it clear in every course that I was not a teacher and proud of it. I also privately doubted myself and felt dejected for a while. Of course, this person is long gone and she probably never gave me another thought after our interaction. Nevertheless, I am thankful for that interaction. It spurned me. I wanted nothing more than to prove her wrong. Undertaking a doctoral program is no easy feat and having someone, whether knowingly or not, sow seeds of doubt could have derailed me—especially because she too was a person of color. But alas, here I am—a non-teaching, teacher earning a Ph.D. with a collection of emotions, lived experiences, and stories that are steeped in a myriad of theories and the practical application of them subsumed within this dissertation.

I recall this incident as a lesson and one that I have only had to learn once throughout this process. Just because you aren't something *now*, doesn't mean you'll never be. The power of this dissertation lies in my belief that change and growth are always possible. That what we are presently is only a snapshot of ourselves in a given moment. There is always so much more to us as people, scholars, or whatever it is we hope to become. We just have to ask what more is there.

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CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE BEGINNING

In this chapter, I recall some of the experiences I have had as a young adult, graduate student, and how I came to this doctoral program. The memories of these experiences and the reflexivity I engaged in while conducting research have become a part of my dissertation work. With every keystroke I have altered a recollection or created a new one in the story of my life and ultimately now, my research. This crisis of representation is a central tenet of this dissertation.

Schooling Life

My personal philosophy as an educator is shaped by over twenty years of education in mostly rural, public schools. As I transitioned from high school to college, I struggled to understand how and why college was a place people went for personal development and growth. I understood college as a means to an end. I saw college as an escape from the confines of a small town and as insurance that I would not be working in a seemingly menial job as an adult. As a student, my impression of college was not entirely incorrect. When I looked around, I saw a lot of students from small towns like me, though we often differed in our skin tones and hair textures. We all seemed to be trying to get ahead and believed college would be the way to go. I believed that every decision colleges made about curriculums and student affairs programs was predetermined and theoretically grounded in traditional scientific method—all proving that college was the way to make it. Though I was not privy to the inner workings of the politics of higher education policy and procedures, faculty and administrators I interacted with all seemed to be at odds.

As an only child, I had difficulty adjusting to many aspects of college and I was not exactly prepared for it all. At first, I kept on being angry and upset about my own experiences in and outside the classroom. I never had to share anything or express why something upset me.

Both my parents worked when I was in secondary school and I was a latch-key kid. I had chores and I answered to my parents of course, but I was also extremely independent, probably to a fault. I would commonly hear things like, you are "too-something" in my educational career as a student: too upset, too assertive, too direct, too, too, too. I was smart and hard-working, but nobody cared about the fact that I did not know how to navigate an environment where separating your personal self (ontology), complete with emotions and feelings and passion, from the professional self was required to be successful. In classes, I knew the course material. However, I lacked the skills to ameliorate my emotions or work well in groups.

As an undergraduate student, I experienced processes and classroom interactions as static and objective and without the ability to question or critique. Just as I saw college as a transactional space, I thought too that faculty and administrators felt the same. I had no inclination that administrators and professors, who I believed were at my beck and call, had lives of their own. And, contrary to my beliefs then, they too were dealing with life and all of the challenges of teaching, the emotions of their students, and doing so in front of a classroom or inside of a student union with less than compassionate students peering at them for answers. As I continued through four years of undergraduate study I slowly realized that college was full of emotional and challenging experiences that transcended classroom and university politics. Thankfully, only a little while later I would begin my journey toward understanding that I wanted to become more of myself in college as opposed to being degree-oriented and focused on a job or wealth at what I thought would be the end of my academic career.

I had my first experience with emotion "research" in higher education as I was finishing my freshman year of college. I applied to serve as a student conduct board member and upon acceptance we had our first trainings where we learned that there were a variety of emotional responses that can occur during disciplinary hearings. Joining the student conduct board at the barely-legal age of 18 was my first official foray into the policies and procedures that would ultimately become my way of life. Student Conduct Boards, Judicial Hearing Boards, or, as they are sometimes called, Faculty Student Disciplinary Committees, consist of a panel of faculty and or staff and students who adjudicate student conduct matters. At many colleges and universities members are either elected or selected to join the committee. Often there is no training prior to joining, but I caught on quickly and the experience was transformative. Maybe that’s why after all these years (18 to be exact), I have never left student conduct.

After adjusting to the first year away at college, I began my career in student conduct as a sophomore at Ohio University. Eventually, I would go on to advise hearing boards and step into a leadership role, a low-level adjudication officer, as a graduate student. When I began to study education from within academia as a graduate student, my understanding of education as emotionally-detached, rational, methodically-curated policies and procedures began to crumble. In my first professional role as a Student Conduct Coordinator, I trained and advised hearing boards and trained other conduct officers in Residence Life. Today, I am the sole advisor to the Faculty Student Disciplinary Committee and the only conduct officer at a large, urban, public institution. My work in student conduct has not only informed my student affairs practice and undergirded my support for due process for students, but it has also inspired me to practice educating the whole student, addressing emotional and social issues, and focusing on the wellness of both students *and* administrators. Through my interactions with hundreds of students over the years, including those who violated policies and those who I met under other circumstances, I began to see the importance of not only managing emotions and wellness, but becoming aware of them, giving voice to them, and accepting radically different perspectives about acceptable student conduct within higher education.

Transitioning to a Professional Student

When I first began in this doctoral program, my focus was extremely limited. I believed that a "mixed methods" study would make the most valuable contribution to higher education literature and diversify the current research in student conduct. Akin to many graduate students I had preconceived notions about what I would study, what my hypothesis was going to be, and even a plan for how I might present what I would "find" from my research. What I did not anticipate was the collapse of a qualitative and quantitative research dichotomy and that my research, as I understood it, would change categorically. Though I was ignorant to the language of a new paradigm when I began designing my research, I sought frameworks that valued lived-experience as central to meaning-making and that highlighted more than just student outcomes. Engaging the conduct process from a theoretical perspective was a priority for me, but as I traipsed through the first few semesters of my doctoral program I encountered myriad challenges about how to move forward with a project that not only enriched the conduct profession, but also changed who I was and the way I worked.

A quick search in ProQuest Database using Boolean phrases "student affairs administrator" and "student conduct" and "stress" yielded hundreds of thousands of results—over 200,000. Of that search, the first 20 entries on the search return page were dissertations. Filtering for what ProQuest considers scholarly journals, the total search results diminished to just over 3,000 hits. A similar search for terms like stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout also produced considerable results, but filtering for student conduct administrators specifically yielded almost exclusively dissertations. There is ample concern about wellness in student affairs, but for conduct officers it is only when *we* are doing the talking that our specific needs are recognized. Throughout my career, I have had a comprehensive experience in student affairs serving in a variety of roles within residence life, multicultural affairs, student development and engagement, orientation, advisement, and student conduct both in and outside of a residential community. What has remained constant and perpetually underemphasized in all of my roles has been the need for self-care for administrators specifically and the acknowledgement that student conduct work, especially, is part of the helping professions within student affairs. While it would take me years to decide how I would develop research that acknowledged student conduct administrators experience in the field as relevant and central to developing strong wellness and self-care practices, I knew that our voices needed to be heard.\

Some Nuance and Perspective

Dannells (1997) contended that disciplinary studies are complicated and difficult to conduct within the confines of traditional research methods. Much of the student disciplinary process does not allow for the standardized scientific method, especially when taking into consideration the perspective of all participants, not just student participants. Similarly, statistical analysis of conduct work is useful and important, but the analysis itself is laden with assumptions and the unspoken understanding or biases that the researcher/s preparing a study have already accepted. Of course, there are the tertiary limitations to a study that are usually presented in one or two paragraphs, but rarely are assumptions about what constitutes knowledge or the axiology or ontology of the researchers and the researched addressed within those limitations. The difference between that standard of research and what I intended to do with this work was that I did not endeavor to recreate or reproduce any scenarios for the sake of generalizability, but to examine how very specific scenarios impacted participants, and specifically, me. I endeavored to see limitations as complications to be included and highlighted as integral parts of the research.

In this dissertation and also in life, I have accepted as a part of my epistemology that knowledge is socially constructed and ever-evolving. So, this research, phenomenological and based on the principles of Authentic Inquiry, becomes crucial to explain how, why, and what the experiences of student conduct administrators as well as students are and to give voice to those experiences. To use the very terms that I argue limit research, there are too many dependent variables, a lack of generalizability in the findings, and methods and methodology sections that focus on clean data collection and randomized sampling that simply do not meet the need of this phenomenological project. Instead, I argue that the ways in which we tell these stories, these experiences of our application of theory and practice, is through a methodological bricolage and an explicit, expansive, multiontological standpoint (Tobin, 2006). Using methods and methodology like heuristics, event-oriented inquiry, and researching the practice of what we do every day provides thoughtful, multifaceted perspectives of student affairs, and specifically student conduct work. Additionally, literary tools like narratology, autoethnography, and impressionistic tales can provide rich descriptions of what is happening and why while simultaneously engaging our ways of knowing and being. As I move through each chapter, I situate my use of Authentic Inquiry, emotions research, self-care and trauma as lenses with which to view and interrogate the world.

Metaphorically Speaking

This dissertation is in constant conversation with its reader(s). I speak to the reader and respond to imagined reactions and invite the reader to participate in role-taking and empathy with me as those concepts along with others frame this research. I use role-taking to create heuristics, to understand how to interact with others, especially students, and to explore emotions that run the gamut from pain to sorrow to joy. Role-taking allows us to take the perspective of the other (Turner, 2002). Performative in nature, empathy through role-taking sets us free to experience emotions without the need to carry them, store them, or keep them as baggage. Ultimately, it allows us to explore alternative perspectives, with little to no risk of harm to ourselves or others.

Similarly, free writing (Tobin & Alexakos, 2021) and narrative writing (impressionistic and confessional tales) has allowed me to explore empathy in ways that protect my own boundaries and prevent additional stress and burnout. While role-taking is vital to the process of developing and using heuristics, free writing and including it as part of the chapters, too, allows the reader access to my inner voice and also my origins of thinking as I develop ideas throughout this work. The conversation between the reader and I is emergent and contingent (Tobin, 2006) in that I change my thinking or activity based on what role-taking or considering the perspective of the other elicits for me. Within this research I acknowledge that I am not the authority—that readers will come to this work with experiences and knowledge of their own (Alexakos, 2015) and it is my intention to share in the creation of new knowledge as the reader(s) engage.

My Thoughts on the Upcoming Chapters

In this manuscript style dissertation, each chapter builds upon my wellness trajectory as a student affairs and student conduct professional. The chapters are presented in chronological order (though editing occurred continually and simultaneously) and each marks a measure of growth both in my personal wellness and the ways I engage in meaning-making for a productive life and career. After each chapter has concluded, there are just as many unexplored ideas as there are ideas that I explicitly engaged (Tobin & Alexakos, 2021). In my concluding chapter, I offer insight about what more there may be.

Throughout the chapters, I use narration in my work. I present my whole self as part of my research and expose the origins of my thoughts, ideas, and the assertions I make in the following chapters. I came to the idea of using narratology as a part of research through the work of Peter Waldman (2015) and Katelin Corbett (2018), both graduates of my program at The Graduate Center of City University of New York. In Waldman's (2015) work, he uses narrative to present perspectives that embody the research quite literally and employs narratology as a valid and useful tool in educational settings. Corbett (2018) uses personal narrative to explore complex issues such as race and gender and highlight salient emotions within teaching and learning. Like those scholars, as I continue both in this chapter and in the following chapters, I reflect upon my experiences through narration and confessional and impressionistic tales (Van Maanen, 1988) as I examine wellness from a student conduct officer's perspective. It is my intention to be intentional and expose my axiology and ontology (as discussed later) as a researcher while simultaneously interrogating how my value systems and ways of knowing impact my research and to what extent.

Outline for the Remainder of the Dissertation

I wrote chapter two, *Exploring Federal Financial Aid Networks – Who Cares and Why?* as a response to my experience with student conduct matters and financial aid issues that sometimes coincided in my work. I approached this chapter from a systems-oriented, macro-level perspective that reflected my understanding of how a small cache of interconnected individuals can have influence and control over financial aid for masses of students in the United States. In my professional career, having worked with both financial aid appeals for students and conduct work simultaneously, I thought this area was ripe for interrogation though I would soon realize my approach would become deleterious to the work I actually did at that time. I became obsessive over the latest mega-donors to political campaigns who were heavily involved with higher education reform. Revamping financial aid as a means to assist students was something I was invested in at the larger, societal level, but my focus was too broad. However, the chapter did reveal how questions of access, financial literacy, and governmental policies shape and underscore the prevalence of systemic barriers that impact not only students, but how student affairs professionals do their work. Investigating systems of inequality that are inherent in higher education benefitted me by exposing how macro-level structures can impact issues of wellness for all involved. I am grateful for the opportunity to have published this chapter in *The Business of Education*, a book which I co-edited with my doctoral cohort members Dr. Dianne Price-Banks and John Eric Frankson and our professor at that time, Dr. Joel Spring. Although my focus since publishing this research has changed drastically, this research reshaped and transformed my ways of thinking about how access to higher education impacts our well-being.

In chapter three, I return to my original interest in student conduct practice and the impacts of contentious conduct work on administrators' emotional wellness. I explore how using heuristics guides and informs my practice by drawing attention to power dynamics, values, and emotions. Chapter three also addresses reflexivity through the lens of role-taking to ameliorate emotions that negatively impacted my health and well-being for years before this intervention. Drawing on the work of prior scholars, I offer a heuristic for use by other student conduct administrators. I am grateful to Dr. Konstantinos Alexakos and Dr. Kenneth Tobin for their inclusion of this chapter in their forthcoming book, *Transforming Learning and Teaching: Heuristics for Educative and Responsible Practices*.

Chapter four is an impressionistic tale that explores contradictions or "spikes" that arise during interactions regarding a tumultuous conduct case. Throughout the tale I consider how issues of morality, gender roles, and trauma impact my daily work life as a conduct administrator. Additionally, I consider the use of boundaries and free-writing as core elements of self-care. Finally, I examine my incorporation of wellness practices and the potential for ripple effects on the students and community where I work.

In chapter five, I expand my exploration of trauma and burnout from chapter four as I engage in a deeply personal and emotional narrative that examines significant wellness challenges that arose for me during the COVID19 pandemic. My most personal and transformative work, this chapter explores how I used food as a coping mechanism and an unhealthy tool for ameliorating emotions. I offer my nuanced experience as a conduct officer using self-care as an act of resistance and intervention.

In chapter six, *Progress and Pursuit*, I review my transformation as a researcher and scholar and consider how this dissertation process has informed my conduct practice and greatly improved my overall wellness. I also explore the impacts of hidden or unspoken elements of this work including mentorship, race, and the importance of community in scholarship. Finally, I conclude the chapter with thoughts about what more there may be.

This dissertation concludes with chapter seven, a postscript I wrote after my oral defense, that clarifies some of the concepts and suppositions that were highlighted during my oral defense.

CHAPTER TWO

EXPLORING FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID NETWORKS: WHO CARES AND WHY

Original Insight and Background

The United States Federal government has long-established rules and regulations for the disbursement of federal financial aid funding to students dating back to the Higher Education Act of 1965. Initially, I had planned to explore a small section of the 1998 Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 that enforced a new law in regard to Title IV funding for students who were convicted of a drug offense by state or federal government—a law that is still very much in practice today. That new amendment from 1998 stated that students would not be eligible to receive Title IV federal funding if they were “convicted of any offense under any Federal or State law involving the possession or sale of a controlled substance” (GovTrack.us, 2021). As a higher education professional working in conjunction with financial aid at one of the colleges in a large, urban, university system, I am very involved with the Title IV process and this amendment piqued my interest. Additionally, as the primary conduct officer at the college, it seemed fitting that I might come across some of the students who could be affected by the 1998 HEA amendments. However, once I began the research, many of my ideas about the 1998 amendments and others changed. While the importance of changing that particular aspect of the 1998 HEA amendments still resonated with me, the impact of those restrictions touched far fewer students. So, I would not say I had a change of heart, but a change of focus.

Instead of creating a sort of expose’ on those who *cannot* receive federal financial aid and why they cannot receive it, I decided that I would focus on Title IV Federal Financial Aid policy in general and how it is created, changed, and administered by the federal government. Who makes the decisions about the amount of Pell grants to be dispersed in a given year? Are there major corporations, like Sallie Mae, that play a role in the decisions of the Department of Education? Who are the people lobbying for more (or less) financial aid availability, especially loans, for students? Additionally, in my quest for answers to the questions about the overall function of Title IV funding, more specific questions arose around education policies that shape the way financial aid decisions are made. While financial aid and Title IV funding remained a focus for this research, I could not ignore the intersection of economic policies and education in the United States. How would increasing the minimum wage and poverty indicators affect Pell funding? How many students utilize Title IV funding? Can the United States have free college for all, too? How would the recent Presidential candidates' plans for education impact financial aid? Those are the questions that guided my thinking and for which I attempted to provide some answers. I have also provided my own insight into the world of financial aid as a Student Affairs professional entrenched in the current system.

Financial Aid Funding: Origins and Processes

Origins

Similar to nearly every ideal we have in place about education in this country, financial aid was not established by the good people of the United States or even the original 13 colonies. Financial Aid, more appropriately called "pious" giving in its very early days, was among the first kinds of financial aid established in the medieval times. Needless to say, there have been a plethora of changes since the original ideas of student-paid, church-paid, or crown/state-paid financial aid of the medieval times. However, the underlying principal of "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" that originated with those early years in education, where religion and piousness undergirded the pursuit of education, are still in effect today (Fuller, 2014).

The University of Bologna has also played a significant role in the construction of the original forms of financial aid. The students, who hired professors directly, would form together to ensure that they could keep receiving instruction even when some students could not pay. Fuller (2014) described this process as the first need-based institute of financial aid; students not able to pay would have to receive funds from senior students who maintained their "nation's" funds as loans (Fuller, 2014). Fast forward 900+ years and we have a seemingly completely different system in place today in the United States. Although our current processes and how we determine needs have changed, the barebones structure of state-paid giving has remained intact.

Moving into the 20th century, in 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 into law. The HEA was originally created "to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in post-secondary and higher education" (GovTrack.us, 2021). The HEA provided stipulations and directives for how federal money would be distributed to the states and ultimately to the students. Essentially, the HEA provided the basis for the formulation of student loan programs like Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) and the Pell grant. Since its inception, the HEA has been amended at least half a dozen times (Kantrowitz, 2015a). In addition to amendments, in 2008 the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) was enacted which reauthorized the original HEA and extended the provisions of the HEA (Ace Net, n.d.). With the enactment of the HEOA, the original HEA was extended until 2013, though recently congress has extended the law through 2016 (Ace Net, n.d.). However, a complete overhaul of the law is expected to occur in the following months as Congress' recent extension was set to expire in September 2016. Ironically, the importance of these laws and the influence that lawmakers, lobbyists, and the general public goes unnoticed to those not directly impacted by the effects. In the not too distant past of the 1990s when many of the amendments to the HEA were passed, the complicated language and hundreds of pages of information, as well as extended periods of time that lawmakers wasted fighting over other, often unrelated, issues prevented financial aid issues in Higher Education from coming to the forefront. However, with the proliferation of student loan debt and the ability for students and parents to voice their opinions about it now, financial aid issues, especially around access and the cost of access are certainly at the forefront today.

Processes

American tax dollars and a Federal budget, created years in advance, provide the funding for Federal financial aid and specifically, Title IV funding. What might be a more accurate statement is that the HEA defines and directs the taxes of the American people along with some government subsidy to supply federally based financial aid. In the 2014-2015 school year alone, taxpayer dollars and government subsidies supplied over 150 billion dollars in federal financial aid to students across the country (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). The President's allocations for a given year determine the way in which the funding will be disbursed. These allocations are made years in advance though, sometimes disabling a current President from making changes immediately to the next year's funding scheme. Whatever federal aid is available for students is then distributed by the United States Department of Education. These resources include, loans, grants, and work-study programs. Within each of those sources are multiple varieties of each kind of aid, which I will explain in detail later.

There are four major federal grant programs including the Federal Pell Grant (Pell), Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant, and the Iraq and Afghanistan

Service Grant (Grants and Scholarships, n.d.). While all of these grants are needs-based, the TEACH grant and Iraq/Afghanistan service grants come with additional qualifying stipulations for students to receive them, including service post-graduation and stringent timelines of eligibility for those whose parents were serving in the military post the 9/11 tragedy (Grants and Scholarships, n.d.). In order for students to receive these grants (or even loans, which I discuss later), they must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or FAFSA. In the past, students completed the FAFSA at the beginning of the calendar year in January, to determine their eligibility to receive funds for the upcoming academic year. However, recent changes by President Obama have significantly changed and improved the FAFSA process.

As a result of changes made by the Obama Administration of the Department of Education, the FAFSA now will now be available three months earlier—beginning in October 2016 students can file for aid around the same time as college application processes begin (Fact Sheet, 2015). Not only will the FAFSA be available significantly earlier, the President has allowed prior, prior year tax information to be considered in determining student's eligibility for funding (Fact Sheet, 2015). The changes will allow students to apply earlier and also to apply with fewer obstacles or complications that changing tax information from the previous year can sometimes create. For example, a student intending to enroll in college under the previous iteration of FAFSA regulations would need to apply for aid using FAFSA in January of the year they would attend, so January of 2015 for enrollment in Fall of 2015. Under the new regulations, a student intending to enroll in college for the Fall 2017 semester would need to file the FAFSA beginning in October of 2016. This change allows students to meet college and universities' "priority deadlines" which allow the students to be eligible for additional funding (FAFSA, n.d.). In the older iteration of FAFSA regulations, most colleges and universities accepted applications until mid-March for priority deadlines, but this left a very small window of time for students to update their or their parents' tax information which is now a moot point, thanks to the prior-prior year tax information. In other words, students can use tax information (theirs and or their parents) for the year prior to which they apply. Additionally, the priority deadlines for additional funding, like Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG) or additional monies awarded to the school through the state (TAP for New York State) or other agencies would become even more pressing (FAFSA, n.d.). Again, with the new regulations governing FAFSA, the final deadline for FAFSA will remain the end of June, with all corrections (corrections can include changing marital statuses or parental information) being due in early fall (Student Aid Deadlines, n.d.).

The Department of Education uses FAFSA and the financial information students provide on the application in combination with complicated metrics for determining student eligibility. These metrics are comprised of multiple answers that students report on their FAFSA about topics from tax information to savings to investments, among other things. From that information, FAFSA metrics assign the student a specific dollar amount known as the Expected Family Contribution. The Expected Family Contribution (EFC) represents the student and his or her family's portion of financial responsibility for a college education. Further, the EFC is based on all the financial, tax, and in some cases living situations, of the students. For example, in the 2015-2016 academic year, a student whose parents earned less than $24,000 for the 2014 tax year and received some form of needs-based benefits (like SNAP or TANF in New York state) would receive a zero for their EFC for the academic year (EFC Formula Guide 2015-2016, 2014). In other words, the family would not be expected to contribute any funds to the student's college expenses. While some may argue that this is a positive and generous program, it does not negate the fact that some students must live in poverty, endure unfair obstacles to accessing colleges and universities, and basically ensure massive loan accrual for students with zero EFC scores. However, there is at least one positive benefit of using the EFC formula and that's the simple fact that the United States Department of Education does not use the federal poverty guidelines to make a determination of the amount of money families can expect to pay out of pocket for higher education expenses (Frequently Asked Questions, 2015).

