Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Gracie Wilson March 27, 2023

The Culture of College Mental Health: Narratives of Stress, Value, and Belonging

By

Gracie Wilson

Dr. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva

Advisor

Anthropology

Dr. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva

Advisor

Dr. Alicia DeNicola

Committee Member

Dr. Kristin Phillips

Committee Member

2023

The Culture of College Mental Health: Narratives of Stress, Value, and Belonging

By

Gracie Wilson

Dr. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva
Advisor

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Anthropology

2023

Abstract

The Culture of College Mental Health: Narratives of Stress, Value, and Belonging

By Gracie Wilson

College students across recent decades seem to be presenting with more severe mental health needs and universities struggle to meet rising demands for mental health services. Called a “crisis in college mental health,” these trends, and the clinical framings and national surveys through which they become known, share a focus on the individual as “getting sicker.” Less explored is how the symptoms this crisis describes are embedded in social and cultural meanings, or how student culture structures students’ experiences of their mental health. This thesis presents an ethnographic study of college student mental health and social and academic life at Oxford College, one of Emory University’s liberal arts colleges. I present how student mental health comes to be defined through student culture, narratives of high achievement, and notions of productivity to structure students' experience of belonging. Findings consider how college mental health represents social and cultural phenomena related to systems of value, identity, and adequacy, and how a student-centered lens can inform policies and practices of college mental health.

The Culture of College Mental Health: Narratives of Stress, Value, and Belonging

By

Gracie Wilson

Dr. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva

Advisor

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Anthropology

2023

Acknowledgements

I experienced first-hand many of the themes engaged in this work: I attended Oxford College for my first two years of undergraduate education, one of which was fully online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I watched my community as I was newly introduced to it, when I was isolated from it, and when it came together again. I am endlessly grateful for the Oxford community I had then and the Oxford community I know now. My interactions, successes, failures, transitions, disappointments, affirmations, and connections to this community inspired me to begin this research; the structures of community and connection revealed to me throughout these interviews led me to continue it.

I've come to believe that the "typical college experience" is never as common as we think. When we look at the student experiences together, we can start to see not only how people make sense of themselves in this environment, but how they do so relationally, how they construct ideas with others that become essential to how they view the world. None of the stories here could represent the diversity of experiences, identities, interests, and perspectives of students alone, nor do I aim to scaffold a story of this community as one that determines or generalizes someone's experience to mere roles or norms.

I've written most of these words with a cat by my side. Numerous friends and mentors have read and listened to my ideas throughout the years I constructed this piece. To my advisors, Dr. Chikako Ozawa-de Silva, Dr. Alicia DeNicola, and Dr. Kristin Phillips, thank you for your inspiration and devotion as I learned what it means to write and represent. AJ Jones, thank you for showing up as I learned to believe in myself as a graduate student and thinker— your attention to detail, ethics, and creativity inspires me daily. I'm grateful to Heather Carpenter and Dr. Bobby Paul for organizing and inspiring this year's honors cohort. To my long-time research team—Dr. Alicia DeNicola, Dr. Gary Glass, Dr. Amanda Yu-Nguyen, thank you for believing in me three years ago when I told you we could do this, and for continuing to believe that when it seemed we were going in a thousand directions. To my research partners Julia Kwak and Cody Nelson: you've set an impossible standard for every future group project or collaborative work. May we always have so much to say.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"Stressed."

Student, responding to "What does it mean to be a student here?"

When I asked Lucy[1] to describe her college experience in three words, she confidently responded with: stressed, interconnected, community. From our lawn chairs on the Emory University quadrangle, she recounted the first two years of her college experience that took place thirty-six miles away at the site of Emory's original founding: Oxford College. Lucy had recently graduated from Oxford, a two-year residential campus where a portion of undergraduates begin their Emory education. We'd known *of* each other during our shared time at Oxford but hadn't known each other until we met in a classroom on the Atlanta campus and began talking about traditions, clubs, and friends that shaped our college experience.

Spanning a few hundred acres, Oxford College includes a campus farm, four residence halls, athletic facilities, classrooms, a dining hall, and a newly renovated student center all perched around the historic quad. Students can see a tree from almost anywhere, and they'll walk right by at least two dozen squirrels each day. Walking along pansy adorned cobblestone sidewalks, they're bound to see somebody they know—someone they've heard of, seen before, know something about, or perhaps who they should know. The 24-hour library is full, the study rooms are booked, the dining hall is filled with open laptops, and the resident dorm lounges are occupied until sunrise. With dozens of student organizations ranging from Healthy Eagles to OxPride to Volunteer Oxford to Student Government, every day is sure to hold some event, club meeting, sign-up sheet, or online fundraiser. Any one of the school's enduring student group messages alert students to daily events and invite them to take a break, to learn something new, to meet new people, and maybe get a free slice of pizza. One-thousand students call Oxford home for the first two years of their college education, many looking for a liberal arts

[1] All names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

education, small class sizes, and abundant leadership and research opportunities. Sixty-five percent of these students hold leadership positions in over 80 clubs and organizations. These students are polite and kind, they are high achieving, they are leaders; they want to be here, they have something to contribute. Everyone here is stressed and busy, they are involved and engaged, they work hard. This is “just what the culture is like.”

Surrounding these motifs of involvement and overcommitment are language and messages that encourage students to take a break, go to the counseling center, and take care of themselves. Mental health, rest, and well-being occupy the forefront of student conversations, and multiple clubs, committees, and initiatives are devoted to well-being, yet students continue to report high levels of stress, burnout, and mental health challenges. Mirroring national trends across college campuses, stress seems to pervade every aspect of these students’ lives. Called the “crisis in college mental health” (Kadison and DiGeronimo, 2004; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Schwartz & Kay, 2009; Xiao et al., 2017), college students across decades seem to be presenting with more severe mental health needs. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students (CDC, 2020). Mental health struggles have nearly doubled in the last decade among college students (Duffy, Twenge, and Joiner, 2019); more students are taking psychiatric medications (Gallagher, 2015) and over 60 percent of students meet the criteria for one or more mental health concerns (Lipson et. al, 2022), with anxiety, depression, and stress as the top challenges (CCMH, 2021). In a 2019-2020 survey, nearly 90 percent of college mental health workers reported higher demand for services than the previous year (Gorman et al., 2021); TimelyMD, the most widely used college telehealth service, tells us that 9 in 10 college students say there is “a full blown mental health crisis” (TimelyMD, 2022). Researchers have questioned whether these students are “getting sicker” (Much and Swanson, 2010), how students’ needs and the pressures they face have shifted (Duffy, Twenge, and Joiner, 2019), and if these framings might reflect changes in the ways in which we recognize and make sense of student struggles (Watkins, Hunt, and Eisenberg, 2010).

Research Questions

This study focuses on student stress—an "epidemic among college students" (Heckman 2019)—to better understand how student culture and identity shape the lived experience of mental health for college students. Here, I ask: what does "mental health" mean, and in what spaces are these meanings constructed? If everyone seems to be talking about mental health, what are they saying?

My pursuit to better understand how Oxford students talk about mental health began shortly after an encounter I had with a group of fellow students. In one of numerous student spaces dedicated to raising awareness about student mental health, it became clear to me that, to be an Oxford student, I was meant to be stressed. For roughly the first half of each of these gatherings, students went around the room sharing how they were doing, inciting an unsurprising chorus of "stressed", "overwhelmed", and "busy." When I answered that I was well-rested and feeling content, I quickly realized I had made a grave error: to be an Oxford student, I had to be always stressed, always busy, and always aware of what else I could be doing. I had crossed some sort of social line; the empty stares across the room made me question, with a red, flushed face, in what context could *not* being stressed seem to be a bad thing?

A number of previous Oxford student groups have formally and informally asked questions about how stress manifests at Oxford; I began this project three years ago with a focus on students' ideas about mental health and their relationships to the counseling center. Like most counseling centers across the country, the school's Counseling and Career Services (CCS) continued to see students struggling with symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression, reflecting a continuing trend as well as the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I started with an interest in the diagnostic terms students used to understand their mental health and shape their identities; I wanted to know what frameworks they adopted to negotiate things like stress, anxiety, and depression as students in a high achieving environment. A much different project

emerged when students began talking not about their individual pathologies or diagnoses, but of how their experiences fit into larger campus narratives: it appeared the classifications students were using to make sense of their experiences were not diagnostic categories, but cultural ones. The issues students brought to the counseling center represented much larger patterns of stress, worth, identity, and value—patterns that suggested students' experiences were informed by relational and cultural practices at least as much as they were individually constructed. With this shift, my research questions became: what narrative frameworks are students constructing to make sense of their mental health? What does student culture reveal about the social and linguistic elements of the crisis in college mental health?

Structure of Thesis

This thesis is organized into three main chapters. Chapters One and Two present ethnographic detail from two years of research among Oxford students, concentrating on how student culture structures experience through narratives of involvement, high-achievement, productivity, identity, success, and community. Chapter One focuses on what student culture is and how students construct narratives and norms related to high-achievement, leadership, and busyness that informs how they are to perform as students. Chapter Two concerns how students understand and share experiences about their mental health on campus, with particular attention to how stress is embedded within discourse as a descriptive state of being that affirms identity and adequacy, rather than solely a physiological or psychological experience. Chapter three analyzes how stress and identity complicate traditional notions of belonging by exploring the possibility that belonging is at times in opposition to student well-being. The conclusion places these findings among the larger phenomenon of college mental health and discusses the implications of student culture and student subjectivity for addressing misalignments of care and mental health on campus.

The College Mental Health Crisis

Since as early as the 1980s, reports from college counselors, universities, and media have suggested college students are "getting sicker" year after year (Kadison and DiGeronimo, 2004; Kruisselbrink Flatt, 2013; Schwartz & Kay, 2009). Attending higher education at the traditional[2] ages of 18-24 has always been considered a challenging endeavor categorized by change, relative independence, identity development, and transition (Arnett 2000; Erikson 1968) from which a host of struggles of well-being can arise. Sometime between the onset of college counseling in the early 20th century[3] and the continued college mental health crisis in the 21st century, college students' challenges represent more severe psychological concerns. The "college mental health crisis" describes two connected phenomena: students are struggling with more prevalent and severe mental health issues, and colleges and universities are struggling to provide the amount and types of resources these students need (Gorman et al., 2021). As such, the focus has lied within identifying what students are struggling with and adjusting resources and treatments to meet these needs.

Defining Mental Health

Despite the statistics of college mental health being quite revealing, there remains ambiguity about what exactly is, has led to, or can ameliorate these unprecedented challenges. What is the "mental health" that seems to be in crisis, and what does this suggest about the way forward?

---

[2] College students continue to represent more diverse populations in terms of age, race, sexuality, and more. The so-called "traditional college student" has greatly shifted; still, 40% of 18–24-year-olds attended post-secondary education in 2020 (NCES 2021).

[3] College counseling, and its parent disciplines within psychology, have come a long way since the early 20th century when they began offering counseling services "in loco parentis" (in place of parents) for a selection of white, upper class males (Hodges, Shelton, and Lyn 2016). Debate about what services should be offered, who should offer them, and whether they should have an academic, psychological, or developmental focus contributed to the changing landscape of student affairs in the early 20th century university (Hodges, Shelton, Lyn, 2016).

While questions of health and illness have been explored for centuries, inquiries of mental health are comparatively new.[4] As psychology emerged amongst tensions of biomedicine and social science, so too did the field of college counseling experience a push and pull between the realm of student affairs and student health—tensions which lay at the foundation of our questions about college mental health today. College counseling has seen a medical, as well as cultural, shift from a talk-therapy counseling model towards one emphasizing expert methods and clinical services, often at the exclusion of community-based health practices (Rosenbaum and Liebert, 2015). Nestled at the core of this shift is a change in what "mentally healthy" means for students, practitioners, parents, and universities. Until recently, mental health has been defined as the absence of psychopathology, depicting a binary continuum where "mentally healthy" and "mentally ill" are opposed (Keyes, 2002). Through diagnostic measures and the reports through which these findings are circulated, so too has student mental health been framed in terms of the absence or presence of symptoms of mental illness. When students are asked about their mental health, which will most likely be through a questionnaire and Likert-scale, their responses serve as measures of the presence or absence of mental health symptoms, with less attention to how their symptoms are experienced, what they mean, and what else might be important to them. More importantly, this narrative increases the possibility that the struggles the "crisis" language describes might also be reflective of linguistic, social, and cultural phenomena (Rosenbaum and Liebert 2015; Lindholm and Wickström 2020).

Meeting Student Mental Health Needs

[4] Organized mental health research began in the early 20th century with the commission of the DSM and served as the foreground for the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, social work, and college counseling, among others.

As the college mental health crisis continues to make headlines, universities have faced considerable pressure to keep up with the rising demand for mental health services on their campuses. While in the past, many students did not have access to universities[5] or would seek more intensive mental health care with outside providers, college mental health care in the 21st century has introduced more psychotherapists and psychiatrists to the campus staff, as well as utilized online telehealth therapies and external clinical services (Bailey et. al, 2022; Cornish et. al, 2017; Ghetie 2007; Mitchell et al., 2019). While the immediate response to rising student mental health concerns was to hire more therapists and supply more clinical interventions, many have suggested that even exponential clinical care will not in itself end the college mental health crisis (Frank 2022; Wood 2022). Many are now calling for cultural change, community based initiatives, and a shifts in the broader conversation of mental health (Beresin et al., 2017; CCMH; see "Caring campus" initiative, AUCCCD; Brunner et al., 2014; JED foundation, Clay Center). This begins by identifying existing narratives of mental health in the context of their emergence. It is within this broadening from clinical services to community and cultural contexts that this study originated and has followed.

Methods

This thesis presents an ethnographic analysis of student mental health through methods of semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The conversations and perspectives presented throughout this thesis represent dialogues that students themselves are having all the time; this project, too, can be conceptualized as an extension of student conversations that have been happening for decades. Students at Oxford College have in recent years created spaces to reflect and analyze many of the same themes I make visible here—spaces ranging from

[5]College demographics radically changed throughout the social movements of the 20th century, and more people were able to pursue higher education due to the emergence of psychotropic drugs and other therapies (Gallagher 2015, Schwartz & Kay 2010).

reflective discussions to ethnographic inquiry to research presentations. The present thesis serves as an empirical cultural and linguistic analysis of such conversations through interviews with Oxford students.

From August 2021 to December 2022, I, along with my research team,[6] interviewed[7] thirty students. Participants[8] were either current students of Oxford or had graduated within one year and were attending the Atlanta campus. Interviews were semi-structured to allow for participants to share about their experiences more broadly and to address topics they considered relevant to conversations about mental health and campus life. All participants gave verbal consent to the interviews per IRB standards.[9] Interviews lasted from 20 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the participant's eagerness and ability to share. Some interviews were conducted via Zoom, and many were in-person on campus. Common questions included "Describe your college experience?," "What do you think about student mental health?," "What does a typical day look like for you?," and "What are you stressed about right now?" Interviews were transcribed by hand as well as with an online transcription service, then imported to MAXQDA for the entire research team[10] to analyze independently via thematic coding. For the purpose of this thesis, I re-coded all original transcripts with particular focus on student stress, belonging, and mental health. These generated codes relating to student stress, identity,

[6] Data were primarily collected with two other students: Julia Kwak and Cody Nelson. A selection of more recent interviews was gathered with the help of students Imaan Hashan and Rachel Lawrence.

[7] Because the interviews presented here represent data collected by multiple researchers, I use the title "interviewer" when presenting transcripts in this work to represent any member of the research team. If there is no indicator of "interviewer" it can be assumed that I, the author of this thesis, was the researcher who talked directly with that participant.

[8] As a researcher having previously attended and still part of the school's network, keeping the institution's title anonymous would not have been feasible. While the school's name and location are identifiable, all other data has been deidentified. To better organize ethnographic data, I present student narratives through four student pseudonyms. These characters are composites of multiple participants and are in no way meant to represent any particular kind of student or to generalize the experiences of the many students interviewed. At times, there may be shorter quotes presented without a pseudonym attached.

[9] IRB study number: 00002963

[10] Some arguments presented throughout this thesis draw from conversations or presentations conducted by the collective research team. These sections are marked by footnotes and the proper citations.

productivity, belonging, mental health, relationships, expectations, culture, authenticity, among others.

To present the stories and narratives shared by students, I utilize four pseudonyms throughout this thesis. Each is constructed from multiple students as composite representations. Chapter One opens with a case study pulled directly from a conversation with one interlocutor, named here as Lucy. Lucy, a composite of two female students, is mentioned most frequently throughout this thesis because the students "Lucy" represents were the most broadly descriptive of Oxford student culture as well as took part in follow-up interviews. The other students depicted here—Alex, Daniel, and Justin— each represent about 3-4 students interviewed.

