Conquering Chaos: Critical Reflections of Beginning Doctoral Education in 2020

Jana L. Woodiwiss, Brian D. Graves, Jennie Pless, Fahmida Afroz,
and Kasandra Dodd

Abstract: In a time of the COVID-19 pandemic, civil unrest, and the tumultuous 2020 presidential election, our first-year PhD cohort reflects on beginning doctoral education. This collaborative autoethnography provides insight into our lived experiences during this time. Three major themes identified include: (1) unprecedented socio-cultural, economic, and political national context; (2) interpersonal connections with students and faculty; and (3) strategies to overcome challenges. Strategies include staying connected virtually, making the most of face-to-face time, meeting with professors during office hours, normalizing feelings of uncertainty, and asking for help. Implications for students and faculty are discussed in the forms of consistent and transparent communication. Ultimately, it is our hope that the critical reflections shared will be able to assist students and faculty in gaining insight into overcoming challenges in times of uncertainty beyond these specific events.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, doctoral education, social work, collaborative autoethnography

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been described as a catastrophic event that caused the academic system to struggle while grappling to regain a sense of normalcy (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020). An international study by Aristovnik and colleagues (2020) found students were most concerned about the future of their careers, leading to anxiety and frustration. They also found that "male, part-time, first level, applied sciences [students], [with] a lower living standard, from Africa or Asia were generally more strongly affected by the pandemic since they were significantly less satisfied with their academic work/life" (Aristovnik et al., 2020, p. 1). Furthermore, women, non-Hispanic Asians, those in fair to poor health, low income, and those who knew someone with COVID-19 reported having higher levels of psychological impact (Browning et al., 2021). Female students studying social sciences, working full time, that had not lost a student job due to COVID-19, and without financial problems, appeared to be more satisfied and positive during this time (Aristovnik, 2020). In addition to student impacts, resource strain experienced by academic support systems themselves caused by budget cuts across the board in higher education led to declines in research, student funding, and staff capacity (Blankenberger & Williams, 2020; Johnson et al., 2021). The uncertainty created by the pandemic caused the machine we know as academia to come to a slow and grinding halt, as decision-making became cumbersome due to limited and changing information being provided across media and government sources (Nagler et al., 2020).

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, tensions around police brutality were also foremost thoughts in the minds of college students across the nation. The brutal murders of African American woman Breonna Taylor on March 13, 2020, and African American man George Floyd

on May 25th, 2020, spurred social action by Black Lives Matter protesters along with other advocacy groups (Davalos et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). A recent study conducted with over 100 college students found that witnessing events of police brutality on mediums such as social media caused students to experience symptoms similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder including anger, sadness, and fear (Campbell & Valera, 2020). Various academic institutions responded by communicating messages of solidarity and racial justice, holding webinars, starting research initiatives, and launching the recognition of Juneteenth as an academic holiday (Hadden, 2020).

Along with anxiety surrounding the pandemic and a new reckoning with social justice, there was the 2020 presidential election. Robocalls, home visits from campaign workers, and media overload were an added layer of worldly chaos experienced by students during the 2020 Fall semester. Immediately following the election, the nation seemed to come to a standstill as a debate over the validity of the election took place. Tensions rose and anxiety set in as the country awaited the final turnout to be provided. An article from the Washington Post captured student sentiments around the election as creating a sense of confusion, apprehension, nervousness, and fear (Lee, 2020). Furthermore, terms such as "Trump stress" and "Trump-related distress" to describe student reactions such as anxiousness specifically for those students who identified as part of a marginalized group had begun to appear in scholarly literature (Albright & Hurd, 2020, 2021).

Cohort Context

Our cohort, decidedly named "Justice League," consists of a group of diverse students who began the first year of their PhD program in the fall of 2020 in the field of social work. Each member of this cohort possesses a unique personal background. Jana Woodiwiss identifies herself as a Latina, mid-30s, first-generation immigrant, Christian, heterosexual, divorced, and a mother of three. She was adopted and raised within the Southern culture of the United States and identifies as a member of the lower-middle class. She believes her background and experience in life and practice have influenced her constructivist epistemological stance. Brian Graves, the lone male student in the program, is of both Caucasian and Korean descent. As a racially mixed man in his mid-20s who was raised in the lower-middle class of the American South, he possesses a blended cultural background and is a first-generation college student in his family. He holds a post-positivist epistemological lens to research. Fahmida Afroz, the only international student within this cohort, is from the South Asian country Bangladesh. Her religious beliefs and cultural orientation are different from all other members of this cohort. In her home country, she belongs to the middle-class of society. As a growing scholar, her epistemological and methodological approach to research is influenced by post-positivism. Jennie Pless identifies a white lesbian woman in her mid-twenties who grew up within the lower-middle class in the Southern United States. She tends to hold a constructivist epistemological lens toward research. The final member of this cohort, Kasandra Dodd, identifies herself as a heterosexual, Christian, single, African American female, and has experienced various levels of social class throughout her life. Along with two of her other colleagues, she too holds a post-positivist epistemological approach to research. While talking about herself she mentioned:

> I am the only African American woman in my cohort: the oldest, most professional experience, and except for my international accomplice and colleague, the only one who has lived for several years outside of my home state of Georgia. I am at a pivot point in my career, not the beginning. I feel non-traditional in every sense of the word and a sense of purpose in coming home.

In terms of class structure, waivers were provided to some professors to teach online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was one factor that led classes to be held in a combination of in-person, hybrid, and fully online instructional formats initially. Onboarding and orientation activities were held online. Zoom was the primary meeting platform used for online instruction throughout the semester. In-person class sessions were held at the school's social work building, where precautionary measures such as social distancing, mask requirements, and sanitary wipe-downs before and after using all working spaces were enforced. Students participated in a total of four classes their first semester, and each student was additionally paired with a research mentor as a graduate research assistant. Assistantships were completed in a mixed modal format depending on each student's individual agreement with the professor they were working with.

With the pandemic looming over our daily activities, our social justice–minded cohort became focused on racial injustice at a national level. For over 40 years, social work's role in police brutality has been questioned and called for throughout scholarly publications (e.g., Banks, 2016; Ellis, 2011; Wilson & Wolfer, 2020). For cohort members that had been practicing in the field, there was a "boots on the ground" mentality that led us to want to take action, protest, become active in the community, and find what we saw as tangible ways of making our voices heard. Although, the time commitment of the doctoral program—specifically in the first year—became a barrier to doing this. As we discussed actionable steps we could make within the realm of academia, we were encouraged to use our writing as a form of action, hence this study. Places of reflection, such as Integrative Seminar, became a sounding board for our thoughts and feelings around issues related to the pandemic, police brutality, and the pending election.

Narratives used for this study were obtained from each of our autoethnographies (e.g., Ellis et al., 2011) which encompassed material from individual weekly journal submissions throughout the course of the semester during Integrative Seminar class. This class was led by the PhD program director and academic advisor for our first two years of the PhD program. Excerpts from each student's autoethnography were used to create this collaborative autoethnography which provides insight into our experiences within the context of the program, the school, and the culture of academia. Themes from our individual autoethnographies were utilized to develop three general themes. Using thematic analysis, we worked together to develop a grand narrative to further present our experiences.

The goal of this paper is to inform fellow doctoral students and social work educators about this cohort's shared experiences of entering a doctoral program. Additionally, how we overcame the challenges and complexities of beginning our journey of becoming social work scholars in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with racial tension brewing as a result of social injustice and the chaos of the 2020 presidential election, will be discussed.

National Context

Undoubtedly, the first theme to emerge from our autoethnographies was starting the doctoral program during the COVID-19 pandemic and tumultuous national social context. As previously mentioned, an unnerving culmination of the global pandemic, civil unrest, and a controversial presidential election created a unique sociocultural and political context during the fall of 2020. Brian shared, "Following quarantines, lockdowns, and closures during the spring and summer, the academic term at universities nationwide was in a state of flux. For many people, there was a 'new normal' that required getting used to."

Indeed, the pandemic resulted in an uncertain period for those attending universities. The more typical adversities that come with entering a PhD program, such as the workload and intellectual growth, were confounded with virtual classes, social distancing, and the ever-growing uncertainty as to what would happen from one day to the next, as described by two students:

> As an initial start into the semester, the first field journal prompt was, "how do you feel you are adjusting to year one in the PhD program?" This was answered by feelings of uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which started in the United States in March of this year, hesitation about meeting workload expectations, and getting acquainted with my professors and other students in my cohort. (Jana)

> I started this PhD program amid a pandemic situation which made socialization more difficult for all of us. Even in the class we had to maintain social distance and follow safety guidelines that never allowed us to spend time together. (Fahmida)

This period of uncertainty paired with obstacles to connection-building resulting from the pandemic, social separation, and virtual formats led to feelings of anxiousness and disconnection. From Jennie's perspective, "We did not have a non-COVID point of reference for doctoral education." Kasandra noted, "I honestly do not know if the stress and anxiety are more heightened due to the pandemic because at this juncture, this is all I can reference as a first-semester student."