While the disuse of federal poverty guidelines does not seem to further the economic disparity among citizens of the United States, a look at the National Center for Education Statistics' report on Student Financial Aid Estimates for 2011–12 showed that students living in poverty (poverty as defined by the EFC guidelines as having an automatic EFC of 0) more than half, or 56.6 percent, are still using loans to finance their education (Radwin et al,, 2013). More strikingly, the study showed that seemingly middle-class students (the federal government makes no determination of "middle class" or "wealthy"), or in this case students whose parents earned more than $40,000, ($40k-59,999) but less than $80,000 ($60k-79,999) annually, had the highest percentages of students borrowing at 63.6% and 58.3% respectively (Radwin et al,, 2013). The fact that at least half of students, whether in poverty or not, are using loans to supplement their education costs is a cause for major concern. Whether students are borrowing to pay their room and board while living on campus or using loans to provide childcare for their children while taking night classes, education is costing us significantly more than it ever has, with what seems like fewer and fewer job opportunities to show for it. To be fair, though fairness and equity seemingly have no place in the financing of education, there have been some important changes to the way federal loans and grants are distributed. For review, the following list from Federal Student Aid (2015) explains all the categories of aid and then lists the kind of aid each category provides. As I discussed previously, students must complete the FAFSA to be eligible for any of the kinds of aid listed below:

- Loans
    - Direct Loan
    - Federal Perkins Loan
- Grants
    - Federal Pell Grant
    - Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grants
    - Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)
- Federal Work-Study (FWS)
  (Federal Student Aid, n.d.)

As students continue to enroll in colleges and universities the recent changes in the way students apply for aid have helped, from my perspective, in being able to afford college while they are attending. But, as is the case for many, myself included, affording the debt associated with college continues to be a struggle—particularly for those with loan debt. In recent years through the Obama administration, there has been a major focus on fixing student loan debt, increasing the Pell grant, and the destruction of the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL)—all of which were impacted by the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act. With the passing of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010, the Federal Family Education Loan was terminated (Kantrowitz, 2015a). This means that the federal government has effectively cut the financing of loans by "middlemen" and now only offers loans directly to the borrowers. Prior to the act, student loan borrowers had a choice between Direct Loans, which are funded directly through the Department of Education, or FFEL which were funded through banks and other financial institutions that received subsidies from the government for providing student loans (Kantrowitz, 2015c). The act, described below, meant more funding for Pell and other small programs as well as an increase in the loan servicing business of Sallie Mae, now

Navient, and other big name servicers, like NelNet. Kantrowitz, (2015a) describes the changes as follows:

> The Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (P.L. 111-152) was passed by the House and Senate on March 25, 2010 along party lines and signed into law by President Obama on March 30, 2010. The bill eliminates the federally-guaranteed student loan program (FFELP), with all new federal education loans made through the Direct Loan program starting July 1, 2010. The savings are redirected to the Pell Grant program, deficit reduction, improvements in income-based repayment and a variety of smaller programs. Most of the Pell Grant funding was used to backfill a funding shortfall from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (stimulus bill) and to make permanent the increased maximum Pell Grant from that legislation.

While the Higher Education Act and all its amendments have been instrumental in governing the programs and funding streams of federal financial aid, there are several constituents both in government and the private sector that wish to influence the law and the creation and/or flow of funding from the federal government. Some of these organizations and individuals are well known, while others are behind-the-scenes tech gurus and lobbyists. Organizations such as American Council on Education (ACE) boast its 1600-person membership that represents presidents of colleges and universities across the country (American Council on Education, n.d.). ACE, an advocacy group that hails itself as the “convener of higher education associations,” has lobbied for a dozen issues in 2015 including tax acts, the HEA renewal, and federal budget and appropriation issues (American Council on Education, n.d.). But ACE is just one of many education-based organizations that hope to influence educational policy by engaging those who are directly involved—college presidents, higher education officers, and even some faculty.

However, there are other organizations that include constituents from both public and private sectors, which seemingly hope to influence higher education trends, though I am arguing, their benevolence comes with a price.

Influential Organizations and Leaders

The aforementioned tech gurus and behind-the-scenes lobbyists include people like Bill and Melinda Gates, Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan, and others like Wendy and Eric Schmidt. These individuals and their foundations are almost famous for donating funding to research and other charitable enterprises, but to what end? How do these people, among many others, impact financial aid and higher education? For example, let's talk about Eric Schmidt of New America Education Central and EdCyclopedia. Both, Education Central and EdCyclopedia the organization and web resources, are parts of New America Foundation's Education Policy Program, which was founded in 1999 by Ted Halstead. Eric Schmidt, now the Chair of the Board of Directors for New America, is also Executive Chairman at Google, was (at the time of the research for this article) on the Board of Directors at Apple, and also was a member of the Board of the popular publication *The Economist* (Crunchbase, 2015). Interestingly, New America Foundation has another arm—their policy analysis tool known as "Atlas."

While Atlas provides important information about the effects of financial aid on students and the economy, it is important to note that Eric Schmidt's personal investments might play a role in those statistics. Furthermore, Dr. Schmidt recently invested $18 million into WibiData a "software company that provides big data applications for enterprises to deliver personalized experiences across channels" (Schmidt, 2015 via Crunchbase). Considering that Atlas is a subsidiary of New America, it seems less than ironic that Atlas is where the information about financial aid sources, specifically federal aid, and funding streams abounds. I am not arguing that

Eric Schmidt or the Zuckerbergs or the Gates are inherently evil people. But, the amount of money they are able to donate does allow for some questions about the influence of those donations. Do they have undue influence on policies and procedures because of the sheer volume they are able to give? Does their work in numerous corporations and companies cause conflicts of interest? I think we would be remiss not to consider those questions and the fact that most donations come with their own tax benefits—be they for the individual or the foundation.

As I have discussed, key players for federal financial aid ideas do not stop at individuals. There are multiple advocacy groups, lobbyists, and politically inclined foundations that have interest in financial aid, and the way in which it is dispersed. Some of those key players include Sallie Mae, Nelnet, and other political entities like education unions and even private donors. In short, these players made and still make money from student loans. In the long version of this story, these corporations know that less funding for Pell and other grant money equates to need for students. That need is then supplicated by loans. The *types* of loans are of significant interest to Sallie Mae, Nelnet and other loan-related corporations. Now that the FFEL program has ended and effectively eliminated banks and other financial institutions from dispersing funds to students directly and therefore also eliminated the subsidies those financial institutions received from the federal government, it would seem that these corporations have a lot more to contribute to the discussion about financial aid and loans (Kantrowitz, 2015c).

Sallie Mae, whose parent company is SLM Corporation, was the principal government-affiliated agency that provided public, government-guaranteed student loans for over thirty years. Since its inception in 1973, Sallie Mae has been first a public loan originator, then a private loan originator for student loans, and now is a servicer for the government in addition to keeping its own private loan business for students (Sallie Mae, 2016). Recently though, in 2014, Sallie Mae split into two companies, Navient and Sallie Mae (Stratford, 2014). Sallie Mae's association with the government still maintains about $550 billion in contracts to service federal direct loans (Kiersh, 2009). And while Sallie Mae may have lost some of its ability to lend directly to the student loan borrower population with the changes in law and in their business practices, Sallie Mae has still given substantial campaign funds and other donations to Republican and Democratic Party members of the House and Senate. They too know the importance of their influence on individuals. Most notably John Boehner *former* Republican Speaker received in 2009, just before the elimination of the government's indirect or Federal Family Education Loan in 2010, the maximum amount of $250,000 in the 2009-2011 session of Congress (Kiersh, 2009). However, Senator Boehner was not alone. In 2014, the parent company of Sallie Mae, SLM Corporation's lobbyists consisted of over 80 percent of former government employees or 24 out of 29 of their primary lobbying committee were previously connected to the Department of Education and other federal-level positions within the US government (Opensecrets.org, 2015). While SLM and Navient as corporations saw increases in their budget and contracts with the federal government, one would be remiss not to mention one other particular individual: former Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan.

Although Duncan's contributions to the state of education in the U.S. today are most distinctly tied to his work with the K-12 sector with Common Core initiatives and increased testing mandates, he has played an important role in the increased funding of Title IV, specifically Pell grants. Both Duncan and President Obama worked to relieve middlemen in the higher education loan funding processes and discontinued FFEL. But Duncan and President Obama's collaboration on this initiative should not come as a surprise, as Duncan and President Obama were friends during President Obama's time in the Senate and Duncan's time as CEO of

Chicago Public Schools—where Duncan was notorious for closing public schools and reopening them as charters. The key players are not just politicians though—as I have examined in previous sections, they can be any people or corporations with money to give and something to gain. The public must be scrupulous and diligent in the investigation of relationships to private sector donors and philanthropists who tout influencing and ultimately changing education policies "for the better."

As I have explained there are several players that are involved funding programs, whether financial aid related or not, within the federal government. The lobbyists, PACS, and foundations that have interest in education in general are innumerable and range from small, grassroots groups like Grassroots Education Movement to superpower "philanthropists" like the Gates' Foundation. Political parties, candidates, and private individuals all have a stake in education as business and as a tool to control future economic and capital development in the United States. Unfortunately, it seems that most of these groups (individuals as well) have one major focus—education as a means to a capitalistic and monetized end.

Can Free College Fix It All?

In a time where K-12 education seems to be suffering through test-and-punish standards, a series of ineffective legislation initiatives like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, and now Every Student Succeeds Act, as well as a lack of funding, it seems nearly impossible to consider the effects of funding for higher education. Still, it seems that the United States as a country values higher education and often considers attaining a college degree a symbol of wealth and prosperity. As an educator, seeing terms like "college readiness" and "grit," becoming more popular, leads me to believe that the idea of employability and the ability to make money are beginning to define what we think of as happiness and even success. Further, common mantras like "Stay in school," "keep your grades up," and "graduate and get a good job," flow easily from adults to high-school students as they prepare to officially enter adulthood. There seems to be deeply held beliefs about what it means to be successful in this country. These well-meaning people often forget to mention that even if a student gets a "good job" after college or even scholarships while in college, that they will likely be burdened by a large debt as the rising cost of college, in addition to potential loan issues, constrict finances for students after graduation. Not only do current students use loans, but they also struggle to find jobs even with a degree. It seems like now more than ever, making college tuition free would positively impact the country. Everyone from President Obama to Democratic Senator and former Presidential candidate, Bernie Sanders has a plan to make that happen. When Senator Sanders lost the party nomination, he and Secretary Clinton appear to have collaborated, as Secretary Clinton's plan echoes ideas from Senator Sanders' plan. President Obama too has taken strides to address college affordability and debt. And then, unfortunately, there is the case of Mr. Trump. What is missing from any plans addressing higher education and the funding for it is the impetus to examine what role higher education plays in the United States. We should question whether that role was defined by the people, for the people and how might the people want to change its role. Whether it's the New College Compact plan proposed by Secretary Clinton, Senator Sanders' College for All Act, or Trump's plan (at the time of publication, he had not indicated a formal platform on Higher Education policy) we should be taking a broader look at the purpose of education outside of capitalistic endeavors. So yeah, free college would be great. But, to what end?

Parting Thoughts

Throughout this work I have argued that there is a continual push to fund higher education and that the idea of degrees equating to jobs remains unquestioned. Further, I have argued that although there are both Republicans and Democrats alike lining their pockets with donations from Sallie Mae, Navient, and Google, there is again little to no mainstream critical thought about higher education and the purpose of it. From my perspective as a Student Affairs professional in higher education, as a society, we do not consider how $20,000 in student loan debt (a modest amount by any standards) positively impacts a student or their ability to be a happy and productive citizen. Instead, what we measure is the number of years it will take a person to pay off that debt, and how quickly they do so depends on how "good" of a job they get with their degree and in many cases multiple degrees.

The idea that education is an economic stimulant affected by education policies alone has been debunked, though politicians, policy-makers, and even laymen have negated that finding with neoliberal thinking and promulgation of the "pull yourselves up by the bootstraps" mentality. To combat the "American Dream," ideology that is so pervasive in mainstream culture today, I look to the work of Jean Anyon, Joel Spring, and Steven J. Ball, among few others. Perhaps most infamously, Anyon focuses on small, "winnable" battles in the community. Specifically, she touts going door-to-door to discuss school reforms with parents in a local community as an example of mobilizing and building a coalition of parents. In regard to federal financial aid policy, it is not as simple as mobilizing one school district, or rallying a particular PTA group. The work for this kind of reform must begin early, move forward with small steps, and prepare others for the long-haul as *indirect* policies are the key to effecting change in federal aid and higher education overall.

I am not from the K-12 sector of education, but I do realize that primary schooling is essentially the beginning of a student's college career. Access to pre-K, bilingual education, and other early education reform are some of the keys to ensure access to underrepresented minorities in higher education and essentially the end of the whitewashing of higher education as an institution. The following quote from Anyon's Radical Possibilities (2005) outlines my thinking and propels me as I continue the daily work of an educator. "Education is an institution whose basic problems are caused by, and whose basic problems reveal, the other crises in cities: poverty, joblessness and low-wages, and racial and class segregation" (Anyon, 2005, p.177). Financial aid is an important factor in higher education, but it should not be a determining factor. Free college, student loan forgiveness, and charitable foundations might be the solutions to the problems in education, but only if we want to continue the pursuit of our capitalistic notions of success.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDENT CONDUCT ADMINISTRATORS AND EMOTIONS: MANAGING EMOTIONS BY DEVELOPING A SELF-CARE PRACTICE WITH HEURISTICS

This work examines a student conduct administrator's experience in developing and utilizing a heuristic for the purposes of self-care and emotion management. Using stories of her every-day experience in student conduct, the author addresses emotional triggers and the process of becoming aware of emotions in her work life. Incorporating heuristics as a part of her repertoire of self-care practices to address and alleviate negative emotional energy, the author provides examples of heuristics as ever-evolving tools that can shape healthier, more sustainable strategies to help negotiate high-charged emotions in student conduct settings.

Student Conduct Administration – A Brief Overview

Student conduct administrators (SCAs) fulfill vital positions at colleges and universities in the United States. These administrators, some of whom are Deans of Students, Vice Presidents of Student Affairs, Directors of Student Conduct and a plethora of other professional titles, administer the standards of student conduct at institutions of higher education. The Association for Student Conduct Administration (ASCA), the professional organization that supports individuals who administer student conduct policies and procedures at colleges and universities, describes SCAs as professional educators who maintain the integrity of the academic community and who administer student conduct standards in ways that are ethical and clearly communicate student conduct expectations at the institution (ASCA, 2017). The primary role for most SCAs includes a spectrum of activity depending on the style or format of the conduct system at a college or university. In some instances, conduct administrators, work closely with students who may have violated codes of conduct or honor codes for low level matters or in other systems, the conduct officer is primarily responsible for preparing cases for disciplinary boards, completing investigations and maintaining disciplinary files while working with faculty members, other staff members, and even parents depending on the purported violation (Dannells, 1997). Although student conduct professionals may not have all the same titles, the goals outlined by our profession, both in Student Affairs and as higher education administrators are similar – to uphold and promote ethical student conduct standards.

In my role as a student conduct administrator at the director level, I too am responsible for upholding the student code of conduct and supporting the academic integrity and conduct standards of a large, public, urban institution of 17,000 students within a system of interconnected colleges. Colleagues at the connected colleges of our university, The City University of New York, often discuss the stress, burnout, and frustration that arises when working within a legalistic and multifaceted position. Our jobs, though both fulfilling and impactful, have the capacity to negate our emotional health and wellness. How we manage and alleviate our own emotions and help others to process the impacts of student conduct administration work (investigations, relevant terminology, processes and procedures) on our emotions is a salient and focal question in my research.

While conduct issues like underage drinking or physical assaults take precedence over simpler matters such as assisting faculty with difficult conversations or classroom management issues, there are other concerns about the personal wellbeing of student conduct officers in their role. Consternation about ethics, our job-related emotional stress, compassion fatigue and burnout related to the job, as well as the pressure to be fair and reasonable within every situation and with every individual abound. These concerns require not only the ability to recognize signs of emotional distress, but also the need for self-care and general wellness strategies to address the negative impacts that student conduct has on conduct administrators and student affairs professionals. We are responsible for adjudicating student disciplinary matters *and* ensuring that we remain healthy while doing so.

The goals of this chapter are to examine my own experience exploring emotional wellness tools and techniques to improve my awareness of my emotions as an SCA, and the impact of my emotions on others while interacting with me. In this chapter, through reflection, writing, and the use of heuristics as tools, I examine specific instances where self-care in the context of interacting with and learning from others impacted me and my ability to manage my emotions and holistic wellbeing. One of the ways I engage in these is by journaling and recalling specific events and experiences. Through these examples I explore how different self-care strategies for becoming aware of my emotions and ameliorating them while managing stress have assisted in improving the quality of my work life and my wellbeing.

A Typical (Emotional) Day in Student Conduct Life

In this section, I use a fictionalized (though based on actual experience) conversation with a faculty chairperson to illustrate an example of a common request for assistance with a perceived student conduct issue. While the story of the event has been altered and some parts are fictional, the interaction and emotions I describe are typical of many similar interactions that I have had but cannot provide details about to respect and honor ethical and professional commitments for privacy. This example provides context for how self-care and different strategies for engaging self-care have created emotional wellness and healthy self-care habits for me as a student conduct administrator.

The conversation happened as I was getting lunch on a particularly stressful day. I was standing in the cafeteria lunch line debating between curly fries, regular fries, or the best option, no fries, when a department chairperson approached me. In my mind, I knew this would not be a casual conversation about the lack of healthy food options, so I was not surprised that she quietly whispered to me about a student she wanted me to confront. In my experience, a faculty chairperson normally approaches me for assistance when one of two scenarios have occurred. The first, and most common reason, is when they perceive a concern relating to a student to be outside of their purview to address. Examples of these scenarios may include anything from a student revealing that they are homeless and unable to complete assignments, to a student who had a family member pass away and is now unable to attend class or complete any classwork. The other most common reason a chairperson approaches me is when they are unsure of how to proceed with a student who has exhibited some kind of misconduct. Examples of student misconduct may include anything from a student yelling during class, to a student who has failed to submit any assignments, to a student who has not responded to multiple attempts by the professor to address their misconduct. In those scenarios, faculty members seem to be at their "wit's end" when they reach me and often expect immediate action. In this particular case, the faculty chairperson fell into the former category. She wanted me to confront the student concerning their style of dress as it was negatively impacting a laboratory class setting, something she did not believe was her place to address with the student. In either case though, anticipating unpleasant and or uncomfortable interactions is stressful and, in my experience, people will do their best to avoid those interactions – especially faculty.

Difficult conversations in higher education are certainly not new. Educators across fields have not only been having difficult conversations (see Tobin & Alexakos, 2021, and Alexakos et al., 2016), but have also been developing tools like heuristics, an instrument with statements called "characteristics" that describe a particular phenomenon to explore, to help address the difficult emotions associated with those conversations (Powietrzynska, 2015a). Similar to the inherent discomfort with difficult conversations, in my experience, the rising number of adjuncts that fill so many higher education classrooms have led to an influx of faculty members who have expressed that their job is “to teach” and that addressing student issues that go beyond the classroom is *not* a part of their job. Fortunately for me, in this cafeteria scenario, the department chairperson at least acknowledged that this concern with the student was well within her job responsibilities. During our conversation, the chairperson was having a moment that conduct officers often experience – the duty to balance the needs of the larger academic community and the needs of the student in regard to the impacts of misconduct. Although this matter was related to the student’s style of dress, not other more problematic disruptions to a classroom setting, it illustrates not only the variation in student concerns SCAs address, but also the sensitive nature of the concerns that we address.

Student Conduct Administrators – Always On the Job

As a conduct administrator it is expected that we address any facet of student disruption that is problematic – regardless of the nature of the disruption. Every issue though is not ours to solve even if the person bringing it to our attention believes it is. Hearing the chairperson’s dilemma, my emotions were bifurcated into two feelings: relief and humility. The relief that this situation was easily resolved with some light coaching and assurance that the chairwoman’s approach would be gentle but impactful, was significant. In other instances, faculty, students, and even other Student Affairs administrators have asked me to address occurrences of more serious matters like assault or theft outside of the normal parameters of the job – while walking to the train station, attending an event, or while out in the local community for lunch. Those experiences outside of the physical work space are jarring and have trained me to be on alert *whenever* someone approaches me. However, the humility I was feeling after this encounter was a welcomed experience. It is not every day that we are consulted as experts, but for someone operating out of my ontological standpoint – my belief that we learn from each other regardless of our positions in life or in our work – it is both humbling and invigorating to have had the chairwoman ask for my advice.

Being viewed as a professional problem-solver, someone whose input is considered essential and sought after is intensely affirming for me. Although personal affirmation is not required for the job, the praise is welcomed as most of my interactions with others end with negative consequences, particularly for students. In my experience, engaging with students and other constituents regularly leaves me with feelings of doubt and an internal dialogue with myself that leads to extreme stress. Did I do the right thing? Have I considered every perspective? Was I rational and responding to "facts" and not feelings about an incident? Receiving outside validation assists me in some ways to know that I am doing a "good job" and lessens the feelings of stress and anxiety. I feel worthy and accomplished when I excel in my work. I am validated by making right decisions. While I do recognize that the need for validation is self-imposed, I have to admit that simple things like a pat on the back to keep me moving forward or a positive affirmation about the work I do is a strong motivation for me. Conversely, the stress and burnout, which are both indicative of job satisfaction for student affairs professionals (Mullen et al., 2018), that I experience from being the *only* SCA at my college demotivates me and transforms feelings of stress into despair and dread that has kept me up at night. As a result of those experiences and reading about other, better work experiences, I am working to separate my own self-value from my job hence, *this body of work.*

Student Conduct Administrators Have Emotions – Surprise!

In my role as an SCA I am expected to separate "facts" from emotion. In reality though, this work is emotionally-laden and dependent upon my perceptions of students' misconduct and by default, my decisions about that misconduct. I also recognize that my personal values and beliefs are interspersed in my work and I make decisions with my personal values in the background of my mind, though they do not always align with the mission and goals of the college. Admitting this is a bit of a challenge as again, the role of a student conduct administrator is supposed to be unbiased, objective and neutral, whatever these things actually mean. I am cognizant that in some respects, I cause harm to some students even though I am preventing harm for others. That is certainly not an unbiased stance. I decide when students are or are not taking (enough) responsibility for their actions and I can pursue suspending them directly or at least strongly recommend suspension to a hearing board. For instance, in cases where students engage in physical violence or a fight, the student who instigates the fight and the student who engages it are usually both suspended. There are times when there is some leniency, but most times both students are suspended. In cases like those, when suspension is used as a tool to protect the greater college community from violent conduct, it does in fact also harm the suspended students too. Although the students fighting may have severely disrupted the campus environment, sending those students home permanently could do the same, if not more damage to them personally and in their educational career. The balancing act of deciding cases like physical altercations or cases where the greater college community is at risk takes an emotional toll. In a role where making unpopular decisions – no matter if they are the *right* decisions – is the foundation of the work, it is difficult to find balance between assisting young people in taking responsibility for their actions and still considering their personal development as citizens and their ability to receive an education.

