



Centering Love as the Foundation of a Racially Just and Decolonizing Student Affairs

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Abstract: In writings on humanizing pedagogy, the concept of love is often presented as the core principle grounding all action. However, love, as it is currently conceptualized, leaves much room for interpretation (hooks, 2000; Levinas, 1998; Matias & Allen, 2013). Therefore, it is critical as educators and Student Affairs professionals we challenge the idea of how we commonly think about love as an abstract notion (“fight hate with love”) and, rather, reimagine what love means within a movement that challenges oppressive structures within Student Affairs. By not recognizing or taking actions to correct higher education’s past acts of indifference (noting the gross injustices against Indigenous populations and the exploited labor and enslavement of Africans rooted within the history of college campuses), we are perpetuating the protection of a historical lie and continuing the legacy of settler colonialism and dehumanization within the profession. In this manuscript, we provide an overview of settler colonialism and its impact in Student Affairs, review how love is academically and culturally defined across fields, and present an alternative framework for building love as an actionable "skill set" that allows educators to move the field toward racial justice and humanization.

Keywords: *Love, racial justice, decolonization, dehumanization, settler colonialism, student affairs*

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Love as Action

Over the last seven years, the American College Personnel Association (ACPA)-College Student Educators International has grappled to fully understand what it means to be a truly socially just field. After much conversation, feedback, and wrestling with the realities of the field in relation to the value of social justice, ACPA leaders penned the document, *A Bold Vision Forward: A Framework for the Strategic Imperative for Racial Justice and Decolonization* (Quaye et al., 2019), that laid out a powerful approach to work in Student Affairs. The framework is focused on equity, inclusion, and transformative change, which Student Affairs educators can utilize to (re)imagine their work and its impact. The framework centers love as the “core” (Quaye et al., 2019, p. 10), the groundwork from which all other transformative action should stem and which guides the underlying principles of humanization, radical democracy, and critical consciousness. The document moves beyond the commonly held conceptualization of love as amorous (hooks, 2000) and extends love to the community as a whole. Additionally, the framework notes that “we must not only resent and be angered at injustice; we must simultaneously be in love with justice” (Quaye et al., 2019, p. 11).

But what does it mean to be *in love with* something? To articulate love in this way is to recognize that love is not simply a non-critical display of emotion, affection, or care. It is not an ethic but rather an actionable concept which can spread throughout a community in tangible ways. In relation to reconstructing a racially just and decolonizing field, we argue that love acts upon the call for justice, which requires particular outcomes and a set of skills, knowledge, and behaviors; we must become competent at love, especially in a field that so heavily centers transformation and development of self and others (Patton et al., 2016).

Here we attempt to help expand upon the framework’s call for building love as an actionable philosophy in Student Affairs and for Student Affairs educators. For the purpose of this paper, we will be using “educator” as an all-encompassing term to embody practitioners, scholars, graduate students in Student Affairs preparation programs, and other professionals who are actively engaged and involved in Student Affairs work. Noting that educators should be striving to cultivate love as the foundational groundwork for humanization and decolonization in Student Affairs (Quaye et al., 2019), we first explore our understanding of settler colonialism and how it impacts higher education broadly. Next, we review how the notion of love extends throughout seminal texts on humanization partially by understanding dehumanization. Although love shows up in many texts, its articulation of purpose and utility varies widely from simple notation (Tuck & Yang, 2012) to described behavior (hooks, 2000). Extending the arguments of “love scholars,” we then create a bricolage of skills necessary from those who work from a framework of love that moves from idea to reality. If educators want to use love as a concept to forward justice in the field of Student Affairs, then we must build our capacity to love. Following an examination of how love is currently defined in multiple disciplines and society versus how the term could be (re)envisioned, we articulate moments in which Student Affairs may have acted from a place of indifference, a term we are borrowing from author Elie Weisel (1986). In doing so, we do not indict anybody involved with purposeful indifference, but rather come from an analytical place of impact. bell hooks (2000) argues that we only know love when love is absent; therefore, this exercise may allow educators to imagine possible ways forward when acting from a place of love (Quaye et al., 2019). Finally, we make the argument that love as a skill can be used to fast track the trajectory of racial justice and decolonization praxis within the field of Student Affairs, a project that is ongoing and unending (Dotson, 2018).

Situating Settler Colonialism

To uphold indifference is to engage in dehumanization. And to understand dehumanization is to understand settler colonialism and its impact on Student Affairs. This understanding proves important as we move through this argument and juxtapose acts of indifference and their relation to settler colonialism to cultivating a skill-set of love as an action within Student Affairs. The dark history of colonization and settler colonialism continues to enact violence upon oppressed peoples that negates their humanity (la paperson, 2017; Levinas, 1998). Freire (2000)¹ writes that “dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a *distortion* of the vocation of becoming more fully human” (emphasis original, p. 44). Afropessimist scholars argue the idea of *social death* (Patterson, 1982) in reference to the specific and perpetual condition of [Black] people not being fully accepted as human or offered opportunities for humanization in larger society. This notion is especially emphasized by Frank B. Wilderson III (2020), stating, “Human is not an organic entity but a construct; a construct that requires its *Other* in order to be legible” (p. ix). Therefore, within an educational setting, one who is not able to bring their full selves to the university, or have had their selves stolen, by way of oppressive forces such as ongoing settler colonialism/Indigenous erasure, anti-Black racism, whiteness’ technologies, sexism, ableism, etc., has been dehumanized (la paperson, 2017; Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2019). These dominating forces, supplemented by imperialist capitalism, lend themselves to the eradication of humanity (Levinas, 1998).

In our view, the conditions that facilitate dehumanization draw upon settler colonialism and its intertwining sinews of capitalism and neo-imperialism (Wolfe, 2006). These core philosophies, policies, and progressions of society are to blame (Harvey, 2007). Student Affairs must find a way to identify and engage in reparative action to battle these historic and ongoing wrongs (Steinman, 2016). The sinews are not gossamer but heavy and weigh on the spirit of Student Affairs. One way forward is actionable love.