Subjectivity, Narrative, and Performance

A primary purpose of this thesis is to consider how we can better understand student mental health by attending to the subjective states of well-being, identity, belonging, stress, and affect. This study draws from three interconnected theoretical and methodological tools: subjectivity, narrative, and performance. I view the lived experiences of mental health as fundamentally questions of subjectivity—requiring attention to "*that* a person experiences, *what* they experience, and *how* they experience it" (Ozawa-de Silva, 2021: 20). In an ethnographic analysis of student culture among secondary students in Mexico, Levinson (1998) describes student subjectivity as "all forms of identity and self-awareness, but especially those informing and informed by intersubjective cultural practices, through which students apprehend their environment and generate behavior" (289). Because individual experiences alone can be "misleading units of analysis and reform" (Varenne and McDermott, 2018:145), studies of student well-being must also devote great attention to the social conditions in which student experience is understood—the "role of the social in an individual's experience of an emotion" (Luhrmann, 2006: 349). Such a lens draws the focus towards how students construct identities, generate norms, configure relationships, appraise emotions, and make meaning of those

experiences as at once both singular and collective processes (Ozawa-de Silva, 2021; Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). I approach mental health as a fundamentally collective and cultural experience.

As will be shown in this thesis, student culture is the center social stage where students learn about and express their understandings of what it means to be a student. As they learn new social rules, navigate academic pressure, and negotiate identities, students engage in a performance of impression management and cultural capital reflective of Goffman's (1956) dramaturgical analysis, whereby people are thought to be performing particular selves according to the social rules of their environment. These performances of student life, and the meaning created through them, are expressions of student subjectivity particularly relevant to student mental health and well-being.

Additionally, narrative, as an organizational, cognitive, and expressive act of storytelling, is central to how students spread information and conceptualize their social and academic world. This study follows everyday student subjectivities and examines how they are produced and negotiated through what Langellier and Peterson (2004) call performing narrative: how storytelling is “embodied, situated and material, discursive, and open to legitimation and critique” (2004: 8). When students think about, construct, and share their experiences, they are not merely recounting; rather, this narrative is embodied and “lived through the body as meaningful” in ways that inform and structure experience (Langellier and Peterson 2004: 9). When we experience emotions, we are also, consciously, or unconsciously, generating meaning through complex narrative structures which inform us about ourselves and our world (Shweder 1994:37); when students experience stress—have too many tasks, receive an unwanted grade, feel overwhelmed—they create meaning and look to structures of meaning to apprehend that experience (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The following chapters attend to how student experience, through shared narratives and embodied performance, structure the lived experience of mental health as relational and intersubjective.

Chapter 1: Student Culture

> I think that Oxford is made up of a lot of really talented overachieving kids and that is something that helped us in high school to get here. The kind of environment that Oxford has - a small group environment that fosters good social well-being could also foster a lot of unhealthy competition. It's very easy to get involved in everybody's business and that means that even if you're trying to avoid people or avoid, say, some negative news or whatever is going on, it spreads incredibly quickly, and it's almost impossible to, you know, get away from it all. Oxford is simultaneously liberating and isolating at the exact same time, I think in this aspect.

As Lucy demonstrates in this opening quotation, the environment of Oxford plays a considerable role in shaping students' social and academic experiences. Throughout my research, within campus programming, and during the last four years I've engaged with Oxford students, the terms "campus culture," "student culture," and "Oxford culture" have been recurring descriptors used when referring to the Oxford community. Campus culture, often used to emphasize university affiliation, academic culture, and athletic or cultural groups, describes "the complex of values, attitudes, and behavior held by undergraduate groups and transmitted to those entering them" (Horowitz 1986: 2). While often used interchangeably, I use the term student culture here to emphasize the role of students in shaping and interacting with campus culture. Further, I am interested here in not only the identities and diversity students bring into their school but in the ideas and frameworks they construct together within the walls of the university (Levinson, 1998; see also Bishop, 1993; Eckert, 1989). Echoing Bourdieu's habitus, student culture informs and structures students' social, academic, emotional, and relational worlds as well as provides a scaffolding through which students transform their intersubjective realities. Beginning with a case study, this chapter examines the student culture whereby students reproduce and reconstruct norms, identities, and expectations through shared narratives of identity, success, achievement, and productivity.

Case Study: Lucy

I spoke to Lucy at length about her experiences as an Oxford student. Like me, Lucy had recently graduated from her two years at Oxford and was transitioning to the Atlanta campus. While we had shared a classroom together, there remained much I didn't know about her college experience. We began by talking about well-being on campus, to which Lucy described a stressful spring semester and difficulty seeking help for stress as a junior:

> I think that the small campus environment made it easier for me to have at least good social well-being because, even though I didn't get out much, the small campus environment made sure that I have friends, have smaller classes, and made it easier to interact with people.
>
> I'd say regarding other aspects of well-being like physical and mental, I was also OK just because I felt like the stress really started hitting in spring semester. I would say my stress is probably at an all-time high now, and I feel like it's difficult to seek help for that kind of mental wellbeing. I feel like it's really difficult to reach out and ask people because it feels like as a junior you should be able to understand and know this information by then.

With a population of just 1000 students who almost all live together in four residential dorms, the smaller campus facilitated more social connections. It also meant that most people knew each other, and knew, or could quickly find out, what was going on in each other's lives. This, Lucy observed, could manifest in comparison and competition:

> I think that people recognize the issue of mental health, especially people who have been at Oxford campus for more than a year. I think that there's a lot of effort, for example, to make executive boards less stressful and reduce the amount of work that they ask for from their leadership, but at the same time I think stress is almost revered in a certain way. You know, I think that Oxford is made up of a lot of really talented overachieving kids and that is something that helped us in high school to get here. The kind of environment that Oxford has - a small group environment that fosters good social well-being could also foster a lot of unhealthy competition.
>
> It's very easy to get involved in everybody's business and that means that even if you're trying to avoid people or avoid, say, some negative news or whatever is going on, it spreads incredibly quickly, and it's almost impossible to get away from it all. Oxford is simultaneously liberating and isolating at the exact same time, I think, in this aspect.

Throughout my conversation with Lucy, the topic of stress continued to come up in different aspects of her experience. She described how people are aware of stress—and the need to reduce it—but that it could be "revered in a certain way." This, tied with the ways students are involved in each other's lives, can quickly foster a sense of competition. She continued:

> I would say that stress is primarily just in the environment being fostered. For example, executive club culture. Obviously one of the big draws of Oxford is the small classes and the fact that you can get involved with organizations incredibly quickly. I suppose like the only people above you are the sophomore or kind of your seniors, right? So, you're already in a very big leadership position and equipped, so people feel a lot of pressure to kind of rush those positions and put in their 100%.
>
> But they're not realizing that as a freshman, part of that is, you know, making mistakes, overcommitting, but also pulling back when you need to. But the fact that Oxford has so much reliance on this small executive club culture and organizational structure means that people feel like they can't pull back when they need to.
>
> There's the guilt of seeing someone you know on campus again, small campus and pulling out of their club for whatever reason you have, and feeling as if you should have pushed through and tried harder, especially with everyone else around you and other examples.

I had known Lucy was involved in many clubs and activities on campus. I'd seen her post about events in the student group chats and be featured on school emails—two strong indicators that someone is involved and influential on campus. When I asked Lucy about her experiences in these spaces, she described how students, including herself, engaged in deficit thinking that "perfectly contrasts" with this pressure to be involved in everything. She said:

> I think that of course there's always people on the Oxford campus and I was always one of them where we were always kind of like "you know I'm failing everything," but in reality you're not, you feel like it because it's a great way to cope and it's one of those ways that like competition kind of manifests. Saying I'm failing everything, then getting As on your projects is a very unhealthy but a perfectly contrasting way to cope with what's going on and you feel very overwhelmed and stressed. When you manage to pull through it's almost

> intoxicating like you could keep doing it over and over again, but that's not how your mind works and how your body works. You will eventually give in.
>
> I think that my freshman year I felt the need to compete like there's always this kind of like “oh, you know I slept only three hours last night I only had two hours last night.” I know a lot of people who always saw it as a challenge and I know one up, you know, trying to get a leg over someone because you slept less when in reality you probably should have gone to bed at a certain time because now your immune system is completely drained. You just can't do anything right now.
>
> I would say that regarding just kind of like the structure of it all and like how people were impacted from it. Again, people talk about it, but nobody has a real solution to it. Does that make sense? Like Oxford is a really small campus and they pride themselves on this organizational aspect of getting involved early, but nobody really steps in and is kind as a mediator. Like hey, maybe you shouldn't over commit early like it's OK if you don't, you could still be a regular college freshman or whatever college freshman entails.

Lucy couldn’t help but laugh when trying to think about a “regular college freshman” in comparison with what we’d both experienced in our first year of college. After tossing around anecdotes about our friends attending larger, public universities, Lucy offered a definition of a regular Oxford freshman:

> I think I would say a regular college freshman at Oxford is someone who's getting involved in at least 16 or 17 credits because let's be real. Even though the school says the 16 credits like the max you should take like the average suggested. That's the minimum for most people. I feel like other regular Oxford College freshmen would be involved in a lot of opportunities. They would be, you know, rushing every executive board application they possibly could. They would try to get involved with some kind of jobs that shift their work study and they would try to get involved like in Oxford Farm research they would have something to keep them busy because everybody at Oxford seems like they have something to keep them busy. So, it feels like you're almost like losing out in the rat race If you're not getting involved.

In her account, Lucy addressed a number of larger themes that emerged throughout my time talking with Oxford students. The rest of this chapter will look specifically at five areas of Oxford student culture: (1) visibility in a small, tight knit community; (2) the ideal student; (3) comparing oneself to others; (4) leadership; and (5) clubs and student organizations.

Visible in a Small, Tight knit Community

As only a portion of undergraduates begin their 4-year education at Oxford, the student community is uniquely both connected to something larger and isolated in a local setting. The most common words used to describe Oxford were that it is a “small, tight-knit community” or a “small campus environment.” The college, with roughly 1000 students, is nestled into a rural town of just over 2000 residents, making the 56-acre campus its own kind of bubble. When talking about their experience being among such a small number of students, Alex, a second-year student, explained:

> I think it's unique in that it's very small, but there are very scholarly people here, like overachievers. And so, it’s interesting, I think. I always remember a sophomore last year who told me that she had a friend that hated Oxford, because it was just like high school. It was so small, it's really cliquey. It's in the middle of nowhere. I think Oxford culture is unique because you can really lean into what you're interested in. You also see a lot of other people, there's lots of overlap with other people.

While this close community improved social well-being for many students, it also meant that students see each other all the time, and, with that, they are always being seen by others. Many students described feeling very visible on campus. Talking about how this small campus impacted social life, Lucy explained:

> If one thing happens, everyone knows about it, and everyone has an opinion on it, and then everyone starts to spread their opinion on it. And then soon enough, it's just like, mob mentality where everyone believes the same thing. And because everyone's like, keeping you in check. Everyone's just so involved in each other's lives and stuff. It's hard to break from the mob.

Similarly, another student described how, in an environment where “everyone knows everyone,” gossip and news spreads quickly.

> For the most part, I feel welcomed and appreciated on this campus. But, like many things in life, it can be kind of a double-edged sword. Because we are so small, your business gets around. You know, especially if you are well known on

> campus. With social media, with Yik Yak[11] in particular. Yik Yak is so d*mn toxic. Horribly toxic and especially at Oxford when only 1000 people. It is so easy to fabricate something that's not true and it's just a big game of telephone, right? You read something and it's a quick upvote. It just hurts when you're the subject of what they're talking about.

This constant possibility of being seen also means students are left managing the ways they are seen by others. The ways students manage these impressions are shaped in large part by their perceptions of others as busy, involved, and successful: the ideal student.

To be Busy and Involved: Performing the Ideal Student

When students described their academic, social, and personal lives, they often compared themselves to what they viewed as some sort of quintessential student. This "ideal student" is a representation of what all students could or should be; it is not necessarily any real student around them, but rather a construction of the "right kind of student" meant to be strived for. This includes specific narratives about what is expected for students and how they are to manage these expectations. Interestingly, Lucy connected these expectations to the construction of a particular Oxford identity:

> I think it is not just an identity as a student, I think you have to add as an Oxford student, because there's a lot of expectations that not only does the school puts on you, there's also expectations from other students that they've put on you. So you have to be doing a lot of things. You have to be always studying, but you also have to be able to go out on the weekends to Atlanta to hang out or you feel left out, right and I think like. Of course, like. Being a studious student is good, but there's a limit to where it becomes, you're just overworked, right? And sometimes being too busy or studying too hard becomes normal standards that you are comparing yourself to others, right? Especially because people are studying. I mean in the connector [in the dorm] people study late at night. I'm guilty of that. People study in the library. It's 24/7 and you can see the library from the quad, right across the campus. That's basically our campus.

[11] "Yik Yak" is an anonymous social media platform where users sharing a geographic location can post information—it was previously shut down for inciting cyberbullying and hate speech but has resurfaced on many college campuses since 2021.

> But you see people studying everywhere and sometimes you're just walking in like “Should I be studying as well?” Maybe I'm not thinking about it constantly, but I’m subliminally thinking to myself “I should be studying too.” I should be doing this, I should be doing that based on what other people do, just because it's so visible, and you know the person too, right? Especially if it's a person you know, you think maybe you should be doing that too.

Describing a similar sense of comparison, Daniel, a first-year student, tied the “ideal student” to everyone being so visible on campus. He explained:

> I have a friend who’s always like “you need to be doing everything.” Like if I’m just doing biology, that’s not enough. The ideal Oxford student is involved in a lot of things, multiple clubs to a high degree. Uhm, but that might just also be the people that you would see the most? You would always be commenting in the Oxford Group chat. Like the people you probably see the most from our people who are in clubs and are like advertising for that club or something. That’s probably why there’s that perception.

Like many students, Daniel quickly offered a list of things expected of students. He also added the ways that this idealized student is a perception based on what people observe. Similarly, Lucy questioned whether this ideal student might represent a performance from students: students acting in ways they associate with what is expected of them. She said:

> I think high achievement can be a bit of a stereotype, but that’s again a visible thing that people would associate. But it might not be what’s actually true? I guess like maybe people aren't highly motivated, but they feel like they should be so they act. But really, it might be the exception. Maybe people perpetuate it because they think it is the expectation. If everyone else is working harder and feeling motivated, I should go be motivated, too.

When talking about how sometimes other students made him reflect on his own work ethic, Justin, a sophomore at the time we spoke, explained how people compare themselves to this idealized student, often to the detriment of their well-being.

> People are involved in a lot of things. Everyone had a job and everyone was taking all these hard classes and like having a difficult lab. I remember knowing I didn’t want to overwhelm myself; I would think ‘Yeah, I'm only going to take one science class at a time like I don't want to have two labs at a time.’ That's like that's too much for me, or like I'm going to make sure I get a professor that's not really intense or crazy. And it's going to make this class easier. I'm someone who likes to balance it.

> At Oxford, we are just going really hard. People are always saying “I gotta take a lot of classes. I have to make sure I'm involved in all these things. I need to be the President of this club” because they're trying to build up. There’s not a lot of work life balance. Like people always say they pulled it all nighter and I'm like ‘well why did you do that?’ You probably could have used this sleep more than you could have used three extra hours of studying.

Interestingly, in this quotation, Justin reveals how performing what is expected of the ideal student, while important for “building up” resumes, reputations, and skills, is frequently tied to unhealthy behaviors.

As students navigate these expectations to be constantly busy, they can find themselves, as Alex describes in the following quote, seeking to make everything feel productive. Even when students recognize the need for them to rest, the pressure to make everything productive leaves them compromising between “doing nothing” and “feeling productive.” Alex, a second-year student involved in numerous clubs and organizations, asked to schedule our interview at midnight—right after the end of their club meetings. At one point in our interview, she paused to check her calendar “just in case,” then told me that this interview felt productive because it was being used for research purposes.

> Alex: I'm constantly thinking about the work I have to do, just on my To Do List in general and also doing them constantly, which isn't really productive. It's just like you drag it on the entire day. That's why I feel like it's costly doing without actually finishing anything.
>
> Interviewer: What do you mean it is constant but not productive?
>
> Alex: I have such a long to-do list that even when I finish one, I don't feel like I have actually made much progress. So the difference between being constantly doing something versus being productive is that constantly doing something gives you a sense of being productive, a feeling of being productive without actually doing anything. So that is unproductively rewarding. You feel like you’re doing something. Receiving the email itself is not productive, but I think people feel like they're doing work by receiving an e-mail or their work right, even though they didn't do anything.