Even as a seasoned administrator, I still find such aspects of conduct work to be isolating and draining, but I am also fearful about saying so. Some may believe that we get used to the repetitive nature of SCA work after having been in this role for many years. And, in some ways, I am used to certain aspects of being an SCA like addressing copious alcohol cases the first month of a school year as students transition to college from high school. Nevertheless, I still struggle sometimes with the isolation that results from addressing student misconduct rather than being in a more traditional helping role, like advisement, student clubs, or enrollment. However, "getting used to" or becoming numb to the more repugnant student actions and others' reactions to them does not shield the human side of me from empathizing with the student in some respects. While the issues we address frequently, like alcohol or drug violations, or classroom management become routine, there are other incidents that I still agonize over or feel guilty for making or delivering some hard decisions – whether those decisions were mine or not.

I am challenged as I write this, because every word I choose is loaded. The way I describe what I feel has the potential to cause harm to those I interact with and also to bring shame and guilt upon myself as a professional. Within the student conduct field, I can hide behind the technical jargon of words and phrases like "responsible for violating the code of conduct" and "behavior" or "misconduct," when what I should be saying is that some students make bad choices and sometimes, I have to sanction (a fancy word for punish) them for it. In student conduct, we preach that we are "developmental," that we care about the student as a person and want them to learn how to make good and sound decisions. We say that we are invested in "educational sanctions" or sanctions that illuminate the effects of a students' misconduct and encourage them to learn from the process and, in most ways, we are. But, we are also humans with our own biases, emotions, and experiences that shape our interactions with everyone, especially our students. The dread of knowing that I am suspending someone who would likely receive probation *if* they had an attorney or the sickening feeling I have when I see another kind of student walk away from a suspension-worthy offense with only a warning are only a few examples of the tension I experience on a daily basis in this role. My work here is not only an exercise in self-care as a way to become aware of and address emotions, but it is also an exercise in addressing these concerns publicly, because I can't be alone, right? There are other, better conduct systems in place in colleges and universities, however, I have yet to experience them.

Policies, Procedures, and Participants in Student Conduct

With competing demands in student conduct – upholding conduct policies and procedures, resolving conduct matters in ways that satisfy supervisors (often Deans or Vice Presidents), ensuring that the disciplinary process strikes a balance between an educational experience and lessons of responsibility, maintaining the balance of the greater college community needs and individual student learning – the work of an SCA is not only difficult, but also political. These demands require the belief that the correct or right conduct is based on the rules each college puts forth. In my experience, the shared processes where we decide as a community with various stakeholders how we will approach misconduct have been stymied. There are boards of trustees, student senates, faculty senates, unions, and a litany of other stakeholders that decide how students should conduct themselves on campus or while affiliated with a college or university, but rarely have any of the constituents ever *experienced* the conduct process in any fashion. The disciplinary system is not inherently bad, but it is not exactly easy to navigate, either.

Struggling within the confines of these pre-written rules and ways of maintaining the status quo, it is difficult to always care for a student accused of misconduct as a person. I find that in some cases I have to suppress my feelings of frustration (with the process) and anger (with certain students), but also win my case by proving that a student did violate policy. In some scenarios though, I become numb to the emotions of it all. A combative respondent (a student who is accused of violating a policy) yelling at me that I am ruining their life or a complainant who has not participated in any part of the process until the matter is ready to be adjudicated can seriously impact the work I have done with no acknowledgment of that work. During those times, I try to breathe deeply, but mostly I let the feelings of anger, frustration, and even a strong sense of apathy or "fuck it" mentality take over. Compassion fatigue, the loss of the ability to care and connect to the feelings of others because of your own stress (Figley & Ludick, 2017), and the risk of burnout are just some of the side effects of working on difficult cases, but stress from students is not the only source of fatigue. Lack of support for resources, both human and monetary, are other stressors that add to the sometimes-daunting work of holding people responsible for violating college policies and procedures. Furthermore, student conduct administrators do not operate in a vacuum. Many other social factors including race and gender play significant roles in the work we do and when those issues intersect with student conduct matters, it is nearly intolerable. However, I will reserve that highly-charged discussion for another body of work.

In each of our cases our constituents have their own agendas, but as student conduct administrators we must consider how students' lives will be impacted *and* maintain our professional and ethical responsibilities, simultaneously. The aforementioned demands on SCAs dictate the relationships we develop as conduct officers with others in the college community that have stakes in how student misconduct is handled. While there is certainly a balance that must be maintained on the macro level – being careful with setting conduct-related precedents, making controversial sanction decisions or denying complainant appeals – those decisions are attributed to the larger college administration rather than an individual. The micro-level decisions we make as SCAs – giving a warning rather than probation or referring a case back to an instructor – have significant impacts on our daily interactions. These decisions, whether at the micro or macro level, impact my self-efficacy because unpopular decisions or perceived inaction influences how constituents interact with me moving forward. When I make decisions that negatively impact an affected party, that party's future interactions with me will be influenced by these experiences. Similarly, negative past interactions often precipitate the party treating me (or my role) as if I am incompetent or insignificant in their future interactions with me. These examples of interactions illustrate what sociological theorist Jonathan Turner (2002) describes as sanctions and expectations that arise during an emotional encounter. As a result of my past experiences in these interactions (sanctions and expectations I previously encountered now shape my future experiences), I am attuned to positive affirmations like the chairperson gave to me because my value in my work, for me, comes from making the right decisions that benefit others and show that I am competent, particularly with the micro-level scenario the chairperson and I addressed. There are several value judgements I make about myself based on the work I do and I have only recently begun to explore how and from where these judgements arise. In many ways this work, too, acts as a heuristic to raise my awareness of emotional triggers, continually challenging me to reflect on my practice of self-care.

Student Conduct Administrators – Back to Emotions

Emotions play a significant role in the work and in the self-efficacy of student conduct administrators, regardless of whether we admit it. Instead of considering emotions as a standalone concept to be explored and developed, researchers in higher education have described emotions in the context of other broader, more palatable concepts like, "ethics and care" (Waller, 2013) or "moral distress" (Haug, 2018) or the need for "autonomy" (Glick & Degges-White, 2019). Student conduct administrators' participation in developmental support and student services, a commonly understood role of Student Affairs, is rooted in the concepts of caring for the whole person and addressing student needs, which I argue are all influenced by our emotions and our awareness of others' emotions. While there are other important concepts like ethics and care, and compassion, I remain committed to the notion that these, too, are undergirded by the awareness of our emotions and the impacts they have on our work as student conduct administrators.

Experiences of emotions like the ones I had in the cafeteria are common in my daily life as a student conduct administrator. Emotions not only impact our thinking and our responses to micro-level interactions, similar to the lunchroom scenario that prompted this work, but becoming aware of our emotions as they ebb and flow challenges us to consider the ways in which emotions permeate our interactions in meso-and macro-level structures as well. To frame my discussion of emotions and for the purposes of this body of work, I utilize the work of Jonathan Turner (2002) and his neurobiological, sociological framework for understanding and working with emotions.

Turner (2002) notes that emotions are embedded in an encounter regardless of whether we are conscious of them. As a result, emotions then guide our encounters as we work through sanctioning and expectations – two concepts that Turner (2002) believes determine the scope and magnitude of emotions. For example, in successful encounters – those that result in both me and the other party agreeing to investigate or adjudicate a matter – there is an expectation from the party that I will meet their need (whatever that need may be in relation to student conduct). When that expectation is met, the party, in theory, experiences satisfaction or low-levels of happiness (Turner, 2002). It is when their expectation is met with a negative *sanction* or a need is *unmet* (expectations are incongruent) that levels of negatively-valanced emotions like anger or disappointment-sadness increase. This is true for me as well.

When I approach a faculty member or other colleague with certain expectations about how a conduct issue is addressed and they are not met, my emotions trigger me both consciously and unconsciously by the interplay of expectations and positive or negative sanctions in the encounter. Because student conduct work often addresses negative student actions and the impact of those behaviors on a person or a community, emotions are embedded in the experience and account for how each of these actions is perceived and then presented to me. There is no neutral way to explain disruptions or inappropriate conduct for a collegiate setting and I am far from neutral when I engage the person recounting the behaviors. In this respect, each encounter leaves me with potential for a buildup of negative emotional energy (Collins, 2004) that permeates my interactions if not immediately, later in my additional interactions with a person/party with similar circumstances. Regardless of my attempts at being a neutral fact-finder and investigator, even in simple conversations, emotions guide and frame much of the day's work for me.

Moments like those in the cafeteria, at times frustrating (I am just trying to get some fries, already!), and at other times reinvigorating, do not only trigger our emotions, but also define what success means (for me) in a student conduct administrator's world. These outward sanctions and markers of progress are helpful and revitalizing, but I challenge myself and other professionals to seek our own affirmations and peace with our emotions. From sporadic cafeteria interactions to more formalized meetings, student conduct administrators have opportunities to acknowledge our emotions in a variety of circumstances. With the use of heuristics, we become aware of our emotions as they emerge, especially from high energy interactions, and use heuristics as a tool to recognize what our emotions are so that we might deal with them more appropriately.

Self-Care and Wellness – Same Thing, Right?

Before defining self-care, I will explore the overarching concept of wellness as a kind of umbrella under which self-care lives. In my approach to self-care, I begin with wellness as a priority for a healthy and productive life. That concept of wellness in education, first introduced to me by Alexakos (2015) and Kenneth Tobin (2015), and expanded upon again by Tobin, Powietrzynska and Alexakos (2015), highlights the importance of ameliorating emotions by using tools like mindfulness through breath work and meditation, and through the use of a tool I advocate strongly for, the heuristic. Moreover, Tobin's (2017) focus on the birth to death continuum of wellness as an educational priority has influenced my thinking about ways of managing my emotions in a highly stressful and emotionally challenging role in a college setting. Similarly, as Alexakos (2015) explored in his work on sexual health, managing emotions and breathwork are also part of a toolbox of self-care techniques to incorporate into this research. While those scholars have not specifically used the term, "self-care," their assertions that wellness is a practice that incorporates the whole self, it seems prudent that wellness includes self-care, inherently. From their extensive research in the classroom, these scholars' work undergirds my current endeavors to incorporate their research into student conduct, with the goal of meaning-making that is impactful and useful to others in student conduct and student affairs roles within higher education.

Though my exposure to research on mindfulness, heuristics, and self-care come from classroom-oriented sources, there is much research available for review regarding wellness in higher education. Student Affairs literature has addressed wellness, including self-care, in a variety of ways (D. S. Anderson, 2015; Burke et al., 2016; S. A. Miller, 2016). Some have addressed common stressors in student affairs including burnout and compassion fatigue and student conduct work (Figley & Ludick, 2017; Mullen et al., 2018; Nagel-Bennett, 2010). Research like Anderson's (2015) guide to wellness issues for student affairs professionals and Treadwell's (2019) NASPA-affiliated volume addressing well-being practices are abundantly available for student affairs professionals (the umbrella category under which student conduct administrators fall), in regard to burnout, compassion fatigue, and interacting with students, though very few works use the term "emotions." There is a plethora of research (Regehr et al., 2013) available on college *students* and stress, including meta analyses and handbooks or multiyear volumes (Anderson, 2015) for student affairs professionals to review in relation to student stress. Alternatively, research on wellness for student conduct administrators *specifically* is mostly limited to dissertations (Filipchuk, 2018; Haug, 2018; Waller, 2013). Scholarly or peer reviewed materials do exist, but not at the volume of other general student affairs related research. My research, through this piece and others, focuses on the importance of self-care and wellness for Student Conduct Administrators. In the next section, I discuss such implications.

Self-Care, Especially for SCAs

Personal self-care has become wildly popular and may now be considered a mainstream health phenomenon, especially in the time of COVID-19. In some spaces – magazines, blogs, podcasts, yoga studios, etcetera – "self-care" is a popular phrase that gives permission to indulge our whims guilt-free after a long day's work and at other times is an excuse for just plain indulgence for the sake of indulgence as a part of a health practice. Self-care in Student Conduct is similar in some aspects from the iterations previously mentioned, but also very different from my lived experience as an SCA. The constant judgement (of others and how we react to others) and the pressure to make the best decision with someone's educational career and life are just two small facets of the kind of emotional effort that happens in student conduct work. The pressure arises from not only the uprising of legal considerations that have continually increased in the field of student conduct, but also the impacts whether positive or negative of our decision-making on a student.

In addition to the added pressures of legal constraints and student development, there have been questions about the validity of student conduct administrators as a unique position within higher education as well. Brian Glick and Suzanna Degges-White (2019) investigated the relationships between student conduct administrators' professional identities and skills required to fulfill the role to determine that the position *is* a legitimate profession with its own competencies and skillsets. In conjunction with the notion of SCAs perceived as unspecialized higher education professionals, yet simultaneously requiring SCAs to have even more specialized and legalistic training than ever before (Kimball et al., 2019), the pressure to balance those factors with being a "neutral" fact-finder or adjudicator is nearly impossible without some form of self-care. Moreover, the multiple rules and regulations of Title IX by the federal government dealing with sex discrimination and other college guidelines are just some examples of the complexity and additional emotional involvement in the work of student conduct. Even for a seasoned practitioner who knows the regulations and other important theories and processes fluently, I have found that there is still an inordinate level of emotional stress and tension embodied in the role. For example, a Director of Student Life is typically responsible for the extracurricular programming and the development of a social program at a college or university. The legal ramifications of making a mistake in that role include financial implications and potential social development issues for students, but it is highly unlikely that mistakes in that role will change the trajectory of a student's educational career. This is not a slight to those in these roles and is certainly not meant to undermine the importance of the position. This example of how concerns and pressure vary highlights the differences in the level of emotional engagement for student conduct administrators when compared to other student affairs roles.

Self-care, wellness, fitness and other health-related terminology can ebb and flow in popularity and become fads and trends in popular culture, but it does not negate the seriousness in which we need to take care of ourselves and our emotional and physical wellbeing. Student Affairs professional Stacey A. Miller (2016) recalls the suicide of a close colleague in Residence Life and Housing, another Student Affairs area in higher education. She notes that while self-care is often given much "lip service" in Student Affairs conferences and professional development seminars, not much of it is actually prioritized in the academy. Because of the nature of student conduct work, interacting with students and others from a *negative* starting point such as an accusation of a behavioral misstep, low emotional energy or emotions that do not serve us instantly abound. In my current role, there are limitations to how much self-care I can practice at a given time and it becomes difficult to release unwanted emotions before the next encounter. Some colleges within the university system are operating with offices of two SCAs or more, not including the administrative support staff. In my case, I am the only SCA in the office. With only one person adjudicating incidents on a college campus of 17000+ students there is a strong need for inquiry with a self-care focus. My colleagues from our university system find ourselves asking, what can relieve the stress, burnout, and pressure we apply to ourselves and that which is applied to us? To answer that, I argue that through self-care, which includes reflection, writing, and becoming aware of the unaware (mindfulness) are all techniques that can assuage and lessen the impacts of conduct work on student conduct administrators as social beings.

Self-Care – Creating Our Own Tools for Wellness

If self-care is the means by which we heal *and* prevent ourselves from damaging emotional experiences including blocking or avoiding others' emotional energy from permeating our own, and ameliorating emotions when we need to, we need tools to assist us. Some of these tools, like recognizing emotions that do not belong to us and the ability to choose our response or lack of response to other's emotional energy are already within us. Becoming aware of when we are experiencing an emotion is important as well as then asking ourselves if it is ours or not or if we want to engage it. Tools, like heuristics and writing or journaling as a kind of heuristic make becoming aware of our emotions a strong reflexive practice that we can continually develop over time and through each emotionally laden or triggering experience. With practicing our own emotional awareness, we can learn to forecast or see potential triggers as or before they arise, strengthening our preventative repertoire of self-care. Because we cannot simply set our previous emotional experiences aside, there are instances when student or even colleagues' behaviors can and will trigger intense emotional memories, including traumatic responses. However, our own agency, the ability to make choices about how and when react, is not only at our disposal, but is vital in addressing self-care at the onset of a triggering experience. Conversely, emotional experiences we have not previously encountered may set the tone for our future encounters, though we are not aware of it at the time we can choose our responses for new experiences, too.

Following the theoretical perspective of emotions by Turner (2002), our past experiences affect positive and negative sanctions and expectations in ourselves. Becoming aware of those responses through reflection and tools like heuristics to frame our reflections allows us to assert agency over our responses to positive and negative sanctions. When we react without agency, our responses are imbued with unchecked previous emotional energy (Collins, 2004). Self-care again becomes a vital practice with tools, both intrinsic (agency) and extrinsic (heuristics and writing), to ameliorate negatively valanced emotions and feelings by bringing ourselves back to the present, acknowledging the emotions at that time and moving forward. In some ways self-care represents a kind of mindfulness – as Jon Kabat Zinn (2014) noted, being aware of the present, now. Multiple studies have shown that Mindfulness-based interventions reduce the effects of stress on college and university students (Regehr et al., 2013). Knowing that those kinds of interventions assist *students* to address high-levels of stress and anxiety, providing guidance to administrators needs to be a priority. The helping professions like counselors, social workers, and particularly student affairs administrators often experience burnout and compassion fatigue, but instruction about these challenges earlier in graduate training programs or through mindfulness practices can prepare student affairs professionals to alleviate that stress and prevent burnout before it becomes an issue (Burke et al., 2016). Creative strategies that assist other helping professions like counselors include scrapbook journaling and visualization techniques (Bradley et al., 2013).

Through their work, Powietrzyńska, Alexakos, and Tobin (2015a) created a heuristic for Mindfulness in Education that assisted in the amelioration of emotions for pre-service and in-service science teachers. Their work laid the foundation for how I intend to incorporate heuristics as a part of my own self-care practice. In this work, I use utilize heuristics as reflexive tools for my use in Student Conduct.

Reflecting and Writing – Creating Opportunities for Self-Care

For Foucault, as described by Infinito (2003), writing activity is an important act of caring for the self – essentially the self becomes the subject of the activity. Writing is a form of self-care that I practice regularly. After troubling interactions like student meetings where the student became hostile or combative, yelling and screaming, I took notes afterward. After a fight occurred, I immediately returned to my desk, took notes and wrote down what just happened from my perspective. Even before I meet students or other constituents to discuss investigation matters, I take notes as a practice. In the past, I have known interactions would be highly emotionally-charged and in those cases, I allowed scenarios to play out fully on the page, often preparing responses or rationales for questions or conversations I imagined would occur in real life. There is power in writing; it gives me the ability to reflect on what I actually think after introspection and also to respond without judgement. Other times, I free-write so that I can clear my head and prepare for an important meeting or procedure. Sometimes "dumping" or writing out the things I know cannot be said aloud helps to remove the urge or recurring desire to do so. It seems that after every event or occurrence, I revisit my writing. In times of turmoil, stress, or overwrought emotions, without fail, I return to writing. In these ways, I view writing itself as my cardinal heuristic and self-care practice. In response to the aforementioned cafeteria experience, I decided to return to writing (again), but with a goal of understanding how writing might encourage my own self-care, before I began.

Formalizing My Self-Care – Creating a Heuristic for SCAs

After reviewing and using multiple heuristics (see this volume), I have reimagined some of the characteristics to work for me in a student conduct setting. Furthermore, I designed the following characteristics to become aware of any emotions that unfairly impact decision-making and the ability to remain open to multiple perspectives of an incident or event. Emotions like sadness, guilt and even fear as described in works by Turner (2002), may serve the purpose of identifying negative sanctions or a break in solidarity, which illuminates further areas for exploration and inquiry. The characteristics are self-focused and encourage reflection on our own behavior in relation to others. The principles guiding the creation of these heuristics are centered on ethical principles and practices in student conduct administration as noted by Association for Student Conduct Administration (*Theasca.Org*, n.d.). It is important to note that those below are no longer first iterations of the heuristic, which commonly go through several changes and tweaks as previous scholars Powietryznka, Tobin, & Alexakos (2015), Alexakos, et al., (2016) and Tobin and Alexakos (2021) have noted. This heuristic and the specific characteristics, or statements for reflection, are being reviewed, utilized, and revised continually during this work:

Student Conduct Heuristic

1. I listen to others to seek understanding
2. I am open to different interpretations of an event (or incident)
3. I am considerate to others when they are speaking
4. I participate in positive inner speech
5. I recognize emotions that are not mine

6. I show myself compassion
7. I accept my emotions and move forward

In my work so far, I have used these characteristics to reflect upon my interactions with students who may have violated the student code of conduct as well as with other staff and faculty as they report incidents to me. The goal was to implement the use of this heuristic on a regular basis into my practice (completed), continue to evaluate the heuristic (in progress), and ultimately to expand the use of it and invite others to participate in its use (in planning stages). Already the use of this set of characteristics as a tool for self-care has been valuable because it has reminded me that though I am performing a job or service, I am still a person. This heuristic still serves as a reflective tool for me to improve the way I engage with others by being more present and remembering that some emotions are not mine though I may be working with them. Below I review why and how I chose or redesigned each characteristic in relation to my practice of self-care within student conduct with examples.

Characteristic 1, "I listen to others to seek understanding" is directly related to student conduct administrators listening intently and looking for consistency, similarities, and differences in what a person is saying. Taken in the context of executing an important skill in student conduct, the heuristic allows me to focus on what I am hearing, rather than preparing a response to what is said. Moreover, from a self-care perspective, this characteristic allows me to listen to others without judging *what* they say or *how* they say it to me. Sometimes when a student or other person is speaking, they are upset or yelling and I am only focusing on how they are speaking, rather than trying to recognize the meaning of what is being said. Using this characteristic in practice allows me to form a better understanding of what has transpired from another's perspective and ultimately allows me to view that perspective not as a truth or lie, which conduct officers are charged with determining, but as only one of many perspectives to be considered. Furthermore, this characteristic assists me in seeking to understand why something happened (or did not happen) as a result of an event or incident.

Characteristic 2, "I am open to different interpretations of an event/incident" addresses the biases with which SCAs sometimes operate depending on whom is recalling an event/incident or story. This characteristic, similar to the first one, allows the notion of "truth" to become subjective and relative as the perspectives will differ from each person who recalls an incident. For example, a faculty member reported that a student became irate, did not want to leave the classroom as asked, and started cursing as they exited a classroom. The student, whom I later met with, described the incident as brief, with him agreeing to leave and grumbling curse words under his breath as he left. While what the student recalled was factually accurate – the student did leave the room as asked – the way he described his exit was much less detailed than what other witnesses and the professor described. These kinds of incident described from such diverse perspectives depending on who you ask and when you ask create significant dilemmas for conduct officers. In my experience, there have been professors who have made reports in the moment when tensions were running high or an audience was present. In those cases, because of the additional pressures like other students watching, embarrassment or even fear, the recalling of an event is far from neutral and becomes one version of an incident that has multiple other perspectives. For me, allowing for differing perspectives provided depth and complexity as opposed to one "truth" that decided how I interacted with the case moving forward. Taking only the perspective of the faculty member or only the perspective of the student would result in a divide that could worsen future interactions between all parties involved. Allowing for differing perspectives also releases the pressure of needing to understand “what really happened” or to feel compelled to determine the “true story.” Because we use the preponderance of the evidence standard (it is more likely than not that a violation occurred) at my college, it is less important that a “truth” is discovered. Therefore, this characteristic allows me to take actions in investigations or adjudication that is less focused on finding truths, and refocused on repairing the harm that was caused either in the classroom or between the parties involved.