In addition to the pandemic, civil unrest was pervading the streets nationwide in response to the highly publicized and controversial killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd by law enforcement earlier that summer. The resulting protests, riots, and calls for reform posed serious questions and concerns for the field of social work as well as for first-year doctoral students. Kasandra pointed out, "The Black Lives Matter Movement has forced the Social Work profession to confront racism within the field and within the profession." Jana felt this critical reflection should prompt large-scale re-evaluation and changes to the field of social work from within: "The radical social injustice occurring, accepted, and even being solicited at the administrative level may cause social workers to re-evaluate the current paradigm (person-in-environment) and incorporate a social justice-based paradigm to increase the efficacy of practice, research, and education."

The third component shaping the national context was the political landscape that saw an emotionally charged presidential election in November of 2020. Some cohort members felt completely distracted by the political spectacle while others felt emboldened in their academic endeavor.

> In the weeks leading up to and during the week of the election, the topic dominated day-to-day discourse and deeply rooted itself in the inner realms of my mind like a rapidly growing seed. I constantly wondered what the defining moments from this election presently taking place would be remembered as years from now and how this will shape the politics of a new decade. (Brian)

> Social work is political, and the field's relationship with politics may be more apparent now than ever. This is seen in both the racial tensions that seem to be coming to a head, and with a president who is challenging some of the most fundamental rights of our citizens, including the right to vote. This is a reminder of the importance of our work. (Jana)

> Aside from the national context serving as a distraction to completing assignments, which was certainly the case most of the time, this perfect storm of national adversity was a prime reminder that this intellectual pursuit to help shed light and formulate solutions to social issues is a venture most needed. (Jennie)

Jennie reflected that the whirlwind that shaped the fall of 2020 certainly created a tumultuous period of uncertainty. Despite this, we were able to recognize and manage the unprecedented challenges faced as well as learn to see the silver lining through it all. "The contradictions I encountered throughout this semester in the School of Social Work during an election year and a pandemic created this space for me to analyze my own self and where I fit in this new culture." She also stated:

> My cohort affectionately named our experience "The Struggle Bus." I selfishly felt some comfort that my colleagues who had recently finished school experienced the same difficulties while juggling demands and producing quality work. To ask more of myself daily was no easy task. That coupled with the world in chaos as we work through an international pandemic.

Interpersonal Connections

Crucial support came from interpersonal connections with each other and with faculty members. These connections were not made without some difficulty, but ultimately proved to be key in navigating our first semester successfully. The social distancing practices that became the hallmark of the COVID-19 pandemic created unique difficulties for this group as they worked to integrate themselves into this new social environment.

> It is difficult not to be able to truly socialize with classmates. While we can talk over Zoom and from six feet apart in some classes, we are not able to go out to lunch or coffee on breaks, or any of those other informal interactions that help to form connections between people. (Fahmida)

Not only did we enter the program expecting to bond with each other, but with faculty members as well. Barriers to socialization with each other prevented similar interactions with faculty in the same way. Kasandra explained, "As personable as our professors have been, we all missed the experience of bonding with each other and other faculty members." The pandemic restrictions heightened the already stressful process of getting to know new people, even more so for students who hold cultural and language differences and were already worried about navigating those differences while forging new relationships. From an international perspective, Fahmida noted:

> Limited knowledge about American culture and the cultural differences I have with my other classmates sometimes makes socializing challenging for me. The concern of not doing anything culturally inappropriate to them also has sometimes held me from socializing with them. My limited English language skills have always been an obstacle for socializing with American classmates, even when I was a master's student.

Despite limitations, we did create a bond that proved to be a huge help for each of us individually. Jennie elaborated:

> Despite these limitations and challenges, I would say I could develop a sense of belonging with my cohort members as we all went through this together and could build a support system that I believe will get stronger in the future.