Technologies of Domination

As Australian scholar Wolfe (2006) professed, “the structural complexity of settler colonialism could sustain libraries of elaboration” (p. 392). Therefore, we attempt to paint a broad picture of settler colonialism for us to imagine Student Affairs, where settler colonialism is not ubiquitous or opaque. In short, settler colonialism is an ever-present and changing technology of domination (la paperson, 2017). In thinking of settler colonialism in this way, the project of decolonizing higher education does not reach a completion point until colonization, along with capitalism and imperialism, are destroyed. There is much work to do, and the analysis is complicated.

¹ We do want to acknowledge the benefits and problematics with citing Freire here within the scope of discussing Settler colonialism. Author 1 has read and taught this book at least a half dozen times. Each time, he returns to some of the questions that we cite in this paper and which this paper hopes to answer as well as some contradictions and opaque statements Freire makes regarding humanizing pedagogy. Without belaboring the point, there are a few limitations. These are also supported by Tuck and Yang (2012) in their seminal manuscript *Decolonization is not a metaphor*. Specifically, we are interested in their critique of Freire’s liberation which they define as a liberation of the mind; Indigenous erasure includes stealing of land and exploiting nature. Therefore, there is no rectifying a disconnect between his epistemic liberation and decolonization. This critique helps to ground this manuscript’s analysis as we attempt to provide a possible way forward. We do not mean that there is no benefit to understanding his text, but rather that there is a distinct limitation regarding teaching it ahistorically and apart from context.

Settler colonialism is the process by which land and people become property (la paperson, 2017). It is the movement of Native life and lifeways to production, consumption, exploitation, and destruction. Current settler colonialism is a *set of technologies*, rather than a particular set of actions, meant to alienate, separate, and subjugate peoples through the turning of people and land to property (la paperson, 2017). For example, the recent battles taking place over the Enbridge Line 3 pipeline in Minnesota provide a prime example of the federal government's failure to honor an 1855 treaty by stealing and poisoning Ojibwe land and decimating areas of hunting, fishing, and farming. The pipeline would also create 190M tons of greenhouse gasses per year and carry tar oil to the great lakes damaging the ecosystem and making Pipeline 3 a problem for all people (The YEARS Project, 2021). This example demonstrates how settler colonialism can impact us all because, as previously noted, it is not a particular set of actions against a certain people, though the genesis of settler colonialism was the attempted destruction of Indigenous peoples/societies that continues to be a key feature.

Clearly evident, those technologies are the intersection of whiteness, Indigenous erasure, and anti-Blackness. By noting these as technologies of domination, we mean to say that they are ever-changing, providing never-ending opportunities for exploitation and colonial rule. Thus, settler colonization is *always happening*, as is decolonization (Dotson, 2018). Dotson (2018) noted that in order for decolonization to happen, a project of remembering and locating one's self and historicity in relation to settler colonization must also occur. In this way, relationality is built and maintained between the colonizing and potential decolonizing self. People who engage in this liminal, yet material space, may be what la paperson (2017) called scyborgs. For instance, a thorough history of how enslaved Native and Black bodies were used to build both the first physical universities in the U.S. and catalyze a scientific racism that permeates university life today (Wilder, 2014), is not common knowledge. The ways colonial logics, embedded within slave plantations, continue to organize epistemologies and action on college campuses today (Squire et al., 2018) is unconscionable. The property rights of white people (i.e., whiteness) over enslaved Black people (i.e., anti-Blackness) continues in multiple forms today in institutional reliance on, for example, Chief Diversity Officers as plantation drivers, campus cultural centers as underground railroad systems, and Black student bodies as entities from which to profit. Wilderson III (2020) highlights slavery (much like settler colonialism) as an ongoing and adaptive process rather than a moment in time, noting "Blackness and Slaveness are inextricably bound in such a way that whereas Slaveness can be separated from Blackness, Blackness cannot exist as other than Slaveness" (p. 42). Therefore, Student Affairs educators, particularly Student Affairs educators of color who hold subordinate social identities but are not Indigenous, must engage in a (re)membering of their past colonial history in relation to their decolonizing present desires and actions (Tengan, 2008).

To be clear, when we say that land and people are turned to property, what we mean to say is that land and people are made into property that can be utilized to forward whiteness and anti-Blackness, both enacting various forms of violence on Indigenous peoples and Communities of Color. The concept of whiteness as property (Cabrera et al., 2017; Harris, 1993; Smith, 2012) means law, treaties, and rights are the government's vessels (technologies) of continued subjugation of "land and nonhuman life to deathlike states" (la paperson, 2017). In understanding whiteness as property, we understand that not only was land stolen from Native people and Black folx made into property, but that only white people could then own land, and almost all slaves were not white (Harris, 1993; John, 1999; Squire, Williams, & Tuitt, 2018), thereby creating a racial hierarchy and encoding in U.S. law what it meant to be white and the

rights associated with white people based on the “nature” of their whiteness (Smith, 2012). This re-encoding of racial privilege/property rights linked to the law continues to permeate U.S. socio-cultural milieus today. One can see this currently in the challenge of Affirmative Action and the clashing understandings of who deserves the right to enjoy “tangibly and economically valuable benefits” (Harris, 1993, p. 280), including access to higher education (Poon et al., 2019).

The belief that one has a right to a community good or that a public good can be privatized for one’s personal gain at the exclusion of others is the definition of white privilege (and settler colonialism) (Harris, 2020). Whiteness is the “embodiment of white privilege” and becomes “usable property” when it is codified in law, as anti-Affirmative Action proponents hope to complete (Harris, 1993, p. 282). The Affirmative Action battles are a modern-day manifestation of what is known as the right to use and enjoyment, and the absolute right to exclude in the conceptual understanding of whiteness as property. When, and if, educators teach about Affirmative Action in Student Affairs, if it is not linked to a discussion on settler colonialism and property rights, then it is void of important historical context and has the potential to reproduce harmful systems that reinforce anti-Black racism (Poon et al., 2019).