Characteristic 3, “I am considerate to others when they are speaking” allows for me to consider my non-verbal cues and body language that I communicate to a speaker. With this characteristic, my goal was to remind myself to remain open and receptive and to physically communicate those cues to the speaker. This characteristic also serves as a reminder that others may view my non-verbal cues differently than how I believe I portray them. In future iterations of this heuristic, I will consider adding a characteristic that specifically addresses physical manifestations or bodily movements. Furthermore, this characteristic prevents my mind from wandering when a person speaks. In the past I have had the experience of interviewing multiple witnesses to one incident or event. The witnesses all recalled the incident using very similar vernacular and chronology to describe the incident. It was difficult to continually engage each witness as much of what they described was the same. However, allowing them to express themselves without interruption and while giving non-verbal cues such as head-nodding and direct eye-contact seemed to improve the interaction as normally, I would focus my attention on writing notes. This characteristic remains a challenge for me to continually engage. At the time I drafted it, I had not considered that I may be the person interrupted or receiving inconsiderate treatment. Regardless, the characteristic still remains relevant even if it is just a reminder to model mindfully listening behaviors.

Characteristic 4, “I participate in positive inner speech” reminds me that while some parts of the student conduct process are perceived as punitive and cause highly-charged emotions, those parts are a function of the role and responsibility of an SCA, not my personal attitudes or beliefs. It is also a reminder that student conduct work is not a personal affront to our students as it sometimes seems, but it is meant to assist students in taking accountability for their actions and preventing them from repeating misconduct that detracts from their educational experience. When I drafted this characteristic, my focus was on a specific case where a student begged me to reconsider a sanction. They pleaded with me to be kind and to think of all they would lose as a result of their suspension. As SCAs, difficult decisions are a part of our jobs, but we do not need to take responsibility for a student’s actions. We are not responsible for the choices a student made prior to our interactions with them. This heuristic prompts me to remember that although I am experiencing personal stress and highly charged emotions, I can acknowledge them and then move forward.

Characteristic 5, “I recognize emotions that are not mine” permits me to acknowledge that another person may be having an emotional experience during the retelling of a particular incident or occurrence that is wholly unrelated to their present interaction with me. This characteristic is a reminder that while I am empathetic toward another person, I do not have to mirror their emotional energy. Perhaps the most important characteristic, this statement helps me to become aware of my own difficult emotions like anger or fear that are triggered in the moment, but also to recognize that I do not have to maintain or retain those emotions. Ultimately, this is the heuristic I use most to get “unstuck” from lingering emotional energy.

Characteristic 6, “I show myself compassion” is the characteristic that is most related to self-care for me. Managing my own emotions while maintaining a professional and attuned presence with others is not an easy task. This characteristic encourages me to acknowledge difficult emotions and challenges and to accept those with grace and understanding for others, but also for myself. In working to develop the heuristic overall, I found myself thinking that my characteristics were not as good as the other scholars who created them previously. I questioned whether I should undertake this project at all and if this heuristic would actually make a difference in my work. I decided that if I expected to show others compassion and cared enough about their emotions to want to manage my own, the least I could do was to allow myself some compassion for doing so. Thus, my favorite characteristic and sometimes the most impactful of them all, this characteristic 6, was developed.

Characteristic 7, “I accept my emotions and move forward” remains important to me to include because it addresses the implication that, despite working with Number 5 above and learning not to allow other people’s emotions become my own, there may be times when I have or do absorb *some* emotions, but I do not get stuck in them. I take away their power by admitting that they are present, but that they do not take control of my life. This particular characteristic is also an acknowledgement that while emotions are ever-present, there are times where limiting my response to them is important for continuing to be professional, but also maintaining my personal wellbeing. Recently, when a student told me of a traumatic experience that occurred, I connected with the story because I personally had a similar experience. That experience triggered me and I became angry and upset at the alleged respondent. In order for me to move forward with the investigation, I had to set aside or separate my personal emotions about that incident. At that moment though, I could not. This characteristic assisted me to distinguish the difference between my personal emotions about the situation and the emotions that lingered as I was triggered because of my own past experience.

Changes and Challenges in Self-Care Practice

Since beginning this work, I have thought about the way self-care in its various forms has proliferated social media and popular culture. Taking time away, learning to say "no" to things that do not bring us joy and cultivating the ability to engage the self through any kind of introspective exercises are popular and important ideals, but *how to do* those things in worthwhile ways is not always clear. The challenge I overcame with the process of creating and using heuristics was the praxis of it all. Remembering to use heuristics, learning to tweak the characteristics, and incorporating heuristics as a part of my other self-care habit of writing took work. And sometimes, I failed. I became flustered, I was not able to deal with sadness or disappointment, even though I really wanted to. At times, I resorted to "bottling it up." However, I know it was not because this intervention failed, but sometimes we need more than we can manage to give ourselves. In my view, self-care is great and the more ways I learned to practice it, the better I became at managing and anticipating my emotions as well as feeling and understanding the emotions of others, while not allowing their emotions to become mine. What I want to say here is that self-care is important and heuristics and writing are a few of the tools available to help us practice it. If a heuristic does not work, it can be changed. If the heuristic or even one characteristic draws me away from *myself* or *my emotions*, what then does it draw me to? What does the characteristic reveal to me or about me in my interaction with it? Even when the heuristic does not address what I want it to, what it does address becomes salient and a point for further exploration.

Perhaps the most important lesson I have garnered from this experience is that heuristics continually evolve just as we do in our practice of self-care. Even now as I review these characteristics, I can see how I have changed as I have interacted with them. I recognize that there are contradictions in the first iterations of the heuristics because I had only considered them for my personal use as a kind preparation for difficult meetings or interactions. Furthermore, I noticed that at first, I only practiced with the heuristic during times when I thought anger, fear, or sadness would result from an interaction, but I then quickly realized that the heuristics "worked" for deepening more pleasant emotions as well. My continued use of the heuristic strengthened it by regularly making me aware of my own emotions on a consistent basis. Moreover, I adapted the heuristic to work for me in different ways. Not every characteristic was appropriate or worked for me in every situation. In those times, I was able to "skip" or move on from that characteristic to focus on others that might better ground me or prepare me for my next interaction. In those cases, turning my attention *away from myself* and attending to the emotions of others was powerful as an act of self-care, too. The changes both within me and with the actual characteristics of the heuristic represent the ability to effectively navigate difficult emotions, positive or negative, and apply what was learned from my previous experiences to improve for future experiences.

Just as we engage in assessment for our professional roles, assessing our personal and emotional needs consistently is vital to a successful self-care practice. Not every tool works for every person at every instance. The strength of heuristics lies in the personalization and ability to adapt them as necessary. They can be used in conjunction with other kinds of self-care I previously discussed, especially with writing. Combining some or all the characteristics with writing elicited some of my best ideas for new heuristics and other projects/initiatives. Thus, in many ways my writing became a heuristic in itself.

Heuristics allow for role-taking – understanding a different perspective – even if the role of the other is imagined. A heuristic allows the user to consider different ways of thinking, even if no one else presents these different ways of thinking by simply incorporating difference into it. In conjunction with role-taking, I have come to recognize that there are other perspectives that I am not seeing for each of these characteristics. Because I would like to be aware of these different views and perspectives I want to share them with others and get their feedback as I may not always be aware of what I may be missing. The input and use of this tool with others sets the agenda for my next avenue of inquiry.

Moving Forward with Self-Care – How I Have Changed

Self-care is a continual practice. It requires regular use and evaluation, much like any good wellness practice does. The next steps in my work will be incorporating feedback from others regarding the characteristics and use of the self-care heuristic. Continuing to develop this tool with others is vital as a part of the refinement of the heuristic. I know what using heuristics means for my own self-care practice, but learning from others and exploring difference will continue to improve its usefulness not just for me, but for other SCAs.

My intentions for this work were to illuminate the litany of ways I have used a heuristic for self-care. By using this heuristic, I have learned to become aware of the tide of my emotions as well as decide whether and how I want to alleviate any negative emotions or explore them in healthy and meaningful ways. Incorporating the heuristic as a part of my daily practice has allowed me to maintain emotional awareness as a baseline. Before I walk into any conduct meeting or even before I respond to the first emails of the day, I check-in with myself. I become aware of my emotions and consider how they may or may not relate to a task or interaction.

Similarly, when I do recognize emotions that could impact a situation, I explore them by either writing about them or changing the order of my day so I can take time to reflect and address them. Other times, after reflection and "sitting with" some emotions, I am now able to accept my emotions as a natural part of my work experience and move on from them or interrogate them further when necessary. No matter which option I choose, taking ownership and acknowledging that I decide how and when to alleviate my emotions at all is a significant change for me. This practice, using heuristics and writing as tools, is sustainable and fulfilling to me. I am able to reclaim the power in my emotions and ultimately my health. Importantly, I do recognize that this tool is just that – a tool, but a powerful one when we use it in combination with our agency and awareness.

Future Directions for Heuristics in Student Conduct

On the chance that I have not been specific enough about the myriad ways I envision heuristics as a tool for student conduct administrators' personal and professional repertoire, I offer the following. Preparing a heuristic for use prior to a disciplinary hearing where members of a hearing board can review characteristics that highlight disciplinary principles *before* engaging in the hearing could provide the opportunity for board members to explore the biases or preconceived notions they have. Similarly, prior to investigatory interviews a heuristic can illuminate ideas about the kinds of questions to be asked or draw attention to the disciplinary concepts to be discussed. In the prior examples, heuristics are used for group and single-person experiences, a trait that makes the use of heuristics attractive and adaptable. Heuristics can also be used as a form of team-building, particularly for inviting group discussion or debriefing after staff meetings. Similarly, there is no age limit or specific experience needed in using heuristics; their beauty lies in their simplicity. They are easily adaptable to draw attention to new concepts or as a tool to review older, but still relevant ideas. Finally, we can use heuristics as a participation tool to engage others in their own self-care, especially in a teaching and or training environment. Heuristics are a powerful apparatus for beginning work in awareness and agency as well. In each of these scenarios, the heuristic has the ability to draw attention to important concepts without placing value judgements or requiring responses from the participants.

Using a tool like a heuristic gives student conduct administrators the option and awareness to not only acknowledge their own emotions and what is theirs or not about a particular issue or incident, but to also interrogate where their experience comes from, how it impacts their work and their decision-making going forward. Denying our emotions and personal feelings in student conduct work does not make us unbiased or neutral. It muddies the waters and allows us to pretend that we can objectively make decisions about student lives and educational careers. In my belief, knowledge is not free from biases regardless of where it is developed (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). Also, significantly, it offers a way to explore alternative ways of dealing with stress and caring for oneself and others. So, the next time I go for lunch I will take a few minutes to review my self-care heuristic. And maybe, I will also *skip* the fries.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPRESSIONISTIC TALES AND MULTI-THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN EXAMINING STUDENT CONDUCT ADMINISTRATION

In this chapter I engage in a reflection, a "tale from the field," of a traumatic experience I had as a student conduct administrator (SCA). This reflection serves as a means to nuance the experience of student affairs professionals as I navigate the complex processes associated with disciplinary work in higher education. I examine a "spike in the curve" through the use of narrative and impressionist tales to situate this work in the greater context of student conduct administration. My tale from the field is comprised of notes, written monologues (between self), and free-writes during the pendency of a complicated disciplinary case.

Notes About This Tale

Each student conduct case has the potential to leave its mark both on the larger institution and with the people who are part of the process. There are cases that have transformed me for the better and some that I believe traumatized me in ways from which I am still healing. After serving as a student conduct administrator for over a decade I have come to accept the position as a significant part of my identity. I have thrived when I have witnessed students who were suspended return to successfully complete their degree and felt joy when I announced their names at graduation. I have been devastated when complainants (a person who makes a formal accusation against another) have walked out of the hearing room expressing feelings of invalidation and helplessness. The personal and professional changes that occur as a result of some cases have left an indelible mark upon me. Those cases, including sexual assault matters, theft, and even some mental health-related cases, have not only exposed my beliefs, but have also challenged me to consider how emotionally-charged interactions continue to shape my practice. As the case study for this chapter, I discuss a particular case for which I am still ameliorating my trauma.

In this work I explore how an interaction I had with a male student respondent (student accused of violating college policies) who I identify as John acted as a "spike in the curve" of my everyday practice in student conduct. This fictional tale of the field is based on real life experiences I have had over the course of my career as a student affairs professional. John is a fictional character who represents the student perspective of this tale. The spike, as theorized by Tobin and Alexakos (2021), signifies difference and the potential for transformative interrogations about what has happened and why in a particular field. In this instance, John was alleged to have violated an honor code and I was the conduct officer investigating and preparing the case for a disciplinary hearing. What I thought would be a routine conduct case unfurled into an intense examination of how my experiences as a Black woman in higher education shapes the way I interact with and perform my role as a student conduct administrator. In this chapter I acknowledge difficult interactions and interrogate my practices so that the influence of those experiences is taken into consideration and critically examined.

The form of this impressionist tale (Van Maanen, 1988) offers humanization of a field experience and provides some inner-voice insight without negating important theoretical concepts. An impressionistic tale, as Van Maanen (1988) describes it, is the "kitchen sink" or the catchall for ethnographic writing (p. 117). The writer can freely recall the previous events, giving more weight to details that seem important to the author and less to others. Further, the narrative portions of the tale give life and voice to those in the tale to explain what is happening and why, as the story unfolds. Impressionist tales also use literary tools like dramatic recall and they follow a literary cannon rather than the writing "rules" of the discipline in which the writer uses them (Van Maanen, 1988). Further, the narrative portion of this kind of research provides a richness and connection with the reader that traditional methodology, which typically focuses on data-driven results and survey collection, does not offer. Choosing this event, John's case in combination with impressionistic tales, to reflect upon is an example of how interrogating a spike in the curve and using a bricolage or multi-logical approach within a student affairs context can offer an expansive view of what is happening and why (Tobin, 2017). Emotions, culture, gender-performances, and compassion fatigue will all provide different lenses with which to view this research. In what comes ahead I narrate an open, reflective, and nuanced look into my ontological shapeshifting process that continually evolves as I engage this material.

A Spike in the Curve and Insufferable Days

Just as Van Maanen's (1988) impressionist tales depend on "exceptional" occurrences within the field to elucidate ideas for interrogation and exploration, this phenomenological research, too, centers difference and recognizes a "spike in the curve" in this micro-level example of a field in student conduct (Tobin & Alexakos, 2021). The concept of the spike or contradiction to the normal activity of a student interaction constitutes an example of the use of event-oriented method of inquiry introduced by Sewell (2005) and theorized by Tobin and Ritchie (2012). Event-oriented inquiry supposes that an event or an occurrence that fosters change or significantly impacts participants is the catalyst for structural change and can lead to a richer understanding of the world around us (Alexakos, 2015).

Like many cyclical college or university positions, there is some uniformity in the daily occurrences of student conduct administration. While the everyday happenings are of little interest for a spike and an impressionistic tale, there are other days that are *insufferable* even to the most seasoned conduct officer. The significance of an impressionistic tale rests with insufferable. The exceptions, the extraordinary, and the contradictions that rise above the mundane, daily experiences are where we can learn and grow from the stories of an impressionist tale (Van Maanen, 1988). This tale also offers the opportunity to provide the reader with private insight into the field as the writer can reveal things that may not appear in more positivistic styles of writing, where knowledge is considered free from biases and separated from its creator (Kincheloe & Tobin, 2009). As Van Maanen (1988) indicated, [with impressionist tales] we are free "…to say things that under different circumstances could not be said" (p. 108).

Tales act as a catalyst for change as we become aware of our own thoughts and actions by reviewing those of others. This shapeshifting or changes in perspective and practices is another important component of spikes and impressionistic tales. Also, with tales, we identify traits or commonalities between ourselves and the tale-tellers and perhaps more importantly, *differences* between us. Similarly, when writing or narrating a tale, a conversation between the self and other is developed. Imagining readers' responses and role-taking too provides perspective that informs impressionist tales. As I recall specific details for this tale, providing an illustrative context or setting the scene, I offer a glimpse into the ways in which my previous experiences shape and are reshaped by the culture of the practice of student conduct administration.

Inclusive Frameworks – The Case for Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Authentic Inquiry

According to Tobin (2017), "frameworks illuminate what is experienced in social life while obscuring much of what is happening" (p. 5). In this case, preparation for an upcoming disciplinary hearing was what was happening, however, the experiences of that preparation, both mine and the students, were illuminated. Throughout this research I continually ask what was happening in the moment. I allow this question to guide my work so that as I attempt to nuance the experience, more questions emerge about it. This work is a tale of *my lived experience* and *recollection* of transpired events. From that perspective, this work highlights the salient aspects of conduct work and the interaction to me and obscures other aspects of the field that I do not find relevant. However, to others, what I do not discuss or what I do not explicitly address could be of utmost importance. Importantly, this tale only includes my voice and not John's. John's voice in this work is my imagined response from an amalgamation of various student responses I have heard and experienced throughout the years of my career. In using an impressionist tale to frame this work, I "seek to imaginatively place the audience in the fieldwork situation…" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 103).

Authentic Inquiry (Tobin & Alexakos, 2021) is the overarching framework guiding this chapter. Authentic Inquiry is inclusive of difference and guides research with four criteria that form the tenets of authentic inquiry as a theoretical framework. The criteria, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity, are based on Guba and Lincoln's (1989) work and further developed and theorized extensively for teaching and learning by Ken Tobin (2014). A major component of the Authentic Inquiry theoretical framework is Hermeneutic Phenomenology. Based on the interpretation of lived experience, Hermeneutic Phenomenology focuses on exploring lived experience as it is understood and encountered by the participants (Ricoeur, 1992). Furthermore, Hermeneutic Phenomenology allows for the use of a bricolage of methodologies and methods, and, in this research, underscores the importance of including lived experience to be explored with and inside social context (Alexakos, 2015). Tobin (2017) maintains that multi-logical research is an inclusive approach for conducting inquiry. Similarly, Konstantinos Alexakos in his work with teacher | researchers (2015) asserts that researchers choose frameworks based on their own axiology and that there are inherent value judgements, which can become embedded in the research. Rather than ignore the presence of my specific axiology, particularly in regard to student conduct matters, I highlight my standpoint and make it “explicit” and “out in the open for anyone interested” in my work (Alexakos, 2015, p. 7).

In this work, I engage each of the authentic inquiry criteria and while there are some limitations, embracing this methodology has already become personally transformative. As a participant of this research and teller of this tale I make my axiological stances clear and present them as lenses through which I view and interpret what is happening. Although I do not include the voice of the student, I do include salient (to me) statements that were part of my recollection of multiple events. This limitation complication exists because of the litigious nature of student conduct in higher education and the potential harm that could befall a student as a participant of this work. Thus, my recollection of multiple occasions and interactions over the course of time is meant to serve as another voice in this work.

Ultimately, I offer insight into processes that are normally obscured or seem complicated for those not directly and regularly involved in student conduct cases. Simultaneously, I interpret this work through multiple lenses to construct new knowledge and ways of knowing as a result of sharing, editing, and constructing this work as it emerges. Finally, this work provides advantages to myself and others who engage it. It allows for reflection on my practice in student conduct, highlights areas of growth for me and illuminates larger structures in place that can prevent or promote equity issues.

Culture and Fieldwork – Student Conduct in Practice

For impressionist tales fieldwork and culture are interrelated and form the basis of ethnography, which I used in the creation of this impressionist tale (Van Maanen, 1988). In this research, the fieldwork is the work that I do every day in student conduct. Culture then occurs in a field which Tobin (2017) describes as “structured and unbounded…” and operates within a dialectical relationship with the individual and the collective engaged (p. 4). While the engagement occurs, it is geared toward specific “motives” and each member in the collective operates to attain those motives. However, when an individual within the collective disregards the collective’s motives or goals, there is a contradiction (Tobin, 2017). For this project, my intention was to explain the student conduct process to John who was facing serious disciplinary charges. John’s combative resistance toward the collective (the collective in this case being the College and I, the student conduct administrator) goal of understanding the process and engaging with important documents created a significant contradiction that needed to be explored.

Exploring the culture of practice of student conduct administration requires building a robust understanding of multiple theorists to fully articulate the experience. I look to both William Sewell (1999), and Pierre Bourdieu (1992). Sewell (1999) argues that culture consists of patterns of “thin coherence” that are constantly evolving across time and fields (p. 49). Additionally, Sewell (1999) purports that culture operates as both symbols, signs and also as practices, all of which are interrelated, though they can change. While Sewell’s work is centered on the amorphous nature of culture, theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1992) argues that culture occurs within our habitus and fields. Within the broader macro-level field of student conduct, my colleagues consist of *student conduct administrators (SCAs)* with specialized training in conduct practices and also other *student affairs professionals* who do not have specialized training to address conduct matters, but have taken on the responsibility on an ad hoc basis. This subtle, but significant difference in even the language used to describe the act of student conduct administration exemplifies the patterns of thin coherence among both the practices and the administrators of student conduct in the field. Similarly, the terminology SCAs use, the codes of conduct we carry with us or have memorized, and even the professional clothing we wear to work every day act as symbols within our larger practice of student conduct, solidifying our rituals and habitus.

Within student conduct, the culture of our student conduct processes is designed to provide educational benefits rather than punitive sanctions alone. With that notion at the forefront of our practice, conduct officers juggle adding an educational component to adjudication for students, even when students must be separated from the institution. While we operate with learning as a goal, we also focus on our integrity as we navigate the varied experiences we have with students (Waryold et al., 2020). However, as conduct officers we are not special or beyond reproach. In his 2015 dissertation, Scott Stallman found that implicit bias in college student conduct officers was just as prevalent as implicit bias measures in the general public (Stallman, 2015). There was no indication that college conduct officers who often work with a variety of students were less biased than others, which complicates our interactions with students further. Even with special trainings and regular exposure to bias-related professional development, conduct administrators are not immune from biases. Additionally, among other challenges from conduct systems formed on the basis of the justice system, student conduct administrators can feel “on trial” themselves (Miller, 2018, p. 92). The fear of making small mistakes or having small mistakes become the basis of appeals in this legalistic environment heighten the stakes for conduct officers and add to the pressures of maintaining an educational process for students. Similarly, Nathan Miller’s dissertation (2018) explores the impact of governmental regulations on SCAs and Title IX coordinators at colleges and universities. Participants in his study, both SCAs and Title IX coordinators, reported that they felt increased levels of stress and anxiety in combination with changes in and more stringent, legal requirements of conduct and investigation work, especially in regard to sexual misconduct.

Adding to the stress of tumultuous investigations, legal requirements, and maintaining an educational component of the conduct process, conduct officers only recently established the field as an independent profession within higher education (Glick & Degges-White, 2019). While the primary role for an SCA is to address alleged policy violations, that does not mean that we only interact with rule-breaking students. Other student affairs professionals like Greek Life advisors, athletic staff, or even faculty in specific disciplines ultimately decide which kinds of students with whom they work (Brown-McClure & Cocks, 2020). Conversely, SCAs interact with all kinds of students, regardless of their majors, time at the college or any other demographic or discipline-related factors. Working with such a diverse group of people, students or otherwise, adds to the emotional arsenal and cultural repertoire we employ to do conduct work with students. At times, my voice as a conduct officer has been silenced as a result of the work I do. There are no choices about the cohort of students with whom I interact.

Student Conduct in Theory

Centering students as co-researchers and participants in Student Affairs research is difficult to do with traditional, positivistic research methods and methodology. Surveys, Likert Scales, and statistical analysis undergird much of the literature and research in Student Affairs. Within Student Conduct research specifically, it is even more challenging to center the participants' perspectives as the objectivity of scientific method-based research prevents the researcher from becoming a participant or even supporting direct participant interaction. As Gehring (2001) has described, student conduct is increasingly legalistic. The challenge of conducting research ethically is a consideration, but doing so without legal implications now, too, becomes an ever-present threat. Similarly, other scholars have noted that legalistic practices and the need to be familiar with city or state laws in *addition to* college policies and procedures can add further stipulations that ultimately negate student well-being (Kimball et al., 2019).

