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COLLEGE STUDENTS ON RESTRICTIVE SANCTIONS

Examining Developmental and Sociological Effects of Restrictive Behavioral Sanctions on

College Students

A Dissertation Presented

By

Patrick Sharry

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2022

Ph.D. Educational Studies

Human Development and Learning Specialization

## COLLEGE STUDENTS ON RESTRICTIVE SANCTIONS

Examining Developmental and Sociological Effects of Restrictive Behavioral Sanctions on

College Students

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Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

Ph.D. Educational Studies

Human Development and Learning Specialization

**Dissertation Approval***In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation is approved.*

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## COLLEGE STUDENTS ON RESTRICTIVE SANCTIONS

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### Abstract

With the rising costs and social implications of attending higher education, the importance of student success and degree completion has taken on even more weight in recent years.

Something that can derail these important elements is the implementation of a restrictive sanction due to the impact they have on a student's personal and social development. While the success rate of sanctioned K-12 students continues to be explored by many researchers, the population of traditional college students who are severely sanctioned has not been well represented in the literature. This study explores the lived experiences of college students issued a restrictive sanction due to their behaviors, instead of those who are "failing out" of college.

Using a phenomenological method, five research participants completed a survey and took part in a semi-structured interview to provide insights into their experience with these sanctions.

These participants, ranging from current students to recent graduates, faced a variety of sanctions across multiple institutions. This analysis resulted in themes such as student ostracization from the institution, perceived labeling from administration, a retreat to individual or small group reliance, reassessing priorities, and a change toward having a resigned or pessimistic view of their circumstances. Additionally, a theme outside of the student experience that arose was the belief that higher education institutions need to reconsider their sanctioning practices to a more individualistic response per each student. Recommendations from this study include institutions implementing a mentor to assist and accompany students on their restrictive sanction journey to enhance reflection.

*Keywords:* Sanctioning, student success, higher education, student development

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## COLLEGE STUDENTS ON RESTRICTIVE SANCTIONS

### **Examining Developmental and Sociological Effects of Restrictive Behavioral Sanctions**

#### **Chapter One: Introduction**

"The best four years of your life" is a well-known cliché, and many students have heard that phrase multiple times before, during, and after their own college experience. This high praise for post-secondary education creates images of friendships, parties, incredible post-graduate outcomes, or other triumphant scenes in the minds of young adults across the country. The expression captures glorified years of invincibility, exploration, or the expression of young adulthood while seemingly ignoring, or maybe just forgoing, potential pitfalls, social unease, or anxieties that come during the college experience. Of course, many college students can participate in their college experience as they would like. They can aim for something close to what they pictured in their minds every time they heard that ageless cliché. However, for some, their experience is not as carefree, nor does it match that adolescent daydream. In fact, something that certainly does not come to mind when thinking through the "best four years of your life" phrase, unless it occurs ironically, is a date with a dean or disciplinarian who is issuing restrictive punishments. With college often being a period of time that is ripe for individual growth, finding oneself, or developing new social relationships, the restrictions put in place by a punishment must have an impact on the student experiencing the punishment.

This study is an exploration of the restrictive sanctions issued to college students in response to their behavior instead of academic performance and the lived experiences of the students to whom they are issued. Additionally, this study involved examining any effects of the restrictive sanction that may occur, positive or negative, regardless of the university's intention when implementing the discipline. Utilizing developmental (Chickering's Theory of Student Identity Development, Schlossberg's Transition Theory) and sociological (Labeling Theory,

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General Strain Theory) lenses, this study involved examining the use of restrictive sanctions at the college level and the subsequent developmental and sociological impact it has on the student. Through interviews with five individuals who were issued restrictive sanctions during their college experience, this qualitative study will bring to light the true circumstances of these students as they maneuver these sanctions as part of their campus community.

### **Background on Restrictive Sanctions**

Restrictive sanctions issued to a student for their behavior are often a high-level response by an institution to address to a student violating the code of conduct or the expectations of the community. While the distinct policies and the resulting institutional responses may vary from school to school, restrictive sanctions are almost universally included as options for schools to utilize. One of the most restrictive of sanctions, and one of the most well-known sanctions, is a suspension. Suspensions have been well studied for students in the K-12 years of education, focusing on the inequity of who the suspensions are issued to, the resulting academic impact of the sanction, the overall effectiveness the suspension has on student behavior, and the impact on individual identity development (Anyon et al., 2014; Krezmien et al., 2006; Losen, 2011; Moreno & Segura-Herrera, 2013; Morris & Perry, 2016; Quin & Hemphill, 2014; Seager et al., 2015, Skiba et al., 2014). However, in the post-secondary levels of education, studies into suspensions are often focused on academic performance instead of a student's behavior. With students, especially those attending residential colleges, learning quite a bit outside of their classroom, the impacts of sanctions that hinder or restrict how they engage in their environment is not well understood. According to Moffatt (1988):

