

## The Ethics of Self-care in Higher Education

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*In this literature review, we seek to work through the implicit dilemma of the ethics of self-care in higher education. The pressure to meet the multiple demands of higher education, alongside personal goals and diverse value-systems, can make it difficult to prioritize self-care. Individuals in higher education often seek to meet their goals through self-sacrificing practices which can lead to stress and burnout. We used authentic leadership theory to present our conclusions, that self-care in higher education is an ethic, and integral to meeting higher education goals. Authentic leadership promotes communion with self and the resultant effect of attaining balance. This article presents selected self-care practices which can support emotional, mental, social, and physical needs in higher education.*

Keywords: Self-care, ethics, authentic leadership, higher education, well-being

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I call for each of us to come to our own understanding of the importance of inner values. For it is these inner values which are the source of both an ethically harmonious world and the individual peace of mind, confidence, and happiness we all seek (Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, 2012, pp. 122-123).

In this article, we conduct a literature review to work through the implicit dilemma of the ethics of self-care in higher education. Self-care is a pattern of learned, purposeful, and continuous behaviors. It includes practices which foster, reinforce, and sustain well-being, with a focus on the soul and knowledge of the self (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). Higher education (HE) is comprised of a wide range of students, faculty, administrative and supporting staff occupations in postsecondary educational institutions (Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century, 1998). This mixed demographic has diverse needs, goals, and responsibilities (see Block-Lerner & Cardaciotto 2016; Jungblut, Vukasovic & Stensaker, 2015; Peseta, Barrie, & McLean, 2017). The pressure to meet the multiple demands of HE, alongside personal goals and diverse value-systems, can make it difficult to prioritize self-care (see Christie, Cree & Tett, 2010; Lewis, 2014; McArthur, 2011; McCune, Hounsell, Rashid, Omar, & Shah, 2016). As such, HE lifestyles which are propelled by distinctive career or academic goals may include self-sacrificing, self-compromising practices which can lead to chronic stress (see Eddy & Gaston-Gayles, 2008; Hendel & Horn, 2008;

Manathunga, Selkrig, Sadler, & Keamy, 2017; Sutton, 2017; Yeo, Bennett, McNichol, & Merkle, 2015).

The research questions guiding our article are: what is self-care in higher education, and how can individuals in higher education practice self-care ethically? Through our research process, we noticed that authentic leadership (AL) theory aligns with the ethics of self-care as it places importance on understanding “the self” (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). We found AL useful for understanding self-care in HE. AL is a pattern of transparent and ethical behaviors with emphasis on the extent to which individuals are true to their selves, their values, and their beliefs (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009). AL principles can bring about greater self-awareness and self-development (Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Cunha, 2012). AL encourages balance (Vitello-Cicciu, Weatherford, Gemme, Glass, & Seymour-Route, 2014), thus reducing burnout (Rego et al., 2012). Balance is a state of peace, equilibrium, and stability (Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011; Merriam-Webster, 2017). In this literature review, balance in HE refers to the ability to achieve and sustain a state of equilibrium. We consider equilibrium in terms of emotional, mental, social, and physical well-being.

We began our research through the lens of what self-care meant to us in our service professions, leadership histories in our work contexts, and many years of experience as students, using a reflective analytical approach (Bolton, 2014). We conducted a comprehensive literature search through books, online journals, online databases including SAGE, Taylor and Francis, and Google scholar, using the key terms: “self-care, ethics,” with the inclusion criteria of “higher education.” We also consulted online bookstores for the most frequently reviewed books on ethics and self-care. We used an analytical approach which identifies themes in the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The emergent themes aligned with health-care connotations of self-care. Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017). Therefore, we framed our analysis of the literature through WHO’s definition of health, and we categorized self-care practices into mental, emotional, social, and physical habits which are essential to well-being throughout the HE context.

We present a review of literature about challenges in HE, the ethics of self-care, and then we consider what the AL theoretical framework offers in order to understand the ethics of self-care. Finally, we present a self-care plan which is guided by AL principles. We include a wide range of references for this review so that readers can turn to relevant resources to build an individualized plan which is supported by research.

### **Challenges of Higher Education**

According to education executive, Strikwerda (2015), the top challenges facing HE are raising graduation rates, setting high standards, improving the training of academic administrative leadership, fostering responsible board governance, meeting the federal expectations, and financing renovation. Health and wellness are not in those top six, much less self-care. However, HE makes multiple demands on students, faculty, and staff, who all have to balance personal and professional concerns (Dea, 2012). Sound health can be a challenge for individuals in HE (Abouserie, 2006; Block-Lerner & Cardaciotto, 2016), as there is an ongoing risk of stress and burnout.