Property is a legal construct which is inherently contradictory to Indigenous knowledge systems. Even in the case of arguing that Native tribes have sovereignty, sovereignty is still based within a colonial legal system; it is not necessarily inherent to Native lifeways in the way it is described constitutionally. With this brief example, we hope to help the reader understand how settler colonialism is linked to property and, consequently, whiteness.

Disconnection From Land

In this section, we focus on the importance of land to decolonization. We believe this requires special attention because the discussion of land can often be lost behind the liberal inclusion of land acknowledgments. There is a mental block that disconnects a person not just from the land, but what the land provides. In a system where many can access anything they need at any time (e.g., a slew of food delivery services available at our leisure), society forgets the source of that nourishment in the first place. Land is a valuable resource and therefore fought over and required to survive. Universities sit on stolen lands, expand on stolen lands, and profit from stolen lands (i.e., Land Grant Universities; Historically Black Colleges and Universities) (Lee & Ahtone, 2020; Wilder, 2014). Every time a new residence hall is built, the university expands on stolen Native land without consideration of past histories and current relations. Every time university students engage in service trips to build homes on colonized lands for non-Native peoples, Student Affairs engages in settler colonization. However, the use of land in unnatural ways does not have to be so visible; the extension of settler colonial land abuse can also run through intermediaries toward what vendors a division uses and how they respect the land and in what their vendors/partners invest. For example, the University of Texas’s endowment hit \$31B in 2018, making it the second biggest endowment in the U.S. (McDonald, 2018). This boost in funds came because of oil rights on the traditional and ancestral lands of the Comanche and Mescalero Apache in what is now West Texas.

Universities are settler colonial projects and *terra nullius*, a term meaning “nobody’s land,” is a false doctrine that must be reckoned with by each institution (Wolfe, 2006). It should also be noted that there is a persistent narrative of Indigenous erasure in the form of *once being*. That is, through narratives of settler exceptionalism and modernity, there is a belief that the Indigenous peoples who once lived on the lands that universities are situated are no longer there.

As somebody who worked at a university that is situated upon multiple traditional and ancestral lands [Author 1], in a town that was once a logging community, with the mascot of a Lumberjack, we can confidently say that Indigenous peoples have never left these lands and continue to have a significant presence in multiple communities. Therefore, even with a compulsory mission to “serve the community,” a university cannot and must not neglect Indigenous peoples in their missions, goals, and educational visions. The existence of Native peoples on these lands and the continual erasure of their bodies points to the unfinished processes of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is not a finite process; it is a kind of shapeshifter, an ever-bending, enduring understanding that history is the present and continues to inform how we think about and honor Indigenous communities (Kauanui, 2016).

Similarly, this disconnection from the land lends itself to define generational traumas and identity dissonance of the Black diasporic experience. Wilderson III (2020) positions that the antagonism between the postcolonial subject and the settler cannot be mutually exclusive with the violence of social death in that “slavery is a relational dynamic...and that relational dynamic can continue to exist once the settler has left or ceded governmental power” (p. 41). As such, the ongoing process of slavery has yet to lament the loss of Indigeneity and the trauma of Black people being abducted from the lands that would define their identities which has resulted in legacies of “‘de-culturalized’ Africans, denied knowledge of language, clan, family, and land base, denied even knowledge of who their nations are” (Amadahy & Lawrence, 2009, p. 127). With this, Sexton (2014) posits that this loss of Indigeneity can only be acknowledged abstractly with its recovery being lost to the historical violence of enslavement. However, this process of de-culturalization is foundational in the narrative of Black-Native solidarity as one of the defining characteristics of colonization is the “systematic disconnection (and dispossession) of Indigenous Peoples from [their] homelands” (Waziyatawin, 2012, p. 72) which ultimately situates Black and Indigenous peoples in kindred positions within settler colonialism.

Current Theories of Love

Often, theorizing love in decolonizing work occurs by understanding it as an amorphous, differentially understood, and liberal notion. This is not to say that love is not a useful tool for interactions with other B/beings, but rather to say that love, as it is typically defined, is often misunderstood within Student Affairs and may be too narrowly characterized to be valuable in the move toward racial justice and decolonization. With this, we assert that evolving love from its current indeterminate form and definitions towards a more action-oriented ideal will operate as a tool in dismantling settler colonialism and dehumanization within the field.

Finding a singular definition for the concept of love may prove elusive, particularly if it is only defined through an amatory lens. Often as Humans, we find comfort in the ambiguous nature of love because it then places the onus on the individual to seek self-meaning rather than bearing the weight of being held accountable to a collective definition. This “self-meaning” generally allows one to mold the idea of love into an incorporeal, inherent feeling with which one is born as Human that typically extends itself into either a romantic, monogamous experience between one partner, the platonic joy of friendship and kinship, or the enthusiasm one possesses for general passions and hobbies. Simultaneously, the non-defined term of love is at times weaponized as a form of liberal ideology that is expressed as the solvent to structural violence (i.e., “fighting hate with love” or the One Love movement). hooks (2000) noted,

Everyone assumes that we will know how to love instinctively” (p. xxvii) ...Our confusion about what we mean when we use the word ‘love’ is the source of our

difficulty in loving. If our society had a commonly held understanding of the meaning of love, the act of loving would not be so mystifying” (p. 3).