For about 40% of students, the do-it-yourself side of college [what took place outside the classroom] was the most significant educational experience. And for all but 10%,

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extracurricular learning had been at least half of what had contributed to their maturation so far in college. (p. 58)

With the college experience often being a vital part of a student's learning and maturation, a punishment of exile or enforced constraints from certain community events, even for a limited period of time, should be better studied to understand the repercussions of restrictive sanctions on the student's development.

### **Researcher's Reflexivity**

My understanding of, and subsequent interest in, restrictive sanctions at the college level stems from my time as a college administrator issuing these types of sanction. As someone who investigated alleged college policy violations, I utilized sanctions on behalf of the university as a way to address unacceptable behavior or situations. Traditionally, restrictive sanctions were held as a response to more serious misconduct. Students facing restrictive sanctions are removed from their social groups, peers, or even unceremoniously ushered out of the college environment. This being said, there often is not much follow-up to understand the student's experience or how they may have developed through that time. After implementing a number of restrictive sanctions for a variety of cases over the course of my career, my interest was stirred to truly understand the depth and impact of these sanctions on the student.

As an administrator, I adjudicated alleged violations from simple noise complaints and minors in possession of alcohol to more severe violations including stalking, domestic violence, physical altercations, and sexual assault. While each case unfolded differently, within these experiences I would collect statements from the people involved, review reports from university staff or police, and review any other relevant information that would provide insights into the alleged violation. In my nearly five years as an administrator, I was able to investigate hundreds

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of cases. My conversations, both in person and through email communication, with the students who were alleged to violate university policy served as the majority of my interaction with them. In very rare circumstances, these students would follow up with me after their sanction. I typically did not see a student beyond the conversation in my office. While I attempted to provide a personable, professional face to students, I had no way to truly know their opinions of me after the sanction was issued, as it often was sent as a later email after the face-to-face meeting we had.

Through my early career in higher education, as well as my attendance at a variety of trainings and seminars that I used to supplement my career throughout the years, I have been predisposed to the rationale of why these sanctions are needed. In their meetings with me, I would hear the student's explanation of an alleged policy violation, but ultimately, I made a choice that I considered as best for the student and the university. During those meetings, I may have been perceived in a specific way due to my position. In terms of this study, how the student perceives their student conduct officer and their sanction experience will have a dramatic influence on their faith in the college judicial system and the opinion that they share in the research I conducted.

While I have issued many sanctions as an administrator and seen the sanctions from the institutions' lens, I personally did not face a restrictive sanction during my college experience. This part of who I am, as well as how I engage with the world as a heterosexual, white, male from the Northeastern United States plays a role in my worldview but also my research. Based in part on those latter, demographic traits, and how much of the society around me operates, I was set up to succeed. I was raised in a suburb of Boston where education was highly valued. For me and the community I grew up in, a college education was the expected next step after high

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school, not a privilege for a select few. That expectation meant that earning a higher degree was something of a given, but also something that I had support in pursuing as my family had done so before me. I had a built-in network who understood the higher education world and the corresponding stresses. I did not have to prioritize staying close to home or balancing a full-time job while studying, the expectation was that I would dedicate my primary time and effort to obtaining a degree. For many other communities, college is not taken for granted like that. While I had this expectation placed upon me my whole life, many other groups or communities do not.

Restrictive sanctions, including suspensions, have sparked my interest as a researcher due to the large impact they have on the student, their family, and the overall community. Most intriguing to me is the self-identity of a sanctioned student and how they view themselves during and after the sanction. I am interested to find how they identify as college students with their specific institutions, how they view themselves, and how they interpret society's view of them.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to assess the current state of college-level restrictive sanctions through the lived experiences of the students to better understand the developmental and sociological effects of these sanctions. College students, after an exile from their campus community, are in somewhat uncharted waters. This population of students, though a small subsection that is often overlooked, does not have a playbook of what to do, nor do they often have a peer or mentor who has experienced the sanction to lean on to mentally and emotionally to digest the sanction. This missing, or not yet completed research into restrictive sanctions at the college level, creates an area of opportunity. Through completing this study, practitioners will be better informed on how to best serve and help the students they are working with. The lack of knowledge surrounding restrictive sanctions is a disservice to everyone involved as each party

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may have much to gain through exploring the topic further.