However, there are scholars who are attempting to broaden the scope of research within student conduct and have done so with their work. For example, Howell (2005) conducted a case study with 10 respondent students about the meaning-making experiences they had with the student conduct process. King (2012) noted that the key factor in determining whether students found their experience in a conduct hearing/meeting educational was the value students placed on meeting with a student conduct administrator and the fairness the students perceived as a result of the interaction. Lancaster's (2012) work outlines the history of student conduct and found that conduct officers, regardless of the policies and procedures they follow to address conduct issues, should act as moral mentors. He argues that fairness (or perceived fairness) by students works to encourage learning and that having a moral mentor can encourage "submerged moral values of the participants" (Lancaster, 2012, p. 59).

Other scholars have investigated student conduct from the approach of centering student development theory. Biswas (2013) conducted research where students explored meaning making through the co-creation of standards in an English course. Neumeister (2017) developed a conceptual framework for student conduct administration known as the Model of Transformational Change for Moral Action (MTC). The model, which incorporates moral development theory with transtheoretical model and transformational leadership, works by addressing the developmental needs of students, using conflict as an opportunity for growth, and portrays students as moral actors and SCAs as moral agents. Recently, Adam Ross Nelson (2017) and colleagues developed a survey instrument using quasi-experimental design to ascertain a measure of student development through a student's interaction with a student conduct process.

One popular student development theory in higher education is that of self-authorship and the process of becoming fully realized adult. The concept of self-authorship guides students throughout their trajectory through college, as young adults and also shifts meaning-making from an external process influenced by others to an internal process realized through self (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Scholars like Baxter-Magolda and earlier theorists (Stimpson & Stimpson, 2008) have argued that student development theory can assist us in understanding the ways of being and becoming for young adults. What is not addressed in the theory or in most practices of student conduct is the interaction of lived experiences of all participants in the research, especially respondent students and the conduct officers whose primary role is to assess responsibility. We are dependent upon thin descriptions and or statistical analysis of survey responses to make decisions that can set precedents. Again, one of the aims of this research is to provide context, nuance, and insight that is often missing from traditional research methodology in student conduct.

Incorporating the use of impressionistic tales with hermeneutic phenomenology in this research allows me as a researcher and a participant to give voice to my lived experience within a micro-level cultural field. Further, this research allows for exposure and interrogation of the culture of student conduct practice as contradictions arise throughout the narratives. What was it about John's case that triggered a staggering emotional response from me? Was I reacting to the student, personally? What happened on this day that prompted me to reflect upon this specific incident? Did my race or the fact that I am a woman change how the events unfolded? As an integral part of this inquiry, I hermeneutically engage the contradictions that become visible as I review, edit, share, and continue to write this work. As a part of my own axiology, I am in constant conversation with myself about the rationale of my actions or inactions, ethical considerations, and the structures in which I operate. My reflexive practice is one that calls into question the whys of the way things are and informs how I change and improve my practice and approaches over time.

Tale Production and Construction Outline

In the following sections I return to the incident that I discussed earlier as a spike in the curve involving a respondent student, John. As I return to John's case, I guide the reader through the experience of a typical pre-hearing meeting I have with all students who are accused of policy violations. Pre-hearing meetings are designed to prepare a respondent student for the disciplinary process, and in particular, a student conduct board hearing. In these meetings, I review all evidence and documentation that may be presented in a case and also answer any questions or concerns about how the hearing process works. It is the last time before the actual hearing that the student will interact with me or have access to first-hand knowledge about how a hearing will proceed. The sections in italicized font indicate common student refrains (as I recall them) during the course of my career that have occurred during these pre-hearing meetings. My recollection of the student statements is not attributable to John, but I use his case as the tale that tells a nuanced story of the lived experience of a student conduct administrator. The paragraphs that follow each student statement reflect my notes, free writes, and inner dialogue with myself as a conduct officer, student affairs professional, and a Black woman. I begin with a recollection of the notes I took immediately following John and I's first interaction.

I Just Got Yelled at…Again – CAM 2/13/19 2:48pm.

I remember saying something like this to a colleague in my office suite as I rolled my eyes and sat down, exhausted in my office chair. At times, the constant push and pull of this work erodes my patience and my empathy. But even with those intense feelings of hopelessness coursing through me, I still had another two hours left in the day. I had just been verbally brutalized by someone who needs the utmost compassion, that I could no longer seem to muster. Empathy and compassion for students is something that any *good* Student Affairs professional brings to their role every day. Through my formal Student Affairs education, I was prepared to expect challenges from students and to offer support to those students in helpful and meaningful ways. What I was not prepared for were the emotional extremes of the educational landscape that I navigate daily among students, myself, and the larger institution in which I learn and work.

Back in my office suite, I sit down and write notes. The beginning of this story—a reflection about what has just happened—helps me remember the occurrences during the conversation and the way the student and I both interacted with each other. I try to recall things accurately and also critically, but I know my emotions belie my accuracy and my lived experiences prior to this occurrence are already coloring my work. Even if I wanted to present this story as a "truthful" depiction of what happened, I cannot. That is not to say that I am actively lying or creating a false narrative. The use of written language and the ability to choose each word, casually or deliberately, illustrates the crises of representation that occurs in any attempt to describe what is happening and why it is happening (Tobin, 2017). From a multi-ontological perspective, the presence of multiple truths and differences is welcomed in social interactions and within inquiry. However, in my role as a student conduct administrator, being objective and discerning "facts" about what is happening and how it happened is an integral part of the responsibility. While my axiological stance is in direct conflict with the assertion that anyone is or makes decisions in unbiased, neutral, or valueless vacuums, an adherence to those notions in the Student Conduct field is required. The constant contradiction between my values and the role of this position creates unique situations where I believe I have to choose policy and practice over empathy and compassion for students. This is the life of a conduct officer.

Emotions Overtake Us All

This Entire Case is Bullshit!

I could barely get through the procedure. If you can call it that. I tried hard to thoroughly review the evidence that would be presented in his hearing, but he fought me at every turn. I began by outlining the rules of the hearing and asking if he had any questions. Immediately, John began interrupting me. His anger was palpable. His legs were shaking, his voice was high, and he could barely contain his emotions while trying to casually state that this entire case is “bullshit.” Like normal, I tried to proceed. We reviewed the hearing procedures—all of which had been provided to him prior to the meeting on several occasions, but not one of the pages was creased. Reviewing just one of those documents can take at least an hour alone. I knew he hadn’t read one page by the kinds of questions he asked. We continued.

In those moments, I struggled to avoid the emotional pull the student exerted. I wanted to match his high-pitched voice and hostile energy. It took physical effort from me not to engage in mirroring the same physical behaviors as the student. I gripped my pen. I held it until it was damp with sweat. I was angry. Being berated or yelled at is hurtful and wholly inappropriate and, in other circumstances, I would have rescheduled the meeting but could not as this was the last opportunity for John. When I experience yelling in person it is an emotional trigger for me that requires my active engagement to redirect the unnerved, panicked energy that yelling conjures for me. Recognizing yelling as a trigger of past trauma and continuing to engage the student in those moments was (barely) possible for me only as a result of self-reflection practices and self-awareness. Richard Davidson's (2012) work in neuroscience highlights six dimensions of emotional styles that can be improved by changing behaviors or incorporating wellness practices like mindfulness and meditation. Two of the emotional styles, self-awareness and social intuition, focus on perception, both of our bodily responses to emotions (self-awareness) and our ability to recognize social cues (social intuition). Using these concepts allows for "reflection in practice" and the knowledge to recognize the emotional styles of others in the moment to address concerns and the potential to ameliorate emotional tension (Tobin & Alexakos, 2021). Fortunately for me, at the time of this incident, I had already begun to engage in emotion management techniques and had a grasp on some baseline emotion theory.

Sociologist and emotion theorist Jonathan Turner (2002) argues that there are four primary emotions, assertion-anger, aversion-fear, satisfaction-happiness, and disappointment-sadness, which are experienced at varying intensities. While I was experiencing my own emotional turmoil, I was not alone in my anger. The student's anger (or fear) was substantial. It was as if I could see the tension rising on his skin. He vacillated between seeming outraged, but also anxious and alarmed. The varying intensity of the student's emotions (from my perspective) indicated to me that there may have been some underlying concerns that the student did not want to or could not express. Research indicates that high negative emotions can make people sick (Tobin & Llena, 2011). In Tobin and Llena's (2011) work, continuous contradictions between what was expected of a high school science teacher and what he preferred to do in teaching a curriculum began to build substantial negative emotions that were ultimately deleterious to his health. The physiological expression of emotions impact health in many ways, including disturbed breathing patterns, elevated heart rate, and low blood oxygenation levels (Tobin et al., 2016). Though I did not view any of these indicators in the student at the time, the fluctuations in his speech and flushing of his face were evident. Similarly, my own bodily response was clear—elevated body temperature (sweating) and an increased heart-rate (becoming angry) were signs of high negative emotions. The interaction highlighted an extreme contradiction in how I am required to respond to these negative interactions versus what would actually be beneficial to both the student and I.

From my perspective, anger played a role in the response I experienced from the student. However, there may have been other less prominent emotions at play as well. In Giovanni Frazzetto's (2013) work on emotions, he explains that anger occurs in addition to other feelings and emotions. He argues that anger, guilt, and even shame can happen simultaneously, with the difference between the two stemming from the private nature of guilt and public features of shame (Frazzetto, 2013). Shame then becomes powerful by its proximity—it is based on others' judgement of our moral failures or behavioral mishaps (Frazzetto, 2013). From a sociocultural perspective, I left this interaction perhaps with more questions than answers about what happened and what more is there—emphasizing the emergent and contingent nature of this work.

Morality as Part of Our Identities

"I've Already Seen All of This…"

I showed John every piece of tangible evidence that may be presented in the case as his rights, according to the procedures, allow. He quickly perused incident reports, which I had to remind him have two sides and multiple sections. In my mind, I was thinking that this is the time that he should be fully invested in understanding the process. Understanding how a hearing works and the nuances of what is and is not permissible can be detrimental to a student's "success" *and* equity in a hearing procedure. I felt trapped—suffocated. I was walking the line between advocacy and adjudication and I was not doing it well. I know that if he had better resources and access to legal representation and or even a parent, he would have been better off, but I also knew those resources weren't available to him and that I would likely "win" this case because of it. I felt guilty, but also relieved. This is where the struggle of being an educator (or a caring, kind human being) and a conduct officer conflict.

According to our professional standards conduct officers should act in moral ways, but this is challenging given the systems in which we operate. In the above example, my defined role as a conduct officer is to ensure that the student's rights are upheld and also to maintain the behavioral integrity standards at the college. This duality in my role represents a moral dilemma and ethical quandary. Administrators, and especially conduct officers, are most effective when they are open to examining their biases and cognizant of their own self-awareness to ensure that "students feel heard and valued as individuals" (King, 2012, p. 577). Although I am aware of and have examined my personal biases, I am not in the position of power to change macro-level structures, like the funding our college receives to hire more positions or to provide students advocates at the college's expense. In the position I am in though, within the micro-level, I can be explicit with students about the standards and procedures in hearings, offer examples of past experiences, among other things. In John's case, I tried many times to offer my expertise in those areas, but to no avail. I am left to consider what prevented me from reaching John or John from accepting the information. Lancaster (2012) argues that moral action is important for SCAs and consideration for the individual student is what should drive our decision making, not only the confines of a student code of conduct or rules and regulations. However, the onus is not only on the conduct officer to address ethical and moral concerns. In Biswas' (2013) research, students became co-creators in knowledge and in standards for a writing class, helping them become attuned to moral and ethical behavior. Students began to share the responsibility of developing ethical and moral behaviors and did so through social interaction with their peers (Biswas, (2013). Looking back on the event, I struggle to identify how I might have engaged the student or expressed compassion and care, rather than frustration.

Developing an ethic of care on campus is a vital component of the relationship of students to their colleges and universities (Dalton & Crosby, 2013). As colleges and universities focus on the rights and responsibilities of students, they enforce personal conduct rules as deterrents for harmful behaviors. However, depending on "punishment" to regulate student behaviors disregards care for students (Dalton & Crosby, 2013). The ethics of care concept developed for education by Nel Noddings (1998) is rooted in the foundation of John Dewey and his ideologies regarding student-centered instruction. While student conduct administration is not delivered in a classroom or other defined learning space, the unequal relationship (power dynamics) between conduct officers and their students necessitates an exploration of moral duty in relation to upholding college policies as a part of the conduct officer's role. Caring for students includes protecting them from college policies and procedures that also "create hardships and barriers for students because of their youth and inexperience" (Dalton & Crosby, 2013, p.202). Nevertheless, SCAs even if working from an ethic of care must evaluate how showing care for one student may inadvertently harm another. That is not to say that each student should not be treated with care, even if that care results in their removal from the larger college community. These are some of the dilemmas conduct officers grapple with and experience distress from being engaged in their work.

In Christopher Haug's (2018) dissertation, *Identifying moral distress within Student Affairs administration in higher education*, he discusses multiple sources of moral dilemmas conduct officers experience in performing their duties. Haug (2018) identified several sources of distress including stressors he classified as both internal and external. Of the internal barriers that prevent conduct officers from moral action, he found that fear of job loss or retaliation, a perceived lack of power or control, avoiding conflict and having been socialized to follow orders were the primary issues of concern for conduct officers. For this particular body of work, I experienced all of these factors as barriers to enacting what I believed was the moral and ethical thing to do at several points during the interactions.

Girl, Bye. Dismissing Women as Authority Figures

"You're Scared of Me"

I felt it in my gut. The slight deepening of John's voice, the way he rested back in the chair and spread his legs wide while stroking his chin. Pleased with himself, he suddenly seemed very confident. It was as if I were witnessing the physical manifestation of his realization that he could outsmart me. That he could visualize himself walking away from this interaction with the upper hand. Was it the fact that I allowed my frustration to peek through? Did I sigh too heavily or flinch earlier when he yelled? When students yell I would normally stop the conversation so that we could regroup or refocus, but in this instance, I did not think that would help. There was nothing I could do to appease him, short of dismissing the matter, until he seemed to recognize that I was wavering on my decision to continue the interaction. I (still) struggle to understand how the tables turned. I have the thought, but if I write it or even think it people will say that I am making it up. I'm used to being called a liar, but can I trust myself to recognize when I'm being intimidated? Am I feeling this way because I am a woman?

John’s assertion that I, specifically, have orchestrated this entire “attack” against him isn’t exactly untrue. I have done most of the research and investigation of the case. I have built a solid cache of evidence that will be presented in a hearing, and I understand his weaknesses or characteristics that might influence a conduct board because he has been interacting with me since the initial incident occurred. He does not know the extent to which I have examined his actions and behaviors without his knowledge, nor do I know how he has viewed mine. I cannot speak to how John viewed me in relation to my role, but when he realized that I would not be in the room with him during the hearing, it seemed as if he were relieved. Despite all the emotions I experienced, anger, frustration, and even sadness, I still felt the need and responsibility to advocate for him. Is that some innate motherly feeling I was harnessing?

Throughout the remainder of our meeting John continually criticized the policies, the evidence, and basically all of my work. Though I know what I did was correct, my investigation was thorough and well within the norms, I still felt like I had done something wrong. In the beginning of our meeting, I told him that he needs to control his yelling or we may have to stop. I reminded him that this is not personal. I would do the same process for any student accused of similar violations. I warn him that such behavior—yelling, cursing, talking over—can negatively impact him at the hearing. Regardless, I could not shake the feeling that he would tear me down in every possible way to the next man who will listen to him. Nor could I stop caring so much.

While men attend college at relatively similar rates as women, men are overrepresented in judicial or student conduct matters on college campuses (Harper et al., 2005). My college is no different. In a free-write about a week or so after the prehearing interview with John, I made a list of cases that have remained in the forefront of my mind when I recall tough or emotionally draining conduct work. In addition to the case with John, every case that I recalled involved a male-identified respondent. Each incident, including a mental health referral issue, a stalking accusation, and an alleged physical assault, involved male respondents acting out violently. Unsurprising for student conduct administrators familiar with the historical underpinnings of student conduct practice, higher education has a long history of men behaving in what are considered inappropriate ways by current standards (Dannells, 1997). In my experience, little of that has changed today.

Klobassa and Laker (2018) challenge male gender norms and performative scripts in their exploration of critical, gender-aware restorative justice approaches in Student Conduct. They argue that gender scripts, originally theorized by Judith Butler (1990), can assist practitioners in understanding that the gender performances that lead to disciplinary issues are not inherent behaviors exhibited by male students, but are learned behaviors that can be addressed and therefore, changed (Klobassa & Laker, 2018). Their approach through restorative justice, an inclusive practice that allows the harmed and offending parties to address responsibility and repair community relationships, allows for SCAs and the respondent student their self to examine their behavior through the lens of multiple identities, inclusive of the male identity. Similarly, in her study, King (2012) found that male students rated their experiences of the discipline process as less fair than their female counterparts. As Klobassa and Laker (2018) assert, by critically engaging male-identified students in identity work and development practices, we can examine not only the behaviors that lead to violations and or sanctions, but the underlying rationale for the exercise of the performative behavior in the first place.

The research available on male identity and development is plentiful, but without support from administration or high-level leadership, change to include this kind of work with students is slow to non-existent in my experience. Issues of gender and culture within student conduct represent the macro-level changes that are needed within some higher education institutions. In an ideal world, my conduct work would incorporate programming and inquiry into these matters as complementary practice. In future works, perhaps men's self-care should be a focus of inquiry for college administrators.

Are You Sure? Really Sure? Absolutely Sure?

"You Don't Have the Intelligence to Understand Bioinformatics"

I struggle as a professional to compassionately and empathetically address students when they blatantly lie, misrepresent information, and reject any notion of responsibility. Issues of morality and ethics are not new to conduct administrators (Dannells, 1997), but the ways in which we deal with them can vary. After several meetings with me and the Vice President of Student Affairs—a meeting in which, as I predicted, John berated my work performance and impugned me as beyond incompetent—John finally went forward with a hearing. Not only had John questioned my ethics and competence, but he also blatantly lied and misrepresented what I said both during a hearing and to my supervisor about what occurred during the meetings between us. This part of conduct work is especially frustrating because as a conduct officer much of what I do is advocating for students' rights, regardless of if they are the respondent or complainant in a case. Although John was rude and belligerent, I maintained professionalism and advocated for him even when it cost me humility and in part, my peace.

Ultimately, John was found responsible for the charges and the college met its goals of providing due process for students and upholding the academic standards. However, questions about the experience remain. Did the student actually accept responsibility and grow from the experience? Did he reevaluate his actions at all? It is next to impossible to tell. What *I* can tell though, is that I have embodied the emotional and physical aftereffects of this experience. In future instances, I would recall the anger that swelled in my chest when another male student raised his voice at me. I would struggle to breathe deeply and force myself to remain calm and continue working when someone else claimed I am not equipped for my position. In some respects, the blaming, the lying, the misleading that seems like desperation from students becomes a form of gaslighting for me. A manipulative tactic, gaslighting occurs when a person questions their reality or even their sanity after interacting with someone who purposefully doubts or undermines the other's experiences (Wood & Harris, 2021). In my experience, John is far from the only student who has invoked those feelings and when I have endured self-doubt and confusion a little too often, I sometimes lose my sense of purpose.

While John's case is an example of the ways that this works taxes me as a conduct officer, John is not directly responsible for the larger concerns, like budgetary constraints, trauma, and stress that lead to traumatic experiences in the first place. The fact that I am the only conduct officer and am required to address all cases is impacted not only by poor budgeting and lack of care or concern, but especially by the perspective that every "student problem" is mine alone to resolve. Those are some of the overwhelming macro-level problems that I am not sure how to solve in a way that serves all parties equitably. As I have throughout this work, I maintain that our lived experiences mediate our actions and emotions. Furthermore, these lived experiences define and are (re)defined by institutional structures.

Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Traumatic Stress Are Real

"I Hate This School!" Vs. "…All I Want to do Is Finish My Education at the School I Love."

The sentiments above are common from students who are just learning of their disciplinary charges or that the college will adjudicate an incident. The first statement was made directly to me and the other was made to my male supervisor, after John had learned the severity of the charges. After working with disciplinary matters and witnessing students show competing identities to me and other conduct-related staff for many years, I used to joke that I had "compassion fatigue." I was hardened by so many negative experiences of students lying, becoming belligerent and taking no responsibility for their actions. And, to be clear, it is not only students who do those things in disciplinary cases.

In another freewriting session after John's case was resolved, I wrote about the experiences I had of feeling empathy for students quickly evolving into apathy. I considered cases that elicited empathy from me for either the complainant or the respondent, but I realized, I had a short list. A drug case that occurred before John's case and another academic integrity case after the conclusion of John's both drew tepid responses from me upon recollection. In fact, I found it difficult after the case with John to recall other cases where I felt any connection to the students. It was as if John's case traumatized me. I felt withdrawn from the work and a numbness permeated my interactions. In retrospect, I can now see that I wasn't actually joking about my fatigue.

Compassion fatigue, or what is known in traumatology as secondary traumatic stress (STS) or secondary victimization is the "'cost of caring' for others who are in emotional pain" (Figley, 2002, p. 2). Compassion fatigue is also a form of burnout that arises from providing care for those who are suffering (Figley, 2002). While there may be differences in the nomenclature, compassion fatigue, STS, and even secondary victimization represent similar concepts and are all based in trauma. Trauma, as defined by the American Psychological Association (2016) is defined as "events or experiences that are shocking and overwhelming, typically involving major threat to the physical, emotional, or psychological safety and well-being of the individual victim(s) and loved ones and friends…" (p. 6). Working with students who have been sexually assaulted, students who have sexually assaulted others, and students who have created harm in the college community were and still are regular occurrences in my student conduct practice. Though John's case was not related to physical trauma, the student's highly emotional outbursts, the story of his life leading up to his violation, and our tumultuous interactions evoked significant duress and agitation within me. John's case was nowhere near the same experience of that of an assault case, however, after a myriad of emotionally-draining encounters it felt as though my well-being was at risk.

Research in the helping professions (see Figley & Ludick, 2017 references), have addressed the concerns of experiencing trauma through their work with patients and clients, but there are similarities in the effects of trauma work in academia, too. Little attention is paid to emotional health outside the confines of how it relates to student conduct work—whether we can remain impartial and fair, and even "unbiased." As conduct administrators, we too can endure vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, among other stressors. While there is a plethora of research on helping professions like counselors, teachers, and medical professionals, there is little research available regarding college administrators as helping professionals, and even fewer studies that center the experiences of student conduct administrators specifically.

In a study on secondary traumatic stress that included individuals from a variety of functional areas in student affairs, including residence life (where I worked previously), RJ Lynch and Chris Glass (2020) identified the following common themes:

> The impact of trauma support work on personal well-being, the impact of professional and organizational influence on the development of maladaptive views of student support, the professional's self-efficacy in regard to trauma support, and the importance of personal and professional support networks to well-being. (p. 1052)

Their work, along with others, confirms the presence of secondary traumatic stress as a legitimate phenomenon to be considered in addition to other stressors like burnout and compassion fatigue that have been explored in relation to student affairs professionals and wellbeing (Lynch & Glass, 2020).

