



National Conference for

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September 14 - 16, 2022
Stillwater, OK



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Professorship in
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2022 NCHP Agenda

Sept. 14, 2022 Preconference – Closed session for team members 2020 and 2022

12:30 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Registration & Pre-conference Networking
1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.	Welcome & Conference Overview
1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Icebreaker
2:00 p.m. – 2:20 p.m.	Break
2:20 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Methodological approaches

Sept. 15, 2022 Team reports and presentations - Open to all registered attendees

9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Registration
10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Welcome
10:15 a.m. – 11:55 a.m.	Session 1 - Teams' report on findings
11:55 a.m. – 1.00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m. – 1:40 p.m.	Session 2 - Arts-based presentations
1:50 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Session 3 - Research discussion
2:40 p.m. – 3:20 p.m.	Session 4 - Concurrent research presentations
3:20 p.m. – 3:40 p.m.	Break
3:40 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Session 5 - Panel

Sept. 16, 2022 Teams – Closed session to 2022 teams

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Research Teams Meeting
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch



Teams' Report on Findings

Understanding the Knowledge and Confidence of Postsecondary Education Leaders and Staff to Serve Students with a Foster Care Background. *Team members: Jennifer Geiger, Kalah Villagrana, Brenda Sweeten, Justine Cheung, Paige Muehlenkamp-McHorse, and Molly Sarubbi.* This study sought to better understand what knowledge and experiences campus-based professionals have with students who have been in foster care and what resources they have to serve these students.

College Students Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): A National Study. *Team members: Kerri Kearney, Kayla Loper, Lisa Will, Lisa Kerr, Sarah Gordon, and Maddy Day.* The purpose of this study is to better understand aspects of students' pre-college journeys, and sometimes in-college experiences, that may influence their academic success and outcomes.

Campus support programs. *Team members: Royel Johnson, Lori Tiller, Ciara Collins, Amy Salazar, Angela Hoffman-Cooper, and Linda Schmidt.* This study aims to support college and university staff and administrators in improving the delivery and implementation of their CSPs for students with foster care experience.

Campus liaisons for students who have experienced foster care: Lessons learned from Texas legislation. *Team members: Toni Watt, Sheila Bustillos, Johanna Greeson, Regina Gavin Williams, and Toni Hail.* This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the liaison legislation for SEFC in Texas.

The summary of the teams' report will be published in upcoming issues of [The Scholar-Practitioner](#).

Picture the experiences of students with a history of foster care or homelessness

Authors: Lisa Schelbe, Esaa Mohammad Sabti Samarah, and Lisa Jackson

Abstract: What is it like to be a college student with a history of foster care or homelessness? What is it like to participate in a campus support program? These are the questions eighteen undergraduate students at Florida State University sought to answer with photographs. This display of photographs features the work of students who captioned and titled the photographs that they took to raise awareness about their experiences in college. The students were involved in Unconquered Scholars, a campus support program (CSP), serving students with a history of foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the State status.

Summary of the artistic piece(s): This display is part of a photovoice study that addresses a gap in the literature by examining the experiences of students in a CSP for students with a history of foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the State status.

We used photovoice methodology to elicit the perspectives of 18 undergraduate students in the Unconquered Scholars Program. Students took pictures that addressed two guiding questions: What is it like to be a college student who experienced foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the State status? And what is it like to participate in a CSP? Participants were interviewed using six guiding questions: 1) “What do you see happening here?” 2) “What is actually happening here?” 3) “What does this photo tell us about life in your community?” 4) “Why are things this way?” 5) “How could this photo educate people?” and 6) “What can we do about it?” (SHOWeD). Interviews were transcribed and coded thematically using an inductive, iterative approach.

Rather than presenting our study, we are only presenting the titled and captioned photographs of the students. Our intent is to raise awareness of the issues of students with a history of foster care or homelessness.

Insights: Students’ experiences in college were often impacted by their past. Students shared how challenges experienced as children and youth frequently persisted in college. Participants disclosed that they often felt like outsiders in college. For some participants, this was related to student experiences of diversity while attending a predominantly white institution. Concerns of peers not understanding their foster care or homelessness experiences was accompanied by intense feelings of pressure these students felt as they acted as role models for their family, friends, and community.