While this study is focused on the lived experiences of the students that these sanctions directly impact, there are corresponding influences on institutions and the college administrators that implement the sanctions. Understanding how restrictive sanctions impact the students they are issued to, as well as the corresponding effect on the student's identity development, will be beneficial to all the stakeholders involved and may shape disciplinary sanctions in the future.

### Research Questions

The research question that guided this study is:

1. How do college students make sense of their experience during and after a behavioral restrictive sanction?

Within this question, there are two main sub-questions that I focused on:

- a. What specific changes do college students identify in their experience after being restricted from a college, college event, or their college community?
- b. What do students who have been issued a restrictive sanction identify as resources they utilized, and what resources did they report were lacking?

### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined based on their relevance to the topics of this study: *sanctions*, *discipline*, *othering*, and *identity development*.

- **Restrictive Sanction:** Restrictive sanctions publicly deprive students of institutional rights or privileges. Examples include, but are not limited to, a student being suspended or expelled, being unable to study abroad, live in campus housing, serve in positions of trust and responsibility, or use university facilities (such as libraries and gymnasiums). Often, the restriction of rights or privileges is in response to a more serious violation of

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university policy and can have social implications as the student is removed or restricted from their peers.

- **College student:** A college student is a traditionally aged (17-22 years old) student enrolled in a postsecondary institution.
- **College administrator:** A college administrator is a professional member of a postsecondary institution tasked with addressing student misconduct through implementing punishments or sanctions on behalf of the institution.
- **Conduct Meeting:** College students who are reported, written up, or arrested have a conduct meeting to discuss the alleged violation. This meeting is commonly an individual one-on-one administrative conference with a college administrator.
- **Sanction:** If a student is found responsible for a violation of the Code of Conduct, they are often issued a sanction as a response. A sanction is a task or status issued to the student that often takes effect immediately after the conduct meeting. There are multiple philosophies regarding the true intention of sanctions, but one of the primary splits is if a sanction should be educational or punitive. Common sanctions outside of restrictive sanctions include educational classes (e.g., alcohol education), a fine, or a probationary status.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research on this topic could help to steer the discussion surrounding fairness, student development, and identity formation in students who are in crisis. Additionally, by utilizing strain theory, the results of this study could provide clues on how to better serve current students through a crisis to avoid a sanction, provide them with various supports to better cope with stresses. Instead of restricting or exiling these students, student affairs professionals and

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administrators could respond with support for these students who may need their institution's help to succeed.

The results of this study will be useful to the key stakeholders involved in college restrictive sanctions, mainly the students themselves and the college administrators. College administrators will gain further insight into the impacts of the sanction that they are implementing on students in crisis. Additional understanding of these sanctions would be beneficial as administrators can understand the lived experience of the students and what available supports should be utilized to address any potential negative repercussions during the sanction or after its completion. Through a more thorough analysis of this study and further studies like this, administrators can make changes to sanctioning to rectify any potential negative repercussions for students, remedy any inequitable trends of sanction implementation, and, if there are any, address larger societal ramifications.

The exploration into the impacts of restrictive sanctions will also be beneficial for the sanctioned student themselves. Currently, many sanctioned students are left to their own devices while handling their new circumstances. By studying the student's experience, these students could be better served while on sanction. Since not much is known about the experience of restricted college students, it is important to understand what benefits and shortcomings they encounter. "[I]f school exclusion is proved to be the *cause* of detrimental outcomes later in life, it will be worth investing in more programs focusing specifically on the reduction of school exclusion" (Valdebenito et al., 2019, p. 278). Through understanding these sanctions, students could be better supported to avoid common pitfalls or stumbling blocks.

Considering the identity development side of these restrictive sanctions through sociology is important based on how it may impact the individual and the community.



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Understanding how individuals respond to their perception of society's expectations and the subsequent influence that has on how they move forward in society is crucial to address student crises prior to, during, and after the sanction. How one views oneself personally, as well as within the fabric of their campus and with their peers, plays into how they engage with the community around them. When being removed from their social group, a student issued a restrictive sanction may have a unique response to social reintegrate themselves. "Socially ostracized individual[s] may reduce their contribution in comparison to their prior contribution as a form of counter punishment" or "an individual may increase their contributions to regain the group's approval" (Davis & Johnson, 2015, p. 127). Through this study, a better understanding of how restricted students respond to varied levels of restriction could inform future practices.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

The delimitations of the study are: (1) the study was limited to only the experience of students sanctioned based on behavioral infractions. Academic non-performance or other reasons for time-off from post-secondary education were not considered. (2) The study was restricted to private, 4-year universities on the East Coast of the US. (3) Administrators, policymakers, family, and friends of the sanctioned students were not interviewed and additional context beyond the student account were not sought out.