Teaching and writing about violence against women and experiencing secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue too was the premise of Nikischer's (2009) autoethnography. Realizing that her own research and teaching regarding sexual assault victims and cancer survivors was causing her emotional duress, she began documenting her experiences with emotional trauma. Ultimately her research concluded with a call for IRB-like protections for researchers as well as participants (Nikischer, 2019). In Residence Life, Lynch's (2017) study resulted in the development of a scale to assess secondary traumatic stress for resident assistants, as they serve as first responders in residence halls. Additionally, secondary traumatic stress disorder and compassion fatigue, are significant factors in Black administrator's experience with racial trauma within academe (Anthym & Tuitt, 2019). As each of the preceding studies have explored trauma work in higher education, I am confident that student conduct administrators are not alone in the experience of traumas, compassion fatigue, and other stressors. However, having those experiences for me was especially isolating. I am hopeful that this research provides additional insight into the work, both literal and emotional, of student conduct administrators within higher education.

Striking a Balance—Not Everything is Awful

In my role as a conduct officer, I am not always at odds with students who violate policies. There are some rare instances when I am a bystander or assist others with their hearings. Those times are my favorite. Hearings are simultaneously horrendous and, surprisingly, the most enjoyable parts of the conduct officer's role from my perspective. Whether I am acting as a presenter of the case (a prosecutor-like role), or I am just in the room to record the hearing or guide the process, these scenarios can set precedents for behavioral standards at the campus, impact student lives, and change the culture of a college or university in front of me as the hearing progresses. I believe that the hearing is where the most learning happens, especially for me. Students have the opportunity to see how their decisions and actions up to that point have impacted the community and specific people around them. I can see how I applied disciplinary charges and whether students or other members of a hearing board seem to understand them or interpret them. I can see the gaps in evidence or testimony, and sometimes I can see the humanity of the process.

In some ways hearings, like spikes and impressionistic tales, are shapeshifters—tools that focus on self-reflection, are context-specific and have the potential to catalyze change (Tobin, 2018). It is one of the only times in a disciplinary process where a student interacts again with a complainant or victim. Hearings offer the unique opportunity for opposing parties to have their respective arguments heard and also countered. And, at times, the effects of harm are on display as well. Hearings are a field of their own and as we navigate these fields, we constantly change and are changed by the field itself. Each hearing has specific rules, but rarely are the outcomes ever similar. As I have maintained throughout all of my work, and also in this chapter, every decision we make is influenced by and shrouded in our lived experiences. The hearing for John, the student referenced in this narrative tale, went just as expected in practice yet was not at all what I thought it would be in terms of the experience. Not only did he test my moral, ethical, and even some physical limits, he did the same to the conduct board members.

Creating Space—Tales Really Tell

This tale tells far more than just my perspective of John's and my story. In this piece I explored an interaction with a student to illustrate some of the contradictions I experienced in student conduct administration. Issues of morality, gender roles, and trauma framed this work as I engaged in meaning-making and interpreting what was happening and why. In addition to the shapeshifting this work has allowed me to undergo, I choose to write these experiences of my work to diversify the kinds of knowledge and styles of research for higher education and student affairs. I believe that humanizing research, contextualizing and nuancing inquiry provides an opportunity for growth both as an educator and researcher, but also as an engaged citizen. For me, one of the goals of any research is respecting all participants while transforming systems and practices for the better. Those principles are what I believe guide ethical inquiry into complex matters of student development.

Although I have no goals for generalizability, or the idea that this work is or will be identical to the experience of any conduct officer if reproduced, this work does contribute to the social aspects of the world around us (Tobin, 2009). Collecting data or producing statistical findings are not part of the outcomes of this chapter, but nevertheless I want to address significant challenges that I believe provide important insight about what is missing from this work. The challenges, including the student's perspective of the interactions, the lack of generalizability, and even the wide breadth of topics reviewed, could be viewed as too lax to be considered research. However, I believe that this approach to research in Student Conduct has the potential to be rich and diverse and illustrative of the theory and praxis of sociocultural and student development theory in action. Furthermore, the lack of generalizability emphasizes the detail and nuance that each conduct case embodies. Perhaps the presence of specific nuances in each case represents a commonality in the complexities and intimate knowledge of student conduct administration. As we learn and grow from each interaction with students and even colleagues, the ripple effects are ever-present and ongoing. Our past practices inform our future performances as we move forward in our careers and in life.

Changes and System Upgrades

When I began writing the notes I have included in this chapter, I did so only for me. I did not have intentions to share with others how stressed I was or that I was seriously considering a complete career change. Having experienced years' worth of trauma and compassion fatigue, I was forced to examine my student conduct practice, my choices related to conduct matters, and how I have changed over time. John's case, along with others, solidified my need to act, to return to a state where I could empathize with students again and also feel confident in my work. It has taken therapy work, exercise, and overhauling my wellness practices to return to myself. Sleepless nights and journals full of free writing that I thought would never see the light of day again are some of the ways I have coped with this career path and its impact on my whole self.

In West and Greer's (2019) study on the wellbeing of Black women in student affairs, the participants noted that setting work-life boundaries were important for maintaining personal well-being and professional success. My experience, too, mirrors their findings. Boundaries are those fundamental limits we set for ourselves that protect the "integrity" of our lives (Katherine, 2012). In my experience, they keep me from spiraling into an overextended, stressed state that continues until my inevitable crash. Since my experience with John, I have had to learn to be more conscious of my boundaries and actually assert them. I will no longer accept emotional outbursts or verbally abusive behaviors from students (and staff, too!) regardless of the helping nature of student conduct work. I recognize that with my new stance there will be challenges.

Sacrifices to my own emotional wellness have peppered my experiences in Student Affairs, but after having separated from the physical workspace of my job (see chapter five), defining and realigning my boundaries in relation to my work has become easier. For example, setting boundaries for acceptable interactions and actually saying no to unnecessary tasks or requests that make no difference in a conduct case are two key components of change that I am implementing in my student conduct practice. Similarly, I have come to understand boundaries as tools—as the invisible shields that I use to protect myself from harm or undue burden.

Borrowing from Kate Linder's (2013) student affairs-related strategies for creating healthy boundaries, I engage most of the practices that she recommends. Regular self-reflection and evaluation of external factors that may influence my boundaries from both work and home are important strategies that I have incorporated into my boundary work. However, I have also developed a few practices of my own. Namely, I engage free writing as a practice to create awareness of excess emotions and to create clear definitions of my boundaries. Both as a part of my self-care and in preparation for academic writing, as I was first introduced to the concept, free writing is a "contemplative activity" that encourages writing mindfully (Tobin & Alexakos, 2021). These free writes also act as heuristics, a tool for reflexivity, that helped me become aware of the unaware, especially in regard to my emotions. By engaging in free writing, I can see my boundaries form and shift as I articulate them and other experiences I have on paper, not just in my head or heart.

In addition to examining boundaries through writing, accepting contradictions or spikes in my "normal" routines as points for reflection and self-learning has been transformational. The tough cases, the students who push me outside of my comfort zone, the toxic environments that set me up for failure in one way or another have all become points of interrogation and exploration for me. Similarly, I have also learned to recognize the spikes that bring intense joy. Sitting with the pleasure of learning something new, experiencing tenderness and thoughtfulness from others and also toward myself are now part of my practices as well. Whether I am writing about those wonderful moments where I believe I have made a connection with a student or I am furiously scribbling about a reckless decision, I choose to use both as points of exploration and ultimately, empowerment. Through research and inquiry, free-writing, and the regular setting and maintaining of boundaries, I explore these spikes in the curve with confidence that I will change and learn from them. Of course, I have been hurt, upset, and even devastated, but sitting in those feelings helped me to readjust—to realign my boundaries so that I might protect my emotions and my energy. Overcoming compassion fatigue is possible. Satisfaction with my work and a sense of purpose returned once I learned to separate my emotions from others. Perhaps most challengingly, I accept that I am not responsible for anyone else's emotions or feelings and I never have been.

From Being Stuck to Moving Forward

The research and writing in this chapter have empowered me and brought me the awareness necessary to evolve and search for the tools to change in ways I did not think were possible. I was hurt when I began working on this chapter and while I am tempted to say that I am healed, what I can actually say more accurately, is that I am *healing*. Transformation, from my view, is an active process. I am proud to say that I have learned to accept and adapt to change as a regular part of my practices in student conduct based on what I have learned from years' worth of interactions and occurrences and it is my goal to continue doing so. Being a student conduct administrator is not just deciding facts and interpreting policies and procedures—it is learning and engaging with and from students simultaneously. The work of a student conduct administrator is far from unbiased, but it is expansive and each case has the potential to impact many others. With this tale, I attempted to broaden the forms of inquiry that are traditionally used within student affairs. It explores the lived experience of a conduct administrator as I interpret and make meaning of the world in which I operate every day. I am hopeful that it invites commentary and critique so that it becomes transformative for anyone who engages with it.

CHAPTER FIVE

TAKING AGENCY. WALKING AWAY AND COMING HOME – HOW COVID19 CHANGED MY RELATIONSHIP TO MY JOB, MY EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES TO FOOD AS A COPING MECHANISM

I know that my perceptions, both in relation to COVID19 and in my educational experience, are laden with privilege. I acknowledge that what I say in this chapter may not be received well, especially by those who have felt the sting of COVID19 directly through losing loved ones, losing their jobs, or facing trauma as an essential worker. This work is not meant to minimize or overshadow COVID19's significance in anyone's life or to deflect from the racial and economic disparities the pandemic has amplified. Rather, by exploring my own challenges and triumphs in my health and wellness during the height of the COVID19 pandemic I hope to offer an alternative discourse centering growth and positive change as part of exploring the emotional impacts of the pandemic.

Surprise! We're Going Home

Prior to COVID19, I spent the majority of my days in a school. Whether working or actually attending classes, social interactions with students and colleagues were planned and purposeful. However, since the pandemic began in March 2020 until now (March 2021, as I am editing this chapter) students, faculty and administrators across the United States have spent their time in front of a screen rather than in person. This change's impact has been felt world-wide. From teachers scrambling to make online content for 2nd –graders, to college professors trying to make a physics lab work remotely, there has been a major effort to adjust rapidly to the new ways we both live and work. I argue though, that for some, this was a welcomed and needed shift away from the everyday monotony of school, work, repeat.

At the university were I currently work, walk-in or general help services at the Registrar, Financial Aid, and Student Affairs and Conduct offices must now be addressed by administrators from their home environment. This shift from home-as-a-respite to home-the-workplace has consequences. Each student-administrator service requires building or maintaining relationships via little black boxes or avatars, rather than face to face encounters. The logistical and technical gymnastics required to resituate our entire division of employees was daunting. However, connection issues were only a sliver of the larger concerns that arise from moving to a fully online service model in a matter of weeks. Did these consequences change our experiences for the better, or worse? Perhaps the better question is, *how* have they changed our experiences?

Personally, integrating my home and work environments elucidated serious obstacles for me especially around stress management and coping mechanisms. I hadn't given one thought to how this displacement could exacerbate poor wellness practices or highlight non-existent ones. Prior to COVID19, I loosely managed (I use "managed" very lightly as you will soon read) my work-life balance and wellness practices, falsely believing there was a magical separation between my work life and my home life. In short, I needed to address two health projects that I had been avoiding by clinging to a false work/home dichotomy. The first of those was my relationship with food. The other was a lack of stress management which inspired my budding relationship with walking as a therapeutic exercise. What began as a national health crisis would eventually become the impetus for my personal transformation through a wellness-centered approach.

This work reflects my personal wellness research project that emerged soon after I learned I would not return to work for the remainder of 2020. It includes notes that I wrote for myself at varying times during the early spring and into the summer of 2020 as well as my reflections.

Quarantine Exposes My "Bad" Behaviors—My Work From Home Reality

I started social distancing approximately one week early *before* COVID19 prompted New York City and NY State to shut down and transition to work-from-home policy for colleges and universities. I had recently returned from Colombia where I visited Medellin and Cartagena. On the plane home, I was riddled with sickness. Nausea, stomach cramps, profuse sweating and a fever were some of the symptoms I endured during the 6+hour flight from Medellin to JFK airport in Queens. When I returned home, I went to work for about a week. I thought I had just picked up a bug from the airports, so I continued, *not* resting, even working from home while sick. The weekend immediately following, I went to an urgent care center and tested for multiple strains of the flu and oddly, strep throat. At that time, the first week of March, 2020 no COVID19 tests were available to me. Although I had a 102-degree fever, I was negative on all other tests and I was sent home on March 9th. I have still not returned to the office. However, by storm, work came to me. And like many of my higher education colleagues, the work has not stopped coming.

At first, I did not believe that working from home would cause any major disruptions to my personal life. I considered myself lucky. I have no children to care for and I already had most of the technical equipment needed to setup a home office, even if it was in my living room. Missing, however, was a balance between work and home time as that boundary had been blurred. I would check emails and fix things late at night on my laptop when my insomnia lingered. As I have a work cell phone and a work laptop with VPN access that allowed me to access university systems, I would never disconnect. I responded to emails throughout the day and often at night as well. Though I am not a workaholic, I value being informed and responding quickly. It brings me joy, sometimes, to answer questions or deliver good news in the wee hours of the morning to unsuspecting students and or staff. In Student Conduct, a win is a win. And, if there is just one small thing I can do to make the process easier for students, and myself, I usually try to do that, regardless of the time or physical location. As time progressed throughout the quarantine though, I found that maintaining any work/home balance—between Zoom calls, emails, TEAMS meetings, and the regular ebb and flow of a workday—had become a significant challenge mentally.

In every room, I was accessible. When I wanted to walk away from job stresses, there was nowhere to go. I tried moving my "office" out of the living room into a corner of our guest room, so I could go downstairs (a luxury in and of itself) and put down the phone. However, I remained literally one buzz away from next problem, crisis, or even innocuous email advertisement that viscerally impacted me until I actually checked it—and I HAD check it. Finding balance was emerging as a priority for me even though I was unable to visualize it at the time. Guthrie et al.'s (2005) study found that, for student affairs administrators, finding balance in their personal and professional lives was "nuanced and extremely individualistic" (p. 124). They argue that, while there is no predetermined solution for student affairs administrators for finding balance, there are multiple considerations that can impact their ability to find it. Some of those challenges include personal alignment with institutional goals, their supervisor's management style and the level of control an administrator has in their position (Guthrie et al, 2005). In student conduct work, especially from home, finding balance and controlling how I manage my own time has been essential to addressing my emotions in a healthy way.

Work-from-home life is a double-edged sword. Though I can stop checking everything and go radio-silent, doing so produces a heightened level of anxiety, pressure to be “in-the know” and the inevitable feeling of guilt for not at least “checking in.” The other option is to go *all-in*. Constantly checking and responding to emails, has its anxiety inducing factors, too though. Needing others to respond so I can move forward, waiting for those who *do* practice work-life balance to initiate their portion of the work becomes vital then. There are certainly some great advantages to going all-in, like knowing at all times what is happening, but, when I do that I can never relax. I had also been trying to write every day to finish my dissertation. Adjusting to life in quarantine was not easy, but it was easy to rely on coping mechanisms I had been using for years. I knew that I could not continue down that path much longer…

Admitting Some Hard Truths in Quarantine

I thought my experience at home would be vastly different than in my workplace, but it did not begin that way. When we began working remotely in March of 2020, I continued the same destructive behaviors that I had at work. However, at work, they had been present for so long that I was blinded to them. Now home, I was forced to watch my self-destruction manifest in what I thought was my sanctuary. My unconscious thoughts and even some unconscious actions became center stage events at home where I was alone with myself.

As Sewell (1999) explains, our culture and patterns of thin coherence are revealed in unsettled times. The pandemic was just one of many unsettling events that would unfold. As a country during 2020 we endured a pandemic, George Floyd’s death at the hands of law enforcement, the continued unjust treatment of Black and Brown people, the Black Lives Matter movement, an unprecedented election season and an attempted coup. As those events unfolded with my husband back at work and me in my make-shift bedroom office, I was both alone with, and surrounded by, my poor health choices. Prior to quarantine, the separation of work and home allowed me to believe that I had/have a different home persona. I believed that at home I automatically made better, healthier decisions for myself—even though I rarely actually did. During quarantine as my work-home fields changed, the places where I enacted my habitus (Bourdieu, 1992) morphed and reformed before me. My old coping mechanisms did not work in this new environment.

In my physical workspace at the university, I was thoughtful about my personal practice as a student conduct administrator, but not about how I treated myself or allowed myself to be treated. Questioning certain rules, be they about student conduct regulations or whether I can skip what I know will be an unproductive meeting, was easy. However, before leaving campus I was struggling mentally and emotionally with changing my office's practices or creatively circumventing the rules. For example, within the confines of the college's disciplinary procedures I am limited in the kinds of interventions I can offer to students regarding infractions of college policies. Though I may personally believe one intervention would serve a student better, it is not always within my power to enact it. At times when my personal beliefs were in opposition with my job, I would become stressed and engage in comforting, but sometimes harmful behaviors. The separation from my physical campus environment and the transactional space of an office illuminated previously obscured practices (Tobin, 2012) embedded in my praxis of student conduct administration. Although I was unaware prior to the office exodus, Pierre Bourdieu's (1992) concepts of habitus and fields were (as always) at play. When I changed the field (on-campus office to home office) I discerned what habits I engaged in physically and emotionally to uphold the expectations about how "good" student affairs professionals think, work, and behave. Everything that I accepted as "the way it is" and my adept reproduction of the status quo at the college and of larger social structures transformed in a fully remote environment.

Being away from the physical space of the college, I considered the *how* and the *why* of what I was doing on a daily basis, both in the actual practice of student conduct and the way I performed the practice. Prior to COVID19, I occasionally considered whether the interactions I was having with students were beneficial or harmful to them, or the College, or even the larger university system. Did the interactions benefit *me* in any way? While I routinely reviewed the manner in which I evaluated and investigated cases, and interacted with students to improve "outcomes," I rarely reflected upon my personal practice and the sociocultural contexts that impact how I perform student conduct work. Working from home fundamentally altered the *how* of what I do as a conduct administrator. Most poignantly, a new work stress had entered my home. My boss, staff, and anyone with my email address, and work phone number, had unprecedented access to me, in what I considered to be a "safe space," and my highly valued privacy was seriously compromised.

The week before COVID19 shut down New York City in March, 2020, as I mentioned earlier, I had taken off work to recover, but did not hesitate to make myself available while home. Though I was very sick, I still felt guilty for taking time off. I monitored my temperature every day to see if it were possible for me to return to work. I checked emails regularly and even texted to check in with my office staff. In hindsight, it seems to me that unfettered access to me was okay, as long as I was the one initiating it. What had changed for me during COVID19? And how did this change put me on the path to a *different* health project? What follows is how COVID19 became a salient personal event that led to a change in my habitus and the structure of my world.

Food – My Medicine and My Poison

It is tedious and somewhat ironic to describe the way I use food as comfort, in print. When I write about how I did something in the past relating to food, it does not mean that I no longer engage in these behaviors. I simply mean that I am looking at my choices with a different lens. At work, and again when work became working at home, I used food as a coping mechanism for the myriad emotions I experienced in a day. I would go from happy, to stressed, to sad, to relieved sometimes within the span of an hour. To control those emotions, I would eat something. That process did not change while working from home. Emails I could have easily let sit in my inbox until the next day while working on campus suddenly became urgent, as if I had to justify every moment not spent working, which led to my grabbing a quick snack before diving back into the chaos. Months ago, I would have described my coping strategies around emotional eating and lack of work life balance as “bad” or “negative.” However, I have learned that putting value judgments on my choices, and how I talk to and about myself only intensifies a circular, emotional response of guilt, shame, and despondency. I needed to reframe my thinking and change my judgmental lenses for ones that helped me see clearer.

My lens now is health-centered and focused on my overall emotional and physical health. I no longer focus solely on food, or how food contributes to my feelings, and ultimately, my weight. I try to avoid obsessing over weight-based indicators like clothing sizes, my actual weight in pounds, as definitive measures for how I *feel*. Even as I recall my past practices around food, I feel anxious and embarrassed to admit that, sometimes, yes, a brownie did and does make me feel better. But, for me the difference is that I can recognize how and why that brownie works (or does not work) to alleviate stress or give me joy. Again, it is difficult to delineate my past uses of food from the present way I view or use food, especially in writing, because I have not exactly *changed the what* of my actions, but have drastically changed the *why* of them. Yes, I will still eat a brownie sometimes when I am stressed, but I do so with the knowledge that this is a temporary fix (if a fix at all) and that there is something more I need to address that the brownie may represent. Still, for me, the lines between now and then are blurred. This story, my story, is messy. My habits around food are in flux, but my interrogation of them is steadfast. I'm no longer on autopilot, mindlessly eating and expecting to feel better. Another difference for me is how I am choosing to reframe food choices. I take agency over them and my actions. If I am eating, I am checking in with myself to see if I am hungry or eating to relieve some other issue. I perpetually and emphatically manage the urge to slip back into food oblivion where I do not have to think or feel, but just consume. As difficult emotions arise, checking in with myself and my emotions becomes integral to my wellness.

My desire to eat as a coping mechanism for managing my feelings fueled both positive and negative emotional states for me. I also learned that not only *negative* emotions fueled, as positive states did as well. Celebrating, relaxing, accomplishing something great was as much a trigger as arguing with my husband or being stressed with difficult conduct cases. Things both in and outside of my control all contributed to my eating any and everything that I wanted in hopes of feeling better, even though I often got sick because of it. For me, my primary tool for comfort has always been and honestly still is, food. I have known for a long time that I needed help and if I am honest, I had it. I had years' worth of exposure to Jin Shin Jyutsu (Tobin, 2017), meditation (Kabat-Zinn, 2014), breathing meditation (Alexakos, 2015), heuristics (Tobin & Alexakos, 2020) [which I still use and wholeheartedly believe in!], and finally, therapy. In hindsight, I was not ready to receive those gifts. I did not know how to work towards healing especially in regards to body acceptance and some identity issues. I had not come to the point where I could deal with being a fat, Black woman in higher education *and* address how everything, especially my work, impacted my emotions around food. The intersection of those facets of my life were too much to bear at once. What I thought was just a coping mechanism for dealing with my emotions and experiences with my multitude of identities, was actually harming my body.

I would like to pause here for a moment to nuance my perspective. I am not shaming, belittling, or chastising myself for my previous actions. I recognize that I saw food as a tool to give me comfort and I have no shame about that. If I am honest, it did work sometimes and I do not believe I or anyone else should be shamed for admitting their truth. While shame is a powerful emotion, capable of creating and shaping social norms (Turner, 2009) it is not the only—or the most effective—impetus for changing habits or seeking help to do so. Healing, too, is a motivator for change and alleviating shameful feelings, though it would take the experience of working from home in isolation to recognize that what I actually needed was to heal.