In the literature, authors theorize love in multiple ways, all leading to a somewhat confusing amalgamation of the term. For instance, in *Loving Whiteness* (Matias & Allen, 2013), an examination of love’s unconsciousness is a treatise on how true love can be understood in relation to how a mother loves the child she birthed and how love cannot exist if abusive power relations are present. Clearly articulated is the notion that there exists a “problematic relationship between two types of love: romantic and humanizing” (Matias & Allen, 2013, p. 288). In short, a woman who experiences childbirth experiences a humanizing love because the woman experiences both the “pain and struggle that positively binds the humanity of one person to another” (Matias & Allen, 2013, p. 289). Like Fromm (1956), love requires a mutuality of growth and development between two Beings and in that loving relationship between two Humans both can love the whole of Humanity. Basically, a neo/liberal notion of the connection of individuation, competition, desire for acceptance/conformity, and relations for the purpose of tangible outcomes (Matias & Allen, 2013), characteristics of whiteness (Cabrera et al., 2017; Gusa, 2010; la paperson, 2017) and perhaps what Boggs (2012) would call the “shadow side” of love (p. 33), all create an inability to love in this context. At the same time, love that extends from these social realities, noting that this unconsciousness becomes the love that grasps onto power in whiteness, begs for challenge. While we agree that this notion of love can exist, it still falls short of understanding how to love in a communal context like Student Affairs and how love can instruct social change, namely racial justice and decolonization. Understanding the power dynamics between two loving individuals in a humanizing loving relationship *is* important to dismantling whiteness; however, we are not sure if *recognizing* the power of love *moves* us in a decolonizing way.

In examining other humanization/ontological scholars, such as bell hooks (2000) in *All About Love* and Grace Lee Boggs (2012) in *The Next American Revolution*, one begins to understand why love is operationalized inconsistently across contexts. Specifically, bell hooks writes that “there can be no love without justice” (p. 19). For hooks, love is a combination of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and it is unconditional, meaning that it is non-transactional. Love is an action. Love turns to selflessness. For Boggs (2012), love is a precursor for justice. Are these perspectives incommensurate?

hooks (2000) drew from Fromm’s work and her own lived narrative, as do Matias and Allen (2013), when they noted that “love and abuse cannot coexist” (p. 6), perhaps leading her to this conclusion which is informed by her experience as a Black woman. Boggs (2012) instead drew from Martin Luther King, Jr., where love “is based on the willingness to go to any lengths to restore or create community. Practicing this concept of Love empowers the oppressed to overcome Fear and the oppressors to transcend Hate” (Boggs, 2012, p. 95). Perhaps the answer lies in the backgrounds of these two women, their experiences extending from interactions with anti-Blackness, one directly (i.e., hooks) and one through the filter of her relationship to anti-Asian racism, radicalization within leftist politics, and her solidarity work embedded in the Detroit Black community (i.e., Boggs). This means that how one understands themselves in relation to the world around them may determine how they conceptualize love.

To complicate the matter, Levinas (1998), a French existentialist who is known for his work in ontology, wrote that love forgives injustice and injustice is the limitation of freedom. In this case, his thinking aligns with Boggs, who does not believe that one needs justice to have love. hooks (2000) extended this idea in *All About Love*, writing, “when love is present the desire

to dominate and exercise power cannot rule the day. All the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted a love ethic” (p. 98). While it may be unnecessary to explicate which came first, Justice or Love, one can clearly see the implication of the relationship. Therefore, the application of love as an analytical tool for understanding social justice movements becomes unclear when one does not understand the personal and social context and applies the tenets of love in discretionary manners without completely understanding the intent and impact of such prior analysis. Or perhaps, love can exist in one venue (a place where love exists before justice, i.e., Boggs), but not another (a place where there is injustice and no love, i.e., hooks), thereby weakening the theory of love as a holistic answer to injustice while at the same time providing hope for love as a mediating factor in an unjust world as people can apply it at will; love is a choice, a “transformative force” (hooks, 2000, p. xix). Perhaps this brings one to a place where there is an inability to decide upon one theory of love in the sea of possibilities of the concept, and perhaps that is okay because settler colonialism indeed asks us to continually choose one way of being over another.

The Art of Love

In the next section, we provide the tenets of love that are critical in practice if Student Affairs educators are ever to adopt the art of loving properly as the framework within the field. Incorporating love as a core value within Student Affairs allows educators to begin to own their historical truths of colonization and enslavement (responsibility), address and reconcile the ongoing legacies of genocide and settler colonialism (care), position Indigenous, Black, and Brown people’s ways of knowing as the foundation of educational practices (knowledge), and include Indigenous, Black, and Brown people’s values and perspectives within policies and operations of the institution and specifically within Student Affairs (respect).

Ultimately, a community built on supporting each other and building a more human world full of love is what Student Affairs should work toward being (Boggs, 2012). With this, the infrastructure of Student Affairs operations and functions should be working to incorporate the framework of love as a form of creating justice within the community. Learning and mastering the Art of Love is a requisite skill in the toolkit for Student Affairs educators in their work and praxis. The propositions listed to theorize breaking the cycle of abuse are a non-exhaustive list and an ever-going process requiring educators to build the capacity to love as a collective. Love is a skill, and the skill becomes a form of art; the field of Student Affairs owes it to its legacy and future to commit to this art (Fromm, 1956).

Love as Skill

In the exploration of love and the absence of love within Student Affairs, it becomes clear that creating the idea of love as an actionable framework within the field is critical. Love resists power over another and instead asks both people to understand themselves as inseparable from the other and the self (Fromm, 1956). The totality of Human relies on the relationship between individuals and the freedom that exists among people (Levinas, 1998). Love is non-transactional, but still requires accountability and responsibility (Levinas, 1998). hooks (2000) noted that when one loves somebody, they see the world the way it is. From this, in thinking back to the question of humanization, what this means to say is: “I see you existing in the world in the way that it is.” That is, since I understand the ways that systemic oppression, racism, sexism, ableism, genderism, transantagonism, and classism impact your life, I will act in a different way and therefore see you as Human and love you as such. Therefore, love demands knowledge of the

other and love of the other demands knowledge (Levinas, 1998). Lastly, love is an act, so when one “risks an act of love” (Freire, 2000, p. 50), they get to the core of what love can do for justice.