The limitations of this study are: (1) The timing and resources of the researcher. Based on my role as a doctoral student, the overall structure of this study was limited to a timeline and budget of a smaller scale research project. (2) There was a risk of non-reply where selected participants did not answer survey questions or participate in interviews. With this limitation, there was a risk of not accumulating enough information to be relevant. (3) Based on my previous role as an educational administrator, there was a risk for preconceived notions that may

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infiltrate the study. Mainly, as an individual who once served in the role of implementing sanctions, I believe that the sanctions are not wholly unjust and/or applied without good reason. Through time working in the same role, I believe that more often than not student conduct administrators are held to their policies of their schools and issue sanctions based on the severity of the student's action, not just to punish the student for the sake of punishment. (4) Implicit bias may be introduced through qualitative coding and analysis. Similar to the explanation for preconceived notions, based on my time as an educational administrator, I needed to understand my bias surrounding students who have been issued these sanctions. Through my time working with students in similar situations, I may have unrealized opinions or understanding of sanctioned students that will color the analysis.

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**Chapter Two: Overview of the Literature**

Sanctions within the academic world are primarily focused on those levied for academic reasons, such as poor performance, or within the K-12 years of public schooling. Through the journey of reviewing literature, it became clear that much of the research on restrictive sanctions revolves around the implication on the students to whom they are issued. To properly assess these sanctions, this chapter begins with theories that may apply to students dealing with restrictive sanctions and is followed by a section regarding the history of such sanctions in education. The next sections detail the impacts of sanctions on social and individual development. For each subsection, this chapter contains an explanation of how restrictive sanctions shapes student development as they are issued sanctions. To conclude the literature review, gaps in restrictive sanctioning research are evaluated as much of the literature on exclusionary sanctions is explored at the K-12 level of schooling. While the parallels may be assumed as trends are extrapolated to the college setting, there are specific challenges and characteristics of college that must be explored, as it is an exceedingly unique environment. Table 1 contains an overview of the literature reviewed in this section and provides a high-level summary of the theories utilized in the framework of this study.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Theories Utilized for the Framework of this Study*

<b>Theory or Area of Literature</b>	<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Key Points or Takeaways</b>
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<b>Chickering's Theory of Student Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Development Theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often used to examine the identity development process of students in higher education</li> <li>• Seven vectors contribute to the development of identity:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Developing competence</li> <li>○ Managing emotions</li> <li>○ Moving through autonomy to interdependence</li> <li>○ Developing mature interpersonal relationships</li> <li>○ Establishing identity</li> <li>○ Developing purpose</li> <li>○ Developing integrity</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Schlossberg's Transition Theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Development Theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A transition as any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles</li> <li>• Four "S's": Situation, Self, Support. Strategies</li> <li>• To understand the meaning that a transition has for a particular individual, the type, context, and impact of the transition must be considered</li> </ul>
<b>Labeling Theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociology</li> <li>• Criminology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-identity and behavior can be influenced by the terms or "labels" used to describe them</li> <li>• Deviance is not inherent in an act, but a label given to those outside social norms</li> <li>• Stigma is a negative label that can change a person's social identity</li> </ul>
<b>Strain Theory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociology</li> <li>• Criminology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure stemming from social factors, that drive individuals to act out</li> </ul>

To find and select the literature for this study, I used key words, such as *sanctions*, *college* or *university*, and *punishment* within multiple document libraries, including institutional collections and broader searches in sources such as Google Scholar. In addition to these searches, I included K-12 sanctioning research, implications of sanctions at any level, college student

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development, and student success in college. A key area that was intentionally omitted was academic struggles/failure as this study was focused on responses to policy violations instead of grade performance.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To understand the developmental impacts of college restrictive sanctions, and the societal implications, several key theories have been identified: Chickering's Theory of Student Development, Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Labeling theory, and Strain Theory. These theories were chosen based on their positions alongside the research topic. Chickering and Schlossberg are two preeminent higher education researchers and theorists. They have combined to shape many research projects around the higher education space and their theories are based on college students. Labeling and strain are sociological theories in the study of deviance. Deviant behaviors are those that violate social norms. When it comes to actions that result in college restrictive sanctions, it nearly goes without saying that something beyond social norms has occurred, whether that be society at large or the social norms of a specific campus. Utilizing these theories, an understanding is generated regarding how the student perceives themselves based on the restrictive sanction, both personally and socially. Implementing strain theory provides insight on what sociological expectations led to the restrictive sanction and if that was addressed through the sanction.