> So I think that sense of feeling productive is not just contained to our school, but our society in general, because you emphasize so much “what's next? What's next? What's the next step you're going to take? What's your next goal? What's the next position you're going to get?” You want to procrastinate, but you also don't want to feel like you're doing nothing, so you find a compromise between the two. You drag on what you're doing, maybe even if it's something easy or hard. Drag emails on for the entire day. You would procrastinate on it while having the window up to feel productive. And feel like you're doing something, but instead you're actually avoiding it.

Alex was not alone in thinking about how to co-opt time to feel more productive. Others described listening to lectures while taking naps, scheduling time to study with friends to make sure they’d see them and doing their homework in the dining hall. When I asked how rest fit into this need to feel productive, Alex explained how they never really see anyone resting, just co-opting spaces for productivity. In this conversation, Alex revealed two connected aspects of student life: students rarely see others resting, and students struggle to “do nothing” without feeling as though they should be constantly working, regardless of how much work they complete. As Alex described, checking something off a to-do list, as an Oxford student, will never end—students are meant to always be busy.

The Average Student is Above Average: Comparing Oneself to Others

In the opening case study of this chapter, Lucy described that the average is “the minimum for most people.” While taking 15 credits is the generally recommended course load, this quickly became the minimum benchmark. During my own class registration as an Oxford first year, I too was told that “as long as I took over 15 credits,” I would “be okay.” While an above average cognitive bias is well documented, it seems that average, for Oxford students, serves as a minimum threshold to be a student at all. In this way, “what everyone else is doing” becomes a constantly moving and increasingly more difficult minimum threshold. This measure serves as a strong point of comparison for students, whereby seeing what others are doing is always also an evaluation of whether an individual is doing enough. Justin, who had made an

effort to make his life feel more balanced than he had his first year, recognized a sense of comparison. I asked him how he felt to set those priorities for himself, to which he responded:

> Yeah, I feel like sometimes it's hard not to compare yourself to other people. Oh my God, like they're doing well even recently, like some of my people I know were like, oh, I'm doing like scribing and like yeah and this and that. And I think that, if I'm not doing that, I am falling behind. I think to myself “should I be doing that?”
>
> It's hard not to compare yourself to other people who are on similar paths. When I compare myself to other people it becomes competitive, I guess. Sometimes it can motivate people if they're that kind of person, where they think they’re behind and need to be the best.

Comparison becomes competition when students view that they are somehow behind their peers, as though competition is comparison becoming relational. Interestingly, competition seems to be something undesirable in the Oxford community. Talking about how she doesn’t want to be a “toxic student,” Lucy said:

> Sometimes it makes me insecure when I see some people are involved in so many things, and they seem to be doing it better than I do. I would say it motivates me, too. I mean, like, I don't want to be like that, like a toxic student. And I know what constitutes—I'm self-aware enough to know what constitutes like a toxic student here. But there's always going to be that edge of competitiveness. I think people who say they’re above that, I think they're lying.

It seems that, while being aware of “toxic students,” competition still finds its way into many of these students' ideas about themselves and others. Expanding on how comparison and competition showed up in their life, Alex described social competition.

> Alex: I would say that our culture is more competitive in non-academics than academics. Because social groups are so small, they're constantly kind of going to the top and going down. Your ability to kind of be in a good social standing is so constantly on edge, that I think it kind of breeds a certain competitiveness. I think it's a direct competition for social standings, but also that people compete for things like club positions, and it's kind of a competition of who has more executive positions. And I think like Oxford, as kind of a case study, breeds competitiveness, and that people strive to be the most accomplished person on campus in a way that other campuses don't have because of the nature of Oxford, and it being so small.

Here, Alex is describing an overlap between social connection and the networking of organizations—a competition for “social standing” is also a competition for club positions. The lines between social life and the identities of ideal students are increasingly blurred as students face the pressure of “being in good social standing.” I then asked Alex if she found herself competing or whether it was possible not to compete. To this, they responded:

> Alex: I do participate to a certain extent, I do. And I think it's because it's more of, I wouldn't quite say survival, but there are certain things that are necessary for you to thrive later in life. I think clubs and those kinds of things are really necessary for you to stand out when you get to the main campus. I think academic pressures are very necessary to make sure that you thrive and get job opportunities later. I think most of these competitions have direct correlations into most people's futures, to the point where they become, like, important enough to compete. With social situations, I think it's a little bit less necessary. I can't say that I don't compete at all. But I do think I kind of take a step back where others wouldn't.
>
> Interviewer: How do you take a step back?
>
> Alex: In certain situations, it's very possible to not compete at all like, I think, if you don't really care about things like, social standing and stuff. But I do think that people struggle to not compete because of that implication of kind of their futures at stake. I think there's a large consensus of thought that if your name is known on this campus, it affords you more opportunities, in terms of that you know, more people in executive positions, you are afforded more opportunities to join things when you get to the main campus, and I think that's a very direct correlation of like, wanting to know important people on this campus and getting to know people who are really accomplished because it kind of in a way seems that your association with them will kind of bring you up to their level, if that makes sense.

This competition, then, is directly tied to one’s confidence about the future. Competition—gaining more and more accolades, higher grades, and higher achievement—is an avenue to reach this idealized student and rise to someone’s “level.” Here, being seen and known for what you can contribute is directly associated with students’ perception of the future. I then asked Alex about overcommitment at Oxford and what that has to do with competition.

> One hundred percent. Yeah, I think it's a very much product of Oxford thing to, I don't know, like, I think it's a very product of competing of being at kind of elite

> institutions like Emory, but I think that kind of, especially Oxford, like, there's this kind of need to sign up for as many things as you can and then kind of deal with the consequences of it later.

Describing the expectations placed on students, Daniel explained:

> There is this invisible expectation where you are simply put into that class where there are a lot of you know, good students and like the professor really likes them and they're doing great, while you are kind of automatically comparing yourself with those good students. You set the expectation that since you got into Oxford, you are deemed as accepted into this highly intellectual and high achieving student community, which means you have to be somewhat like them. You cannot be bad generally.

The threshold of what constitutes an average student is constantly rising, and easily known to students; when incoming freshmen arrive on campus, they are quickly exposed to norms and expectations of this "highly intellectual and high achieving student community." At every turn, as Daniel notes, students are reminded that they "cannot be bad generally." Interestingly, students already related this need to be "like others" and compare oneself to others to a sense of belonging to the school. When I asked him to describe what students have in common, Justin stated it this way:

> For everyone, their desire to belong. I think that's a main motivator for a lot of people besides, like getting good grades for your academics because your career depends on it. I think any first year students at any school are just trying to belong in a friend group, and not look like you're alone. I think that is a big motivator for a lot of people.

When I asked why "looking alone" is such a bad thing, he continued:

> You need to belong to something. That's anywhere, people want to belong. They don't want to look like they're alone or that they don't have a lot of friends. Although I think as you learn, you realize it's fine to like, eat alone. I think when everyone is in the phase of trying to meet new people and not wanting to miss out on the college experience or feel like an outcast to like the typical college experience. Then it can make you feel like you're doing something wrong.

In this quotation, we again see how comparison and the need to be like others is present in students' understanding of their community. The pressures of high achievement and

overcommitment, then, are not only about success, but tied to how students relate to each other and view their position within the community.

Second-Year Seniors: Leaders Leading Leaders

As a two-year campus, students quickly become "upperclassmen"–by their second year, they are essentially seniors, and are often generalized as all being "student leaders." Among a student body of 1000 students, about 650 of them hold leadership positions across over 80 unique clubs and organizations ("Quick Facts." Oxford Website). The ability to get involved in leadership so early in one's college career is one of the strongest draws of Oxford. The days of general body members have begun to pass, and nearly everyone in these clubs has some sort of position or title and are responsible for organizing events, setting up fundraisers, recruiting, running social media, and maintaining a presence on campus. Consider Justin, who told me he joined eight different organizations within the first week of school.

> A lot of people feel the pressure to go into those leadership positions, because there's so many people in leadership positions, either you or your friend, that you know at least one of them is in a leadership position. At the same time, there's so many people in leadership positions because they're available. We open executive boards to first year students, because if you don't, the club will likely die out. They're dependent on first years getting involved. If they don't, there's no transfer of institutional knowledge over the years and that makes it hard for a club to live because then things are lost. By next June or next May, half of the campus is gone, the turnover is rapid. But you get to keep teaching and transfer the knowledge you have to the next generation of students.
>
> It's great that there are so many opportunities for students, but, on the other hand, because there's so many people in leadership, if you're not in that leadership position, you do feel the pressure to join a club or the executive board. So, there is that difficulty.

Here, Justin described the phenomenon of clubs and leadership as twofold- on one hand, there are so many positions because the leadership boards are so large, and, in relation

to this, everyone then thinks the only “right” way to be in a club is to be leader. Lucy had a similar observation:

> The only people that the students here really confide in is each other, and the only like value that they can find in themselves is often just their grades, like that's pretty much all they're left with at the end of the day. Because even things that are meant to be enjoyable, like art and theater and things like that, can get commodified, they are material leadership positions.
>
> And people here have this mentality that you can't even join a club unless you're in a leadership position here. Because at the end, time is money and you just can't…if you're in the general body of a club and you're putting all your effort into doing those weekly meetings and you're doing this and you're doing that... you could be doing, you could be applying for something else and being a leadership position somewhere else. And that could make your LinkedIn, or your resume look a little better at the end of the day. And it's like... it's such an evil sh*tty way to think about it, but it's the truth about university and about higher education in America.

Lucy was not alone in her perspective of how activities and spaces of community could be “commodified” or co-opted for a resume. Students described feeling difficulty disconnecting from the academic or productive potential of activities or opportunities, including how to enjoy things like art, theater, and community groups when they could be doing something else, applying for something else, or being a leader somewhere else. Describing how this pressure to fill leadership roles is connected to student culture, Justin said:

> I feel like the administration kind of promotes this image of “you're special here, you can do so much here.” You can’t really have a normal college freshman experience or whatever we call a normal one. It feels like it can't be okay at Oxford, and I think that's the problem. I think with students and executive culture, people are aware of the problem, but it's hard not to perpetuate it because there's no other solution. For example, people are trying a solution of opening executive boards to as many people as possible, but that's made it more difficult to initiate events.
>
> It’s like trying to really keep a club going. And clubs again are like the backbone of our culture. If you're not keeping your club going, that's your number one priority, so that club fails. You have to go back to the drawing board, so people tend to stick to the same routine, the same pattern, no matter how difficult it is on the students themselves.

Here, Justin says, you can't have a normal college freshmen experience. Instead, expectations and pressures of leadership are an element of "the backbone of student culture." Students seem to have no choice but to perpetuate it, even if it "is difficult on students themselves."

Oxford Culture: Passing it Down

As incoming freshmen, Oxford students have more opportunities than their peers at larger or traditional 4-year institutions; they also carry the responsibility to influence student culture, carry out traditions, and set up the next set of students with a strong club model. In addition to the ways students share ideas about leadership, it is also an important tenet of the administration's values: numerous retreats, leadership fellowships, workshops, and awards are devoted to training and supporting sophomores in leadership positions. A first-year class, "Learning to Lead" is offered and taught by these sophomore student leaders, as they learn to "teach to lead." As students are learning to lead, they are at the same time telling themselves they need to already be leaders. As described in the previous section, student clubs are a place where institutional knowledge is taught to incoming students, as well as reinforced year after year.

Clubs are considered "the backbone of student culture." Student organizations are places where students emulate what it means to be a student—where examples of leadership, success, and student life are performed. They are sites where this ideal student is constructed, performed, and reproduced to future students. Daniel described it in this way:

> We think people think of success as kind of curating this perfect image of yourself in the world and presenting it in such a way that it's impossible for someone not to look away, like for example, with your resume. Everybody goes into things they're passionate about, but then pulls out when they realize maybe you know it doesn't really work with their goals, their aspirations, right?
>
> They feel that they need to fit into a certain niche and that needs some image created by people who came before them and so the image of success has already been well-established in Oxford's culture, and people are just perpetuating it because they feel like that is the standard they must live up to.

In the context of a community where students feel highly visible, this focus of how students present themselves adds to other students' observations that, in order to be a student at all, they must perform in particular ways. Importantly, what Daniel describes here is that student culture is not merely a definitive set of social rules, but a continuous process of engagement and reconstruction of which students are active participants. These standards of how students are supposed to be are not written into codes of conduct, but constructed, as a communal process and performance, by students themselves. As an analytical space, then, student culture is more than something "held" or "shared" by undergraduate groups, but a site of constant social restructuring where social, academic, personal, and relational stages are brought into being. Student culture is acted out, embodied, and performed in everyday student acts. The next chapter turns to how these narratives, and their performances, structure students' experience of stress and mental health.

Chapter 2: Student Stress

> "I feel like I don't understand stress here at Oxford that much…What does stress even mean to me, and what does it mean to other students?"

Considered an "epidemic among college students" by the American Institute of Stress (Heckman 2019), student stress is among the top three most common student mental health concerns (CCMH, 2021). This chapter concerns how students understand and share experiences about their mental health on campus, with particular attention to how stress is embedded within discourse as a state of being that affirms identity and adequacy. College psychotherapist Declan Aherne (2001) suggested that students create meaning of stress through two developmental questions: "Who am I?" (Erikson 1968) and "Am I adequate?" (Combs, Richards, and Richards, 1976). This chapter looks at Daniel's opening question "What does stress mean to me and other students?" through the lens of Aherne's prompts. I am interested here in what mental health has to do with identity and adequacy for students, and how, through these discourses, stress is positioned as a way to be, rather than as a solely physiological or psychological experience.

Conceptualizing Student Stress

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines stress as a "state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation" (2023). As such, stress is generally conceptualized as a psychological and physiological response to a stressor (Park and Folkman 1997; Pearlin 1989, 1999). It is thought to be mediated by an appraisal process—a primary appraisal of evaluating the significance and threat of a situation, and a secondary appraisal where available coping resources are examined (Lazarus and Folkman 1984: 50). How stressors are appraised, what

that appraisal does, and how stress is experienced are also highly subjective and context-dependent (Park and Folkman 1997; McLeod, 2012).

A certain kind of stress has always been expected for college students (Towbes & Cohen, 1996; D'Zurilla & Sheedy, 1991). Change, adjustment, new social rules, time management, finances, and families—these are all things we expect college students to appraise as stressful. Much research is devoted to identifying and understanding the intensity of stressors (see University Stress Scale, Student Academic Stress Scale, Perceived Stress Scale, etc.) to inform college counseling centers as they provide resources for students experiencing these very things. However, in recent decades, students seem to be stressed at higher and higher rates, and this stress is positioned as a mental health issue[12]. In this chapter, I demonstrate how student culture, through social influences on the appraisal process, positions stress as something highly intersubjective and connected to students' sense of themselves, as well as an important narrative performance of the ideal student.

Oxford Student Stress

At the beginning of many interviews, students were asked “how are you?” and encouraged to respond with whatever they noticed at that moment. When “stressed” appeared as the most frequent answer, they were asked to define what stress meant to them or what they experienced stress from. Below are some excerpts that represent common themes.

- “Stress is the feeling of overwhelming feelings.”
- “For me, stress manifests in stomach problems. Even if I'm not consciously anxious or stressed.”
- “I’m stressed about everything I have to do. It never ends.”

[12] There is ample evidence suggesting a relationship between stress and mental health struggles (see Schneiderman, Ironson, and Siegel, 2005). The misalignment here is that seemingly all experiences of student stress are being framed (through clinical as well as colloquial discourses) as constituting mental disorder.

- “I feel stress from my parents about school.”
- “People are always talking about reducing stress, but I think it’s almost revered in a certain way.”
- “Things that shouldn’t be stressful are still stressful. I have a meeting with a tutor, which is a change in my routine, so I'm going to get stressed.”
- “Stress is also a good way to make friends. Like I said, it also creates a sense of belonging with the people you're stressed with.”
- “If someone else is stressed, I should be stressed as well.”
- “I often feel stressed about not being stressed.”
- “Stress is just in the environment being fostered.”

Throughout my time talking with students, they referenced many of the developmentally expected stressful experiences—responsibility, expectations, and change. But they also spoke of how stress was relational, valorized, and part of the community. For these students, stress was much more than a response to a particular event, but a connection to identity, adequacy, and belonging. To explore the intersubjective experience of stress, this chapter follows how students connect their stress to the stress of others and entangle values with mental health, and how this serves as a personal and social performance of identity and adequacy.

