

Finding Discernment in Vulnerability

When I declared my Psychology major, I had no idea what I was doing or what career path I would follow. Psychology just seemed to fit me, so I signed up for classes that sparked my interest, researched topics that were familiar yet new to me, and just floated by. I had no idea what I wanted from psychology until my senior year. I assume it was because by senior year I had discovered that my persona was much similar to that of the psychologist I saw at the Wellness Center on a weekly basis. So, I set my sights on pursuing a career that would help others recognize and find solutions to ease their mental stressors.

For me, the Wellness Center has always been a beacon of light in times of dire needs. The staff is full of people that understand the life of a college student, but somehow doesn't judge that student when they come in for help. I attended a women-only group session for two semesters. If it hadn't been for the women and the psychologist that were in my group, I would be drowning utterly in a world of pain. During one of our sessions, the psychologist looked at me and said "If you want to do this kind of work, you're going to have to learn how to be vulnerable." She really hit a nerve when she spoke those words. That was my moment of transformation. I was going to do everything possible to find a job or internship that would help me become a professional in the psychology field. I applied for the research assistantship with the Wellness Center the next day. When I was offered the internship, I immediately got nervous and wanted to drop out. Who did I think was? I wasn't qualified to provide assistance for such an intense and influential research project. I had to make a decision. Either I was going to decide to work in Nashville at my old high school job or I was going to be vulnerable in an unfamiliar

professional position. I chose vulnerability. I'd rather be uncomfortable and learning for 8 weeks than be unstimulated.

Upon beginning my internship, I was asked to assist the office staff as they interviewed candidates for the counselor position. I would participate in mock counseling sessions, accompany the candidates for lunch, and attend the presentations they prepared. I was expected to give my opinion of each candidate from a student's perspective. The following week, I dedicated my time to getting familiar with the Bringing in the Bystander program that was administered to all the freshmen that participated in Greek life during their second semester. Bringing in the Bystander is a sexual violence prevention program created by the University of New Hampshire that focuses on using bystanders to prevent the occurrences of violence on college campuses. Students participated in a 90-minute session and were asked to take a pre and post survey. The surveys were used to analyze the effectiveness of the Bystander program. My job was to enter the data from the surveys into an analysis database, SPSS, so that the other assistant and I could run statistics on the data. We spent a couple weeks entering data, excluding bad data, and readjusting our sample. Afterwards, we ran our analyses, interpreted the results into Google sheets and tables, and began to draft a paper. While we were working with the data, Dr. Noffsinger-Frazier asked us to attend the planning meetings for the new university safety app, *LiveSafe*. We gave our input as students and organization leaders about the information the launch team had compiled for the app. Attending these meetings was an insightful experience, as I was able to witness how university leaders with varying mindsets work together to create a resource that will be beneficial to students, staff, faculty, parents, and visitors. Other projects that

my co-assistant and I took on was preparing a PowerPoint slide as an addition to the Bystander training that addressed alcohol use and toxic masculinity as well as creating and submitting two proposals for further data collection to the Institutional Review Board.

I must admit that I went into this internship not confident in my analysis skills. For the first couple weeks, I was constantly trying to hide behind topic searches and organizing data. Yet, when the time came for analysis, I knew exactly what kind of tests we needed to run and how to do it. That was such a relieving and self-empowering moment for me. I didn't feel like a slacker or as if I was holding the entire team down. If I had let my vulnerability get the best of me, I would have cowered and shrouded behind the work of someone else. Of course there were some parts of the project that I was not familiar with, but Dr. Jackson was there when we needed assistance and he was great at explaining concepts without making us feel ashamed. I have learned more during this summer than I learned in class. For me, hands-on experience is my primary style of learning therefore this internship was extremely helpful to solidify and expand skills that I had acquired during class times.

After eight weeks of data entry, analysis, and interpretation, we have a draft of a research manuscript for publication. I was responsible for transforming our data results into digestible words and tables as well as writing up the methods we used to gather data and the type of scales we used to measure effectiveness. I was constantly relying on the APA Publication Manual while writing my portion of the manuscript. While this part of writing in Psychology is my strength, I had never been expected to pay much attention to detail, but it was completely worth it. I learned how to create a table, which is something I never learned in my classes. I learned how to write a

solid method section, how to search for bad data, along with other skills. I became comfortable with my vulnerability as a research assistant so that I was able to receive guidance from Dr. Noffsinger-Frazier and Dr. Jackson.

Now, after weeks of editing, I can proudly say my internship for the Wellness Center this summer has been the best thing I could have ever done for myself. Not only have I been exposed to new research tactics, but I've had wise conversations with professionals that have already taken the steps that I am looking to take for myself. Dr. Noffsinger-Frazier has taught me that even though she's the Director, she is still human. There were times when she chose family over work, and I admired that tremendously. It really taught me the importance of having women representatives in every field. Women are very open about the responsibilities they have and it allows organizations to make space for a woman to fulfill those responsibilities without belittling her professional duties. During my sophomore year I had a male professor say to my class, "I feel sorry for all you women that want to pursue careers in the sciences." That hadn't bothered me until the moment I decided to pursue a clinical degree in Psychology. Society wants you to choose work, and room for family and love is not an option, for a woman. Women are just as capable as men to uphold high professional goals as well as have a personal love and family life. I want to be an example to young women, especially black girls, that you can have your cake and eat it too. After this summer, I became rooted in my desire to continue my education in Psychology, but I have also become inspired to write about mental issues in the black community. As someone who struggles with her own sadness, I have yet to find research on how mental issues are expressed in the black community. Therefore, I am making it my duty to

provide resources and information for my community. Without this internship, I don't think I would have had that realization. But without my acceptance of vulnerability, I would not have given myself the opportunity to find out.