Food – A Part of My Community

During New York's initial quarantine period, I was forced to reconsider how eating, was shaping and shifting who I was as a person. At work, my consumption issues were rampant. Any excuse, even excuses I did not know I was making, lead to my using food as a comfort and a crutch for what I would learn was a toxic work environment and job burnout. For example, there was a specific group of people I had lunch with regularly. Our "lunch with the crew" times were awesome. They provided all of the benefits of social fellowship. We were great at building solidarity; we would share positive emotional energy (EE) as colleagues and friends (Collins, 2004). The group also helped alleviate stress and the effects of strong emotions that impeded my ability to work on a particularly tough day. I would feel at peace being with my in-group. We looked like a 1990s diversity poster. Someone from every "walk of life"—people with disabilities, racial/ethnic minorities, LGBTQ folks, old and young—was a part of our group. However, we rarely ate without one of us being on a fad diet, limiting one food group or another, or sometimes "not eating that day," but everyone helping polish off a fresh bag of Wise potato chips, a group favorite! I look back upon those times with nostalgia and a longing to return to them, but only for the social interaction. As Collins (2004) asserts, successful rituals are energizing and build up our in-group solidarity. Unsuccessful rituals, or failed interactions, drain us. They deplete our emotional energy (Collins, 2004). Because our lunch crew was replete with positive and affirming relationships, I relished those interactions even though they too exacerbated my issues with food.

In recalling my on-campus experiences prior to the quarantine and how I have presented them in multiple iterations of this work, there is a reflexive quality to what I write or recall about my experiences in the present. When I return to each section of this work to address edits or commentary, I am drawn to the ways in which I describe/d myself, my emotions, how this work benefits me and the potential for it to benefit, or harm others. The editing process also allows me to engage with past thinking which informs how I proceed with writing and living going forward. Each section I engage mediates and is mediated by the other (Alexakos, 2015). Similarly, as I engage with comments of others, that process too mediates and is mediated by me. But not all of my experiences are dialectically related. Sometimes, I am just looking back with "rose-colored glasses." Although I can see how that statement is not "true" either, I cannot disconnect to just "look back." As I review this work, time and again, I am reminded to remain resolute in the interrogation of my choices and actions as they relate to how I view food and my emotions, as well as how I present them in writing.

I am hesitant in writing this section where I reveal some common refrains I told myself to alleviate the cycle of guilt and shame. As I am only a few months out of a practice that I participated in for years, it feels raw to share them here even months after writing and editing this work on several occasions. I made excuses and told myself stories that soothed my guilt-binge-shame cycle, memories of which sometimes still torture me. When I reflect upon my past habits, it is as if I am watching a stranger and feeling sad for her. But then the fog clears and I recognize myself. In earlier iterations of this work, I wrote that I was ashamed and anxious, but that I was relieved. I still feel those ways, but there is more under my surface. I also feel a sense of agency, power, and ownership. I do not have to carry the weight of it all in secret anymore. And hopefully, I never will again.

Food – My Poison and My Medicine

In the mornings I wake up thinking about food, but wait until I can savor a hot breakfast at work.

In the afternoons I feel tired from the heavy lunch I eat and need a "pick me up" of caffeine and chocolate from a vending machine or a stash of candy I regularly keep in the office.

In the evenings, I tell myself I worked hard all day and I deserve a nice meal to relax with, one I do not personally have to prepare.

On weekends, I say that I had a stressful week. I am "allowed" to binge drink on the weekends and "calories don't count" at celebratory brunches or parties.

Some days, I say I am going to stop.

The above justifications I created for myself are still embedded in my thoughts. It is only through active engagement with my emotions that I can treat myself well now, without even a morsel of food involved. I have discussed at length how eating was a crutch for my emotions, but, I would be remiss if I did not address how so much consumption hindered me physically in addition to the ways my emotional pain manifested. Being home with myself for months forced me to *really see me*. Before COVID19, my personal appearance was not my priority. I have been a largerbodied person since I can remember, so I knew how to dress the part well enough to avoid blatant criticism. Similarly, I also know my ability to think critically and reproduce the acceptable values and successful interactions in the workplace were and still are the traits that are valued in my work. Frankly, nobody was booking me as a model so I thought that as long as I looked professional enough and suppressed the nagging feelings that something more was happening with me, I was fine. Although, in my heart I felt I was far from fine. At home in my endless rotation of sweatpants and no-longer oversized tee shirts, looking professional and acting unbothered by it became even less important. Combined with the distress of my declining physical condition, (backaches, plantar fasciitis, trouble breathing, etc.), I could not shake the feeling that what I was doing was not only hurting me physically, but “eating my emotions” as a coping strategy for stress stopped working, *totally*. No matter what I ate to make myself feel better, feel less stressed, I still woke up daily to an unrecognizably rounder face, a harder time getting up in the morning, and a weakened immune system. I had nearly every complicating factor that intensifies the impacts of COVID19 and I was scared.

Walking Away From It All

The excitement of ordering takeout yet again had begun to wane a month into the lockdown. I had run out of excuses about why I needed to have this food or that food. I had also started to recognize that we were likely quarantined for a long-haul, though I never expected to still be in it a year later. I was feeling sick. Sick of the sluggish feeling I had each morning, dreading going to work, even though work was in the next room and I was miles away from any angry students, demanding colleagues or an hour-long commute each way. There was no way I should have been feeling worse when I was significantly distanced from all of the things that I thought made me eat my emotions. I knew I had to make a change.

Through isolation and physical distance, I learned how to distinguish between my emotions and the emotions of others. Work stressors have not disappeared while home, but I have a distance-based security blanket. No matter what the incident, I do not have to interact with students, faculty or staff *in person* and therefore I am not directly exposed to their emotions. At home, as soon as the call or Zoom meeting ends, I literally turn off the screen and feel relief. I do not have to explain anything or debrief with other office staff if I do not wish to do so. The complex social interaction that I previously experienced in the office, led to extreme emotional drain, which I used food to alleviate.

Emotional Distance

To explain my experiences with engaging the emotional energy of others in my daily work, I return to theorist Randall Collins (2004) and his work on Interaction Ritual Chains. Interaction rituals (IR), the mechanisms by which we interact and engage with daily social life have four major components or "ingredients" that combine to produce four major outcomes that impact individuals. When present, the components help provide mutual focus and entrainment, both of which are integral to successful social interactions. Successful IRs are those that are energy producing and unsuccessful or failed interactions are those that are energy draining. Think about the lunch crew I discussed previously versus having an angry student lashing out at me. The outcomes of successful IRs center around four major experiences: creating group solidarity; producing emotional energy (EE), the feeling of excitement or potential to act within the individuals of a group; creating symbols that serve as representation of the group and act as group markers; and finally, producing "feelings of morality" or a protective feeling toward the group and the emblems or symbols that represent it. The experiences I had with my lunch crew regularly produced successful interaction ritual chains. As a member of that group, I felt solidarity with the other members, we had symbols that represented us, like our favorite restaurant or our favorite table in the conference room. In contrast though, my experiences with on campus meetings with students, faculty, or staff represent examples of failed rituals or unsuccessful rituals, which had draining effects on my emotions.

On campus, I struggled to disconnect personally from student issues. The faking of smiles and engagement with students who had behaved inappropriately with blatant disdain for our interaction, the meetings with faculty that resulted in unmet expectations and failed IRs all worked to deplete my emotional energy. Again, the physical separation from students and colleagues as a result of COVID19 has shown me just how emotionally involved I was, and personally I took each and every interaction with a disgruntled student. I built up all kinds of emotional energy based on my interactions with students and seemed to mirror their emotions. I did not guard myself. I had virtually no boundaries. Every statement about the quality of their college experience or that they felt wronged I considered a personal affront. At home however, there was no opportunity for me to change students' environments or to alleviate their concerns, which made the stress worse.

Walking on Broken Glass

Acknowledging my emotional eating was my first step toward healing. Gradually, I would take additional steps toward building awareness around my triggers and eventually taking agency over the healing process. I had to learn to make different choices with wellness, not just food issues, as my priority. Just as the idea of ordering food began to wane in April, 2020, I decided that so too did binge-scrolling Instagram, avoiding work emails, and saying yes to nearly every request for a meeting or call after "work hours." It was as if I had taken one step in a different direction than the day before, and very slowly, I kept going. As I mentioned previously, I had plenty of offers of assistance and even tried therapy, but for reasons both known and unknown, at that time, I could not accept help—I had to be ready to seek it for myself.

A few years back in 2017, I walked and did some group fitness classes. At that time I had an older model Fitbit lying around the house somewhere that I used for weight loss purposes. I defined success regarding my health as weight loss back then but thought maybe this time, I could just walk for the sake of walking. Walking was free and something that did not require interacting with folks too closely. Initially, I was tempted to recharge my FitBit to track my steps, but decided on an alternative tactic. I knew right away that if I began walking as an "exercise," I would falter with it under the slightest inconvenience. Too windy, too rainy, too cloudy or any other weather-related excuse would be in my back pocket and then there were the unspoken weight-related measures that I wanted to avoid. I did not want to begin negotiating what I ate (chocolate!) as rewards for steps-taken. I reframed walking as holistic exercise instead of physical fitness and began using it as a way to forget about chocolate. Finally, I decided to just get going. In April, I walked 16 out of 30 days. In May, I walked 24 out of 31 days. By October, I had walked an average of 28 days a month.

The daily walks I took were nothing special, so I thought. I would throw on whatever sweatpants were near, grab a mask, and I would come back when I felt alright. Those little bastions of peace soon became indispensable parts of my days. I walked when I was upset. I walked when I was unsure how to solve a student concern. I walked to clear my mind. I walked to cry. I walked to feel good. I walked to process whatever my emotions were at the time or not—and that is how the walks became my solace. When chicken parmesan, still my favorite dish, no longer made me feel relieved or comfortable, I just went for a walk. When I felt stuck, trapped in the house with so many screens, I walked to relieve the stress. When I received good news, I went on longer walks to celebrate. At the risk of sounding like an influencer-turned-health-guru, walking helped me transform the relationship between my emotions and food in many ways. By Christmas time, I had built a reflexive practice that changed not only how I coped with job stress, but also how I viewed my position in the world as agential and powerful.

Walking to – A New Practice

A reflexive practice is one that allows for the possibility of becoming aware of the unaware (Bourdieu, 1992). Like breathing meditation or a heuristic for mindfulness, I allowed my thoughts and emotions to flow freely and without judgment while walking. I continued to focus on the walks themselves, how the air felt, what the trees looked like as the leaves first budded, grew into full leaves, and then bloomed. When emotions arose, I noted them and allowed them to become unstuck. I began to explore the possibilities of daily movement as a part of a repertoire of self-care, but also a way to engage awareness and growth. In her study of heuristics as tools for mindfulness in education, Malgorzata Powietrzynska (2015b), asserts that a significant part of mindfulness is the interconnection of emotions and our actual conduct. On my walks, I allowed my emotions to arise, but I also began to parse out what, if any steps or action I could take to ameliorate them *outside* of my walks. I was not cured, but I had found a process, a practice, that grounded me, solidified much needed boundaries, and lifted the weight of being fat and Black and a woman navigating higher education. My identity as a fat, Black, woman has been a point of contention for me in the past as discrimination and prejudice from others shapes some of my lived experience. I have had to learn how to differentiate between my own beliefs about my identities and projections of others beliefs' that I may have triggered. I have had to reclaim my own agency and reject those projections. Walking gave me the space and the opportunity to investigate those projections without judgement.

Doctor and psychiatrist Bessel Van der Kolk (2015) states that the brain-disease model of mental health conditions removes agency from patients and transfers the power of healing to doctors, pharmacists, and insurance companies. In my experience, I knew that therapy would be and had been helpful to me in the past, but only through *my choice* to engage it. Further, my agentic involvement in a healing activity, walking and engaging in reflexive practice while doing so, is what I believe assisted me in recovering from emotional eating and traumatic experiences I suffered from previously.

These walks illuminated hidden possibilities that I was blinded to by the confines of my office suite. On campus it seemed like I had no options for reprieve from stress, but that was a fallacy. Being home allowed me to walk away from a situation after a tough conversation or interaction. Being home allowed me to go outside at any time of the day or night and breathe fresh air. Being home afforded me the chance to take calls and video conferences outside. I could see the sun and experience it throughout the day, rather than when I stopped working. I can focus at night and lurk on my laptop in the late hours to get writing done and still make it on time for work the next day. Even as I write this now, I am reflective about why I believed I could not do these things prior to COVID19. Of course, nothing was actually stopping me, but my awareness that these were viable options was obscured to me at the time. I could not see the potential for what a meditative practice like walking could do for me personally. Rather, I saw what those practices could do for others, but I did not believe they would work for me. In Lori Gottlieb's book, *Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*, she recalls her therapist, Wendell, reminding her of a cartoon that showed a prisoner behind the bars of a jail cell, but the other sides of the cell were wide open. As her therapist explained, "we feel completely stuck, trapped in our emotional jail cells, but there's a way out—as long as we're willing to see it" (p. 152). I can *finally* see around the bars.

Quarantine Exposes *Their* Behavior

It is imperative, I believe, to incorporate how my personal changes interact with and are impacted by the larger, macro and meso-level structural changes we have experienced as a society as a result of COVID19. Will we evolve into a nation that values remote work in the same ways that we celebrate landing 9 to 5 corporate jobs? What disparities among school-aged children arose because of leaving the classroom for months on end? How could we have stopped women from being forced to leave the workforce in droves in 2020 because they needed to care for their children? These questions frame my thinking about the larger structures in play, but also how changes in my direct community on the meso level (college) and micro level (my office specifically) can act as starting points for sustained systemic changes.

On the micro-level, COVID19 forced me into a deep exploration of my axiology and epistemological stances. The simultaneous experience of isolation and over-stimulation by current events, and changes in higher education overall, set the scene for an examination of culture and its enactment within higher education. In considering culture, I employ Sewell (2010) and Randall Collins' (2004) Interaction Rituals as foundations for examining the events that have ultimately transformed the structure of higher education through the pandemic. For the first time since the last pandemic over 100 years ago, the United States is forced to consider how education and the culture around which we enact education itself has been impacted as a result of COVID19. This pandemic has illuminated glaring discrepancies and inequality among class, race, gender, and many other groups/subgroups by which we classify and categorize students and ourselves. As The Steve Fund reports, some of those discrepancies, especially around anxiety and depression impacted Blacks and Latinos at significantly higher rates (2020). Not only has the pandemic highlighted outdated ideas about the culture of education, once again people of color are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of it.

As an educator and student affairs professional I am in constant conversation with myself about what kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing I value (Alexakos, 2015). I believe that incorporating emotional wellness as a part of education, especially for racialized students would improve education for many. I believe our greater society is grappling with the need for more inclusive education as so many colleges and universities have shifted to online coursework. Without the context of a grassy quad, fancy computer labs, and regal-looking brick residence halls—a student is sitting in front of a screen engaging with Zoom as the platform whether they attend an R1-research university, an Ivy League college or a community college. While there are certainly differences in the quality of education one may or may not receive in an online environment, I am curious just how much the physical environment, social interactions and an emotions-friendly curriculum could shape new educational experiences, and whether previous practices are worth saving.

The Living at Work Reality

While care is an important concept, personal wellness is often overlooked in higher education (Anderson et al., 2020). The priority of care or concern was geared toward students when the pandemic began and though that was certainly warranted, I argue that care for our colleagues and administrators is of value, too. It allows them to extend caring to those they interact and work with, like students, on a regular basis. Before we understood that we would be home for an extended period of time, I was instructed to create a work-from-home contract with my staff. We did not know how long we would be working remotely, yet we were instructed to create a plan as if we were gracefully allowing staff to work from home, rather than it being imposed. I was concerned because everyone around me, my boss especially, seemed to be focused on making sure people were actually at home and *working*. The school administration needed to justify paying people to be at home and wanted staff to continue working at the same capacity as on campus. I understood that concern, albeit tragically capitalistic, but maintaining a level of normalcy for students was important—though we were all adjusting. It seemed that the strings of control were snipped away by being home and we were grasping at anything to maintain it. Again, I understood this perspective in some ways. There were some risks in sending an entire division of employees home and paying them to be there. But this perspective did not take into consideration the positive impacts working from home could elicit. With just a bit of concern and care for staff well-being prior to the pandemic, we might have been more prepared to be "successful" at working from home sooner. In the absence of face-to-face interaction, care may be what rebuilds a socially-distanced community.

While social distancing is a relatively new catchphrase, it certainly is not new in describing the relationship between academic and student affairs divisions at my college. There is a striking similarity between faculty members' experiences and the experiences of administrators and staff, but the pandemic has seemingly strained the relationship. Faculty have been rethinking their expectations of students in light of this pandemic, including changing their communication styles and curating online spaces for class interaction (Pryal, 2020). Similarly, administrators have been managing their homes as work spaces while addressing the increased emotional labor both women faculty and administrators are managing as a result of COVID19 (Costa, 2020). In conjunction with new practices that require faculty and administration to work together more effectively, we are all suffering. Loss of resources has also played a significant role for everyone to work effectively from home. Higher education has suffered record-breaking job loss since the onslaught of COVID19 (Douglas-Gabriel & Fowers, n.d.). Working together to pool resources and support our areas respectively would be beneficial for all in this circumstance, but the added stress of the pandemic has further isolated us. In my experience, creating new and completely virtual business practices and everyday functions has been tumultuous. It requires collaboration and creativity that is difficult to conjure in these times.

In May 2021, after living through the consequences of the first iteration COVID19 in the early part of 2020, it is easier to quantify just how the virus impacted the greater workforce, including both post-secondary and primary education. In my experience, and others, the stress of working from home illuminated not only my own problematic coping skills, but highlighted my institution's lack of preparation. Similarly, my lack of boundaries, both those I constructed for my own protection and those of others, were and sometimes still are a challenge for me to maintain and recognize. Transitioning from an on-campus, walk-ins-welcome-office to an appointment only, physically-distanced, virtual campus model illuminates hidden facets of social and cultural norms that I had previously adopted categorically. I never turned anyone away without an appointment. I would reprioritize my schedule to incorporate impromptu meetings or student concerns into the day before finishing my own work. I would come early to catchup on work I missed from accommodating others. I was not alone in those practices, but that does not make them acceptable or even sustainable. I accepted these practices and reproduced them regularly. However, I am hopeful that this work will give voice to other student affairs administrators, and nuance the experience of working from home during COVID19 and the ripple effects it created.

2021—It's Still Not Over…

Now, it is June of 2021, and as I revisit this chapter in preparation for its publication within my dissertation, I am wrought with fear. I have admitted some hard truths about myself and revealed some deeply personal flaws. Despite my fear of embarrassment though, I have had the opportunity to overhaul my thinking and my actions and to document those changes so that they are beneficial to me and potentially (hopefully!) others. However, I must also consider that this work could do harm as well. I do not want this chapter specifically to come across as a neoliberal viewpoint of meditative practice or mindfulness practices that serve to uplift "internal regulation" or "individualist responsibility" as a means for healing and overall wellness (Forbes, 2017, p. 149). I am very conscious of larger social structures and institutional inequalities, especially highlighted by the pandemic. The incessant mantras of "do more, with less," "do better," and "always do your best" are the artifacts of many forms of social control that I have internalized over the years. Ironically, I credit contemplative practices like walking, free writing, and heuristics (Tobin & Alexakos, 2021) with drawing my awareness to the bootstrap mentality and other cultural norms that had become so embedded in my life. I am not healthier because I finally laced up my tennis shoes and got to walking. Instead, when freed from a routinely harmful environment, I learned that I could carry it with me. I became desperate when I believed that in my own home I still could not accept my authentic self without food and overworking as coping mechanisms. In turn, I sought practices that allowed *me* to control how far, how deep, and how much I could change and this assisted me in recognizing what was outside my locus of control.

I can say that now that I am better because I have learned how to deal with challenges in a way that does not personally harm me, as much, anymore. I'm healing myself so I can fight harder against the inequities that shaped how I got to where I was in the first place. I was, and still am sometimes, conditioned to look internally for a problem's resolution, regardless of the issue's root causes, but the difference now is that I know to zoom out—search for and then interrogate the bigger picture. There are macro, meso, and micro-level structures that act in concert with my own insecurities. My willingness to engage with those difficult interactions is what spurs me forward. Even as I write this, it seems like I have taken a dark turn away from my original point and it almost seems like I am angry, but I am not. I want to be critical. I want to challenge the notion that "knowing thyself" is the *only way* to change. Knowing myself is now a part of my repertoire, an intentional way of being that continually develops as a part of and as a reaction to our social world.

Even after acknowledging some difficult ideas about my growth, I can confidently say that I have drastically improved my health and wellness, both mentally and physically. After an ongoing year of separation from the social and cultural norms of my daily commute, physical workspace, interactions with hostile students, and the constant push to do more with less, I have gained valuable life lessons. For me, the pandemic was the impetus for significant changes around the way I viewed food and exercise, but it was also so much more. This pandemic ultimately lead me to the interrogation and examination of why I developed those coping mechanisms at all. Having documented my personal changes as I undertook this process, I have been able to reflect on the past 18 months to set new goals and intentions for when I do finally return to my physical work space. Moving forward, boundaries (as I discussed in chapter four) have become essential to my wellness and I intend to enact them within the workspace. Measuring "success" with task lists and meetings held or other administrative to-dos is also something that no longer serves me or the students/colleagues I work with effectively. I am working now to reduce those measures as much as possible and focus on building relationships and partnerships rather than just directing and performing acts as an administrator. I know that these steps will be difficult and steep and, in some cases, task-lists and performative interactions will be unavoidable. However, recognizing and maintaining a constant awareness of how I am managing my boundaries (or not) is ongoing. I will make mistakes, forget to check-in with myself, but I will know that I can walk away and come home, again.

CHAPTER SIX

PROGRESS AND PURSUIT

When I first sat down to write this concluding chapter, I was almost too intimidated to write it. I knew I needed to compose a compelling narrative about how this program and pursuing this degree molded me into a stellar intellectual with a research credential that not enough women, and especially Black women, in this country possess. While I am confident that I have gained skills in research and made the necessary contributions to scholarship, personally, I am far from finished with my work. Kenneth Tobin, one of my advisors and someone I consider a mentor, has instilled in me the conviction that learning occurs from the birth through death continuum. As I prepare to take the next steps in my life and in my career, I am satisfied with what I have done so far, but I know that there is more work to be done and learning to be had. And for that reason, I titled this chapter *Progress and Pursuit*. Within this chapter, I explore my changes in thinking, new areas for my research, and thoughts about the tools I used to come this far and how I will use them to move forward.

Community(ies) in Practice

USER-S

The research in education that I was exposed to before coming to the Urban Education program was rooted in post-positivism and even some constructionist theory. I spent the first year of doctoral work engaging scholarship from John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and several other well-known education scholars. The program presented the canon of (teacher) education literature well, and that knowledge has provided the foundation for me to knowingly, with agency, pivot from those perspectives. Conversely, my experience with sociocultural education research and, most importantly, informal research environments were the impetus for action in conjunction with the change in my thinking.

Challenging what we understand as formal knowledge and creating new knowledge guided the research I experienced in USER-S. USER-S was a homegrown research community where renown scholars and doctoral students both came together to present and receive feedback in their research endeavors. Once monthly, we gathered at the Graduate Center and presenters, including my colleagues and even me a couple of times, explained our work to others who participated with us. We exchanged ideas, challenged one another's assertions, and treated our research and each other with care and compassion. Disagreements were common, but those too were lessons. The USER-S meetings provided a real-life example of how discourse in research is complicated and cannot always be summarized neatly as it often is in journal articles. In many ways, USER-S exemplified some of the most important tenets of Authentic Inquiry in practice. Our mostly self-selected group attended sessions regarding research at our pleasure. No one group was privileged over another. The subject matter for the day was pre-selected, but at any time the discussions and inquiry during the program shifted as more participants interacted with each other and the presenters, highlighting the emergent and contingent nature of the gatherings. While there were no formally established goals for the sessions other than highlighting various research projects within a theme of the month, the ripple effects those meetings created stuck with me indefinitely. Some of my best writing came from notes I took during USER-S. The program helped me generate new research ideas that expanded and changed my thinking based on the interactions in that space.