Burnout is most often described as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and poor personal accomplishment resulting from chronic exposure to stress (Ahola, Toppinen-Tanner, & Seppanen, 2017; Freudenberge, 1975; Pervez & Halbesleben, 2017). In HE, it is a risk factor for staff (Freudenberger & Richelson, 1981; Gold, 1988; Jiang, Tripp, & Hong, 2017; Kyriacou, 2006) and students (Cortes, Mostert, & Els, 2014; Dyrbye & Shanafelt, 2016; Galbraith & Merrill, 2012; Jacoby, Smith, Pellosie, & Lamparella, 2016; Olwage & Mostert, 2014; Stoeber, Childs, Hayward, & Feast, 2010).

### **Challenges for faculty**

High student to faculty ratio is one of the causes for burnout among faculty in HE (Blix, Cruise, Mitchell, & Blix, 1994). Research conducted in the United States, showed that 20% of 265 university faculty members reported burnout, with more female faculty members experiencing emotional exhaustion, and men showing higher mean depersonalization (Lackritz, 2004). In another study, faculty members often complained about the many demands placed on their time, and the resultant impact on the quality of their teaching, they still strove for excellence (Birkhead, 2010). Furthermore, students have declared that their academic performance is enhanced when they have increased access to faculty (Bryan, Weaver, Anderson-Johnson, & Lindo, 2013), and positive interactions with their academic and administrative teams (Graunke & Woosley, 2005). Therefore, when faculty attempt to provide good service, in addition to multiple work demands, they increase their risk for burnout.

Further stresses include fewer tenured jobs, and limited permanent job opportunities (Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT], 2015). This lack of job security has contributed to increased stress among aspiring academics, and it can be exacerbated with crises such as the move to lay off 15% of academic staff from a Canadian University (CAUT, 2016). Additionally, funds assigned to research funding agencies have been reduced by 25-30%, making it more difficult for faculty and students to access financial resources to support their research programs (CAUT, 2013). Therefore, the perception of minimal resources for too many people leads to increased competition and stress (Doughty, 2016).

Universities might have traditionally been regarded as low stress environments, but research on occupational stress among academics has indicated that stress is alarmingly widespread and on the rise (Levecque, Anseel, De, Van, & Gisle, 2017). Stress can be exacerbated when individuals have to put personal goals on hold to meet HE goals. While HE seeks to foster knowledge advancement and human development through research communities, staff often have to sacrifice pursuing a family, or achieving other personal goals outside of academia (Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013). Research among Australian faculty reported that 51% placed other life goals on hold, in favor of an academic career, and 56% said their job was a source of stress (McInnis, 1999). A career in academia is now ranked as the third most stressful in Canada (Doughty, 2016).

### **Challenges for students**

Like faculty, students have reported increased stress and burnout due to academic and financial demands associated with HE (Cox, Schmitt, Bobrowski, & Graham, 2005). One in two PhD students experiences psychological distress, and one in three is at risk of a common psychiatric disorder (Levecque, et al., 2017). In a 2016 survey of Canadian university students,

90% of respondents reported feeling overwhelmed by all they had to do, over 40% reported stress as the number one impact on their academic performance, and 71% wanted more information on stress reduction (Alberta Canada Reference Group, 2016). The demands to score high on assessments, complete research, and mentor other students, have resulted in a culture of action and behaviors that students do not genuinely want to perform (Hewlin, 2003). This tends to lead to further stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion, and an increased rate of attrition, due to the conflicting tensions that students experience (Jairam & Kahl Jr., 2012). Similarly, Wisker (2012) pointed out that students often feel pressured due to their perceptions of low status, their lack of power and control, the demands of a high workload, the financial burdens, and the sense of competition. These pressures are compounded by deadlines, volunteering, and other extra-curricular activities that are strongly suggested for academic progress, success, growth, and development (Devine & Hunter, 2016). A student's natural inclination is to excel at all costs especially if they are committed to the degree program (Willcoxson, Cotter, & Joy, 2011), therefore, self-care needs may be postponed.

Considering these stresses for staff and students, self-care in HE is a priority for action. Self-care is necessary to create balance and prevent burnout (Tan & Castillo, 2014). Brems (2000) described this balance as being able to meet the demands of our jobs, relationships, personal growth, and holistic health and well-being.