Cohort connection is especially important in dealing with feelings of isolation that both the pandemic and any doctoral program can bring. Coming together to mitigate some of the stressors of doctoral education was exemplified by communicating needs as a group. For example, during a particularly stressful time, we came together to collectively ask for an extension on an assignment. In reflection of our efforts, Jennie also shared:

> Embarking on a PhD is primarily a self-driven effort that can produce feelings of isolation and disconnection as opposed to the undergraduate experience. Countless hours spent separately reading, writing, and staring at a laptop screen can make you feel like the only person in the world going through that experience. Given the increased feelings of isolation, a higher level of importance is placed on building relationships with fellow cohort members to create a shared atmosphere of understanding that we are all going through the same academic challenges.

Through this isolating process, we found comfort in knowing that there were other people around us who were going through those same feelings and struggles. We were not alone. We had each other. While the lack of ability to truly spend time together hindered fostering those cohort connections in some ways, it also created a common experience between us all. No one

else in the world began a social work PhD program at this university during this unprecedented time. Fahmida reflected, "So, in short, this journey cannot be made alone, and the support of my colleagues and fellow accomplices is not only essential but has been an added blessing for us all during this crucial period in our lives."

In addition to connections with each other, faculty mentorship and connection proved to be a tremendous support. This support came in the form of flexibility, encouragement, and sharing their own experiences. The genuine feeling that faculty understood and respected our individual lives outside of the program was invaluable. Professors made as many accommodations as they could to ensure we were still able to get the most out of the semester, despite near constant chaos going on around us. Furthermore, professors were transparent about their own experiences and struggles, and invited us to share our thoughts far beyond basic course material. This included creating space to be open about the anxieties the current socio-political context created, as well as the typical anxieties one might expect from beginning a doctoral program.

> Each of our instructors has been extremely open about expectations, and honest about the aggregate feeling around the uncertainty regarding how we will meet due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They were also open in discussing how racial tensions in our nation may trigger some of us, and how we can feel free to openly share our concerns in class, with them during office hours, or with the student support center. (Jana)

We felt the support and encouragement received from both each other and faculty members was vitally important. Kasandra described, "[One professor's] 'it can be done' attitude was encouraging and reaffirming." Two professors candidly shared their experiences of the 2016 election. They were open and transparent about some of the difficulties they had experienced and shared some insight on what may arise for us both personally and professionally based on the election outcome. During one class, we were all asked to reflect on what we would do when election results came back, and how it may impact our individual areas of interest. We all came to the PhD program to advocate for a specific population through research. Identifying how that group may be impacted by either the existing or a new administration was concerning for all of us. We were surprised to hear from one of our professors that they themselves would set out to protest if election results were not accepted. At that moment, we bonded and felt supported. We felt camaraderie, and most of all we felt glad that our values were shared by our instructor. The shared experiences with each other, and flexibility and encouragement from faculty embodied the sentiment of being in the right place, at the right time for us all.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges

All the cohort members wanted to succeed in the program, but this was new ground. There were no rules or instructions on matriculating through a PhD program during a pandemic or national state of emergency. Attending an already rigorous and intensive program was new territory within itself. Developing methods to adapt proved to be needed and necessary to move forward, and in many ways, became instinctive. The human need for connectedness during a crisis showed itself in various ways during our experience. This section discusses a collective summary of some of the techniques that helped us progress through the semester.

Staying connected virtually took effort, but it was critical in maintaining the support system we needed as we were acclimating to doctoral studies. To stay connected, we formed a group chat via text, attended monthly Virtual PhD Student Happy Hour sessions created by student members of the doctoral program committee, and checked in with each other via text or call on assignment completion. As odd as it seems, a funny GIF in the group chat at midnight when we were all up working on projects went a long way. Fahmida's reflection regarding virtual connectedness entailed:

> Knowing the fact that we all are in the same situation due to COVID-19 helped me connect with my cohort. The group chat made it easier to communicate with each other as well as to feel connected to each other. Additionally, while doing the school projects, especially statistics assignments, I reached out to my cohort members which eventually made me feel like I was bonding. I did most of the classes online. When anyone joined online for any reason that also made me feel happy and connected.

Flaherty (2020) highlighted a study examining faculty mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, showing data indicating higher stress levels, faculty struggling with online teaching adaptations, and secondary trauma. University of Georgia traditionally offered its PhD curriculum in face-to-face classroom settings. To reformat teaching methods with little notice or preparation seemed to be taxing for professors and staff.