Love is often seen as “the great intangible” (hooks, 2000, p. 4). Thus, how can educators begin to reimagine and transform this idea into an actionable practice that can be utilized as a tool to achieve justice in Student Affairs? First, this requires that “love” be reframed as an ontological philosophy and decolonizing project that Humans can adopt within their worldview and how they shape themselves in relation to Others and the land. That is, one must understand all beings as Being Human and Human Beings from the start, not as something one must prove to gain respect. Furthermore, we need to re-envision love as a skill-set that one would continue to learn and aspire to master over time; as such, we would begin to view the act of loving as a multi-faceted and dynamic process that would also consider the overarching goals of humanization, racial justice, and critical consciousness and ultimately, the field of Student Affairs.

From this, it can be argued that the skill-set of love becomes a core value that Student Affairs educators embody and incorporate into practice and field. Incorporating a core value of love ultimately redefines the ways one will think, operate, and currently evaluate our mastery within the field and educators’ future vision for Student Affairs work. Love as a core value embodies the tenets stated by Fromm (1956) as care, knowledge, responsibility, and respect (later to be extended and modified by hooks (2000) to also include “commitment” and “trust”). To accomplish the art of love fully demands educators to incorporate these tenets into their daily work and overall vision of the Student Affairs profession. In addition, all these tenets must be taken into consideration and practiced in a holistic sense for love to truly operate and exist within our field.

In this way, Student Affairs professionals must make the conscious choice to love. Treating love as intentional practice rather than a form of nature defaults to the Human assuming accountability by identifying past and present acts of indifference, committing to unlearning relational forms that do not center love, and working towards repairing harm and healing. By not recognizing or taking actions to correct higher education’s past acts of indifference (noting the gross injustices against the Indigenous and the exploited labor and enslavement of Africans rooted within the history of college campuses), educators are perpetuating the protection of a historical lie and continuing the legacy of settler colonialism and dehumanization within the profession. However, educators are purposefully socialized to fear the truth of indifference. When one buys into the lie of history as the past and denies the envisioning and creation of a loving world, “we are all potential victims” (hooks, 2000, p. 47) of indifference. When the field of Student Affairs has decided to love the lie more than justice, it has sealed the justice and humanity of the profession within a tomb of continued colonization and abuse.

Without reserve, we must be able to build the “capacity to love, serve, and create for and with each other” (Boggs, 2012, p. 47). In order to survive, it is time for the field of Student Affairs to embrace the tenets of love (i.e., care, knowledge, responsibility, and respect) as the basic elements that encapsulate the concept of love as a skill and actively embed these principles within their institutional practices. We default to the document, *A Bold Vision Forward: A Framework for the Strategic Imperative for Racial Justice and Decolonization* (Quaye et al., 2018) additionally to explore the tenet of trust and commitment.

Care

The concept of care is shown as being interwoven into the idea of loving through the evidence of familial ties and relationships. “Love is the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love” (Fromm, 1956, p. 26) and as such, if active concern and care for fellow brethren and Human life are absent, then love is not present. For example, drawing upon her upbringing, hooks (2000) highlights that though she was raised in a household where basic necessities (i.e., food, shelter, water) were met, the action of love was not present in the home because “aggressive shaming and verbal humiliation coexisted with lots of affection and care” (hooks, 2000, p. 6). She and her siblings grew up in a household where they did not feel love, but they did feel cared for; however, this lack of feeling loved ultimately did not “positively nurture the growth of [their] spirit” (p. 7).

Though this example is shaped within the confines of familial experiences, these actions are shown within the work of Student Affairs. If college campuses choose not to address and repair harm and abuse that was caused during the initial birth of higher education, then institutions are fundamentally showing a lack of care and concern for the marginalized populations in which they now serve. Care requires intent and an awareness of impact. A care that is intentional removes itself from the confines of neoliberal whiteness; that is, it removes itself from considerations of efficiency, competition, and individualism and places decision-making in the scope of community and communal justice.

Knowledge

Knowledge proves to be a crucial factor in one’s ability to love in that it emphasizes the idea of continually learning about oneself and deepening a connection, learning, and understanding of others. This idea of knowledge stems from knowing a person for their true, authentic self rather than through a distorted picture that a person has painted of the other. Humans have two routes for obtaining this truth: (a) having complete power over another person or, (b) in the act of love (Fromm, 1956). With this, “only if I know a human being objectively, can I know him in his ultimate essence, in the act of love” (Fromm, 1956, p. 31).

The idea of objectively knowing another extends itself to the Student Affairs profession because educators actively need to engage all students critically who hold a complex set of identities and experiences. If Student Affairs educators do not uphold and learn about these different cultures and perspectives and allow space for them within our institutional practices, then these professionals will continue to subjectively paint a picture of Humans in a way that does not align with their truth.

The idea of knowing a person (e.g., a student, staff, or faculty member) objectively is difficult. Love requires all of us to engage in the hard work of figuring out how to live inquisitively. Levinas (1998) spent much time writing about the idea of betrayal and eliminating the occasion for betrayal in the transactions in which Humans engage. Student Affairs educators betray each other when we have no knowledge of each other; Student Affairs educators betray ourselves when we do not recognize that we are betraying our own humanity when we do not know those around us. To love is to know a person in relation to the oppressions thrust upon them (hooks, 2000). To know love is to engage in a critical examination of the world as it is, full of oppression and opportunities for liberation.