### **The Ethics of Self-Care**

Self-care is a matter of survival as it sustains and fosters good health (Taylor & Renpenning, 2011). It is also an ethic, to ensure that one can function responsibly, especially in relation to others. Ethics is the study of "oughts" and relationships, including how we ought to relate to ourselves, to others, and to the earth (Marino, 2010). It is useful to think of these "oughts" as a code of values to guide an individual's choices and actions, which then determine "the purpose and the course" of one's life (Rand, 1964, pp. 188-190). Values are wide-ranging even in a singular context. They project into actions and prompt debate as to what is acceptable conduct, and what is right or wrong. Values in ethics can veer into complex directions when individuals confront uncomfortable scenarios, and they have to make tough choices.

In HE teaching and research, ethics matter when individuals have to negotiate between their core values and principles, requiring compromise with communally held beliefs, and the peculiarities of individual situations (Healey et al., 2013). That is a potential cause for personal tension between beliefs and actions. That tension increases when individuals have to prioritize community values, and academic or professional goals, over self-care needs. However, the ethics of care respects the claims of the particular, which happens in relationships with others, and calls into question, the universalistic and abstract rules of the dominant (Held, 2006). By extension, the ethics of self-care respects the particular, even the personal, sometimes over the universal and dominant. Contrary to common beliefs, the personal aspect of self-care is not an indulgent, escapist time to engage in mindless pleasure-seeking (White, 2014).

Self-care is an ethic because it is a social responsibility. It is a duty to care for the self, because it allows one to be a responsible citizen (Foucault, 1997). It requires knowing the "self" and knowing rules of acceptable conduct or principles (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988). These principles are not preset values, but an interior life which must be worked out by an individual, in order to be able to act responsibly. It is work, requiring effort, because as The Dalai Lama cautions, "our inner lives are something we ignore at our own peril, and many of the greatest

problems we face in today's world are the result of such neglect" (Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho, 2012, pp. 78-79). Responsible, ethical self-care begins with facing the inner life and knowing the self. That is the basis for turning to AL, to frame how individuals in HE may practice ethical self-care. AL emphasizes self-knowledge as essential to ethical leadership of self and others. It can help to foster resilience and balance in HE.

Some occupations embed self-care within the work ethic. Conscious and purposeful self-care in some human service occupations is an "ethical duty" if professionals are expected to provide good treatment to clients (Williams et al., 2010, p. 322). In that sense, self-care is a way of acting responsibly to others. After all, Irvine (2009, p. 127) asked, "how can we hope to care for others if we, ourselves, are crippled by ill health, burnout, or resentment?" Norcross and Barnett (2007) argued that self-care goes beyond the management of such problems, and encompasses action to prevent difficulties from even occurring. Likewise, for professionals and students in HE, self-care can be seen a means to preempt stress and challenges. Self-care is a continuous, proactive process for sustaining well-being throughout student life or career development. It requires self-knowledge and strength of effort (Braime, 2013). This article proposes that AL offers individuals an ethical way of organizing self-care practices, which can sustain well-being.

These perspectives on self-care resonated with us because we hail from teaching and nursing professions, which place emphasis on service to others. In our professional histories, we have found that compassion fatigue and stress can challenge self-care efforts. Further to that, we recognized that such perspectives on the ethics of self-care are just as relevant for us as HE students. Students' work, assignments, and school demands pose similar stress risks to the professionals in HE. At the start of our research we thought of self-care as taking a break to treat the self, relax, or grab a moment to unwind from busy routines, distinguishable from medical self-care which is about managing illness. In reviewing the literature, we came to recognize that self-care is proactive and planned. It is certainly health-care, and it requires tremendous discipline for success (Braime, 2013). To that end, we devised a self-care plan which a range of readers can use in their individualized situations in HE. This plan is the outcome of our reflective analytical approach to this literature review (Bolton, 2014), and our recognition that self-care is not reactionary or interrupting crisis and burnout, but an intentional process to preempt crisis in HE.