To make the most of limited face-to-face time, before or after the classes we did have together, we arrived early to meet with our cohort. While it was not much time, we were able to make the most of it. We put effort into arriving early, which gave the group a sense of solidarity and respect. We used this time to discuss classwork, vent about the madness going on in the world, and check in with each other. Brian shared his view about connectedness and the classroom experience:

> There was limited connectedness due to COVID-19 and the virtual format, but we were all going through the same unprecedented situation, so the patience, understanding, and willingness to find different ways to connect was useful. Certainly, support is vital to getting through a PhD program under normal circumstances, let alone what we are going through.

Meeting with professors during allotted office hours (and beyond) proved an important strategy to stay connected with them, as well as to obtain information about their existing projects and research opportunities. Jana stated:

> [Our instructors] have been open in discussing how racial tensions in our nation may trigger some of us, and how we can feel free to openly share our concerns in class, with them during office hours, or with the student support center. This held true for the duration of the semester in discussions with instructors during and after class time, and even in more discussions which were scheduled.

Jana also decided to refocus and cope by joining a protest against forced sterilizations being performed on Latin American immigrant female detainees in a South Georgia detention facility. She also engaged in research with an organization that works with mixed-status families separated by detention or deportation. Bowe and colleagues (2021) discussed in their research the mental health and well-being benefits of giving back, especially during a crisis. They argued that volunteering or supporting a cause-built community's cohesion can also reduce the anxiety of the person providing support. With advocacy being one method of refocusing, we all normalized feelings and asked for help when we needed it. Kasandra shared:

> My anxiety level during the pandemic was at an all-time high. Starting an academic program in the middle of the pandemic and so much racial tension only heightened it. Learning to ask for extra support from my department and attend to my mental health became necessary.

Learning to address anxiety, attend to our well-being, and identify the "contradiction" of the unknowing scholar in embracing our lack of knowledge, all culminated during this period. Imposter syndrome and the questioning of belongingness were also factors. Jennie shared:

> Embracing the contradiction of the unknowing scholar was important for me in being able to feel a sense of belonging. Before understanding that other people in academia felt this way, it felt like maybe I just didn't belong. I think this may have related to my cohort members and our interactions because it helped me to realize that no one has it all figured out. Coming into the program, it felt like everyone else had it together, and I just slipped through somehow. So, learning that other people feel this contradiction helped me to feel closer to my cohort and to really see that we were all on the same (or very similar) page.

In hindsight, many of the strategies we used were more instinctive than intentional. For future students who may find themselves in unpredictable environments, developing intentional strategies may prove beneficial not only for the students but also for whatever program they are a part of, as the success of any program depends on the students' success.

Implications

Through shared experiences and reflections of progressing through the first year of a social work doctoral program during a pandemic, we learned a great deal about managing stress and overcoming challenges in academia during periods of uncertainty. From the challenges themselves to the stress-mitigating and support-maximizing strategies utilized, doctoral students at any stage of the process and faculty may learn from these experiences to better prepare for the next period of uncertainty. Thus, this section will provide recommendations for both students and faculty to best enable a supportive academic environment that facilitates success during times of instability.

For Students

In periods of uncertainty, relationship-building and forming peer support systems are crucial in reducing feelings of isolation (Wang & DeLaquil, 2020). In our case, we were physically divided given the virtual format adopted during the pandemic, which meant we had to consciously find novel methods to form relationships with one another. While virtual conversations laid a foundation, some classes were offered in-person which allowed us to utilize some face-to-face time. Additionally, normalizing each other's negative feelings during periods of instability provided comfort and understanding. In line with normalizing feelings, it is also recommended that students acknowledge and embrace the differences between each other in the cohort. Each student brings something unique to the cohort and each student possesses different strengths, which can be utilized to the benefit of the entire cohort. If one student excels in writing but another shines in statistics, students should work collaboratively to benefit all involved as they engage in the research and the publication process.

When building relationships with faculty, students should take responsibility for informal mentorship and asking for help when they need it (Wang & DeLaquil, 2020). For our cohort, it was especially important to have ample opportunities to connect with faculty members, whether they were our current advisors or not. The openness and willingness of faculty to have one-on-one meetings with students led to new insights and oftentimes opportunities to collaborate, which was essential for us as growing scholars. Branching out by sending an email, attending office hours, and scheduling Zoom conference calls are all appropriate methods for enhancing informal mentorship. Proactive efforts with faculty were almost always rewarded with stronger connections, a sense of support, and shared compassion.