Responsibility

Often, the idea of responsibility can denote a task or a duty that is generally imparted onto a person by someone else. However, an alternative definition of responsibility allows a person autonomy in participating in the choice: "...responsibility, in its true sense, is an entirely voluntary act; it is my response to the needs, expressed, or unexpressed, by another human being" (Fromm, 1956, p. 28). Responsibility is at the heart of Student Affairs work as educators have an inherent duty to the student. Thus, if Student Affairs educators are not accountable for the historical racial projects of colonization and settler colonialism, then ultimately, they absolve a responsibility to the Indigenous land they occupy and the Black, Indigenous, and other racially minoritized communities with whom they work alongside and serve.

The field of Student Affairs, and the reader as an educator in the field, has a duty to engage in the action of responsibility and, therefore, the act of love. In the example of self-care being utilized as a tool of exploitation and commodification, the project required an education in *knowing* what settler colonialism is and how it exists today, *caring* enough to examine a dehumanizing issue impacting the field, and engaging the duty to be *responsible* for the field, for those in the field, and for the students served. Student Affairs educators cannot absolve their duty not only to serve students but must take responsibility for how they reproduce oppression in service of students and responsibility for the liberation of all Humans.

Respect

If it were not for respect, responsibility could easily turn into domination and possessiveness (Fromm, 1956). Respect is "not fear and awe; it denotes...the ability to see a person..., to be aware of [their] unique individuality" (Fromm, 1956, p. 28). Even though Student Affairs has a responsibility to every student, educators must also recognize that every student harbors their own individual spirit that deserves growth and nourishment with the absence of exploitation. Within the art of loving, the idea that respect is sought through the nonexistence of exploitation makes it paramount for Student Affairs [educators to "grow in [their] own ways, and not for the purpose of serving me [i.e., the Student Affairs professional]" (Fromm, 1956, p. 28). Respect is integral to building a skill-set of love in that it centers the most vulnerable and marginalized ways of knowing at the heart of the institution and the field of Student Affairs.

Indifference in Student Affairs

In this section, we provide two examples of indifference in Student Affairs (Weisel, 1986). As one reads these examples, attempt to note how the tenets of love were or were not present and what applying a loving logic would achieve. While engaging in this sorting activity and thinking through what love looks like, hooks (2000) suggests that by tracking a history of indifference, one might come to a clearer understanding of love. We have chosen to analyze two distinct (yet non-exhaustive) acts of indifference in Student Affairs that showcase the continual pattern of settler colonialism, dehumanization, and white supremacy and have ultimately asked ourselves what can educators potentially learn from those moments? We describe two scenarios below, knowing that these are not complete accounts of the events but understanding that an examination through a love framework may illuminate some ways forward. The first case is a recollection of an event that occurred at an ACPA-College Student Educators International Convention (ACPA), a Student Affairs professional association, with information drawn from publicly available blog posts and articles related to the case. The second is based on an article

written by two scholars in the field relating to their experiences teaching in a Student Affairs program. Analysis of these cases in relation to the proposed love framework is situated at the end of this manuscript.

T*circle at ACPA Tampa Convention

In 2015, ACPA held their annual Convention in Tampa, FL. The scheduled keynote speaker was Laverne Cox, a Black transwoman, actress, activist, and star of the Netflix show *Orange is the New Black*. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Cox canceled her trip. Searching for a replacement, the Convention team asked a group of queer and trans* association members to supply the names of potential replacements. Paying attention to the intersections of race and gender identity, the members provided a list that included an extensive register of racially minoritized trans* educators, but the association chose none of the names on the list and instead chose to invite Michael Sam, a Black gay athlete who recently came out and was in popular media for being the first gay football player to be drafted to the National Football League. Sam eventually canceled two days before the event, and the association invited two Black cis-men to engage in a dialogue instead.

A group of trans* members had already organized a session called *T*Circle 2: A Dialogue on Intersectionality Among Trans* and Gender Non-conforming Educators*, which extended previous work done by T*Circle, a group of trans* Student Affairs professionals, graduate students, and faculty making a space for collectivism and solidarity around identity against the genderism, transphobia, and transantagonism present in the field broadly (Jourian et al., 2015; Simmons, 2016). Once the events transpired in Tampa, the group decided to kick off *T*3: Trans*form! Trans*cend! Trans*gress!* where the group used the space to act against the genderism, transphobia, and transantagonism present in the association and within its membership at the intersections of race and racism, as was evidenced by the erasure of Black and Brown trans* bodies in the association's most recent decision. The purpose of the space according to a poster hung up in the area read: "T*3 is a counter-space where trans* and genderqueer people regroup and heal as well as gather to talk about and enact a resistance against genderism and intersecting oppressions in higher education and student affairs." The space, held for only trans*-identifying members, was centrally located in the convention hall so that trans* members could be visibilized and so that they could have a space of solidarity. Important to the context was the fact that genderism, transerasure, and transantagonism had been present in the association from some of the highest leadership positions despite the association's values of social justice and inclusion (Simmons, 2016). An unauthored ACPA Convention blog post following the Convention noted,

Some members felt that we did not do the right thing in doing so (selecting non-trans* speakers). They protested at Convention. Some members protested their protest...Some felt negatively impacted and we grieve that reality while feeling excited about the extraordinary 'push/pull' mobilizing force that was present in the stories of the speakers. (ACPA, 2015, para. 9-10)

In the context of love and loving, this incident, to us, serves as a potential moment of indifference. These moments exist in all aspects of educators' lives. Educators often describe them as intent v. impact, but love extends beyond the incident into the space of healing that is opened or precluded from happening.

Initial Analysis

It is not that the association leadership did not react without some level of concern for the situation, but rather that the actions neglected a historical understanding of the situation and any ongoing subjugation of the trans* community within this context. Specifically, the reactions to the real-lived experiences and emotions of the trans* communities in this context and within the field at large were largely dismissed (Simmons, 2016). In the block quotation above, one can see that some association members were not able to see and know the trans* community at that moment. That is, to love people within the context of both them as individuals and their space within an interlocking system of oppression (hooks, 2000). The association members who “protested the protest” did not see the world the way it is (hooks, 2000) and to see the world the way it is and the way it impacts individuals and groups is to engage in love. Additionally, educators must “let beings be, to understand them as independent of the perception that discovers them and grasps them” (Levinas, 1998, p. 6). In this case, the perceptions were of trans* members who “felt negatively” rather than “were negatively” impacted – an impact that discovered them and grasped onto them through the eyes of dominating cis-identifying leadership within the association. This grasp centered the trans* members as the problem, as disruptive to the Convention and association rather than the Convention or association as disruptive to full trans* humanity.