Students reflected on issues with housing, food, mental, and physical health as stressors that made it difficult to sustain a college lifestyle like their peers without experience in foster care or homelessness. Resources provided by the CSP including scholarships, housing assistance, and food pantry were seen as

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important. In addition to these supports, participants identified the sense of community they felt in being part of the CSP as valuable. Students appreciated having a designated shared space on campus where they could connect to other students with similar backgrounds. Consistently, participants stressed that the CSP improved their overall college experience and contributed to their successes.

Implications: Findings highlight the importance of holistic services and a sense of community associated with CSP. By providing wholistic support to students as they transition to college, CSP supporting this population can create spaces in which students who disproportionately have been excluded from higher education can feel welcome and able to overcome adversity. Doing so has the potential to address inequities faced by youth in this population as they transition to postsecondary acceptance and education.

Conclusions: Through the powerful photographs of Florida State University students involved in the Unconquered Scholars Program it is possible to gain insights into college experiences for students who have a history of foster care or homelessness. The captioned photographs tell a story of the students' resilience and their past and current hardships as well as value of CSPs.

Step-Up mothering and leading in COVID-19

Author: Lisa Crosslin

Abstract: This digital collage illustrates the challenges faced by school leaders who were also mothers in families formed through adoption during COVID-19. Throughout 2020 and 2021, I was consumed by the fear of failing the staff, students, and families at my Title I elementary school. Meanwhile, I was completely unaware that I was failing my own children as the resurgence of their early childhood trauma made them more vulnerable than ever. The digital images in this collage illustrate the complexity and precarity faced by mother/leaders juggling both roles.

Summary of the artistic piece: In spring 2022, I completed research for my autoethnographic dissertation on mothering and school leadership during COVID-19. My autoethnography employed narratives, collages, and photographs to interrogate the social norms of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996) and intensive leadership (Baker, 2016) that mother/leaders encountered, reframed, and resisted during the pandemic. The study began with my experiences but ultimately included the experiences of other women in leadership positions, some of whom were mothering children who did not share their biology. This digital collage, an artistic extension of my research, zooms in on one finding in the data related to mothering and leading in a family formed through adoption.

The central feature of the visual piece is a mother sinking helplessly in an ocean of COVID-related obstacles. Floating over her are images that represent the precarity faced by mother/leaders during the pandemic. Sinking deeper in the water, she is tethered by additional conditions that amplify the precarity for mothers whose children experienced trauma and loss related to their removal from biological parents. The mother's constraints prevent her from reaching the hands lifted towards her.

As an addendum to the visual piece and written summary of the collage, I added an autoethnographic paragraph illustrating some of my pandemic mothering experiences that exacerbated the oppression I felt over the past two years.

Insights & Implications: This digital collage illustrates the layered social norms that constrain mother/leaders during crises. By critically investigating and artistically representing the oppression they experienced, it is hoped that they can be dislodged and replaced with more matricentric sensitive policies and practices.

Conclusions: As my stories and lived experiences crystallized with those of other mother/leaders throughout this project, they illuminated complex layers of precarity women experienced based on their social positions during the pandemic. One of the most profound understandings is the proliferation of struggles I and one other woman faced as mothers of children who experienced past trauma as foster children. As my reflections interacted with feminist theory and the existing literature on mothering and



educational leadership, they created a tapestry of understanding about myself (*auto*) as well as the culture of leadership (*ethno*).



The educational journey through self-authorship

Author: Leslie A. Wilbourn

Abstract: *Authoring Your Life* by Dr. Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (2009) provides the journey to self-authorship from the external formula to the self-transformation. A piece created by the artist applies this journey toward self-authorship from the experiences of a critical personal loss of life and the resulting non-traditional student educational experience. This journey of success started with inspiration, traveled through severe loss, resulted in accomplishments, and included support and mentoring of others to accomplish their educational goals.