For Faculty

Faculty members looking to create a supportive environment for students in times of instability should begin with exhibiting compassion and understanding for doctoral students. Indeed, faculty members who were flexible and understood their students as individuals who will one day likely become peers, as opposed to viewing them as subordinates, were the most helpful. Getting to know students beyond their research interests and remaining empathetic to various life circumstances demonstrated a genuine care for the students as people, which provided much-needed support in our eyes. One instructor even invited our cohort to their home for a socially distanced lunch and conversation following the final class meeting. This allowed for invaluable connection forming and an opportunity to get to know each other better. To note, over some amazing fajitas, it was also the place we decided to write this collective autoethnography.

Instructors who were both receptive and adaptive to student learning needs were able to effectively teach in hybrid formats with both in-person and online modalities. Responding to the explicit needs of the students made the unprecedented educational period transition seamlessly into a productive space for learning, regardless of format, and made us all feel a little more normal. Above all, compassion, flexibility, and transparency from faculty were instrumental in

making us feel welcome and needed in the culture and space of social work academia during a time of uncertainty.

Finally, we recommend that faculty and university administrators prioritize clear communication and active efforts towards public relations. Aristovnik and colleagues (2020) found that university faculty and staff's public relations was one of the largest forms of support for students during the pandemic. Our experiences were consistent with announcements put out in the dean's weekly digest updating us on the latest developments about the pandemic, university efforts, and other political and social matters. Additionally, we received time-specific announcements from the dean regarding election results and trial verdicts that encouraged students to take time, reflect, and reach out for supportive resources if needed. These consistent reminders of alignment within our school administration were a grounding reinforcement for us.

Conclusion

Throughout our first year of the doctoral program in the field of social work at University of Georgia, a Research I University, we experienced great uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic, racial tension, and political tension as a result of the 2020 presidential election. In acclimating to the pressure of first year of doctoral studies, we became each other's lifelines. Staying connected virtually, making the most of face-to-face time, meeting with professors during allotted office hours, getting active in the community, normalizing feelings of uncertainty, and asking for help when we needed it became our strategies to manage the stress and challenges we faced during our first semester as a cohort. The roots of acceptance and normalization of uncertainty, in addition to a problem-solving focus, may be due to our post-positivist and constructivist lenses (e.g., Al-Ababneh, 2020).

The role of our instructors and administration was also key in bolstering our aim to remain grounded throughout a very chaotic time. Their transparency, clear communication, and candor created a sense of trust and assurance which was needed during this period of uncertainty. They were consistent, aligned, and honest when they did not know the answers to our endless questions. This made a difference for us. It is our hope that this collective autoethnography will provide students, faculty, and administrators with detailed insight to our experiences, as well as assist in navigating challenges during uncertain times.

Final Thoughts

Justice League made it through what had the potential to be an anarchic first semester. In reflection of our experiences used to create this collective autoethnography it is with the understanding that the strategies implemented were the result of a supportive and nurturing learning environment. We also found that dedicated effort from our cohort to support each other was critical in our collective success. Being willing to show up for one another even when we ourselves were drained, disoriented, and fatigued due to rigorous classes and the utter madness we knew as 2020, highlighted the solidarity of who we were becoming as a cohort. Our relationships are what kept us engaged, and we are pleased to say are still a large part of our strategy in pursuing successful PhD careers.

References

Albright, J. N., & Hurd, N. M. (2020). Marginalized identities, Trump-related distress, and the mental health of underrepresented college students. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *65*(3–4), 381–396. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12407

Albright, J. N., & Hurd, N. M. (2021). Activism, social support, and Trump-related distress: Exploring associations with mental health. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *16*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000316

Aristovnik, A., Kerzic, D., Ravselj, D., Tomazevic, N., & Umek, L. (2020). Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on life of higher education students: A global perspective. *Sustainability*, *12*(20). https://doi.org/10.3390/su12208438

Banks, S. (2016). Everyday ethics in professional life: Social work as ethics work. *Ethics and social welfare*, *10*(1), 35–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2015.1126623

Blankenberger, B., & Williams, A. M. (2020). COVID and the impact on higher education: The essential role of integrity and accountability. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, *42*(3), 404–423. https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2020.1771907

Bowe, M., Wakefield, J. R., Kellezi, B., Stevenson, C., McNamara, N., Jones, B. A., Sumich, A., & Heym, N. (2021). The mental health benefits of community helping during crisis: Coordinated helping, community identification and sense of unity during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *32*(3), 521–535. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2520