In the context of T*Circle being an intersectional space for trans* members (Jourian et al., 2015), the action of “racializing assemblages provide[s] visual modalities in which dehumanization is practiced and lived” (Weheliye, 2014, p. 6). Importantly, it must be remembered that not only did trans* erasure occur, but it was Black trans* erasure specifically. The racializing of the body both compounded the importance of Laverne Cox as the speaker (a Black trans*woman) and elucidated the fact that the association believed replacing Cox with a Black gay man, and then two Black men (one gay and one heterosexual) to “appease” trans* members would make everything okay. Ironically, this elucidation was a move away from intersectionality. Ultimately, the world will “emancipate itself only by constructing a world in which it eliminates the occasions for betrayal” (Levinas, 1998, p. 30). Justice presents itself as an opportunity in each transaction and each person has the choice to “naively choose injustice or even present injustice” (Levinas, 1998, p. 30). Perhaps, in this case, the association did both; it betrayed its members and its values in the name of injustice rather than love.

Self-Care as a Settler Colonial Logic

Next, we must examine settler colonial logics that underscore the field’s move toward self-care rhetoric as the antidote to neoliberal moves in Student Affairs (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). Utilizing a settler colonial framework, the notions of production, competition, quantifiable outcomes, and individualism underscore an ontology of dehumanization, particularly of graduate students and other marginalized groups on college campuses. Instead of Student Affairs divisions shifting the norms of work, they rely on individuals to engage in self-care as an incremental relief to stress and burnout while divisions ratchet up work demands. Congruent with settler colonialism, graduate students, and others with minoritized identities are utilized as property and their labor extracted for the benefit of the university (la paperson, 2017; Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). As noted, “‘Productivity,’ ‘consumption,’ and ‘profit’ are all settler colonial concepts reinforced by an ever-evolving capitalistic system, of which U.S. universities are a reproducing component” (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019, p. 8)

At the same time, Student Affairs leaders utilize coercion as a tactic to socialize graduate students into the hegemonic notions of work that are being perpetuated in the field:

In this perspective, self-care rhetoric attempts to soften the harsh realities of capitalism that works to turn people's livelihoods, mental health, and social well-being into quantifiable outputs and institutional profit. It maximizes the amount of labor that a graduate student puts out while minimizing the need to authentically care about the 'humanness' of a person. (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019, p. 5)

Initial Analysis

In this possible articulation of indifference, one can draw back to Matias and Allen's (2013) articulation of the negative, power-driven notions of indifference that are grounded in neoliberal ideas of engaging in relations for the purpose of competition, desire for acceptance/conformity, and tangible outcomes (Matias & Allen, 2013). Because love and abuse cannot exist simultaneously (hooks, 2000), and self-care rhetoric is an abuse of humanness, an argument exists for an articulation of indifference.

Applying a Loving Framework to the Cases

In harkening back to the examples of the ACPA Convention T*Circle protests and the idea of self-care tied within settler colonial ideology, we choose to re-examine how these examples of indifference could be transformed into acts of justice utilizing the proposed framework of love as an actionable skill set and core value within Student Affairs. In reference to the Tampa Convention protests (and the response to these protests), it was evident there was an inability to see the harm and pain that was placed upon the trans* community within this context.

Although the original space was provided for the trans* educators to engage their voices, in this case there was little love present because, based on the manuscripts published by the trans* educators, there was little intent of nurturing growth, understanding the spirit of their concerns, and to know those who were identified as "the Other." If choosing a loving approach that embodies the four tenets (i.e., care, knowledge, responsibility, and respect), it is argued that this harm could have been avoided by examining ACPA's intent in providing specific replacement speakers within the context of the history of the association, the field, and the world.

Utilizing a love framework within this scenario would have allowed for the association to have used the absence of its originally planned speaker, as an avenue for reflection and a pathway for a replacement presenter who identified similarly; the association could have also used the opportunity to provide a space for visibility and healing, listening, and developing. Given the detailed background of society's trans-erasure rhetoric and practices within cultural mediums, policies, and higher education institutions, it proves to be a significant statement when dedicating spaces and platforms for trans-identified individuals to exist authentically and be represented. The association, choosing to substitute a Black, transwoman keynote speaker with less regard to the recommendations of queer and trans* association members, displays a lack of care. In distinction, ACPA Convention leadership supplanting the keynote speaker with someone who would have also been living within the critical intersections of race and gender, epitomizes this core tenet.

In examining the whole of actionable love, care proves to remain only one aspect as an act toward justice. In fact, "care is a dimension of love, but simply giving care does not mean we are loving" (hooks, 2000, p. 22). Within this example, if the Convention leaders would have

supplemented another speaker using the suggestions prompted from queer and trans* individuals, this would have demonstrated an understanding of the intention behind recommendations offered (care), allowed for alternative representation and visibility of some of the most marginalized identities within ACPA and society (knowledge), prioritized space for racially minoritized queer/trans* to share their truths and narratives (respect), and actively showed a deep commitment as an association by centering the voices and epistemologies of the universally disenfranchised (responsibility).