Am I Doing Enough? Stress, Comparison, and Adequacy

When students talk about stress, they do so in connection with the stress of others, often comparing their stress to their peers as an evaluation of whether they were “doing enough.” Lucy, talking about the anticipation of finals week, shared this story:

> Lucy: Once the finals season was coming up, everyone was like, “Oh yeah, finals are here, here is all this anti-stress stuff.” I remember thinking that it was making me more stressed because I had my finals and was feeling okay about them, but then I was wondering if I should be more stressed.
>
> Interviewer: Do people talk about stress often?
>
> Lucy: Yeah, sometimes it's not helpful. Especially when they're preemptively getting you stressed about things and not offering a solution. People will say

> “finals season is going to be so hard” or “final season was really hard for me last year” and I'm like okay, yeah great.
>
> I remember being with my friends at those events and not feeling too much stress, but then wondering if I should be more stressed. Should I be spending more time? That can make you feel self-doubt. You're like, am I missing something? For me, there have been times I've realized I'm missing something.
>
> I see other people and I just think “these people know what's going on more than I do. What are they talking about? What are they discussing? Why do they seem to know what's going on? Am I missing something? Did I forget something with my assignments? Am I preparing for this in the wrong way?”

Before finals begin, school activity clubs hold a series of events for the purpose of “de-stressing,” often carnivals with games, food, and therapy animals. Lucy described how, while they can be fun, it could also be a source of comparing stress to others. If you’re not stressed, then it might mean you don’t understand how much work you need to do, that you don’t care about your studies, or that you’re missing something. To revisit Aherne’s questions of student stress, it appears identity and adequacy are wrapped into Oxford students’ experiences of stress: the experience of stress—or lack thereof—is connected to how students perform the norms and ideals of Oxford students. As we saw in Chapter 1, students are inundated with expectations about overcommitment, leadership, and high achievement which undoubtedly incite multiple forms of stress. At the same time, they are tied to a cultural norm of being stressed—whereby being stressed indicates to oneself and others that a student is doing the right things. The stress process takes on its own performance as it positions students as productive, adequate, and high achieving.

In a similar vein, Daniel notes how students talked about stress all the time, albeit in particular ways. He explains how talking about stress becomes stressful and leads to similar feelings of self-doubt and a feeling of inadequacy about doing enough.

> I think what stresses people out a lot here is the culture that's created. Emory is a hard school to get into because there are smart kids here. Everyone always expects the best from themselves. Everyone is super professional. You've got an

> internship lined up after freshman year. If you don't, you feel like you're missing out on something. And that's just one example. People here are always trying to take the most credits, right? I mean, if you're taking 15 credits, it feels like you're not doing enough, when in reality that can be 5 classes, which is a lot.
>
> It just feels like you always need to be doing something academic, and I think that people feed into that. The culture that we have at Oxford at least is not conducive with also living a healthy life outside of classes. It's conducive to being more stressed out. It's conducive to getting less sleep, with eating less, and not having time to go to the gym.
>
> I feel like all I ever talk about when I'm in a conversation with a lot of students are test scores and how many other midterms people have. I think there's a bit of a vortex too, because, for a lot of people, that is all they talk about. And yes, Oxford can be a very stressful place. It's perpetuated. Stress isn't something extra added on to the day. It's built into your day.
>
> A lot of my good friends do not see me during the week. We are like bears hibernating in the winter. You can find people in the library at 2:00 AM in the morning, but other than that, they basically do not exist on campus during the week, right? Seeing other people working so hard and having their life planned out makes me wonder if I'm doing something wrong if I'm not doing something right, which stresses me out by extension. And I do think our community has heartfelt efforts at combating stress. But it's just a bigger problem than that. I never attempted to use the mental health resources. I've heard from many friends that we just don't have enough.

An important part of stress highlighted in Daniel's story is how he describes stress less as a specific psychological and physiological experience, but rather as an enduring state, something that is "built into your day." Daniel does, at the end, relate this stress to the counseling center, admitting he has never tried to seek counseling but has heard that it would be insufficient. Instead, he says, stress is part of a "vortex" of the "culture that's created." In the following quotation, Daniel expands upon how "doing enough" is connected to his sense of identity and adequacy as a student.

> Daniel: There's a pressure to be premed because so many people are premed. Or there's like a pressure to do like 800 different things. Like you have to be in a lot of clubs or in different extracurriculars. If you're not doing that, you can kind of feel like you're not doing enough. And then that can make you feel like, why are you even at Oxford? Do you even belong there?

> Interviewer: When you say not doing enough, do you mean merit? Or like earning your place?
>
> Daniel: For admission, yes, I think so. I think that's where many people get impostor syndrome, they feel like, why am I here? Like, if they get there and they eventually ask themselves, “Oh my God, do I even have the merit to be here?,” then that can probably be a stressful situation and cause them to feel a lack of belonging. Maybe belonging is feeling like you deserve to be there or you're supposed to be there or it's the right place for you in terms of school or our community.
>
> Interviewer: Do you feel connected to it?
>
> Daniel: I don't think I really did. I didn't really have any friends. I don't know if friends have to do with belonging. Maybe if you're feeling isolated, that can be part of it. I don't have a sense of community here, so then I don't have a sense of belonging.
>
> There's a pressure to be more high achieving at Oxford, I think, and that can contribute to a sense of belonging. Like, if you don't think you're as high achieving as other people, you're like, “why am I even here?”

This evaluation of “doing enough” appears to operate on a binary scale; “doing enough” is continuously being defined and performed, and, by contrast, anything other than that is grounds for self-doubt: “why am I even here?” In students’ descriptions, this evaluation is also central to what it means to belong in this community. What Daniel’s experience, and the stories of many others included in this chapter, reveal is how self-doubt and uncertainty serve as sources of stress for students. Moreso, it seems that the performances expected within student culture are believed to provide some form of structure, or perhaps control, over these ambiguities. In another conversation with Daniel, he shared:

> Academic stress ties into everything. I think because we're given so many opportunities in so many different outlets, academics have become a bigger stress for me. On a long term scale, there's options now of what to do, and how to do it, and how to kind of model your life. At our age, we’re right in the middle of deciding what we will do and how we will build our lives and so it’s a stress that is always there. Like, what if I pick the wrong thing, what if I don’t pursue what I actually want?

> Immediate feelings of stress are definitely something that I feel already often and it's kind of like, a lot of pressure, like a lot of things on your shoulder. I think stress can exhibit itself in many ways.
>
> But I think kind of like a key factor of stress that everyone feels is that things are just building up. And it's kind of a sense of a lack of clarity rather than fear, or kind of like confusion rather than fear in terms of like, being able to assess what you need to do. And I think a lot of the stress comes from like, as like, in terms of like patterns that I see in myself, a lot of stress comes from not planning ahead or understanding it, and that type of thing, more than actual, like workload.

Students explore what stress means to them through identity and adequacy, measured by perceptions of productivity, function, and achievement. Additionally, performance seems to take on a moral quality (Rosenbaum and Liebert, 2015). When we were talking about what is expected of students at Oxford, Lucy related stress to being a good person:

> Lucy: I consider myself to be a good student here. I'm in good standing grades wise. I'm really involved in a lot of things here and I'm able to balance that pretty successfully. But I will say, people here definitely glorify busyness, just being busy. Everyone expects you to be involved in so many kinds of things. It seems like the more that you do, the better person you are.
>
> Interviewer: How does this glorification of busyness impact you?
>
> Lucy: Sometimes it makes me insecure when I see some people are involved in so many things, and they seem to be doing it better than I do. I would say it motivates me, too. I mean, like, I don't want to be like that, like a toxic student. And I know what constitutes—I'm self aware enough to know what constitutes like a toxic student here. But there's always going to be that edge of competitiveness. I think people who say they’re above that, I think they're lying.

In addition to the “ideal” student discussed in Chapter 1, there is also a figure of a “toxic” student, one who is always competing. The line between the “ideal” and “toxic” students becomes increasingly blurred as students negotiate how to be a good, kind, and welcoming student while at the same time achieving at higher and higher levels.

Stress, Mental Health, and Value

For students at Oxford, mental health is a term that follows them everywhere. Countless student groups and initiatives are devoted to raising awareness about mental health, decreasing the stigma of medication and therapy, and hosting events for students to talk about their mental health and connect with others. Like many schools and workplaces during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, “mental health rest days” were implemented. In the one to two years before I began talking to these students, campus life had revealed a new set of initiatives related to student well-being. The school’s Counseling and Career Services (CCS) frequently collaborates for outreach and community events. Suffice to say, “mental health” is everywhere at Oxford, and it is everyone’s responsibility. In the following quote, Alex describes this ubiquity of mental health:

> Everywhere around campus, there are signs saying “Oh, are you feeling stressed? Text this number.” “Oh, take care of your mental health.” “Oh, take a breather today.” Then I have three weeks of straight tests back to back to back. I didn't sleep for like almost three days. And I knocked out and my roommate said I looked dead. My roommate said I look like a dead person.

While people are talking about student mental health, students are navigating their well-being in a culture where stress is entangled with their identity as a student. Students are aware of these juxtapositions—how are they to “take care of their mental health” when they feel that they need to stay awake for three days? As Alex said above, these messages about mental health and self-care exist within a social field where students are expected to do whatever it takes to succeed academically. These expectations, however, that make students feel like staying awake for days on end is necessary, are perpetuated by student culture. Lucy describes this here:

> I think that people recognize the issue of mental health, especially people who have been at Oxford campus for more than a year. I think that there's a lot of effort, for example, to make executive boards less stressful and reduce the

> amount of work that they ask for from their leadership, but at the same time I think stress is almost revered in a certain way.

The issues of mental health are recognized by most students, yet these efforts exist within an environment where that stress and overcommitment can be "revered." Consider how Alex described well-being:

> Functionally being able to do what you need to do. Not getting too bogged down with stress or loneliness and being somewhat stable in your habits and your health routines.

College is a critical time for young adults to create ideas about health and develop health behaviors that are predictive of future health outcomes (Visser and Hirsch. 2014). What we see here is how "mental health" comes to be defined as a measure of functioning in addition to a physiological and psychological experience.

Meanings of Stress and Stress Narratives

When talking about stress, students described it often as a motivating factor or a structuring force, suggesting that the negotiations and ambiguity of student life could be made sense through standards of busyness, achievement, and productivity. In doing so, they also described specific forms of talking about stress, and the experiencing that fell within, or were excluded from, stress as an identity affirming experience. This last section follows stress as it becomes a source of affirmation and adequacy as well as how it is negotiated on campus.

When we talked about stress, Alex described how stress can be a motivating factor:

> Oh, stress. I always thought of it as a motivating factor. So like, it keeps me on my toes, it keeps me waking up every day. I guess people will say it's unhealthy. I go to sleep stressed, and that is how I wake up. I wake up stressed and that's how I woke up on time for my classes, because if I went to bed peacefully and relaxed, I would slip through my classes, which happened this year and last year too.

> So for me I always thought it's like a way to get going in life. It's kind of like how people have standards or guidelines that are objectives. It's a daily calendar for me—that's my stress like "oh what's stressing me out the most?" And like okay what's stressing me out is this essay due in two days instead of this bio homework due tonight, so I'll probably work on the essay first and then I'll do the homework. So that kind of helps guide me too, so I try not to think of the negative thing, because there is good and bad stress, and I feel like people often see stress as a negative thing.

For Alex, stress is a wake-up call, an energizer, a sense of priority, and a way to move through the world. Describing a similar distinction, Lucy shared her perspective:

> Interviewer: Would you say that stress is a positive thing, a negative thing? What do you think about stress?
>
> Lucy: I think stress can be both. I always say I like getting stress from what I want, what's related to my passions, like work related to my career in music. Like "Oh, I can't think of something to write or like a melody to like fit in this song." And then that's a lot of positive stress I get in trying to solve the puzzle to get what I want. And then after I solve it, I feel fulfilled. I get adrenaline and stuff like that. Negative stress I guess, for me it would be schoolwork, because that's not necessarily what I want to do right now or in the future. It's not related to anything I want to do in the future. I feel very forced to do it. And even if I don't feel the pressure to try hard and be as good as everyone else and at the same pace... it's school and everyone is doing the same thing, and walking in the same direction, trying to get good grades. Even if I don't want to feel that pressure, sometimes it's still there.
>
> Interviewer: So it's hard to kind of escape like the collective path and goal, do you think that's kind of a message from college itself?
>
> Lucy: Yes, and I think colleges aren't really at fault for that because they're trying. Because college is like a place where you can explore and find different career options that you didn't know of, and college is just trying to push that so you can be successful, make money and also make the university money. So I don't think colleges are at fault for that, but I think a big thing is that no one here knows what they're doing or what they're really supposed to do, which is why everyone is following the same flow, recruiting for internships like stressing it out about the same midterms and exams and stuff like that, yeah. So I don't think anyone is at fault. It's just what the culture is like.

Most students described stress in similar terms to stress researchers—recognizing a difference between good stress and bad stress. An important distinction, though, is how Oxford students described good and bad stress less as an estimation of the threat it posed to their coping resources, and more so in terms of how it affected their ability to get work done. The appraisal of stress seems to be much more of an evaluation of functioning than a judgment of social and emotional well-being. Justin described this in the following conversation:

> I think that healthy stress is recognizing your priorities, being a little stressed about having so many things to do. But you still get them done. Sometimes stress can be motivating.

A certain level of stress can be motivating, and for some students, even thought to be necessary to complete tasks. Yet, this becomes an issue when stress is embedded in everyday life. Justin continued:

> The problem is that the stress at this school, it's hard to manage, because the state of our mental health is so bad. I've never been this uninvolved at school in my life. And I started so many things at the beginning of the semester that I haven't done and after like two weeks of doing them, I just stopped participating and doing things and, and yet, I still feel like I'm drowning in work. And that I can't catch up.

It appears that there are particular ways students can, and are supposed to, talk about stress, as well as details and experiences that are less acceptable and may be stigmatized.

> Daniel: I feel like I don't understand stress here at Oxford that much.
>
> Interviewer: In what ways?
>
> Daniel: What does stress even mean to me, and what does it mean to other students? I'm thinking about my anthropology class. I don't think I understand everyone's stress, because we're not the same person and we don't understand each other well enough. It's hard for us to be on the same page. Everyone has their own ideas with feelings of stress. Maybe they don't spend enough time to define it, maybe they don't spend enough time wondering about it, or they just know something is there that's causing them to feel anxiety, that's causing them

> to feel the result of stress, but it is never analyzed, and I hadn't really spoken to people enough about that to understand what it's like.
>
> Interviewer: So it sounds like stress is very personal…
>
> Daniel: That's what I think. Maybe it has to do with stigma. People don't really talk about it, or people will try to talk about it, which is why I appreciate this research and that we are talking about this right now. People don't like to be vulnerable, so they don't want to do things that make them vulnerable. Stress may be something that makes people feel vulnerable. This is probably why people just say "Hey I'm stressed" or like, "I'm doing okay you know just stressed"–you know those typical responses, instead of giving you a detailed answer. They're not going to say, like, "Oh my goodness I got like a 46 on my exam and that's like 75% of my grade."

When talking about how she doesn't stress as much as she used to, Lucy said:

> Some people are okay with saying "oh I'm not stressed and like I have this time to do other things" but then other people may look down on that in a way. As if, because you're not stressed, you probably don't care about your career.

Lucy described how she felt she wasn't as stressed as others, but she was still constantly stressed. Interestingly, being less stressed than others, she thinks, can sometimes mean that you don't care as much about what students are supposed to care about. Lucy mirrors the observations of many other participants—the experience of stress serves as an indicator that students were doing the right things. On the other side of that, *not* feeling stressed can spur feelings of self-doubt, whereby seeing other people being stressed makes students wonder if they are doing enough or working hard enough. In my conversation with Justin about how stress is negotiated on campus, he explained how there are particular ways students do and do not talk about stress:

> Yeah, I think definitely like If you're stressed about school, like "oh, I'm stressed about the test," but not like "Oh my God I'm so stressed I'm like falling apart and I'm freaking out 'cause I'm not doing well in the class." I feel like that's less acceptable than when I'm stressed about the test or like it's less acceptable to be like 'These are like some horrible personal things that are happening to me' and I want to talk to my friends about them, but like that can be kind of hard. You

> wouldn't admit that to someone who's just like in your class, but maybe you talk about your back to your friends. But yeah, I think that's an interesting idea like what's acceptable, what's not.
>
> And then sometimes, maybe they're shame involved like, oh, I got a 20 on the last Test. Some people will joke about that and then some people will hide it because they feel ashamed, yeah, and they don't want people to think less of them. Yeah, I think people can get uncomfortable if you're being too personal like that. If I'm like "damn, I'm so stressed about this test" that is fine. But if I say "Oh I'm so stressed, my life is falling apart, I'm clinically depressed. I have no motivation to like to bathe or anything," people might get really uncomfortable.

Daniel's questions about what stress means for students is incredibly important to our inquiry into student mental health given the norms of how students are supposed to be stressed. Stress that leads to a lack of productivity, keeps someone from overcommitting, or any other number of "non-ideal" student actions is quickly stigmatized and even appraised as something close to failure. Stress, then, can both affirm or put into question someone's ability to perform as an ideal student depending on the context and utility of that stress.