### **Limitations**

The limitation of our literature review is that it cannot offer recommendations for all the self-care needs of every demographic in the HE contexts. Self-care practices are not generalizable (Braime, 2013). They are personalized actions which are shaped by one's values. Self-care has an experiential component in that it includes reflection and action in conjunction with real world encounters. It requires a kind of "self-critical, self-reflective, self-transformative" attitude to the self, and relationships with others, in a deliberate "way of thinking that is itself a practice, an exercise, or an activity that serves also to guide subsequent action" (Hroch, 2013, p. 5). From that lens, this article posits that self-care is value-driven and action-directed. The dilemma of self-care may be the tension between values and actions which are in conflict, or values which contradict each other. It can also be the tension in meeting HE professional or academic goals, through actions which may clash with attending to all of one's basic needs. We propose that AL can help with that tension.

### **Self-care within the Authentic Leadership Framework**

Self-care is the performance or practice of activities that individuals initiate and perform on their own behalf to maintain life, health, and well-being (Denyes, Orem, & Bekel, 2001, p. 249). It requires planning, because it explicitly includes the complex processing of self-awareness and self-regulation, balancing connections between the self and others, and balancing connections with the larger community through civic and professional involvement (Baker, 2003). This complex process facilitates holistic wellness. AL is a useful theoretical framework for fostering well-being and self-development in HE, because it attends to self-awareness and self-regulation as a means of promoting and maintaining resilience (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004).

AL draws upon positive ethical climates and psychological capital such as hope, resilience, self-efficacy, and self-confidence, to promote leadership and self-development (Dimovski, Ferjan, Marič, Uhan, Jovanović, & Janežič, 2012). AL can facilitate self-leadership which is necessary for effective self-care (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009). When one adopts an AL framework in one's life, it helps to create balance and avoid burnout (Laschinger, Wong, & Grau, 2013). Research shows the benefits of AL: a professional reported that AL helped her to manage guilt about her inability to work longer hours, she ceased comparing herself to co-workers who could work longer, and she prevented burnout by attaining balance between her work and family life (Vitello-Cicciu et al., 2014). A similar study reported that AL assists people through its positive effects on "occupational coping self-efficacy" with job demands, and the development of resilience and practices to protect against burnout and poor mental health (Laschinger, Borgogni, Consiglio, & Read, 2015). AL has also been shown to improve individuals' well-being, job satisfaction, and learning (Bamford, Wong, & Laschinger, 2013).

### **Elements of the Authentic Leadership Theory**

The AL construct has four dimensions: self-awareness, balanced processing, internalized moral perspective, and relational transparency. Self-awareness in AL refers to the extent to which individuals understand their sense-making of the world, their personal strengths and limitations, and their impact on others (Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). The individual addresses questions such as: who am I, what are my values, what is my purpose, what drives me, are my actions consistent with what I value, how do others see me, and is this consistent with how I wish to be seen (Shirey, 2015, para. 15).

Self-awareness can inform balanced processing, which is the ability for individuals to analyze data before coming to a decision, with the willingness and openness to seek out views which challenge one's fundamental positions (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Balanced processing harnesses an internalized moral perspective. An internalized moral perspective refers to an individual's ability to set a high standard for moral and ethical conduct (Avolio et al., 2004). This standard manifests in ethical decisions, behaviors, and interactions with others (Waite, Mckinney, Smith-Glasgow, & Meloy, 2014). Also, this standard comes from the individual's virtues, where intentionality about developing a particular attitude is purposefully strengthened and developed through all interactions (Ciulla & Forsyth, 2011).

An internalized moral perspective helps individuals remain true to their core values. The "authentic" individual acts on personal values and convictions, and by doing what they say they are going to do, they earn respect, trust, and credibility for adhering to their beliefs (Wilson, 2014). When actions are aligned with an internalized moral perspective, then one minimizes the tensions

which may exist between actions and values (Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005). These AL principles strengthen relational transparency. Relational transparency is a concept which describes the extent to which an individual can present the true self to others, and by doing so, is open to others being true to themselves (Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Cunha, 2012). Therefore, although AL addresses individual self-management and wellness, this self-management is in relation to strong connections with other people.

For individuals in HE, these AL principles can offer ways of managing or aligning HE duties and responsibilities with one's needs, values, and principles. AL can be a strategic approach to ethical self-care in HE, as AL places emphasis on knowing and developing the self. This is not an individualistic course of action, but part of ethical relations with others. An AL outlook encourages individuals to prioritize and schedule necessary activities to care for the self and enhance self-development, so they can be the "best self" possible and function at an optimum state.