Browning, M. H. E. M., Larson, L. R., Sharaievska, I., Rigolon, A., McAnirlin, O., Mullenbach, L., Cloutier, S., Vu, T. M., Thomsen, J., Reigner, N., Metcalf, E. C., D'Antonio, A., Helbich, M., Bratman, G. N., & Alvarez, H. O. (2021). Psychological impacts from COVID-19 among university students: Risk factors across seven states in the United States. *PLOS ONE*, *16*(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245327

Campbell, F., & Valera, P. (2020). The only thing new is the cameras: A study of U.S. college students' perceptions of police violence on social media. *Journal of Black Studies*, *51*(7), 654–670. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934720935600

Dávalos, L. M., Austin, R. M., Balisi, M. A., Begay, R. L., Hofman, C. A., Kemp, M. E., Lund, J. R., Monroe C., Mychajliw, A. M., Nelson, E. A., Nieves-Colon, M. A., Redondo, S. A., Sabin S., Tsosie, K. S., & Yracheta, J. M. (2020). Pandemics' historical role in creating inequality. *Science*, *368*(6497), 1322–1323. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.abc8953

Ellis, C., Adams, T., & Bochner, A. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, *36*(4(138)), 273–290.

Flaherty, C. (2020, November 19). *Faculty pandemic stress is now chronic*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/11/19/faculty-pandemic-stress-now-chronic

Hadden, J. (2020, June 25). How the top 25 colleges and universities in the US are responding to the Black Lives Matter protest. *Insider*. https://www.businessinsider.com/college-top-us-universities-respond-black-lives-matter-protests-2020-6

Johnson, T.P., Feeney, M.K., Jung, H., Frandell, A., Caldarulo, M., Michalegko, L., Islam, S., & Welch, E.W. (2021). COVID-19 and the academy: Opinions and experiences of university-based scientists in the U.S. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *8*, 146. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00823-9

Lee, M. (2020, October 05). College students upended by the pandemic wrestle with yet another challenge: How to vote this fall? *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/%20politics/college-student-vote-coronavirus/2020/10/05/e725a744-fde5-11ea-8d05-9beaaa91c71f_story.html

Al-Ababneh, M. M. (2020). *Linking ontology, epistemology and research methodology*. Science & Philosophy, *8*(1), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.23756/sp.v8i1.500

Nagler, R. H., Vogel, R. I., Gollust, S. E., Rothman, A. J., Fowler, E. F., & Yzer, M. C. (2020). Public perceptions of conflicting information surrounding COVID-19: Results from a nationally representative survey of U.S. adults. *PLOS ONE*, *15*(10), e0240776. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240776

Nguyen, T. T., Criss, S., Michaels, E. K., Cross, R. I., Michaels, J. S., Dwivedi, P., Huang, D., Hsu, E., Mukhija, K., Nguyen, L. H., Yardi, I., Allen, A. M., Nguyen, Q. C., & Gee, G. C. (2021). Progress and push-back: How the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd impacted public discourse on race and racism on Twitter. *SSM – Population Health*, *15*, 100922. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100922

Wang, L., & DeLaquil, T. (2020). The isolation of doctoral education in the times of COVID-19: Recommendations for building relationships within person-environment theory. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *39*(7), 1346 –1350. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1823326

Wilson, B. L., & Wolfer, T. A. (2020). Reducing police brutality in African American communities: Potential roles for social workers in congregations. *Social Work and Christianity*, *47*(3), 66–84. https://www.nacsw.org/Publications/SWC/SWC47_3.pdf#page=71

About the Authors: Jana L. Woodiwiss, LMSW is PhD Candidate, School of Social Work, University of Georgia, Athens, GA (jlw70925@uga.edu); Brian D. Graves, MS is PhD Candidate, School of Social Work, University of Georgia, Athens, GA (bgraves3@uga.edu); Jennie Pless, LMSW is PhD Candidate, School of Social Work, University of Georgia, Athens, GA (jennie.pless@uga.edu); Fahmida Afroz, MSW is PhD Candidate, School of Social Work,

University of Georgia, Athens, GA (fahmida@uga.edu); Kasandra Dodd, LICSW is PhD Candidate, School of Social Work, University of Georgia, Athens, GA (kasandra.dodd@uga.edu).