Further, it is important to notice how stress as a narrative of performance incites certain meanings while potentially obscuring others. Throughout my conversations with Oxford students, stress was the most frequently used term to describe any kind of mental well-being or emotional experience. It seemed that everything, from success to failure to relationships, could be explained in terms of how stress operated in their academic and social field. By defining experiences in terms of stress, students performed their knowledge and adequacy as a student, placing experiences within value systems of worth and productivity. This leads us to question what other experiences these students are having related to their mental health, and in what ways "stress" as a narrative has become a placeholder or dominant narrative that construes mental health more broadly as an evaluation of objective functioning.

With this in mind, it is important to look at how students also described what self-understanding, empathy, and reflection had to do with their understanding of mental health.

Justin, who had made many efforts to enjoy his education more, described his journey of self-discovery as he moved through Oxford.

> Justin: I don't think failure was talked about a lot because when you're straight into college, all you're looking for is running to success. So, I guess any slight deviation from that could be seen as failure, especially if it's based on yourself. Instead of looking at other people, because I think for a lot of people when you look at others and they have some shortcomings, you can view it in a more empathetic way.
>
> Interviewer: So when it's yourself you find it easier to think of as failure?
>
> Justin: Yeah, definitely. A lot of my friends I've seen, I have felt that way. And from a third person view, getting a bad grade on an exam, you don't think of it as a failure when it's your friend. Yeah, but it's easier to kind of put it in perspective when it's not yourself. Like right now I think that way too, which is good. But I remember a lot of my friends had trouble understanding that because they're just focused on like, 'oh if I get this bad grade then like it's going to be on my resume and like it's not going to be good for my GPA when I'm competing with so many other smart people, and then I'm a failure.'
>
> Interviewer: What did you think about the programming on campus, about failure or about mental health?
>
> Justin: I didn't think any of it helped until I understood what mental health meant to me. Until I was able to empathize and be educated on how others, how my friends could feel and experience. You know, like how sad they can be, how happy they can be. I think unless you have personal experience and like are also empathetic to yourself about how you can feel at times when, like during certain situations.
>
> Like unless that happens, I think the messages that they do tell us yes, they're helpful and we will regurgitate that to our friends who look stressed in a lighthearted way, but I think unless like you've seen your friend experience something and you've experienced something as well, those messages don't really mean anything. And like you don't really know the true meaning of what it means to take care of yourself, like take a break when you need to. And learning self-love, that kind of stuff.

As Justin began to better develop his own sense of identity, adequacy, and value outside of student culture, he learned how to care for himself, how to better support others, and how to better cope with the situations he experienced. The next chapter turns to an analysis of student

culture, mental health, and productivity to place belonging in the context of a caring campus community.

Chapter 3: Belonging and Mental Health

> It doesn't seem like it's the school perpetuating this [kind of belonging], it's the students. Every year we get new students, and there are so many ways for them to be involved. It also seems like Oxford is choosing the right kinds of people to bring here, people who have something to offer.

"Everybody is talking about belonging," reads a recent headline from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Lu, 2023). Belonging is a subject of strong attention as institutions face rising pressure related to enrollment and retention during the changing landscape of who attends college and at what cost (see Fotuhi and Barbaro, 2022; Osborne and Shock, 2023). Relatedly, some researchers following student well-being have framed increasing mental health struggles as in part a "crisis of not belonging" (Fivush 2022; Lu, 20223; see also Anderson 2023, Gopalan, Linden-Carmichael, and Lanza, 2022). There are obvious reasons universities are turning to belonging-focused initiatives as sites of intervention for college mental health: belonging is believed to be a protective factor against mental health issues as well as a strong predictor of academic success, retention, and college satisfaction (Gopalan and Brady 2020). Being involved in the community is positively associated with belonging in most measurements; yet, what that sense of belonging means, how it operates in students' lives, and how belonging is related to health behaviors is often under-examined (Samura, 2016). As Daniel demonstrates in the opening quotation, belonging is constructed and experienced in large part by students themselves, though belonging initiatives tend to highlight the role of the larger administration as what they should feel they belong to. In this chapter, I look at how Oxford student culture positions belonging within instrumental values that makes students feel the only way to be a student is to be overworked, constantly stressed, and always busy. What we see from Oxford student culture suggests that a sense of belonging may also perpetuate norms and affiliations that are at times detrimental to students' well-being by equating mental health with the ability to function at higher and higher levels.

Why Belong?

Long considered a basic human need (Maslow 1954), a strong sense of belonging is assumed to be an unequivocally positive experience for social, emotional, and physical health. A sense of belonging is widely considered to be a positive concept associated with greater social and psychological functioning (Hagerty et al. 1996), social acceptance (Freeman et al. 2007), self-confidence (Pittman and Richmond, 2007), and satisfaction with college (Soria and Stebleton, 2013). Belonging correlates with stronger persistence, engagement, and mental health (Gopalan and Brady, 2020), and is thought to be a protective factor against stress (Abdollahi et al., 2020; Baumeister and Leary, 1995), depression (Hagerty, 2005), and loneliness (Hagerty et al., 1996; Hoffman et al., 2002). Student culture is often cited as a critical space of belonging; yet, while incredibly powerful for structuring individual experience, the norms and attitudes student culture proliferates need more investigation (Levinson, 1998).

Defining Sense of Belonging

A sense of belonging for students is generally defined by feelings of being accepted, included by and connected to their institutions, often by feeling that they play an integral role in the community (Goodenow, 1993:80; Tinto, 2012:66). Studies of belonging in the college specific context are relatively still in their "infancy" (Tovar and Simon, 2010), and many researchers agree that more research is needed to better understand subjective and intersubjective sense of belonging (Samura, 2016; Gopalan and Brady, 2020). In this analysis, I follow Strayhorn's (2018) well-accepted definition of college student belonging:

> "Students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers" (4).

Strayhorn notes that, while much research has focused on factors that influence belonging and on the outcomes like achievement and adjustment, less research has focused on social identities and campus environments (2018:3).

Belonging at Oxford

While researchers have clearly defined and measured sense of belonging, more attention is needed to understand how students themselves engage with and experience a sense of belonging on campus and how that affects their mental health ideas and practices. I will now revisit certain themes within student culture to better conceptualize how belonging operates at Oxford and how it informs a study of college mental health. This chapter addresses instrumental value within student belonging, how mental health is equated with high functioning, how students balance health and success, and how belonging, in this context, may be reinforcing unhealthy behaviors. I place these findings in the context of calls for a "caring campus" followed by a discussion of empathy and reflection among Oxford students.

Belonging as Instrumental Value

Drawing upon their "small, tight knit community," many students defined belonging as having to do with connection and affiliation. Many students referenced cultural and spiritual organizations as the most important spaces of connection for them to explore their identities and learn about their peers. Despite this, when they described what a sense of belonging felt like, or what it might mean to belong, students brought up meeting expectations and comparing themselves to others. While Oxford's numerous clubs devoted to cultural appreciation are spaces of connection and community building, students cited a sense of irony that these spaces are situated within a larger club structure that operates on norms of leadership, overcommitment, and constant stress. Even within these clubs, the pressure to lead programs, attend events, and keep a club afloat positioned something as central as cultural identity as at times a space of commodification, as some students noted.

In the beginning of this chapter, Daniel noted that students who belong at Oxford all have something to offer. The school itself seems to be recruiting a certain kind of student—those who are highly motivated, highly involved, and high achieving. While belonging is usually theorized as connection, comfort, and acceptance, these students seem to be experiencing a sense of belonging rooted in instrumental value. Their sense of affiliation and connection to their community appears contingent upon their ability to perform in particular ways: as a student described earlier, students "cannot be bad generally," or they "would not be there." Involvement is a core tenet within theories of university belonging, as is "student engagement." Students who are more involved in their community, research shows, are likely to experience a stronger sense of belonging (Hazel, Vazirabadi, and Gallagher, 2013; Masika and Jones, 2016). This is true for Oxford students as well; however, in the context in which "involvement" is defined and "belonging" is experienced, this student engagement is intertwined with students' sense of identity, adequacy, and value. Further, in a context where over-achievement is considered average, seeking a stronger sense of belonging could mean "signing up for as many things as you can and dealing with the consequences later", as one student described. Students are always thinking of how to make their activities more productive, more valuable, and more successful. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, a general body member of a club may have in the past been considered an intrinsically valuable member of the community just by being there; however, the standard of value is constantly increasing—for your time to be valuable, you must be the leader, the best. Otherwise, why do it at all?

Mental Health and the Fallacy of Functioning

If belonging is thought to be a protective factor of mental health (Gopalan and Brady 2020), we also need to understand how mental health operates. As shown in Chapter 2, students are surrounded by mental health programming and initiatives. Around every corner, it seems, they are introduced to a new program or given advice to "take care of their mental health." At the

same time, these messages are juxtaposed with student culture that associates student identity with high performance and productivity. In this way, student narratives mirrored what college counselors Phillip Rosenbaum and Heather Liebert (2015) have recognized as a tendency to view health as an objective measure:

> "The contemporary importance placed on performance creates a system that associates success, productivity, and achievement with health. In other words, "mentally healthy" has come to mean being able to perform, often at high levels and across different contexts" (187).

For these students, mental health, too, finds its place in the framework of how students believe they are meant to function and how they perceive their peers to be performing. Lucy, in Chapter Two, described how performance, and perhaps even morality, are intertwined with high functioning health: "It seems like the more that you do, the better person you are." Describing this very experience, Rosenbaum and Liebert continued: "performance has almost taken on a moral quality, closely connected with how one ought to be in the world" (187). Mental health then, through narratives and expectation of performance, function, and achievement, is connected to students' sense of identity and adequacy, which ultimately shapes their understanding of and connection to sense of belonging.

Negotiating Health, Stress, and Productivity

Oxford students must navigate this culture of busyness, high achievement, and involvement while at the same time learning how to balance their workload, foster relationships, make sense of their identities, and craft systems of value. Three important phenomena appeared throughout my conversations with students that are particularly meaningful to the ways that student culture orients health behaviors. I will now review three spaces of negotiation: the distinction between good and bad stress, the self-performance of productivity, and the binary of success and failure.

Good Stress and Bad Stress

When students describe stress, they demarcated clear lines between what was “good stress” and “bad stress.” Stress has been shown to play a physiological and psychological role in our functioning capacity; good stress or “eustress” is a normal and necessary part of our awareness and cognitive activation (Lazarus and Folkman 1984) and is linked to better learning outcomes (Rudland et al., 2020), sense of self efficacy (O’Sullivan 2011), and motivation and attention. Accordingly, “bad stress” refers to stress that is appraised as threatening and outside of one’s available coping resources, typically characterized by negative affect. While students described “good stress” similar to stress searchers, “bad stress” showed some distinction. For students, this “bad stress” is defined as anything that stops someone from being able to get their work done, with little to no regard for their affect. In other words, stress is less about how it makes students feel physiologically, but rather how it affects their ability to function at high levels.

The Performance of Productivity

In Chapter 2, Alex described feeling the need to make every moment productive—emphasizing the *feeling* of productivity rather than the measurement of how much was completed. Productivity in and of itself is certainly no bad thing, and is critically important for universities looking to improve student performance, retention, and success (Hazel, Vazirabadi, and Gallagher, 2013). What is different here, again, is the degree to which productivity is enmeshed in structures of value, identity, and adequacy. Alex, as with many other students, described a need to be constantly busy, stressed, and “doing something.” She shared how she keeps her laptop open so that it feels like she’s doing work and how receiving an email feels like completing a task. A consistent busyness—and a consistent stress—subverts Aherne’s (2001) question of “am i adequate?” by providing a performance of adequacy without having to define or reflect on adequacy. Further, this distinction between feeling productive and being productive reveals that, in some ways, the affirmation of “doing enough” is more important, and perhaps

more contested, than actually having produced and completed assignments. This suggests that it is possible students spend a considerable amount of their time in the performance of productivity—time that could be used for rest, for joy, or for positive well-being. It is this perception of lack of time and narrative of constant busyness that positions rest and well-being as unattainable or as counter to being the ideal student.

Performance of Failure and Struggle

In addition to the nuances embedded in student productivity, success and failure was a space of particular conflict between functioning and struggling. When students identified the means of success and achievement, they also, explicitly or by exclusion, described an ambiguous and avoidant state of failure.[13] While success was generally described as striving for, and continuing to succeed within an abundance of leadership positions, earning perfect grades, being well-known, and having clear goals for the future, less talked about were the ways in which failure shows up or is communicated in students' lives. Success and failure were constructed as mutually exclusive states of being—not as experiences. Alex summarized the relationship between success and failure in this simple line: “any slight deviation from success could be seen as failure, especially if it’s based on yourself.” To cope with this binary, Lucy suggests, students, including herself, would perform struggle, while at the same time clinging to success; Lucy described, in her opening case study, that students, including herself, would express that they were failing so that, when they ultimately did not, the success would feel even stronger. This “failure” that Lucy describes, though, is also defined in the context of Oxford students: failure could mean anything less than perfect, or “any slight deviation from success.” The culturally situated and shared narratives of success and failure make it difficult for students to understand their experiences beyond this binary. The performance of struggle, for many, is a

[13] The arguments presented in this section were previously presented at by Wilson, Kwak, Nelson, 2022 at the Oxford Scholar Research Symposium and Georgia Undergraduate Research Conference.

way to cope with the very real realities of student struggle while operating within the desired levels of high achievement and constant productivity.

Belonging and Well-being: Is Belonging Always Good?

Belonging is considered to alleviate stress (Abdollahi et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2008), yet, here, stress serves as a *prerequisite* to belong. The very definition of an Oxford student can be summarized in one word: stressed. How is it that a sense of belonging can at the same time promote the idea that, in order to be a student, they must be always busy, stressed, and high achieving? In the context of Oxford student culture, a sense of belonging might actually perpetuate practices, such as lack of sleep, constant comparison, and self-doubt, that are detrimental to student mental health.

What is perhaps most important about students' distinctions of stress is the degree to which stress is sought after. Stress can be a very helpful physiological response that mediates functioning; it is when students are stressed all the time—or feel that they should be—where student stress becomes a more concerning issue. The experience of stress affirms to oneself and others that someone is doing the right things, and, relatedly, that someone belongs. As cultural capital, knowing, performing, and perpetuating the norms of high achievement and over-commitment within Oxford culture are essential to being connected to the institution. Even more, students are considered to arrive at the school already seeking to be leaders and high achievers. Their sense of visibility on campus only magnifies these conflicts, making it harder, as students described, to disconnect from the shared narratives and expectations.

Deconstructing the instrumental values intertwined with student sense of belonging makes clear how sense of belonging cannot be assumed to be an unequivocally positive experience. Student involvement and engagement, while a pillar of belonging theories, must be considered in the context in which students are being involved. Further, when belonging is defined alongside the presence of stress, efforts to reduce stress might actually, in a convoluted

way, contradict a students' subjective experience of belonging. Not being stressed, as students said, can mean students don't care about their careers. Not being involved, in many ways, is equated to the morality of a person. Sense of belonging here is intricately tied to students' sense of themselves, a subjectivity that must be understood in the context in which they experience themselves.

Towards Better Understanding Belonging

If the values with which belonging is measured are entangled students' sense of identity and adequacy, and these values are determined through evaluations of high achievement, success, busyness, and stress, how might students feel a sense of belonging that aligns more with what researchers suggest when they speak of acceptance, care, and community? As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, sense of belonging is among the latest responses to the college mental health crisis. It is thought to be an avenue to change campus culture and inspire environments based on mutual acceptance and care for oneself and others. One of the most famous of such initiatives, the "Caring Campus initiative" (Institute for Evidence-Based Change), also bases itself on fostering a sense of belonging on campus. The concepts of belonging sought within these programs, though, fails to account for the entanglements of local student cultures and how they inform students' mental health, subjectivity, identity, and adequacy.

At this point, it is worth asking: do students at Oxford seek a sense of belonging not based on their ability to achieve? To ask this question, we need to first review how identity and adequacy is defined through external performance to inform belonging. One student, describing how many students think about themselves, shared that "the only value that they can find in themselves is often just their grades." The distinction between "am *I* enough" and "am I *doing* enough?" becomes increasingly blurred as students associate their identity and worth—as well as their sense of belonging—with collectively defined standards of what is "enough." This distinction between identity and experience may be exacerbated as students

feel that their performance of “enough” is always visible to others. This negotiation is a process of looking to others for examples and standards, as well as conceptualizing oneself as a separate “self” that can be looked upon. Their very sense of themselves—their subjectivity—is a continuing process of experiencing themselves as both connected and separate from those around them (See Ozawa-de Silva, 2021). When their sense of themselves informs and is informed by external values of achievement and productivity, students “may experience themselves as the problem, albeit in a very complicated way (Rosenbaum and Leibert, 2015:187).