### **Discussion: A Practical Application of an Authentic Leadership Self-care Plan**

Epimeleia from the Greek "melete" means exercise or meditation, and connotes a care for the self or "heautou," that suggests a practice requiring work, repetition, attention, and effort of body and mind (Hroch, 2013, p. 3). We examined a range of examples of self-care practices and resources for HE, then we applied the research questions to ourselves, in a self-study process (Lassonde, Galman, & Kosnik, 2009) to ask: what is self-care in HE for me, and how can I practice self-care ethically? Our analysis of self-care practices from a range of sources led us to frame the AL dimensions as questions:

1. Self-awareness: What is optimum emotional, mental, social, and physical wellness for me?
2. Balanced processing: What are the resources to help me foster and sustain this wellness by incorporating sensible self-care practices into my agenda?
3. Internalized moral perspective: How do these self-care practices harness my core values to help me achieve balance with myself and others?
4. Relational transparency: How can I hold myself accountable to my colleagues, peers, mentees, and mentors in HE; family and friends in my domestic life; wider community?

We recommend these questions as the start of a template for a self-care plan. Such a plan can be part of an orientation package for new students. It can also be part of routine professional development activities for employees in HE.

We aligned the AL dimensions to strategic emotional, mental, social, and physical self-care practices (Table 1). The table is a practical application of AL. It highlights some self-care practices which have been helpful in our experiences in HE, as students, and as instructors. Some sections of the plan include practices which are already mastered habits. Good habits should not be omitted from a self-care plan. As part of self-awareness, they can be strengthened, or recognized for their roles in sustaining well-being. Then there are practices which are goals. We recommend filling out a few sections which need the most attention. Guise (2004) is a self-help resource with strategies to transform goals into mini-habits. Mini-habits can eventually become long-lasting, healthy habits. This plan does not specify timelines for executing goals. However, a SMART goal strategy (Lawlor, 2012) can support the inclusion of a time-frame for accomplishing these goals.

Staff and students can turn to their HE institution for further resources to strengthen support in those areas.

Table 1

*Exemplar of an Authentic Leadership Self-care Plan for Students or Professionals in HE*

<b>Authentic Leadership Elements</b>	Emotional	Mental	Social	Physical
<b>Self-awareness</b> What is optimum wellness for me?	<i>reflection</i>	<i>meditation</i>	<i>decluttering calendar events</i>	<i>basic needs: exercise, sleep, medical checkups, sensible nutrition</i>
<b>Goal</b>	<i>yes</i>			
<b>Habit</b>		<i>yes</i>		
<b>Mastery</b>			<i>yes</i>	<i>needs improvement</i>
<b>Balanced processing</b> What are the resources to help me foster and sustain wellness?	<i>spiritual practices</i>	<i>mindfulness family-time</i>	<i>consult a financial planner</i>	<i>sanitation and safe dwelling spaces</i>
<b>Goal</b>		<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>	
<b>Habit</b>				
<b>Mastery</b>	<i>yes</i>			<i>yes</i>
<b>Internalized moral perspective:</b> How do these practices harness my core values to have balance with myself and others?	<i>self-empathy</i>	<i>purposeful - allocate a set time for play</i>	<i>resume planning</i>	<i>sports</i>
<b>Goal</b>		<i>needs improvement</i>	<i>yes</i>	
<b>Habit</b>	<i>yes</i>			<i>needs improvement</i>
<b>Mastery</b>				

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<b>Relational transparency</b>	<i>emotional regulation</i>	<i>generosity-volunteer</i>	<i>network</i>	<i>eco-practices-recycling</i>
How can I hold myself accountable to my others in my life?				
<b>Goal</b>	<i>yes</i>			
<b>Habit</b>		<i>needs improvement</i>		<i>yes</i>
<b>Mastery</b>			<i>yes</i>	

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Self-awareness is important in all categories of self-care, as individuals need to understand where they stand in order to develop and adhere to an effective self-care plan. Balanced processing is evident in all self-care categories in terms of being mindful of the necessary resources to achieve self-care goals. An internalized moral perspective helps individuals protect the time carved out to practice self-care, in order to achieve maximum results. When individuals hold themselves to ethical standards, they can be true to themselves in their efforts to achieve personal and professional goals for self-care. Relational transparency serves as a way to harness support for these goals. Individuals can identify someone, or a small trusted team to whom they will be accountable. This fourth dimension of AL solidifies commitment to self-care goals through the support and trust of others. The following section presents examples of self-care practices which can be part of a comprehensive self-care plan. Just as students plan out their course schedules for the semesters ahead, or instructors and staff plan ways to implement occupational goals for the year, this sampling can help to shape a self-care plan, instead of leaving self-care to chance.