Though ACPA's choice of replacement for the keynote speaker could be argued as a misstep, the response that followed the T*Circle protests further perpetuated the harm caused. Alternatively, the association centering a Love foundation, could have allowed healing around the impact of the actions. However, the justification of the counter-protests in relation to the original dissent displayed by members of the T*Circle and the lack of radical validation and acknowledgment of the group's outcry shows an unethical response on behalf of the association in that it continued to center an act of indifference. There are widespread misinterpretations of ethical behavior, but, in actuality, "living ethically ensures that [we].... nurture our spiritual growth" (hooks, 2000, p. 17). When those who are harmed choose to address their wounds, others may belittle or mock these efforts, which is a form of psychological terrorism (hooks, 2000). If seen through a loving lens, the protests displayed by T*Circle could have been viewed as an act of "accountability and responsibility both from themselves and from those who were the agents of their suffering as well as those who bore witness" (hooks, 2000, p. 23). As addressed, educators can use love as a tool of constructive confrontation which can aid them in healing and promotion of justice within institutions and organizations embedded in the foundations of structural violence and disenfranchisement.

Centering settler colonialism in Student Affairs' rhetoric of self-care punctuates production and capital over one's holistic self and becomes a dehumanizing practice perpetuating acts of colonization (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019). Since global capitalism is built and structured alongside the creation of higher education (Wilder, 2014), the foundations of Student Affairs work, rooted in exploitation of labor (physical, emotional, intellectual), further promotes power dynamics, neoliberal ethics, and settler colonialism. Typically, this exploitation lands in the fate of graduate students and other subjugated individuals on campus, which gives legacy to the ontology that the most marginalized are coined as property on behalf of institutional white supremacy. To reframe the work of Student Affairs through a love context that situates the humanity of the Person in relation to the land they occupy would require substantial transformation and reconstruction in the ways one envisions the field.

In applying a loving approach within the previous two examples, it begs the question: are we ready or able, as educators, to decolonize Student Affairs? First, the ever-rising productivity standards within the field allowed Student Affairs to fail in "[appreciating] the importance of work resistance, not merely as a weapon of class rebellion, but as an essential element of sustainability for the planet" (Kivel, 2018, p. 21). This highlights how a societal obsession with constant expansion and production of labor inherently remains a detriment to the maintenance of the Person and survival of the Land. Additionally, due to the lack of resources, sustainability, and the pervasiveness of oppressive systems, "the outcome is that Student Affairs professionals with marginalized identities are often left responsible for their own care and healing" (Sambile, 2018). The idea of individualism upheld against the disconnection of the Other allows individuals to view healing as a solo pursuit rather than a communal goal. From this, the capacity for self-care to actualize the capacity for one individual to escape burnout and exploitation in the

face of exponential labor and production proves paradoxical and the antithesis of decolonization praxis.

As it stands, self-care rhetoric “attempts to soften the harsh realities of capitalism that works to turn people’s livelihoods, mental health, and social well-being into quantifiable output; it turns people into property to be used for institutional profit” (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019, p. 5). This argument shows that the institution encourages the maximization of labor from the graduate student and other marginalized individuals while actively attempting to minimize their humanity. In maintaining the norm that time, work, and labor is tied to humanity is to further the settler colonial goal of turning “people and land into property, a property that can be utilized for the benefit of the capitalist gains to reproduce whiteness” (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019, p. 4).

Framing self-care through a context of love requires several transformative changes within the field of Student Affairs. In particular, colleges and universities need to work towards identifying and diagnosing the structural influences that are creating this amount of unsustainable labor and then proceed to disrupt and transform this function (care). However, this cannot be done without viewing Student Affairs’ work as a tool to resist neoliberalism, decoupling the notions of productivity tied to self-worth (knowledge). The institution must shift its connection to the capitalist state and dismantle the settler colonial concepts of productivity, consumption, and profit because universities currently serve as a mode of reproducing these ideals (responsibility). And lastly, institutions of higher education and their Student Affairs units need to reposition their hegemonic culture of domination and redistribute structural power with equity towards its labor force (e.g., graduate students and others oppressed within institutional settings) (respect). Self-care utilized through a Love framework emphasizes divesting from extraction practices geared towards the “purpose of transformation into property to be used for the benefit of capitalistic endeavors” (Squire & Nicolazzo, 2019, p. 3). This divestment must center the reimagining of work for the Person, the institution’s abusive relationship to the land they occupy, and the dying spirit within the field of Student Affairs.

Conclusion: Are we ready to love?

“Knowing love or the hope of knowing love is the anchor that keeps us from falling into that sea of despair” (hooks, 2000, p. 78) offers the optimism Student Affairs professionals need to rock transformational change. With this manuscript, our desire is not to replace love with some other form of foundational principle, but rather to help us know love and have hope of knowing and executing love as an actionable and definitive concept within the field of Student Affairs. The question “Are we ready to love?” operates as an invitation for Student Affairs educators to adopt a loving skill set—which should go beyond the material and individual and instead be communal and authentic. Love has been touted as *the* basis upon which all justice work is done; however, love, as an amorphous and liberal notion, then falls short of fully engaging in racial justice and decolonization.

By fully explicating how love *acts* and, therefore, how *Student Affairs educators*, as purveyors of a field, act, there is hope for moving toward true racial justice and decolonization. As difficult as it sounds, “awakening to love can happen only as we let go of our obsession with power and domination” (hooks, 2000, p. 87). To fulfill the imperative for racial justice and decolonization, one must analyze how the field of Student Affairs engages in acts of power and domination daily and then replace those with the proposed loving tenets of care, knowledge, responsibility, and respect. To do so moves Student Affairs toward decolonization and engages the field in “more humanizing love” (Matias & Allen, 2013, p. 302). Student Affairs educators

can engage as “scyborgs” (la paperson, 2017) within their institutions. As scyborgs, Student Affairs educators act as both machines of the university replicating its parts, and decolonizing agents deconstructing and Indigenizing it. The call for this paper is to become decolonizing Student Affairs educators by centering Love, to Love the field enough to recreate Student Affairs in a vision of justice, and to Love each other by engaging in the daily acts that will ensure Student Affairs’ survival by moving our field toward a just future.

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