At the end of Chapter 2, I shared my conversation with Justin as an example of how students learn about themselves and construct their own self concepts in the context of student culture. Justin cites empathy as the most important factor in his development of his identity and understanding of mental health. He described experiencing emotions with others and crafting his ability to support his friends helped him learn the “true meaning of what it means to take care of yourself,” as well as “learning self-love.” Even more so, Justin cited empathy as a fundamentally relational and social experience that has improved his relationships and helped him to better understand the kind of belonging he is searching for.

Given this, it certainly does seem that students are desiring a form of belonging that is not dependent on their ability to perform at high levels all the time. Throughout this thesis, students talked about uncertainty and loneliness as some of the greatest motivations to participate in and latch onto this concept of belonging that suggests that, if they can continue to “do enough,” they will belong. Belonging is an essential component as students, universities, and mental health professionals move forward within college mental health. At the same time, is it critical that we first understand the context in which belonging comes to mean something.

The Culture is Changing

As we geared towards the end of our conversation Justin asked to share with me some of the recent joys in his life. Justin, a musician, had been making more space for the things he enjoys. He pulled out his phone and played me a recent recording, expressing how liberating it was to be able to have a conversation about student mental health while also reflecting on how his understanding of mental health has shifted. At the end of our time together, he mentioned how student culture is shifting as we move past what students are calling the "Covid years."[14] Looking over the green of the Oxford quad, he smiled, and said, "I wish you could see it now. The culture here is changing. We are changing. Instituting something different, something good, something authentically the students' work."

[14] With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring of 2020, Oxford College shifted to a hybrid format for the next academic year. In the 2020-2021 academic year, little to no sophomores were physically on campus, leaving an incoming freshmen class as the only students on campus for an entire year. Some sophomore students— those considered to be the most influential of the "student leaders" –were invited to live on campus. This year, lacking a strong sophomore student presence, is a frequently discussed example of how important the sophomore class is for setting examples, exemplifying norms, and, in the words of many students, "passing down the culture."

Conclusion

The student culture and shared meanings of stress, identity, and belonging explored in this project suggests that the symptoms the "crisis in college mental health" asserts are at least partially embedded in shared cultural practices and understandings. Student culture, and its constructions of narrative, language, performance, and norms, is an important context where students experience and make meaning of their mental health. More attention is needed regarding what the mental health crisis truly describes, how it is linguistically and figuratively depicted, and what these representations do on student, campus, university, and national levels. To conclude, I address five areas of intervention and attention based on the findings presented here.

Language of Student Struggle: Crisis, Clinical, and Cultural Framing

A primary aspect of the college mental health crisis that this thesis has aimed to deconstruct is that of the language used to identify, represent, and ameliorate student struggle. The college mental health crisis is not a passive descriptor, but a narrative that communicates particular meanings while obscuring others, not dissimilar to the student narratives articulated in this study.

Crisis Framing

Evidenced by the very phrase we use to describe it, research and media narratives have positioned college mental health as in perpetual state of crisis. Despite serious concerns for student mental health as early as the 1980s, college mental health struggles are portrayed as ever more recent phenomena. Year after year, student mental health makes headlines, telling us that mental health issues are "soaring" (Thielking, 2017), "skyrocketing" (Higgins, 2022), and "alarming" (Hogan, 2023), among other affect-generating verbiage. While certainly a tool for conveying urgency and drawing attention, the language of "crisis" may also stabilize an existing condition, serving to preserve and proliferate rather than ameliorate or understand (see Masco

2017). Moreover, when student mental health is depicted as constantly becoming more severe, it becomes more likely that their experiences will be evaluated through diagnostic methods and approached from a model of symptom reduction that aims to eradicate any symptoms that suggest mental illness. Similarly, as colleges seek to dispel the realities, not to mention reputations, accompanying mental health crises, they often turn to preventative programs that center educating students on depression, anxiety, and suicide without first understanding the context in which student mental health is made meaningful (Lindholm and Wickström 2020).

Clinical Framing

In addition to the ubiquity of "crisis," a clinical framing is also characteristic of this college mental health narrative. While deconstructing the term "mental health" as it's used to describe a crisis state among college students, college counselors Phillip Rosenbaum and Heather Liebert (2015) reveal three unintended consequences embedded in this discourse: an overemphasis on symptom reduction rather than subjective meaning, health as a measure of objective functioning, and privileging expert methods over community-based practices.

To date, the research and media coverage of the college mental health crisis does so through measures and language that position student mental health in largely diagnostic paradigms of mentally ill and mentally healthy. Statistical assessments, a hallmark of college mental health, are critically instructive for staff to support students; however, these assessments, and the national surveys through which their results become known, broadly frame student well-being in terms of the absence of mental illness, obscuring any distinction between mental illness and mental health issues (Lindholm and Wickström, 2020; Kvist Lindholm, 2015; Liegghio et al., 2010, 2019; Petersen et al., 2010). When taken alone, these measures frame student experience as suggestive of mental disorders.

A similar clinical framing occurs at the level of the counseling center. Today, a student seeking mental health support can expect to first take an intake survey consisting of questions

related to their emotions, sleeping and eating habits, social life, grades, and sense of self. These intake surveys are intended to measure the needs of the student to assign them a level of care; they are not for immediate diagnosis, yet feature language stemming from the primary psychological diagnostic system, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) with subscales of “Depression, Generalized Anxiety, Social Anxiety, Academic Distress, Eating Concerns, Family Distress, Frustration/Anger, and Substance Use'' (CCMH, 2022). Sample items from one of the most common intake assessments, the CCAPS 62, include: “I feel isolated and alone,” “I think about food more than I would like to,” “I drink more than I should”, “I have spells of terror or panic,” “I am shy around others”, “My family is basically a happy one,” and “I am unable to keep up with my schoolwork” (Locke et al., 2011).

As “evidence-based practices” have emerged from tensions of legitimacy in psychology, so too have the measures used to understand student experience become increasingly clinically based. That is not to say empirical measures are not useful to conceptualize student mental health needs; rather, when “evidence-based practices” subvert community ones, a host of meanings, such as those discussed in this thesis, fall out of focus (Baker 2012). These assessments imply a deficit model of mental health, whereby decreasing the symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress students experience is presumed to improve their mental health.

Especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has “worsened” students’ mental health, a model that, albeit indirectly and unintentionally, associates student struggle as an issue of mental disorder obscures students and researchers alike from the shared circumstances and connections of these experiences; further, a model of symptom reduction is insufficient to approach such environmentally, structurally, and culturally situated experience.

Cultural Framing: Student Narratives

When students share their experiences, they are not merely recounting facts and details about their lives. They are also always engaging with and performing sets of social meanings, serving

to reconstruct and reinforce norms of struggle, stress, and achievement as well as obscure other forms of understanding. The ways students enacted and constructed meanings of stress and mental health mirror what Lindholm and Wickström, (2020) call the looping effects (see Hacking 1995, 2004) of youth mental health whereby young people redraw classifications of diagnosis into cultural categories. As shown in Chapter Two, “stress” serves as much more than a descriptor of a symptom, but entails an evaluation of identity, adequacy, and function. When students experienced or communicated forms of stress, they aligned themselves with cultural definitions of an ideal student, in turn affirming their sense of belonging to both themselves and to their community. Stress, as a narrative, performance, and way of being, draws upon an intersubjective set of meanings that makes it much more than a symptom or diagnostic criteria. Further, if “stress” has emerged as a narrative that moves between mental health and mental functioning, it may also obscure a host of other experiences that do not fit so easily into the “ideal student” paradigm. Since it cannot be assumed that students, educators, and practitioners all mean the same thing when they say “stress” or “mental health”, the language students use to describe and make sense of their experiences is a critical space of inquiry in the larger question of student well-being.

Towards Positive Mental Health

In the wake of devastating tragedies on college campuses, universities have moved to better identify the signs of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and other hardships in order to reach at risk students. An unfortunate consequence of this move towards more systematically identifying student struggles through statistical reports, diagnostic screening, and clinical interventions has been an emphasis on problematizing or eradicating student struggle, often at the expense of understanding it. For decades, mitigating mental health concerns has occupied the focus of these efforts, often sidelining conversations about where we are heading and what mental health could look like beyond “crisis” conditions.

The model of symptom reduction built into measurements of student mental health positions all forms of student struggle as cause for concern—concern that has become, through "crisis" language and practices, a concern of mental illness. Researchers in positive psychology advocate for a concept of mental health that includes the presence of something positive, not merely the absence of something negative. Positive mental health includes "flourishing with high levels of emotional, psychological, and social well-being" (Keyes 2005: 539). Not only is it important to support students as they face struggle, we must also build systems that encourage happiness, empathy, compassion, joy, and other facets of well-being.

At the same time, it is vital that we not confuse flourishing with objective functioning (Galderisi et al., 2015; Rosenbaum and Liebert 2015). In this study, student themselves, through structures of identity and adequacy, often framed mental health as the ability to function optimally and achieve at high levels; similarly, positive functioning can easily be oversimplified into the ability to work productively (Galderisi et al., 2015), further suggesting that any individual, in whatever context, who cannot work productively has poor mental health, or, conversely, that the importance of mental health rests within the ability to work, produce, and contribute. This distinction between flourishing and functioning is an essential part of an intersectional approach to mental health that acknowledges systemic inequality and institutionalized sources of distress (Johns and Hawkes, 2020; King et al., 2019). I now turn to how a focus on the relational elements of mental health shifts the focus from eliminating student struggle towards better understanding it.

The Lived Experience of Mental Health: Care, Meaning, and Belonging

This narrative of college mental health, through crisis language and clinical framing, suggests individual students have been getting sicker for decades, and that the experience of this sickness is located solely within the individual. What we see from the student stories in this research suggests that students make meaning of their mental health through relationships,

narratives, and intersubjective experiences. A model that treats student mental health as an individually constructed and enacted experience fails to account for the ways that mental health is defined and experienced as a social process. This adds to a growing urgency to change the narrative of mental health (Rosenbaum & Liebert, 2015), to create a caring campus culture (JED foundation, Clay center; CCMH; “Caring campus” initiative, AUCCCD; Brunner et al., 2014; Lee, 2004), and to foster more collaborative relationships between the counseling center and student body (Glass 2019). The structures of narrative, achievement, and identity within student culture reveal how mental health is a reflection of collective, cultural processes as they interact with the individual’s sense of themselves. Student mental health, then, might be better defined as a series of encounters of subjectivity—of a continuous process of making sense of experience with regards to the social, academic, and material world within which “student” comes to mean something.

Higher Education, Productivity, and Cultures of Academia

The entanglements of functioning, productivity, and high achievement presented here suggest the need for a critical evaluation of the academic cultures within which students experience their education. Further, we need to consider how the crisis in college mental health might more accurately be stated as a crisis in higher education—whereby social, cultural, and relational structures are affected by ideologies of success, achievement, productivity, and instrumental value. This study shows how student mental health is always also a question of student subjectivity—including the systems of value and worth students adopt to make sense of their experiences. These narratives reflect the need to shift the narrative from individual student pathologies towards one that challenges the larger culture of academia and its manifestations for success, achievement, belonging, and identity in the college environment.

Implications for Future Research

Several related complexities are likely to exist within these nuances of college mental health. While outside the scope of this thesis, these concurrent contexts are in urgent need of research that similarly appeals to the linguistic and cultural landscape of mental health programs and policies. As I talked with students, three additional sites arose: the counseling center, disability accommodations, and academic coursework.

Notes on the counseling center

Among students, there was a widely held perception that the counseling center and other mental health resources were inaccessible—always booked, difficult to schedule, and out of reach. At many times, particularly with the COVID-19 pandemic, these barriers certainly made these resources more difficult to access; yet, much of the time, the counseling center has had little to no waitlist, has added many different ways to make appointments, and offers a variety of different services for different preferences. From talking with students about the counseling center, it appears the narratives students spread about the accessibility of the counseling center inhibited many students from trying to access any help in the first place. Many said they didn't need help, or felt too overwhelmed to seek it. Others reported feeling like someone else might need therapy more than them, or having heard negative things and not willing to find out for themselves. These narratives are barriers in and of themselves—narrative and perceptual barriers that exist despite the counseling center expanding their services, eliminating waitlists, and opening more appointments. Making mental health care more accessible is a project at the community level that requires understanding mental health from the perspectives of students, staff, and their universities.

Disability and Student Support

A second space brought up by many students talking about mental health was the office of accessibility and disability accommodations more generally. Accessibility has garnered more attention as the college mental health crisis, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic, have drawn

attention to the complexities of student needs. As the landscape of college mental health continues to change in accordance with social, medical, and economic shifts, more studies should focus on student experiences with disability, as well as the ambiguity surrounding college accessibility services. The student culture depicted and performed throughout these student narratives mirror a social model of disability whereby existing domains of care and policy are considered structuring forces for experiences of disability. As policies and narratives in higher education continue to shift, experiences of disability, like the experiences of mental health presented here, must be studied in the context in which they come to be embodied and made meaningful.

Education, Coursework, and Relationships to the University

Finally, the classroom itself seems to be rapidly shifting as the landscape of college mental health raises questions about disability, accountability, and care. Students and teachers must balance increasing needs in increasingly challenging learning environments (Gurung, 2022), and often find themselves forging novel forms of learning together, particularly with remote learning. Many students I spoke to talked highly of their professors and mentors, yet cited a general misalignment between the needs students have and the ability for faculty and staff to support them. Similarly, the ways mental health is talked about on campus and through larger clinical and public discourses make positive mental health seem like an impossible task. In fact, many students interviewed, as well as in many recent conversations I've had with peers, it seems that the initiatives across campus in recent years have been received as performative gestures with little real change. These misalignments must be addressed through both structural change to the systems of health and achievement within academic discourse as well as by fostering resilience, empathy, and self-knowledge at personal and interpersonal levels.

Studying the Culture of College Mental Health: Student Stories

One clear implication of this study for college mental health researchers is the necessity to view student subjectivity as a space of mental health, and, in turn, to consider how students shape, understand, and can change their mental health landscapes. Students are deeply involved in the construction and performance of narratives of stress, achievement, and belonging. Despite students' subjective experience being the very spaces of inquiry, students themselves are rarely involved in this research. As agents of their own lived experiences, students must not be overlooked as passive players in college mental health; they must be recognized as collaborators, researchers, and community members. As calls for cultural change emerge from the margins of publications, we need to turn to students as more than respondents and consider how student subjectivity is itself a space of inquiry.

Ethnographic work is uniquely necessary for studies of student mental health because it acknowledges that the subjectivity of the researchers can never be fully divorced from the research itself; in fact, this attention to reflexivity—this acknowledgement of our own collective subjectivity, is what strengthens our questions beyond deficits and measurements and into more nuanced inquiries of what really matters. The research presented throughout this thesis was conducted by undergraduate students under the supervision of faculty and staff across different fields. At its core, this project has been an act of community; interdisciplinary and collaborative research is a movement toward involving students in the understanding of their own lives including the social and structural backdrops through which they experience their lives. Engaging with student subjectivity in the mental health space allows educators, counselors, and administrators to consider student mental health as something more than individual pathology—to ask in what context that experience manifests and how social and personal meaning is created through it. In doing so, the question of a college mental health crisis continues to shift from "how do we hire more therapists?" towards reducing that demand, and shaping a more collaborative, contextualized, and community-centered campus.

Bibliography

Abrams, Zara. 2020. “A Crunch at College Counseling Centers.” American Psychological Association. 2020. https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/09/crunch-college-counseling.

Abdollahi, Abbas, Sana Panahipour, Mahnaz Akhavan Tafti, and Kelly A. Allen. 2020. "Academic hardiness as a mediator for the relationship between school belonging and academic stress." *Psychology in the Schools* 57, no. 5: 823-832.

Adams, Gerald R., Michael D. Berzonsky, and Leo Keating. 2006. “Psychosocial Resources in First-Year University Students: The Role of Identity Processes and Social Relationships.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 35 (1): 78–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-005-9019-0.

Adams, Jeffrey B. 2005. “What Makes the Grade? Faculty and Student Perceptions.” *Teaching of Psychology* 32 (1): 21–24. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15328023top3201_5.

Agarwal, S.K., and G.D. Marshall. 2001. “Stress Effects on Immunity and Its Application to Clinical Immunology: Stress Effects on Immunity.” *Clinical & Experimental Allergy* 31 (1): 25–31. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2222.2001.01005.x.

Aherne, Declan. 2001. “Understanding Student Stress: A Qualitative Approach.” *The Irish Journal of Psychology* 22 (November): 176–87. https://doi.org/10.1080/03033910.2001.10558278.

Ahn, Mi Young, and Howard H. Davis. 2020. “Four Domains of Students’ Sense of Belonging to University.” *Studies in Higher Education* 45 (3): 622–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1564902.