In the USER-S space, I felt humanized. I felt like a scholar. It is where I saw theory and practice dialectically entwined. In those sessions, I experienced research, in all its forms, as fluid, dynamic, and continually in flux. I learned new theories, not just from faculty, but from students who were working with them already, adjusting their approaches based on the needs of the participants or as the theory developed. The sessions functioned as informal leadership groups. Presenting and engaging with the community interaction was powerful to me. Whether exploring the tenets of Polyvagal Theory or questioning "McMindfulness" or examining "infinite potential" the USER-S community of scholars were substantial influences in my thinking about research and also, about myself.

Research Squad

The leadership in a research squad is organic. It forms and reforms from week to week as each person takes their turn presenting their work and also commenting on others'. Research squad though, was far more personal than USER-S and cultivated the relationships I now cherish as I prepare to leave this program. As I discussed in my preface, I struggled connecting to my cohort because I wasn't a traditional teacher. Reflecting on my first year reminds me of the strengths I gained as a member of a research community as I move forward. At that time, I was experiencing imposter syndrome. Thankfully, my advisor noticed that I was struggling and invited me to participate. The squad allowed me to become a vital member of a group where my input was valued and welcomed, regardless of my status as a first-year and lack of teaching experience. The squad felt, and still feels, like coming home. The times, the research, and the faces have changed, including mine, but the feeling remains. It was a place where I went to find mutual understanding, assuage my fears and become more like myself and the researchers and scholars I grew to know and respect as participants.

Research squad is responsible for cultivating important relationships that brought me to this point. If I name just one person from the research squad here, this will become a love-letter to them all. And, they deserve it. I credit several iterations of the research squad for pushing me outside of my comfort zone, challenging me to write better and to write more. It is also the place where I saw Black and Brown faces like mine, among other identities, that reminded me that I do belong and that I am valuable. I am so thankful to every member of the squad, past and present. I hope that I can join you all again in the future.

Mentorship

There is an abundance of literature within higher education research that supports the concept of mentorship as critical or vital to successful doctoral degree students. It is also widely-accepted that mentorship among people of color, particularly Black women, is crucial to the successful completion of any degree. Research squads not only provide a space for discussing scholarship and creativity with a professor or mentor, but they also provide peer-to-peer mentorship, which is what I believe has allowed me to continue successfully for the previous six years. These communities, research squad, USER-S, and even co-teaching doctoral classes, are the living examples of how learning and knowledge are socially constructed. As I reminisce about my doctoral trajectory, I do not recall a particular class or a line of text from seminal education literature. Instead, I remember the time when a squad member sent me helpful edits at 7:00am so I could finish a chapter on time. I recall the times when our research squad advisor, KA, encouraged me to just free-write and see what happens and having that free-write become a published chapter. I recall how squad members trusted one another and shared personal stories as part of their research and yet still remained open to receive and incorporate critical, but productive feedback. These experiences exemplify the kind of community that I wish to recreate in my own fields and lifework after this program. Challenging western individualism, embracing community and doing so in wellness-sustaining ways guide my future trajectory.

The leaders of these communities, working tirelessly to gather program participants, review numerous rough drafts, and manage the logistical components to these groups, are who I hope to become in the future. Each of my committee members have imparted to me the communal aspects of research and knowledge production. Significant, too, is the role that their administration and policy skills have played throughout my experiences with them. Deb's work has guided my understanding of teacher education and the importance of teachers becoming actively involved and treated as subject experts in education. Her dedication and commitment to understanding the innerworkings of education policy at state and federal levels inspires me to continue macro-level interrogation of education practices in this country. Whether we teach from podiums in lecture halls or from colorful patterned floors of kindergarten rooms, teaching is the foundation of education.

From Ken and Konstantinos' USER-S and Research Squads, to the multiple community and classroom forums Deb has facilitated as a participant and member, I have several examples of how creating community in research makes opportunities for new theories, ways of being and co-creating knowledge. Being a part of these communities is hard work, but worthwhile. They are not always filled with joy, but they are always full of growth.

Reflections About My Work

This dissertation allowed me to explore a multitude of topics within the overarching frame of wellness. I incorporated my identities as a scholar, researcher, Black woman, and student conduct administrator to coincide and coexist as I gave voice to my lived-experiences. My decision to write this using narrative and autoethnography was liberating and I am grateful for an advisor, Konstantinos, who not only encouraged forging this path, but supported me wholeheartedly, even when I doubted myself and my work. I have come to a deep understanding and appreciation for how my past experiences mediate and are mediated by my present. In my experiences that culminated in this work, I kept questioning why things happened to me as if I were standing still and not a part of the dialectic process of being and becoming in every experience. The ways in which I see the world are and remain inevitably different from the way I imagine that students or anyone else sees it. However, I no longer stress about "facts," but see differences as points of introspection ripe for inquiry and creating a shared understanding. In sharing this work, I hope I encourage reflection in others. It is my intention that interacting with this text creates a heuristic for those who wish to engage it. This work, in all the chapters, has encouraged me to continually seek new experiences and embrace change as positive and necessary. Change is always a possibility when we seek it. In the following sections I explore how I have changed as I completed this dissertation.

Chapter two of my dissertation stands out to me as a turning point in my progress regarding my views on education at the macro-level. I wrote the chapter with the intention of exposing unethical practices that impacted student financial aid matters, but learned there are numerous intricate and powerful connections between individuals both in government and in the private sector that impact far more than financial aid. The relationships between public and private entities in the federal government exist in nearly every facet of education from student debt to healthy lunches to testing. I still believe that oligarchy and corporate interest in education as capital is extremely problematic, but I have another perspective now to consider. As educators, understanding policy and how it is created is critical to challenging the current status of education, especially in the K-16 sector. Similarly, policy changes at the federal level can undergo distinct changes once those policies are interpreted at state and local levels (Dempsey & Shanley, 2011). Understanding policy implementation requires dedicated staff and scholars. It is its own craft. Greater regulations will not solve the considerable issues of education, but greater community ownership and understanding of them can improve student outcomes.

In chapter three, I explored heuristics as a tool to ameliorate emotions, but also as a tool to improve awareness of conduct-related principles. Creating a heuristic for student conduct administrators was a proud and formative moment for me during this doctoral journey. After having read the rich accounts of the changes prior scholars encountered from using heuristics as tools in teaching and learning, I knew I wanted to adapt the process for student conduct administrators. As shapeshifters, heuristics are powerful and the more interaction I had with the characteristics, the more I changed. I also found that incorporating heuristics as a part of a wellness practice was influential in how I interacted with challenging conduct cases. The more I used the heuristic and reflected on my own emotions, the better I became at separating what were my emotions and what did not belong to me. Recognizing the difference between acknowledging others' emotions with compassion and taking on others' emotions as my own was extremely challenging, but also vital to maintaining my own wellness.

In chapter four, I captured a nuanced experience of student conduct work that is often obscured. Explaining a common conduct procedure, a pre-hearing meeting, I used an impressionistic tale to reveal some hidden aspects of student conduct practice. From the tale, themes around gender roles, compassion fatigue, and boundaries emerged as points of exploration and interrogation. The chapter underscores the extent to which my past and current practices in student conduct impact my future practices. In writing chapter four, I recognized that I had difficulty working with one particular student based on several previous interactions with other students and that I needed to incorporate and accept some changes. Importantly, I highlight the ripple effects that each interaction I had with students, or anyone, shapes and reshapes future interactions. I also learned that setting boundaries and maintaining them is important to creating a healthy and robust repertoire of self-care practices.

One of the hardest lessons I had to learn throughout this research is that self-care is not only vital, but impacts how I experience and interact with the world around me. During the COVID19 pandemic I became aware of my previously obscured coping mechanisms and how they were embedded in my social world. Because of the significant changes of merging my home and work environments, I reclaimed my agency over my emotional eating as I was forced to address it in isolation. Chapter five represents my most significant growth as I relied on contemplative practices to take agency over my health and wellness. With healing as the ultimate goal, I felt safe and empowered to embrace painful emotions that hindered my wellness. Similarly, incorporating self-care as a component of my student conduct practice fortified my dedication to boundaries and managing my emotions as continually-evolving practices.

Within each of the chapters I attempted to nuance the experience of a student conduct administrator and the multitude of roles and responsibilities we portray. What I have learned from the experience overall is that this research is most impactful when it is continual and occurring on multiple levels. I believe emotions are a part of our daily interactions and when we acknowledge them we can offer transparency and openness about own values. Challenging my own beliefs and ways of being has been trying, but also so rewarding. I am full of optimism and resilience as I prepare to move forward.

Sustainably Moving Forward

Sustainability is a new direction for me as I transition out of this phase of my educational career. I view sustainability, not only in regard to our physical environment, but also as part of overall wellness. I see sustainability as paying it forward in ways that are helpful to others and simultaneously in tune with our own wellness needs. I recognize that I am here because of the prior scholars, advisors, mentors, and peers that have given their time and talent to me. The students whose voices were obscured by this work, the personal interactions I have had with students, faculty, and colleagues have all shaped my experience and thus, this research. However, for me to continue giving back, I will proceed with caution. Much of my work in this dissertation has centered boundaries, trauma, compassion fatigue and ameliorating emotions because those experiences controlled how I functioned in the world before this program. And, they were *immensely* unsustainable. I want to pay it forward by normalizing cultural production and reproduction that is equitable and conscientious, not just to maintain the status quo. In student conduct, in my life, and in my future academic endeavors, I aim to include difference as a standard and not an exception.

Creating spaces for people like me, Black women, to thrive is also included in my sustainability plans moving forward. Until this section, I have only dealt with race "in the margins." Nonetheless, it permeated every experience I had. The decision to investigate my research without a distinct focus on race was not unconscious, but I am doing so through my lived-experience. I am nuancing the experience and giving voice to me, a Black woman conduct officer without the expectation that I represent every Black woman conduct officer. Everything I did was done while in this Black skin, so it is intersectional—I'm never without myself. I focused though on my passion, which was student conduct and emotions. From my view, enrollment and matriculation data, figures, percentages of degrees-granted can tell the story of the numbers. My goal was to tell the story behind those numbers. I knew when pursuing this degree there would be racial strife in my world, like any other endeavor of mine. I did it anyway. Nicole West in her (2020) work on African American women in student affairs reminds me that racist and sexist microaggressions are not new in the workplace and they weren't new for me either at work or school. She also argues that the experience of being a black woman in conjunction with common stressors in student affairs work compounds the impacts of marginalization and scrutiny in the workplace. This dissertation gives context, substance, and a first-person account of those experiences. It is also "proof" that healing and moving forward is possible.

In Closing

After twenty plus years in the education system, I have finally accepted that a traditional classroom setting is not a defining characteristic of my educational career anymore. I have been teaching as a leader, mentor, and scholar sharing ideas and concepts, and experiencing genuine delight when I see someone grasp an idea and make it their own for years. Very few of those moments were produced in traditional classroom settings. For me, those moments have occurred in a variety of spaces outside the classroom and have included much more than typical educational knowledge. They have occurred in research squad, in student activities, and perhaps most importantly, in my student conduct practice. The encounters have not only impacted my personal philosophies about education, but have also informed my practice to include emotional knowledge and emotional wellness in my life and career every day.

In my career as a professional, I have come to value and appreciate each interaction as a unique and vital experience in the path of every student with whom I interact. It is my hope that with this body of work, I can illuminate the successes and challenges in student conduct administration as well as capture a snapshot of the conduct experience from multiple perspectives of the process—not just the outcomes. I am thankful and grateful that with the support of my advisor, dissertation committee, research squad, USER-S and even some cohort 15 members I have made significant progress as a researcher and a scholar. However, I will always continue the pursuit for more.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A POSTSCRIPT

Beginning the Postscript

I wrote this postscript as a response to feedback I received during this dissertation's oral defense. My responses are meant to clarify some obscured concepts and suppositions present throughout my dissertation, but not explicitly addressed. I welcome the opportunity to provide some additional context and refinement. I ended earlier chapters by defining myself as a lifelong learner, engaging in learning from the birth to death continuum. Even after my oral defense, there is much more for me to learn and I continue in that tradition in the following sections.

Contradictions

I acknowledge that using a bricolage of theory and methods | methodology invites several contradictions (Sewell, 2005) within this work. Selectively choosing theoretical frameworks, like Authentic Inquiry, Hermeneutic Phenomenology, and Event-oriented Inquiry though, allow for expansive and inclusive perspectives. As Tobin (2014) explains, using multiple frameworks illuminates new or different ways of viewing practices or activity. Furthermore, the concept of a bricolage or multilogicality, while illustrative of a variety of some perspectives, also *obscures* other, different ways of viewing practices or activities in research. As central tenets of Authentic Inquiry (Tobin and Alexakos, 2021), the ontological criteria, supposes that participants change their ways of thinking and knowing. However, even within this realm of thought there are still myriad ways of knowing that are obscured. Becoming aware of what I am *not* aware of continues to shape my understanding of what was happening and why as I complete this doctoral journey.

In each chapter, as I explore concepts of self-care, wellness, and emotions, I view myself and my interactions with others through my own axiology or value system. By doing so, I inadvertently obscure other ways of viewing my activity. In my walking chapter, I discussed how I ameliorated emotions with food and connected with my colleagues through emotional energy (Collins, 2004). However, when I reviewed and edited those particular sections, I examined how I ameliorated emotions through a different lens as I experienced and re-experienced the events. I then considered the simultaneous influence of habitus and fields (Bourdieu, 1992) as the physical environment from work to home changed and affected my emotions. Considering how emotional energy and habitus interact exemplifies the dialectic relationship I engaged in with myself throughout this work.

In another example that benefits from clarification, I discuss culture as theorized by Sewell (2005), who notes specifically that culture is unbounded. However, I also discuss boundaries as theorized by Anne Katherine (2012), which from her position are fully constructed with defined limitations. These are strong contradictions, but both have distinct places in my work. This perspective, a "both and" rather than "either or", adds richness and nuance that lived-experience entails and is described in this research. Contradictions like the examples I provided arise throughout my dissertation and they represent my axiology and epistemology as fluid and evolving. The contradictions are what allow for multiple truths or worldviews even within a singular researcher. From my epistemological standpoint and my incorporation of multilogicality, I accept that theories and the paradigms from which they originate are problematic. In this work, theories are often in contention with one another and incommensurate. I consider this acceptance of contradictions and inadequacies to be strengths and invitations for deeper inquiry, meaning-making and knowledge production.

Teaching and Learning

I discuss teaching and learning at length in this dissertation though I do not explicitly engage a singular theoretical underpinning. Rather, I engage multiple perspectives and theoretical stances as I vacillate between teacher | learner identities. From my perspective, there is a dialectical relationship between teaching and learning such that one presupposes and mediates the other in, and as part of, the social world. I borrow this line of thinking from sociocultural research generally, but specifically from the idea of teachers as researchers or the teacher | researcher dialectic as introduced to me by my advisor (Alexakos, 2015). Prior to beginning this dissertation, I viewed knowledge from a positivistic paradigm and believed it to be presented as unbiased. As I became more involved with research and my ideas of teachers as content experts reporting facts evolved, I began to see that knowledge is not decontextualized from "real world" experiences. The idea of teaching from the banking model (Freire, 2000) obscures values and judgements, or axiology and epistemology, that teachers engage as they teach. Much like the faculty member I mentioned in the preface of this dissertation who told me I don't belong in a "teaching" program, I too had a biased perspective of teaching and teachers in relation to the doctoral program and especially my relationship to teaching | learning. I viewed teaching from a metonymic stance (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Because I was not standing at the front of a room with bodies in desks staring back at me, I did not view myself as a teacher. Now though, I recognize that for as long as I have been a learner, I have been a teacher too.

The teacher | learner dialectic is particularly evident in chapter five. In the chapter, I used walking meditation as a tool for ameliorating strong emotions when they impacted my work and interrupted my daily functioning. On those walks, I incorporated mindfulness as a contemplative practice through walking—teaching myself a new habit. However, when I walked I was not thinking consciously of teaching | learning, but I was doing and experiencing both simultaneously. So, who then was the teacher *during* my walks? Tobin and Alexakos (in press), suppose the answer to that question is perhaps more radical than typical Western pedagogy permits. They argue that trees, nature, even what we consider inanimate objects like mountains, do the teaching. I experienced this type of learning in my own walks. Some days the teacher was a clear, blue sky that centered my thinking as my thoughts raced or the teachers were new, pink buds on a rose bush that softened the sadness I felt during other walks. I learned how to focus on the physical environment as a way to center my thoughts, akin to returning to the breath in a breathing meditation. During my defense, Ken Tobin poignantly quoted Lao Tzu, a 6^{th} century (BCE) Chinese philosopher, "When the student is ready the teacher will appear. When the student is truly ready... The teacher will disappear." As I close this section, chapter, and dissertation, I am alone with myself. Some of my teachers have moved on. Others like the trees and the sky reappear whenever I need them.

Financial Aid – A Note About Changes

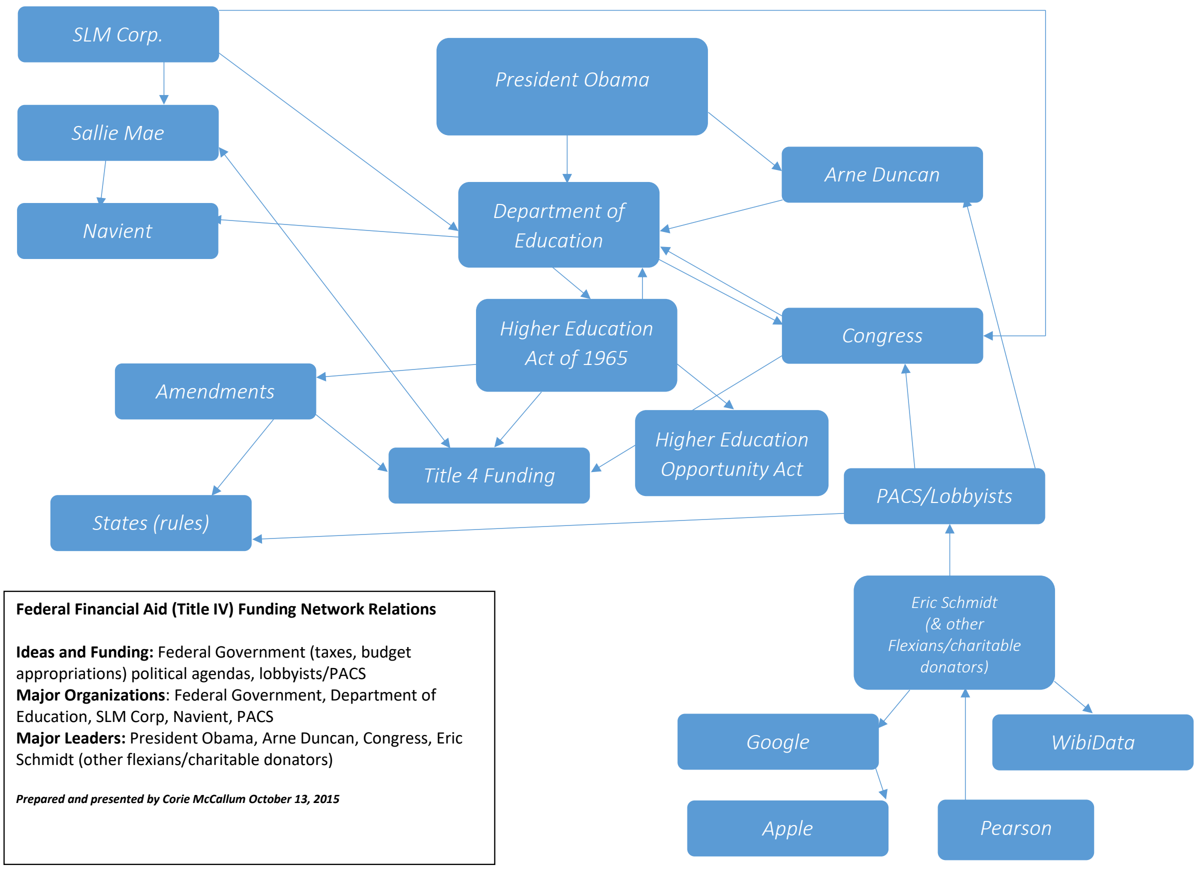
In this dissertation, I included a chapter about Federal financial aid requirements and regulations that was written approximately five years ago. The chapter reflected the challenges of that time period, when former President Barack Obama and Former Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan were not only good friends, but were the chief decision-makers around higher education funding processes in the United States. Since that time, two other administrations have taken office and drastically changed the way funding for all education in the US is administered. There have been substantial changes in the way student loans are processed, the amount of Title IV funding and Pell grant availability, and financial aid reform for formerly incarcerated individuals. All of the aforementioned topics were addressed, albeit from varying stances including some pro-student changes and other pro-government deregulations, among each of these administrations. Similarly, each administration has made significant changes not only to financial aid regulations and practice within higher education, but in several different areas of the Department of Education that impact *access* to higher education. From former Secretary of Education John King's push to implement Common Core standards at the federal level, to Former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos' rollback of protections for transgender students, to President Biden's extension of the pause on federal student loan payments, the changes have been both challenging and, in some rare cases, rewarding for students. However, the need for changes to higher education that specifically address underlying concerns of equitable financial access to higher education within this country still remain.

Financial aid in higher education impacts a large portion of the college-going population including families and individuals and, like all other endeavors from my perspective, those who make changes to policy and regulations are bringing their own lived-experience to their decisions. While the chapter has some obsolete information, including it in this dissertation provides context and nuance to my journey from macro-level thinking, focused on larger structures toward micro-level research with the aim of having ripple effects that reach the students I work with daily. The value of the chapter is in the way it highlights the structural and institutional-level challenges that students and administrators face before even stepping foot on a college campus. Unfortunately, though this chapter is dated, much of the same turmoil and stress I assist students with in regard to financial aid matters is still present. Through three presidential administrations, the challenges in helping students maintain access to higher education by achieving the minimum GPAs and being prepared for college, persist. At the time of writing chapter two, I believed the answers to financial aid problems was to eliminate big business and inappropriate relationships between government and private corporations. Today, I still do not have an answer for solving issues of financial aid and access to education, but I am also still in the fight.

Some Parting Words

During my oral defense I was challenged to explain some concepts, particularly around the notion of knowing myself. Though this dissertation is full of interpretive analysis of my lived-experience, I still struggle "admitting" or *knowing* that I am a teacher. John Dewey (1916) says that education is life. While I do not subscribe wholly to Deweyan philosophy, on this we agree. Education is life for me and remains invaluable. Each time I work with students on taking responsibility for their actions or assist them with filing an appeal, both the students and I are engaged in teaching and learning from each other. We are also engaging in knowledge production and sharing, but rarely have I had the opportunity to explore those concepts with the students in those moments. But, it is in those fleeting moments when I, perhaps unconsciously, fully accept my role as a teacher. Desks and lesson plans are not required, just the acceptance of the social nature of learning is enough. Teaching and learning are not just related to content or discipline specific materials for me. Teaching and learning in my world encapsulates emotions, wellness, and a deeply-engrained respect for differences in ways of knowing and being in this world.

APPENDIX A



Appendix A. Federal financial aid (Title IV) Funding Network Relations Map

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