**Possible Pathways to Holistic Self-care**

**Emotional self-care**

Emotional self-care is an approach to wellness which fosters, reinforces, and sustains healthy emotional states for those studying and working in HE. HE is a center of intellectual work that sometimes excludes emotion and adding emotion to public academic talk can be perceived as a threat to academic enterprise (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Neumann, 2006). Furthermore, there are ongoing challenges to emotional composure in terms of stressful interpersonal encounters, and urgent program requirements, in research or evaluations, for instructors and students (Bloch, 2012). Reflection (Miller & McGowen, 2010; Valente & Marotta, 2005; Irvine, 2009), spiritual practices (Baker, 2002; Flarity, Gentry, & Mesnikoff, 2013; Yoder, 2010), emotional regulation (Christou-Champi, Farrow, & Webb, 2015; Koole & Rothermund, 2011), and self-empathy (Robinson et al., 2016; Neff & Pommier, 2013), are some of the ways to manage risks to emotional wellness. Awareness of the emotional states which could sabotage HE goals and practicing our management of these states, is sound HE resilience (Woods, 2009). Emotional wellness is about showing kindness to oneself just as one might show care and concern to a friend (Robinson et al., 2016). Students and professionals in HE can turn to the following resources for optimizing emotional self-care:

- Self-Care List: How to Take Care of Your Self While Learning About Oppression (With Unaware People) by Fabian Romero (Romero, n. d.)
- Everything is Awful and I'm Not Okay: Questions to Ask Before Giving Up by Eponis (Eponis, n. d.)

### **Mental self-care**

Mental self-care practices are vital to combatting stress and burnout that may be associated with HE (University at Buffalo, 2017). Deficiencies in practicing mental self-care may result in stress, negative self-talk, anxiety, worry, and withdrawal (The Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of BC, 2013). This can occur because HE has several “important” activities that are competing for time. The decision to make carefully scheduled time to care for the self and put other matters on hold, can also create some mental tension (Tan & Castillo, 2014). Managing this tension requires mental fortitude. It may be a constant inner battle and individuals may feel so overwhelmed that they decide to put more time into completing tasks or meeting the needs of others, rather than being involved in self-care (Fowler, 2015). However, some sensible mental self-care includes practices such as meditation (Pembroke, 2016), mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005), generosity (Fowler, 2015; Maloney, 2014), and purposeful decision making (Tan & Castillo, 2014; University of Michigan, 2016). These practices can help people to become less defensive, unbiased, even-tempered, and this can lead to increased mental perceptual acuity (Valente & Marotta, 2005). Increased mental perceptual acuity is an asset in HE. Students and professionals in HE can turn to the following resources for optimizing mental self-care:

- The Daily Relaxer, by Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning (McKay & Fanning, 2006)
- Online resources: Homewood Health Employee and Family Assistance Plan and mindcheck.ca (University of Calgary, 2017)

### **Social self-care**

Social self-care in HE is strategic decision-making to ensure that social encounters are meeting one's HE goals while fostering wellness and managing stress risks. Academic work can be lonely and isolating (Wilshire, 1990). Conversely, the pressure to participate in a range of social activities can be overwhelming, time-consuming, and financially demanding. Time is critical to HE success (Grove, 2017). Social supports can strengthen the HE experience (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Social wellness can include planning one's resume or a professional dossier, much like the teaching dossier (Kenny and Berenson, 2014), legal and financial planning using SMART goals (Lawlor, 2012), or accessing financial supports, time management in terms of networking or social budgeting (Davenport & Scott, 2016), and critical friends (Braun, 2017; Costa & Kallick, 1993). These are just a few of the ways one can work towards academic and professional goals, while maintaining balance and resilience. Volunteering is one of the networking strategies that can strengthen a dossier while providing social engagement. These selected examples of social self-care can harness resources and strengthen healthy relationships with others. Effective, ethical self-care, or epimeleia heatou, sometimes requires attending to the lessons of a master in terms of support from a trusted guide, counselor, or friend (Foucault, 1997, p. 287). Students and professionals in HE can turn to the following resources for optimizing social self-care:

- Self-Care 101: A Guide to Nourish and Flourish Team YOU by Shelley Hunter-Hillesheim (Hunter-Hillesheim, 2016).
- Online resource: free financial and legal services such as money mentors.ca (Money Mentors, n. d).