Summary of the artistic piece: In 1976, the artist was inspired by the summer Olympian gymnast Nadia Comaneci. During the following years, the artist felt love, support, and shelter while training for the 1984 Olympics. Unfortunately, in 1983, her father, biggest cheerleader and financial supporter, suddenly passed away. While sitting on the edge of his death bed, she knew her life would never be the same. Without emotional and financial support, the dream of the Olympics ended, as well as the plan to utilize the summer Olympics to secure an athletic scholarship into higher education. The art piece submitted for the 2022 NCHP Proposal for Arts-Based Presentation titled, *The Results of a Non-Traditional Educational Path*, was inspired during the summer 2022 HESA 6870 Seminar on Arts-Based Tools for the Higher Education Practitioner.

Insights: The collage arts-based project utilizes the journey to self-authorship, picturing the journey of broken promises to non-traditional dreams and experiencing the path from community college to doctoral educational opportunities while including the professional development of a career in higher education. The journey would not be complete without including my children's higher education journey – hopes, dreams, and accomplishments. Applying emotional scars from a parent as a guide to success for her children.

The education of mass incarceration

Author: Charmaine Motte

Abstract: The painting presents the ideas of mass incarceration of Black Americans in the United States and their fight for education. The incarceration rate of Black Americans is five times higher than White Americans. Due to stigma, racial stereotypes, and federal regulations on federal financial aid, formerly incarcerated Black Americans face obstacles that impede their enrollment in higher education institutions.

Using Magolda's theory of self-authorship and securing internal commitments as a guiding framework for this piece shows black Americans' struggle when released from prison. They must live authentically while integrating both internal and external voices, both negative and positive.

Summary of the artistic piece(s): Impetus for work. Description of work. How/process of creation. Representing what/who, for the purpose of what (e.g., representing voice, art created while analyzing data, etc.). Theoretical/conceptual framing and/or how this fits/extends/informs current knowledge or literature (i.e., how this work matters for our understanding).

This piece shows the struggle of Black Americans breaking free from incarceration and reaching the goal of higher education.

Insights: The struggle and stigma of previously incarcerated Black Americans in the fight for higher education.

Seeing students through an arts-based lens

Author: Kerri Kearney

Abstract: In summer 2022, I taught a graduate-level class on arts-based tools for higher education practitioners. The course required that the student-practitioners experience all of the tools themselves. Arts-based tools are known to access emotion and to be effective with processing trauma, and this group was no exception. This canvas presents my perspective, as their companion, at their final presentations of their work.

Summary of the artistic piece(s): Impetus for work. Description of work. How/process of creation. Representing what/who, for the purpose of what (e.g. representing voice, art created while analyzing data, etc.). Theoretical/conceptual framing and/or how this fits/extends/informs current knowledge or literature (i.e., how this work matters for our understanding). This is a collage on canvas that includes deidentified snippets of key pieces of students' work from my perspective as an onlooker/companion on their journeys. Its primary message, I believe, is that we can gather any group of students or practitioners and be surprised by the journeys they have traveled or are traveling. Thus, the piece highlights, from an instructor's standpoint, the importance of working from a trauma informed lens in all spaces.

Insights: Trauma is everywhere, and students find great benefit in our acknowledgment of that and from tools that assist with processing.

Implications: We should be better preparing higher education professionals with an awareness of trauma and tools for working with students who have experienced trauma.

Growth

Author: Aundrea Jackson

Summary of the artistic piece(s): I came into digital story telling as a first-year graduate student - in the Higher Education Student Affairs (HESA), College Student Development Program – simply completing a class assignment. With this assignment I found healing and ease as I got the opportunity to share my struggles with high functioning anxiety. Under the guidance of faculty, I was able to further explore digital story telling in a two-class process of becoming a Facilitator through Story Center. What started off as just another class assignment turned into an area I found a talent, a space to process, and most importantly, healing.

This particular story addresses my relationship, as an adult, with my father. As I am able to count the number of times, I have seen my biological father on a single hand, the making of this story gave me the courage to meet him a final time, as the woman his stagnant child has grown into. This story addresses my childhood concerns of “When is daddy coming home,” but also attributes the success that came in his absence. My childhood imagination told me my father would show up at every birthday, graduation, big event in his little girls’ life. My life story is a juxtaposition, but my reality. This story was a brave space for me to process that disappointment and truth.