Alonzo, Angelo A. 2000. “The Experience of Chronic Illness and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: The Consequences of Cumulative Adversity.” *Social Science & Medicine* 50 (10): 1475–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(99)00399-8.

Andersen, Ditte. 2020. “Narrative Ethnography: How to Study Stories in the Context of Their Telling.” In *Handbook of Ethnography in Healthcare Research*. Routledge.

Anderson, Jill. “Harvard EdCast: A Crisis of Belonging.” 2023. *Harvard Graduate School of Education*. Accessed March 12, 2023. https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/23/03/harvard-edcast-crisis-belonging.

Anderson-Fye, Eileen P., and Jerry Floersch. 2011. "'I'm Not Your Typical "Homework Stresses Me Out" Kind of Girl': Psychological Anthropology in Research on College Student Usage of Psychiatric Medications and Mental Health Services." *Ethos* 39 (4): 501–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2011.01209.x.

Araújo Costa Folha, Otávio Augusto de, Carlomagno Pacheco Bahia, Gisele Priscila Soares de Aguiar, Anderson Manoel Herculano, Nicole Leite Galvão Coelho, Maria Bernardete Cordeiro de Sousa, Victor Kenji Medeiros Shiramizu, Ana Cecília de Menezes Galvão, Walther Augusto de Carvalho, and Antonio Pereira. 2017. "Effect of Chronic Stress during Adolescence in Prefrontal Cortex Structure and Function." *Behavioural Brain Research* 326 (May): 44–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbr.2017.02.033.

Astin, Alexander W. 1999. "Student Involvement: A Developmental Theory for Higher Education." *Journal of College Student Development* 40 (5).

Baker, S. 2012, December. A new view of evidence-based practice. Retrieved from http://ct.counseling.org/2012/12/a-new-view-of-evidence-based-practice/

Bass, Jeffrey. 2006. "In Exile from the Self: National Belonging and Psychoanalysis in Buenos Aires." *Ethos* 34 (4): 433–55. https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.2006.34.4.433.

Baumeister, Roy F, and Mark R Leary. 1995. "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation," 33. *Psychological bulletin* 117, no. 3 (1995): 497.

Beresin, Eliza Abdu-Glass, Steven Schlozman, MD, Gene. 2017. "The College Mental Health Crisis: A Call for Cultural Change – Part 2." MGH Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds. March 6, 2017. https://www.mghclaycenter.org/parenting-concerns/college-mental-health-crisis-call-cultural-change-part-2/.

Bishop, John B. 1993. "The Changing Student Culture." *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 6:3-4, 37-57, DOI: 10.1300/J035v06n03_03

Bourdieu, Pierre, John B. Thompson, and Gino Raymond. 2009. *Language and Symbolic Power*. 1. publ. in paperb., Repr. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bowman, Nicholas A. 2010. "The Development of Psychological Well-Being Among First-Year College Students." *Journal of College Student Development* 51 (2): 180–200. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0118.

Bowman, Nicholas A., and Vivienne Felix. 2017. “It’s Who I Am: Student Identity Centrality and College Student Success.” *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 54 (3): 235–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2017.1331853.

Brunner, Jon L., David L. Wallace, Linda S. Reymann, Jes-James Sellers, and Adam G. McCabe. 2014. “College Counseling Today: Contemporary Students and How Counseling Centers Meet Their Needs.” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, 28 (4): 257–324. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2014.948770.

Canaan and Shumar. 2008. “Structure and Agency in the Neoliberal University | Taylor & Francis Group.” Taylor & Francis. Accessed March 22, 2021. http://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/structure-agency-neoliberal-university-joyce-canaan-wesley-shumar/e/10.4324/9780203927687.

“Caring Campus - Institute for Evidence-Based Change.” 2022. December 7, 2022. https://www.iebcnow.org/caring-campus/.

Caruth, Gail D. 2018. “Student Engagement, Retention, and Motivation: Assessing Academic Success in Today’s College Students.” *Participatory Educational Research* 5 (1): 17–30. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.18.4.5.1.

Chandler, Bret. 2013. “The Subjectivity of Habitus.” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 43 (4): 469–91. https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12025.

Clemmensen, Malene Broch, and Simo Køppe. 2021. “Normality, Subjectivity and Mental Health: A Genealogy of Danish Psychiatry, 1938–2017.” *Health* 25 (2): 231–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459319874102.

“COE - College Enrollment Rates.” 2022. Accessed January 2, 2023. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpb/college-enrollment-rate.

Coffman, Donna L., and Tammy D. Gilligan. 2002. “Social Support, Stress, and Self-Efficacy: Effects on Students’ Satisfaction.” *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice* 4 (1): 53–66. https://doi.org/10.2190/BV7X-F87X-2MXL-2B3L.

“College and University Counseling Centers in the 1990s.” 1990. Accessed January 4, 2023. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000090184001.

“College Enrollment Statistics [2023]: Total + by Demographic.” 2022. Education Data Initiative. Accessed January 4, 2023. https://educationdata.org/college-enrollment-statistics.

Cooke, Richard, Bridgette M. Bewick, Michael Barkham, Margaret Bradley, and Kerry Audin. 2006. “Measuring, Monitoring and Managing the Psychological Well-Being of First Year University Students.” *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling* 34 (4): 505–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880600942624.

Cooper, Amy, and Lisa McGee. 2017. “‘At Such a Good School, Everybody Needs It’: Contested Meanings of Prescription Stimulant Use in College Academics.” *Ethos* 45 (3): 289–313. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12167.

Cornish, Peter A., Gillian Berry, Sherry Benton, Patricia Barros-Gomes, Dawn Johnson, Rebecca Ginsburg, Beth Whelan, Emily Fawcett, and Vera Romano. 2017. “Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Today’s College Student: Reinventing Services through Stepped Care 2.0.” *Psychological Services* 14: 428–42. https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000158.

Darling, Carol Anderson, Lenore M. McWey, Stacy N. Howard, and Spencer B. Olmstead. 2007. “College Student Stress: The Influence of Interpersonal Relationships on Sense of Coherence.” *Stress and Health* 23 (4): 215–29. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.1139.

Denzin, Norman K. 2006. “Pedagogy, Performance, and Autoethnography.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26 (4): 333–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/10462930600828774.

Desjarlais, Robert, and C. Jason Throop. 2011. “Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (1): 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092010-153345.

Dhabhar, Firdaus S. 2014. “Effects of Stress on Immune Function: The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful.” *Immunologic Research* 58 (2): 193–210. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12026-014-8517-0.

Duffy, Mary E., Jean M. Twenge, and Thomas E. Joiner. 2019. “Trends in Mood and Anxiety Symptoms and Suicide-Related Outcomes Among U.S. Undergraduates, 2007–2018: Evidence From Two National Surveys.” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 65 (5): 590–98. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.04.033.

Duran, Antonio, and Susan R. Jones. 2019. “Using Intersectionality in Qualitative Research on College Student Identity Development: Considerations, Tensions, and Possibilities.” *Journal of College Student Development* 60 (4): 455–71. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0040.

D'zurilla, Thomas J., and Collette F. Sheedy. 1991. "Relation between social problem-solving ability and subsequent level of psychological stress in college students." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 61, no. 5: 841.

Eckert, Penelope. 1989. *Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School*. Teachers College Press.

“Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development from the Late Teens through the...: Discover GALILEO.” n.d. Accessed January 4, 2023. https://eds-p-ebscohost-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=3c4ac147-581f-4b47-8c6c-46bed15c4c23%40redis.

Engel, George L. 1977. “The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine” 196: 9.

Filc, D. 2004. “The Medical Text: Between Biomedicine and Hegemony.” *Social Science & Medicine* 59 (6): 1275–85. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.01.003.

Fivush, Robyn. 2022. “Students Overcoming the Crisis of Not Belonging | Psychology Today.” Psychology Today. 2022. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-stories-our-lives/202207/students-overcoming-the-crisis-not-belonging.

Fotuhi, Omid, and Nicole Barbaro. 2022. “The Biggest Challenges Facing Higher Education Are Those of Student Belonging. EdTech Can Help. *Behavioral Scientist* (blog). December 12, 2022. https://behavioralscientist.org/the-biggest-challenges-facing-higher-education-are-those-of-student-belonging-edtech-can-help/.

Frank, Jeff. 2022. “OPINION: Hiring More College Mental Health Counselors Is Not the Only or the Best Answer for Today’s Struggling Students.” The Hechinger Report. August 1, 2022. http://hechingerreport.org/opinion-hiring-more-college-mental-health-counselors-is-not-the-only-or-the-best-answer-for-todays-struggling-students/.

Freeman, Tierra M., Lynley H. Anderman, and Jane M. Jensen. 2007. "Sense of belonging in college freshmen at the classroom and campus levels." The Journal of Experimental Education 75, no. 3: 203-220.

Frese, Pamela R., and Susan Brownell, eds. 2020. *Experiential and Performative Anthropology in the Classroom: Engaging the Legacy of Edith and Victor Turner*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41995-0.

Gallagher, Robert P. 2015. “National Survey of College Counseling Centers 2014. Project Report.” *The International Association of Counseling Services* (IACS).

Garcia, Santiago Andrés. 2021. “Contesting Trauma and Violence through Indigeneity and a Decolonizing Pedagogy at Rio Hondo Community College.” *Journal of Latinos and Education* 20 (4): 376–96. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2019.1603749.

Ghetie, Dora. 2007. “The Debate Over Time-Limited Treatment in College Counseling Centers.” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 22 (1): 41–61.

Giamos, Dimitris, Alex Young Soo Lee, Amanda Suleiman, Heather Stuart, and Shu-Ping Chen. 2017. “Understanding Campus Culture and Student Coping Strategies for Mental Health Issues in Five Canadian Colleges and Universities.” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 47 (3): 136–51. https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v47i3.187957.

Gibbons, Chris. 2015. “Stress, Eustress and the National Student Survey.” *Psychology Teaching Review* 21 (2): 86–92. https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsptr.2015.21.2.86.

Gillen-O’Neel, Cari. 2021. “Sense of Belonging and Student Engagement: A Daily Study of First- and Continuing-Generation College Students.” *Research in Higher Education* 62 (1): 45–71. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-019-09570-y.

Glass, Gary D. 2020. “College Counseling Center Outreach—An Organizing Framework.” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 34 (4): 271–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2019.1596773.

Good, Byron J. 2012. “Theorizing the ‘Subject’ of Medical and Psychiatric Anthropology*.” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18 (3): 515–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01774.x.

Goodenow, Carol. 1993. “Classroom Belonging among Early Adolescent Students: Relationships to Motivation and Achievement.” *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 13 (1): 21–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431693013001002.

Gopalan, Maithreyi, and Shannon T. Brady. 2020. “College Students’ Sense of Belonging: A National Perspective.” *Educational Researcher* 49 (2): 134–37. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19897622.

Gopalan, Maithreyi, Ashley Linden-Carmichael, and Stephanie Lanza. "College students’ sense of belonging and mental health amidst the COVID-19 pandemic." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 70, no. 2 (2022): 228-233.

Gorman, Kimberly S., Cindy Bruns, Calvin Chin, Nivla Y. Fitzpatrick, Linda Koenig, Pete LeViness, and Karen Sokolowski. 2021. “Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey 2020.” Retrieved from

https://www.aucccd.org/assets/documents/Survey/2019-2020%20Annual%20Report%20FINAL%20March-2021.pdf

Gurung, Regan A. R. 2022. “Accommodating Stress: Coping With Student Requests.” Inside Higher Ed. February 16, 2022. https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2022/02/16/advice-offering-accommodations-student-requests-opinion.

Hacking, Ian. 1995. “The looping effect of human kinds.” In: D. Sperber, D. Premack, & A.J. Premack (Eds) *Causal Cognition: A Multidisciplinary Debate.* Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 351–394.

Hacking, Ian. 2004. “Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: Between discourse in the abstract and faceto-face interaction.” *Economy and Society* 333: 277–302.

Hagerty, Bonnie M., Reg A. Williams, James C. Coyne, and Margaret R. Early. 1966. "Sense of belonging and indicators of social and psychological functioning." Archives of psychiatric nursing 10, no. 4: 235-244.

Hazel, Cynthia E., G. Emma Vazirabadi, and John Gallagher. 2013. “Measuring Aspirations, Belonging, and Productivity in Secondary Students: Validation of the Student School Engagement Measure.” *Psychology in the Schools* 50 (7): 689–704. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21703.

Heckman, William. 2019. “Stress: An Epidemic Among College Students.” *The American Institute of Stress*. September 6, 2019. https://www.stress.org/stress-an-epidemic-among-college-students.

Heitzmann, Dennis. 2011. “Commentary: Toward Collaboration and Case Management in College Mental Health.” *Ethos* 39 (4): 522–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2011.01215.x.

Hejtmanek, Katie Rose. 2016. “Care, Closeness, and Becoming ‘Better’: Transformation and Therapeutic Process in American Adolescent Psychiatric Custody.” *Ethos* 44 (3): 313–32. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12135.

Hodges, Shannon, Kimber Shelton, and Michelle Lyn. *The college and university counseling manual: Integrating essential services across the campus*. Springer Publishing Company, 2016.

Hoffman, Marybeth, Jayne Richmond, Jennifer Morrow, and Kandice Salomone. 2002. “Investigating ‘Sense of Belonging’ in First-Year College Students.” *Journal of College*

Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice 4 (3): 227–56. https://doi.org/10.2190/DRYC-CXQ9-JQ8V-HT4V.

Hogan, Andrew J. 2019. “Social and Medical Models of Disability and Mental Health: Evolution and Renewal.” *CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association Journal* 191 (1): E16–18. https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.181008.

Horowitz, H. (1986). *The 1960s and the Transformation of Campus Cultures.* History of Education Quarterly, 26(1), 1-38. doi:10.2307/368875

Johns, Shantalea, and Stephanie Hawkes. 2020. “A Look at Empathy, University Belonging, and Intersectionality: How to Support a Diverse Student Body Amid the COVID-19 Crisis.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Education* 9 (2): x–xiii. https://doi.org/10.32674/jise.v9i2.2407.

Jones, Joni L. 2002. “Performance Ethnography: The Role of Embodiment in Cultural Authenticity.” *Theatre Topics* 12 (1): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1353/tt.2002.0004.

Kadison, Richard, and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo. *College of the overwhelmed: The campus mental health crisis and what to do about it*. Vol. 6. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Keyes, Corey L. M. 2005. “Mental Illness and/or Mental Health? Investigating Axioms of the Complete State Model of Health.” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 73 (3): 539–48. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.73.3.539.

———2002. "The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life." Journal of health and social behavior (2002): 207-222.

———. 2006. “Subjective Well-Being in Mental Health and Human Development Research Worldwide: An Introduction.” *Social Indicators Research* 77 (1): 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-005-5550-3.

———. 2007. “Promoting and Protecting Mental Health as Flourishing: A Complementary Strategy for Improving National Mental Health.” *American Psychologist* 62 (2): 95–108. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.2.95.

Keyes, Corey L. M., and Jonathan Haidt, eds. 2003. *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*. 1st ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Kim, H. Nina, Kristine F. Lan, Esi Nkyekyer, Santiago Neme, Martine Pierre-Louis, Lisa Chew, and Herbert C. Duber. 2020. “Assessment of Disparities in COVID-19 Testing

and Infection Across Language Groups in Seattle, Washington." *JAMA Network Open* 3 (9): e2021213. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.21213.

King, Tania L., Marissa Shields, Tom Shakespeare, Allison Milner, and Anne Kavanagh. 2019. "An Intersectional Approach to Understandings of Mental Health Inequalities among Men with Disability." *SSM - Population Health* 9 (December): 100464. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2019.100464.

Kleinman, Arthur. 1997. "'Everything That Really Matters': Social Suffering, Subjectivity, and the Remaking of Human Experience in a Disordering World." *The Harvard Theological Review* 90 (3): 315–35.

———. 2015. "Care: In Search of a Health Agenda." *The Lancet* 386 (9990): 240–41. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)61271-5.

Korbin, Jill E., and Eileen P. Anderson-Fye. 2011. "Adolescence Matters: Practice- and Policy-Relevant Research and Engagement in Psychological Anthropology." *Ethos* 39 (4): 415–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2011.01212.x.

Koyama, Jill Peterson. 2007. "Approaching and Attending College: Anthropological and Ethnographic Accounts." *Teachers College Record* 109 (10): 2301–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810710901002.

Kraft, David P. 2011. "One Hundred Years of College Mental Health." *Journal of American College Health* 59 (6): 477–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2011.569964.

Kruisselbrink Flatt, Alicia. 2013. "A Suffering Generation: Six Factors Contributing to the Mental Health Crisis in North American Higher Education." *College Quarterly* 16 (1). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1016492.