### **Physical self-care**

HE poses several risks to physical well-being. HE can contribute to sedentary lifestyles, as well as poor nutrition and sleeping habits, for both students and professionals (Buckworth & Nigg 2010; Yang, An, & Zhu, 2016). Physical self-care includes practices such as exercise, sleep, medical checkups, sensible nutrition, responsible sexual habits and substance use, maintenance of sanitary, comfortable dwelling spaces, and protective measures from criminality. These practices tend to primary physiological needs so individuals can find a wealth of traditional, well documented, scientifically supported resources for physical wellness, in most HE wellness departments. Yet physical wellness can go beyond these traditional principles of wellness. Physical self-care can also include practices which ensure a balanced relationship with the physical, natural environment whether it is in terms of exercising in the outdoors, or seeking outdoor nature spaces for peace and restoration, or even relationships with pets. For others, it can be activism in eco-conscious aspects of their lives. Although more research is needed to better describe relationships between the body in the natural environment and how environmental awareness becomes embodied (Humberstone, 2013), individuals who make environmentally friendly choices in various aspects of their daily lives, often articulate their decisions (eating, travelling, home heating), in terms of how these decisions impact their lives and the environment (Hroch, 2013). This aspect of physical wellness is increasingly making its way in traditional guidelines for meeting physiological needs for wellness, however, ordinary practices which are considered “environmentally-friendly” ways of eating, managing waste, using energy, or traveling are complex (Hroch, 2013). They raise the intersections of ethical self-care and eco-ethics (Gasper, 2014). This is an area of research, which the academic literature does not represent fully, but it is worth exploring beyond this article, as a facet of physical wellness. Students and professionals in HE can turn to the following resources for optimizing physical self-care:

- An appropriate, trusted book for one’s physical needs or see the comprehensive online resource: *mindbodygreen* (Mind Body Green, n. d.).
- Online resources: (Caster, 2014; Elrick, 2016) or Apps such as *boosterbuddy* (Booster Buddy, n. d.)

Most HE institutions have dedicated resources for online reference support. Some HE Wellness Centers that we have identified from our online scan include, The University of British Columbia online resources (The University of British Columbia, 2017), McMaster University has a range of online resources for faculty and students (McMaster University, 2017), University of Calgary, Wellness Centre and Mental Health Services (University of Calgary, 2017), and University at Buffalo Self-care Online Resources (University at Buffalo, 2017). We also encourage HE members to contact your institution’s local wellness centre for personalized self-care guidance.

### **Conclusion**

This article was guided by a critical-reflective approach to the literature. We sought to address self-care in HE, and the ways in which students, instructors, and staff can practice self-care ethically. When we began this research, we were drawn to the tension between self-care and HE education goals for students and academics. Through this research process we came to realize that a self-care plan is not a self-indulgent course of activities; an excuse to avoid responsibilities and miss deadlines; a justification for inappropriate workplace behaviors; a self-isolating activity; or a dabble with fashionable self-help trends without a commitment to one's needs. A self-care plan is hard work. Considering the level of discipline required to make self-care work, some

individuals may find it difficult to practice care of the self while pursuing academic or career goals in HE. Through our review of AL as a means to practice self-care, we realized that HE goals and self-care goals do not need to stand in opposition. They can and should co-exist, to strengthen and support each other.

We recommend AL as a series of principles to guide imperative self-care. AL reiterates the ethics of self-care. AL shows that responsible, ethical self-care begins with knowing the self, practicing the self, and becoming the self. Self-care is an ethic in itself. It is a duty, a necessity, and a responsibility to well-being. HE has a range of risks, which can lead to attrition or illness. Proactively practicing self-care can manage and preempt these risks. The ethics of self-care, inherently means that the sense of duty to self, is a way of being dutiful to others. Self-care occurs in relation to others, and so do the implications of ill health, poor finances, and emotional suffering, especially to our loved ones.

Emotional, mental, social, and physical self-care can help individuals maintain wellness. Considering a spectrum of wellness, reacting, injury, and illness (University of Calgary, 2014), HE students and professionals need to practice self-care so as not to descend into attrition or illness. Self-care, as an ethic, “ought” to be a priority for basic survival and resilience while students and professionals pursue their HE goals. Self-care allows individuals to align their inner core values to be their best selves, thriving in balance and harmony, peace and happiness.

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