As a digital story telling facilitator, I am grateful for the opportunity to work with a team of HESA faculty, staff and Oklahoma State University’s 1is2Many in creating brave spaces for students of hidden populations to share their stories, encourage healing, and create community awareness through a campus showing next spring. Digital story telling allows individuals to be vulnerable, share empathy, and educate others. With my core values being love and vulnerability, I plan to help others in their digital story telling process sharing their voice and promoting their growth.

Tears

Author: Tifanie Lyn-Brumbaugh

Summary of the artistic piece(s): This flow of words, that I view as a poem, captures an experience that formed a significant anchor. Reading the words of this poem provides a pathway for me to return to a more regulated neurological state. It is a way of coming back to center in myself after a childhood resulting in an ACEs score of 8 and a resiliency score of 1.

Many times, such as when I struggle with a physical illness, I notice my neurological threshold, or bandwidth, and tolerance for stress significantly narrows. Some level of dysregulation of my nervous system will typically occur. My ability to focus during illness, especially when coupled with activated PTSD, is reduced. This leads to diminished academic productivity. About a year ago, I made a conscientious choice to prioritize my care at a time of such dysregulation and academic pressure.

I was not focused on daily academic work. I took the time to metabolize emotions of guilt and frustration after intentionally pausing for self-care. I engaged in body movement followed by gentle stretching to bring a nurturing awareness to my body and breath. I went out to my back porch and sat on a yoga mat next to the pond. I took a moment to stop and just be. To hear, see, smell, feel, and taste. It seemed like time slowed.

My mind entered into a flow as I turned inward and centered myself. I didn't control it, judge it, or shame it. I listened. I wrote down thoughts as they came to me. The flow of thought and words might be considered poetic or possibly spiritual. Perhaps I was tapped into a universal wisdom. *Tears* is what emerged from compassion for myself and rejection of external pressures. I only added commas or periods from the original form.

As a result of listening and compassion for myself, I was anchored in that remembering, and it is now easier to return to center, noticing my sympathetic nervous system and parasympathetic nervous system in tensioned engagement as they seek to maintain a regulated neurological system.



Moving beyond three percent

Author: Maddy Day

Abstract: The release of the 2011 Midwest Study gave the field of foster care and education powerful data to illuminate the education pathways of young people with experience in foster care. From this report came a rallying cry around a single data point, “3% of young people from foster care will earn a college degree.” Since that time, we as a field have developed programs and passed policies that have created resources and support where there used to be none. This presentation will ask you to consider reexamining the 3% and consider what we know now after a decade of development.

Methodology: The field of foster care and education has become a distinct field of study and as such should engage in deeper learning about the state of national postsecondary outcomes for students with experience in foster care. Researchers and practitioners are invited to explore the opportunity to co-design and implement a research study based on the education methodology of the Midwest Study and in partnership with FAAN member organizations.

Findings: It is the intention of this proposal to spur action among peers to take up a study that will assess postsecondary outcomes from states participating in the FAAN network.

Implications: The implications for this proposal are many, but chief among those is the ability to communicate a clear narrative about current state of postsecondary education success for students with experience in foster care, including who is supported to achieve and who has been left behind.

Conclusions: Exploring the outcomes of over a decade of education success practice, policy, and research through a reexamining of the Midwest Study will provide the field with a much needed update to what we understand about pathways students with experience in foster care move to and through postsecondary education. Moreover, if co-designed in partnership with professionals and scholars with lived experience we have the ability to build a new and stronger narrative about what the field of foster care and education can and will continue to be transformational.

Revisioning “Family”: Considering the implications of voluntary kin for higher education practice

Authors: Lucy Bailey, Kerri Kearney, and Lisa Will

Abstract: This manuscript considers two data sets: (1) college students with foster care experience and (2) “families” with non-biological non-legal ties. We focused on understandings of “family” that reflected voluntary kin. Across both data sets, participants used family words for voluntary kin; there were instances in which voluntary kin had equal or greater influence than bio-legal family; and participants seemed to be seeking authentic relationships they perceived as ideal. Multiple implications for higher education are discussed.