Landy, Robert J. 1996*. Persona and Performance: The Meaning of Role in Drama, Therapy, and Everyday Life.* New York: Guilford Press.

Lange, Clare, and Mark Byrd. 2002. "Differences between Students' Estimated and Attained Grades in a First-Year Introductory Psychology Course as a Function of Identity Development." *Adolescence* 37 (145): 93–107.

Langellier, Kristin M., and Eric E. Peterson. 2006. *Storytelling in Daily Life: Performing Narrative.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Lazarus, Richard S., and Susan Folkman. *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. Springer publishing company, 1984.

Leathwood, Carole, and Paul O'Connell. 2003. "'It's a Struggle': The Construction of the 'New Student' in Higher Education." *Journal of Education Policy* 18 (6): 597–615. https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093032000145863.

Lester, Rebecca J. 2011. "How Do I Code for Black Fingernail Polish? Finding the Missing Adolescent in Managed Mental Health Care." *Ethos* 39 (4): 481–96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2011.01210.x.

———. 2022. "Inner Worlds as Social Systems: How Insights from Anthropology Can Inform Clinical Practice." *SSM - Mental Health* 2 (December): 100068. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2022.100068.

Levinson, Bradley A. 1998. "Student Culture and the Contradictions of Equality at a Mexican Secondary School." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 29 (3): 267–96. https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1998.29.3.267.

Li, Chun-Tung, Jiannong Cao, and Tim M. H. Li. 2016. "Eustress or Distress: An Empirical Study of Perceived Stress in Everyday College Life." In *Proceedings of the 2016 ACM International Joint Conference on Pervasive and Ubiquitous Computing: Adjunct*, 1209–17. Heidelberg Germany: ACM. https://doi.org/10.1145/2968219.2968309.

Lindholm, Sofia Kvist, and Anette Wickström. 2020. "'Looping Effects' Related to Young People's Mental Health: How Young People Transform the Meaning of Psychiatric Concepts." *Global Studies of Childhood* 10 (1): 26–38. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610619890058.

Lipson, S.K., Zhou, Sasha, Abelson, Sara, Heinze, Justin, Jirsa, Matthew, Morigney, Jasmine, Patterson, Akilah, Singh, Meghna, and Eisenberg, Daniel. 2022."Trends in college student mental health and help-seeking by race/ethnicity: Findings from the national healthy minds study, 2013–2021", Journal of Affective Disorders, 306: 138-147

Locke, Benjamin D., Johanna Soet Buzolitz, Pui-Wa Lei, James F. Boswell, Andrew A. McAleavey, Todd D. Sevig, Jerome D. Dowis, and Jeffrey A. Hayes. 2011. "Development of the Counseling Center Assessment of Psychological Symptoms-62 (CCAPS-62)." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 58 (1): 97–109. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021282.

Lu, Adrienne. 2023. "Everyone Is Talking About 'Belonging,' but What Does It Really Mean?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. 2023. https://www.chronicle.com/article/everyone-is-talking-about-belonging.

Luhrmann, T. M. 2006. “Subjectivity.” *Anthropological Theory* 6 (3): 345–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499606066892.

Maramba, Dina C., and Samuel D. Museus. 2011. “The Utility of Using Mixed-Methods and Intersectionality Approaches in Conducting Research on Filipino American Students’ Experiences with the Campus Climate and on Sense of Belonging.” *New Directions for Institutional Research* 2011 (151): 93–101. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.401.

Martens, Matthew P., Jennifer C. Page, Emily S. Mowry, Krista M. Damann, Kari K. Taylor, and M. Dolores Cimini. 2006. “Differences between Actual and Perceived Student Norms: An Examination of Alcohol Use, Drug Use, and Sexual Behavior.” *Journal of American College Health: J of ACH* 54 (5): 295–300. https://doi.org/10.3200/JACH.54.5.295-300.

Masco, Joseph. 2017. “The Crisis in Crisis.” *Current Anthropology* 58 (S15): S65–76. https://doi.org/10.1086/688695.

Masika, Rachel, and Jennie Jones. 2016. “Building Student Belonging and Engagement: Insights into Higher Education Students’ Experiences of Participating and Learning Together.” *Teaching in Higher Education* 21 (2): 138–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2015.1122585.

Maslow, Abraham H., 1954. *The instinctoid nature of basic needs*. Journal of personality.

Mattingly, Cheryl, and Linda C. Garro, eds. 2001. *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*.

Mattingly, Cheryl, Nancy C. Lutkehaus, and C. Jason Throop. 2008. “Bruner’s Search for Meaning: A Conversation between Psychology and Anthropology.” *Ethos (Berkeley, Calif.)* 36 (1): 1–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2008.00001.x.

McGonagle, Katherine A., and Ronald C. Kessler. 1990. “Chronic Stress, Acute Stress, and Depressive Symptoms.” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 18 (5): 681–706. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00931237.

McLeod, Jane D. 2012. “The Meanings of Stress: Expanding the Stress Process Model.” *Society and Mental Health* 2 (3): 172–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/2156869312452877.

Meehan, Catherine, and Kristy Howells. 2019. “In Search of the Feeling of ‘Belonging’ in Higher Education: Undergraduate Students Transition into Higher Education.” *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 43 (10): 1376–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2018.1490702.

Meyer, Michaela D. E., Megan Spencer, and T. Nathaniel French. 2009. “The Identity of a ‘College Student’: Perceptions of College Academics and Academic Rigor Among First-Year Students.” *College Student Journal* 43 (4): 1070–79.

Miller, Gregory E., Edith Chen, and Karen J. Parker. 2011. “Psychological Stress in Childhood and Susceptibility to the Chronic Diseases of Aging: Moving Towards a Model of Behavioral and Biological Mechanisms.” *Psychological Bulletin* 137 (6): 959–97. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0024768.

Mistler, Brian J, David R Reetz, Brian Krylowicz, and Victor Barr. n.d. “The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors Annual Survey,” 188.

Mitchell, Sharon L., Danielle R. Oakley, and John H. Dunkle. 2019. “White Paper: A Multidimensional Understanding of Effective University and College Counseling Center Organizational Structures.” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 33 (2): 89–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2019.1578941.

Moll, Luis C. 2004. “Rethinking Resistance.” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 35 (1): 126–31.

Morey, Taylor, and Nicole Taylor. 2019. “Understanding How Undergraduate Students Experience and Manage Stress: Implications for Teaching and Learning Anthropology.” *Teaching and Learning Anthropology* 2 (2). https://doi.org/10.5070/T32240875.

Much, Kari, and Swanson, Amy L. 2010. “The Debate about Increasing College Student Psychopathology: Are College Students Really Getting ‘Sicker?’” *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 24 (2): 86–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568220903558570.

Myers, Neely. 2019. “Beyond the ‘Crazy House’: Mental/Moral Breakdowns and Moral Agency in First-Episode Psychosis.” *Ethos* 47 (1): 13–34. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12225.

Nora, Amaury. 2004. “The Role of Habitus and Cultural Capital in Choosing a College, Transitioning From High School to Higher Education, and Persisting in College Among Minority and Nonminority Students.” *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3 (2): 180–208. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192704263189.

Norman, Rosana E., Munkhtsetseg Byambaa, Rumna De, Alexander Butchart, James Scott, and Theo Vos. 2012. “The Long-Term Health Consequences of Child Physical Abuse, Emotional Abuse, and Neglect: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.” *PLOS Medicine* 9 (11): e1001349. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001349.

O'Sullivan, Geraldine. 2011. "The relationship between hope, eustress, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction among undergraduates." *Social indicators research* 101, no. 1: 155-172.

O' Toole, Jacqueline. 2018. "Institutional Storytelling and Personal Narratives: Reflecting on the 'Value' of Narrative Inquiry." *Irish Educational Studies* 37 (2): 175–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2018.1465839.

Ortner, Sherry B. 2005. "Subjectivity and Cultural Critique." *Anthropological Theory* 5 (1): 31–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499605050867.

Osborne, Jason W. and Brent Shock. 2023. "Colleges That Worry about Enrollment Should Focus on Missions (Opinion)." 2023. https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/views/2023/02/06/colleges-worry-about-enrollment-should-focus-missions-opinion.

Ozawa-de Silva, Chikako. 2021. *The anatomy of loneliness: Suicide, social connection, and the search for relational meaning in contemporary Japan*. University of California Press.

Park, Crystal L., and Susan Folkman. 1997. "Meaning in the context of stress and coping." *Review of general psychology* 1, no. 2 (1997): 115-144

Pedrelli, Paola, Maren Nyer, Albert Yeung, Courtney Zulauf, and Timothy Wilens. 2015. "College Students: Mental Health Problems and Treatment Considerations." *Academic Psychiatry : The Journal of the American Association of Directors of Psychiatric Residency Training and the Association for Academic Psychiatry* 39 (5): 503–11. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-014-0205-9.

Pilecki, Brian C. 2020. "Medical Model of Psychopathology." In *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences*, edited by Virgil Zeigler-Hill and Todd K. Shackelford, 2834–41. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24612-3_911.

Pittman, Laura D., and Adeya Richmond. 2007. "Academic and psychological functioning in late adolescence: The importance of school belonging." *The Journal of Experimental Education* 75, no. 4: 270-290.

Posselt, Julie R., and Sarah Ketchen Lipson. 2016. "Competition, Anxiety, and Depression in the College Classroom: Variations by Student Identity and Field of Study." *Journal of College Student Development* 57 (8): 973–89. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0094.

"Quick Facts: Emory University: Atlanta Ga." Emory University | Atlanta GA, August 2022. https://oxford.emory.edu/life/quick_facts.html.

Reed, Mark B., James E. Lange, Julie M. Ketchie, and John D. Clapp. 2007. "The Relationship between Social Identity, Normative Information, and College Student Drinking." *Social Influence* 2 (4): 269–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/15534510701476617.

Robotham, David. 2008. "Stress among Higher Education Students: Towards a Research Agenda." *Higher Education* 56 (6): 735–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9137-1.

Robotham, David, and Claire Julian. 2006. "Stress and the Higher Education Student: A Critical Review of the Literature." *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 30 (2): 107–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/03098770600617513.

Rosenbaum, Philip J., and Heather Liebert. 2015. "Reframing the conversation on college student mental health." *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy* 29, no. 3: 179-196.

Ross, Shannon E., Bradley C. Niebling, and Teresa M. Heckert. 1999. "SOURCES OF STRESS AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS." *College Student Journal* 33 (2): 312–312.

Rudland, Joy R., Clinton Golding, and Tim J. Wilkinson. 2020. "The stress paradox: how stress can be good for learning." *Medical education* 54, no. 1: 40-45.

Samura, Michelle. 2016. "Remaking Selves, Repositioning Selves, or Remaking Space: An Examination of Asian American College Students' Processes of 'Belonging.'" *Journal of College Student Development* 57 (2): 135–50. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0016.

———. 2018. "Understanding Campus Spaces to Improve Student Belonging." *About Campus* 23 (2): 19–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086482218785887.

Scarfone, Marianna. 2021. "'Psychosis of Civilization': A Colonial-Situated Diagnosis." *History of Psychiatry* 32 (1): 52–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0957154X20968063.

Schwartz, Gary, and Don Merten. 1967. "The Language of Adolescence: An Anthropological Approach to the Youth Culture." *American Journal of Sociology* 72 (5): 453–68.

Smith, Charlie, and Eda Ulus. 2020. "Who Cares for Academics? We Need to Talk about Emotional Well-Being Including What We Avoid and Intellectualise through Macro-Discourses." *Organization* 27 (6): 840–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508419867201.

Smyth, Emer and Joanne Banks (2012) ‘There was never really any question of anything else': young people's agency, institutional habitus and the transition to higher education, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* 33:2, 263-281, DOI: 10.1080/01425692.2012.632867

Soria, Krista M., and Michael J. Stebleton. 2013. “Social Capital, Academic Engagement, and Sense of Belonging Among Working-Class College Students.” *College Student Affairs Journal* 31 (2): 139-153,168-169.

Sroufe, L. Alan. 1997. “Psychopathology as an Outcome of Development.” *Development and Psychopathology* 9 (2): 251–68. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579497002046.

“Stress.” 2023. World Health Organization. Accessed March 10, 2023. https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress.

Strayhorn, T.L., 2018. *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.

“Students Overcoming the Crisis of Not Belonging | Psychology Today Canada.” 2022. Accessed August 5, 2022. https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/the-stories-our-lives/202207/students-overcoming-the-crisis-not-belonging.

“Suicide Data and Statistics | Suicide | CDC.” 2023. January 12, 2023. https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html.

Sum, Chun-Yi. 2017. “Suffering and Tears: Authenticity and Student Volunteerism in Postreform China.” *Ethos* 45 (3): 409–29. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12172.

Thelen, Tatjana. 2021. “Care As Belonging, Difference, and Inequality.” Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Anthropology. May 26, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190854584.013.353.

Thoits, Peggy A. 1995. “Stress, Coping, and Social Support Processes: Where Are We? What Next?” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 35: 53. https://doi.org/10.2307/2626957.

“TimelyMD College Student Survey.” 2022. TimelyMD. 2022. https://timely.md/.

Tinto, Vincent. 2012. *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action.* University of Chicago Press.

Tovar, Esau, and Merril A. Simon. 2010. "Factorial structure and invariance analysis of the sense of belonging scales." *Measurement and evaluation in counseling and development* 43, no. 3: 199-217.

Towbes, L. C. and Cohen, L. H. 1996. Chronic stress in the lives of college students: scale development and prospective prediction of distress. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 25,* 199- 217.

Turner, Victor, and Edith L. B. Turner. 2020. “Performing Ethnography.” In *Experiential and Performative Anthropology in the Classroom*, edited by Pamela R. Frese and Susan Brownell, 39–52. Cham: Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41995-0_3.

Vaccaro, Annemarie, Meada Daly-Cano, and Barbara M. Newman. 2015. “A Sense of Belonging Among College Students With Disabilities: An Emergent Theoretical Model.” *Journal of College Student Development* 56 (7): 670–86. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2015.0072.

Varenne, Herve, and Ray McDermott. 2018. *Successful Failure: The School America Builds*. Routledge.

Visser, Preston L., and Jameson K. Hirsch. 2014. “Health Behaviors among College Students: The Influence of Future Time Perspective and Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction.” *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine* 2 (1): 88–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2013.872992.

Walker, Elaine F. 2002. “Adolescent Neurodevelopment and Psychopathology.” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 11 (1): 24–28. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00161.

Watkins, Daphne C., Justin B. Hunt, and Daniel Eisenberg. 2012. “Increased Demand for Mental Health Services on College Campuses: Perspectives from Administrators.” *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice* 11 (3): 319–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325011401468.

Westerhof, Gerben J., and Corey L. M. Keyes. 2010. “Mental Illness and Mental Health: The Two Continua Model Across the Lifespan.” *Journal of Adult Development* 17 (2): 110–19. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10804-009-9082-y.

Wilson, Gracie, Julia Kwak, and Cody Nelson (2022, November). “So Much to Say: Contributing Alternative Narratives on College Mental Health.” Presented at the Georgia Undergraduate Research Conference at Valdosta State University, Valdosta.

Wilson, Robin. 2015. “An Epidemic of Anguish.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education. August 31, 2015*. https://www.chronicle.com/article/an-epidemic-of-anguish/.

Wolf, Kristin, Christina Maurer, and Mareike Kunter. 2021. “‘I Don’t Really Belong Here.’” *Zeitschrift Für Entwicklungspsychologie Und Pädagogische Psychologie* 53 (1–2): 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1026/0049-8637/a000233.

Wood, Eric. 2022. “College Counseling Centers Cannot Act Alone.” Inside Higher Ed. May 12, 2022. https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/05/12/responding-demand-campus-mental-health-services-opinion.

Wortham, Stanton. 2004. “From Good Student to Outcast: The Emergence of a Classroom Identity.” *Ethos* 32 (2): 164–87. https://doi.org/10.1525/eth.2004.32.2.164.

Xiao, Henry, Dever M. Carney, Soo Jeong Youn, Rebecca A. Janis, Louis G. Castonguay, Jeffrey A. Hayes, and Benjamin D. Locke. 2017. “Are We in Crisis? National Mental Health and Treatment Trends in College Counseling Centers.” *Psychological Services* 14 (4): 407–15. https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000130.

Yun, Jiyoung. 2021. “Bonding Together like a Family: Self-Development within an Affective Community among Elite College Students in South Korea.” *Ethos* 49 (1): 72–90. https://doi.org/10.1111/etho.12290.

Zumbrunn, Sharon, Courtney McKim, Eric Buhs, and Leslie R. Hawley. 2014. “Support, Belonging, Motivation, and Engagement in the College Classroom: A Mixed Method Study.” *Instructional Science* 42 (5): 661–84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-014-9310-0.