Methodology: This manuscript draws from two qualitative data sets, (1) college students with experience in foster care and (2) members of “families” with non-biological non-legal ties, to analyze the ways participants conceptualized and described “family.” We were particularly interested in the understandings of “family” that reflected what scholars call voluntary, fictive, or chosen kin. Exploring more expansive understandings of family that are commonplace in human relationships is important for revisiting definitions of family used in higher education. Students, such as those with foster care experience, enter the university system with diverse networks of support and understandings of family that differ from those common in higher education policies, language, and practices. Likewise, many students’ family histories include more potentially fraught relationships than some warm, idealistic metaphors of family capture. This was a re-analysis of qualitative data using a constructionist epistemology and an interpretivist theoretical perspective. Sources used for this data re-analysis included long interviews (one on one and group), extended observations, miscellaneous documents, photographic artifacts, and participant-produced drawings. We reviewed transcribed interviews in multiple rounds; each data set was first analyzed independently and then themes considered collectively. Using open coding, we looked for nuances, convergences, and divergences of themes. Both individually and collectively, we wrote multiple analytic memos. Multiple rounds of collaborative discussion, clarification with participants, and tightening of theme definitions and understandings were considered within the research questions.

Findings: Three cross-case findings resulted.

1. Participants had voluntary kin and referred to them using varied socially dominant family terms.
2. Participants reported multiple instances in which their voluntary kin wielded significant influence.
3. Participants seemed to be seeking authentic relationships (safe space, freedom to just be me, etc.) through their family members of choice.

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Implications: The notion of family is so important in our nation's history and in society that we must be very careful, in higher education, about how we deploy it. Traditional metaphors of the family do not resonate with, and even actively exclude, those without positive experiences on which to rely (e.g., if a student's family life was filled with abuse and fear, stating that our campus is like a family may take on unintended meaning). The use of family terms sometimes helps individuals of varied backgrounds to articulate their relationship bonds in language that is understandable and common (i.e., that fit in the socially dominant scripts) and, in our data, denoted those with real influence. Family conflict and relational breakages at various levels occurred in both data sets. Significantly, however, it was only those with experience in foster care who did not have the social "cover" of claiming that all was well (or would be well) in their families of origin. Having an authentic voice and being affirmed for the realities of the human experience is an important component for all human beings, but it is perhaps particularly salient for students seeking to find their space within the complexities and pressures of higher education.

Conclusions: Participants in both data sets crafted diverse definitions and structures of family that reached beyond conventional bio-legal lines. When aligned with literature outside of higher education, these definitions suggest the critical importance of trust, acceptance, and authenticity in human relationships. We make "families" in diverse ways.

What happens after graduation?: An examination of college graduates who participated in a campus support program

Authors: Lisa Schelbe, Jennifer Geiger, Lisa Jackson, and Christopher Schoborg

Abstract: Campus support programs (CSP) for students with a history of foster care and homelessness are typically designed to support the academic and social-emotional needs of students while enrolled in college; however, little is known about the extent to which students who participate in CSP are prepared for life graduation. Study findings show that participants often didn't feel prepared or confident in securing employment or achieving financial stability. They also discussed concerns about lacking social connections and their ability to navigate life after graduation. Based on participant feedback, Implications for program improvement are discussed.

Problem: Postsecondary education promotes social and economic equality among many disadvantaged groups. Unfortunately, it is not accessible to all. Students who have experienced homelessness and non-traditional family care arrangements (e.g., foster care) experience significantly lower rates of college graduation than those from traditional families. Campus support program (CSP) are designed to assist these students be successful in college; however, little is known about the impact of campus support programs (CSP) and how they might contribute to post-graduation outcomes. An abundance of research has examined the outcomes and college experiences of students with foster care history (see Geiger & Beltran, 2017 for a review). Very few studies have explored what happens after these students graduate from college (Salazar & Schelbe, 2021).

Purpose: This mixed methods study examines the experiences of college graduates involved in a CSP serving students who have experienced foster care, homelessness, relative care, or ward of the state status.

Theoretical/conceptual framework: This study is informed by Emerging Adulthood Theory and uses a strengths perspective to understand the ways in which CSPs support students while in college and how students fare after graduation. Emerging Adulthood Theory allows us to understand how young people, particularly those with adverse childhood experiences, may experience the transition to college and after college from a developmental perspective. Using a strengths perspective allows us to understand the strengths students possess that help with navigating the challenges during their educational journey and beyond.

Methodology: Students completed online surveys at graduation, 6 months post-graduation, and one-year post-graduation.

Data sources: Data collected included demographic information, experiences in the CSP, and experiences after graduation. The sample was 56 participants who graduated between 2015 and 2020.



Students were predominantly female (67%). Fifty-four percent were Black, 20% were White, and 11% were Latino/Hispanic.

Data analysis: Descriptive quantitative analyses were conducted along with thematic analysis of open-ended responses to better understand student outcomes after graduation.

Findings: Most participants reported post-graduation plans, including employment or graduate school; however, some did not have plans. A fifth (20%) of participants felt completely prepared; almost half (46%) felt fairly prepared for life after graduation; and a third (33%) felt completely, somewhat, or not at all prepared for life post-graduation. Only one in five (20%) were completely confident they would find a job that they were suited for after graduation. Six months after graduation, half were in graduate school and most (89%) were currently employed. Only 16% felt completely able to pay their bills, and only 44% were paying student loans, with only 6% feeling completely able to pay their students loans. One year after graduation, participants' responses were similar.

Post-graduation, participants identified concerns related to money, starting over with few connections, and adjusting to working. To improve the CSP, participants suggested additional assistance to help them navigate life after college. Participants emphasized they could have been better prepared for life post-graduation in terms of planning, financial literacy, social support, and employment and graduate school. All participants identified CSP as being helpful.

Implications: While postsecondary education promotes social and economic equality, students may leave the university without skills and resources necessary to succeed. CSPs should ensure students are prepared in money management, networking, and life skills. Additionally, CSPs should help students plan and develop support systems prior to graduation. Students with a history of foster care or homelessness may benefit from additional supports and resources that focus on life outside of college, which will promote social and economic stability and reduce inequities.

Conclusions: CSPs can help increase student success during college and play a role in preparing for life after graduation when programming includes establishing plans and supports.



Deadlines can fail us: Collective stories of the higher education experience while navigating trauma

Panelists: Tifanie Lyn-Brumbaugh, Empress Ahyoka Bey, Shawnda Jones, Jamila Ribas, and Susan Bredemeyer

Panel conducted by Denni Blum

Abstract: One type of hidden population in higher education is those who have PTSD or significant trauma. Their challenges on the college campus are not readily identifiable. Social stigma and judgement will often prevent these students from disclosing, specifically because it may require them to identify the experiences that led to their trauma. In addition, navigating a highly patriarchal system that values rational thinking over felt emotions (Ettore, 2016), students with trauma may likely dismiss their strong emotions and mental blocks. This collective presentation involves five women who have experienced PTSD or significant trauma. They use an autoethnographic feminist approach to share about the quality of their participation and learning in the academy was compromised by a variety of personal and institutional issues. They provide recommendations for practice and policy to improve the educational conditions for college-going hidden student populations.

Problem: Higher education is historically a patriarchal, neoliberal institution. It is a business that emphasizes rational, objective thinking, as well as cost effectiveness. The understanding of the impact of trauma on learning is woefully lacking, yet sorely needed. Moreover, secondary institutions, unlike K-12 schools, do not provide instructors or staff with trauma-informed pedagogy or skills. The assumption is that if one has been admitted to a higher education institution, and is not physically disabled, one will not need additional supports. The result can leave students to fend for themselves, possibly being retraumatized, and/or fail. Yet, self-actualization is integral to the college experience. Therefore, the college experience could be a fertile time and place to examine one's past trauma. In fact, it may likely be the first time one recognizes one's traumatic past. Furthermore, students who suffer from being "activated" or "triggered" are rarely, if ever, informed that the university has tools or accommodations to assist them. The prescriptive terminology used in student accessibility statements specifies accommodations for disabilities. Yet, students who have experienced significant trauma may not understand the connection between their traumatic experiences and impairments in the classroom or coursework. Oftentimes, intelligent students are left to themselves to request services they do not know how to articulate, leading to a painful shame-spiral or avoidance and dropping out. Furthermore, if one does understand PTSD is affecting their academics, are the support staff and instructors sufficiently educated on this to ensure adequate accommodations? Is the academy a safe place for communicating one's needs?

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the higher education experiences of five women who have suffered with PTSD to find ways for the university and college setting to become better prepared to serve their academic needs.

Theoretical/Conceptual framework: This study is autoethnographic, consisting of five women who have navigated higher education with PTSD or significant trauma. Autoethnography describes the cultural dynamics that an individual confronts rather than personal dynamics as in traditional autobiography (Ettore, 2016). Although sharing personal stories may be painful on a personal level, sharing stories can also be profoundly political. As second-wave feminists note, “the personal is political.” Autoethnography has meaning for society “because it is political and . . . intended to create change.” Moreover, as a “pointed truth,” used to reveal the limitations of oppressive power structures within society, autoethnography has the potential and power for change that exists through the practice of telling one’s own story.” (Averett, 2009, p. 361).

With autoethnography, the transformative power of ‘writing the self’ can transform personal stories into political realities by revealing power inequalities inherent in patriarchal institutional cultures and the complex cultures of emotions embedded in these unequal relationships. Narrative ‘writing the self’ has been recognized as an important method for feminists for several years (Stanley, 1992, 1993, 1994). Autoethnography allows for interpretations of personal ‘truths’ and speaking about oneself to transform their narrative representations into political responsibility (Ettore, 2010). Autoethnographers present particular embodied events and emotions with people in time, their social shaping, evolutions and how these events are emblematic of wider cultural meanings and social trends (Neville-Jan, 2004; Sparkes, 2003). It is with this feminist method that five women tell their stories of navigating higher education while navigating instances of having their trauma being “re-activated” in different academic situations.

Findings: This is a collective presentation. Panelists share their stories of navigating higher education without an appropriate social safety net; trying to push through trauma at times that were challenging, especially with deadlines. Not meeting the deadlines or not having a clear *enough* understanding of expectations caused further stress and shame, in addition to academic penalty, further feeding an imposter syndrome, and in some cases, creating an additional trauma. The panelists comment on their process of self-actualization and the role of the university; new knowledge of their experiences emerged through ongoing reflection and information gathering. Their final reflection includes their “wish list” for the university, what they wished they had known or had been able to communicate.

Implications: Their recommendations include: the option to join an in-person class virtually, flexible deadlines, examples of assignments, access to course notes, and clear explanations. It is imperative that instructors consider ways to scaffold student learning and avoid demeaning comments. Further, it is important that the institution understand that when measures are not taken to accommodate students with trauma, or rather when heavy penalties are issued for not meeting deadlines, the result can be additional trauma to the student and may include the student’s withdrawal from the class or the university. Thus, it is imperative that not only the institution’s student services consider its role in learning more about learning accommodations for students with PTSD, but that also faculty receive training on what questions to ask a student to start the process of the student receiving appropriate accommodations.



Conclusions: Five women reflected on their college experiences, which they navigated with PTSD or significant trauma. Their stories highlighted the gaps in education and communication regarding PTSD, both on the part of the student and the institution. The participants offered various responses to these gaps of knowledge and practice to improve the college experience for the student and increase graduation and retention rates for the institution. The autoethnographic accounts provided an empowering method for the women; their narratives made the personal political, to improve higher education policies and practices for this college-bound hidden population.



Conference/Research Team Notes

Conference website (public facing): nchp.okstate.edu

To join the Conference email list or for questions: nchp@okstate.edu

To log into the Conference Canvas site (restricted access):

<https://outreach.okstate.edu/canvas-gateway.html>



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