### ***Labeling Theory***

When considering a topic such as restrictive sanctions or punishment overall, the definition of deviance arises. In sociology, deviance is considered behavior that is outside of formal or informal social norms. In terms of restrictive sanctions, both at the K-12 and postsecondary levels, a student is sanctioned when they violate policy or are not ascribing to the

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expectations set forth by the educational community. An important approach to understanding deviance in sociology is labeling theory.

Labeling theory posits that an action itself is not intrinsically deviant, but instead becomes an issue when the majority party labels it as such or considers it outside of the norm. The definitions of what is or is not acceptable are defined and reinforced by society's power structure. Someone who violates the social norm or acts out is then labeled as deviant. Oftentimes, the individual may then adopt the label that is given to them and exhibit further behaviors, actions, or attitudes in accordance with the label. According to this theory, people become deviant when the label is forced upon them. Being labeled as something may impact the identity or perspective of self within the one who has been labeled.

Chambliss' classic work, *The Saints and the Roughnecks*, outlines the power that is tied to labeling but is consciously not as often recognized. For instance, in *The Saints and the Roughnecks*, two groups of boys, both engaging in delinquent behavior, are labeled by their town. The Saints, coming from middle class families, were expected to do well and seen as good; whereas the poorer Roughnecks were expected to fail and considered more so as trouble. The views of the town tend to overlook the Saints' activities, which were often worse than the Roughnecks. However, those same townsfolk would routinely criticize and persecute the Roughnecks for their actions. The social labeling of these groups had repercussions long after the high school days as Saints went on to college and to have more successful careers. Chambliss found labeling to be something of a self-fulfilling prophecy with broad impacts for those being labeled.

Contrary to labeling theory is another criminological theory on deterrence. "Deterrence theorists predict that sanctions, especially those which are swift, certain, and proportionally

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severe, will deter or reduce further criminal behavior. Additionally, criminal justice policy is often predicated on the assumption that sanctions deter offenders” (Bouffard, 2010, p. 839). This mindset is one that is partially attributed to college sanctions. Responses like fines are meant to be punitive and a deterrent from certain behavior where other sanctions are more educational, like an alcohol education class. For restrictive sanctions, they may carry so much weight that they serve as a deterrent of sorts, but what does the residual impact of being restricted from a community, event, or group mean for the individual as they move forward?

For students facing restrictive sanctions, they are being outcast from their educational setting and being labeled in relation to their actions. They gain this title and social stigma. Goffman (1963) defined stigma as the “situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (p.154). This disqualification from a group, event, experience, or even campus, as well as from full social acceptance, must weigh heavily on a student, especially if they do not see their policy violation in the way their college does. For college students, they may not agree with their rationale for why they are being sanctioned or that they even are being sanctioned, so the deviant label may weigh even more on the student. Socially, teachers and peers may begin to view the recently labeled student in a new way. The stigma creates a negative social label both internally for the person but also for how the society around them views them.

Lemert’s (1972) stance on deviance also plays an interesting role with college restrictive sanctions. Lemert defined primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance are acts that are not publicly labeled as such. They have no impact on one’s identity and individuals do not see themselves as deviant. In fact, most people engage in primary deviance from time to time. Secondary deviance is when an individual has been “caught” or labeled for their deviant behavior. The individual is called out for their infraction and stigmatized, and as a reaction may

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continue the particular act. On the college level, restrictive sanctions are one of the biggest, attention getting ways that an institution may address a policy violation. The violation is clearly being outlined by administrators, the individual is being labeled as violating the rules, and the issue is being amplified through a sanction. Through this study, I aimed to uncover instances of secondary deviance for sanctioned students, which would mean the sanctioned students would continue to behave in a deviant manner while serving their sanction.

### *Chickering's Theory of Student Identity Development*

School environments are often considered a hotbed for development. They require individuals to interact with peers, authority figures, rules, their own learning, and many other factors while attempting to figure out one's place within it all. Focusing primarily on college-aged students, Arthur Chickering described seven 'vectors' of development and how educational administrators could utilize this in understanding student development (Garfield & David, 1986). Chickering's vectors are popular, in part, due to Chickering's dedication to improving practices in the field. In short, the seven vectors are: developing competence, the ability to manage emotions, the movement through autonomy toward interdependence, the development of mature interpersonal relationships, the establishment of identity, developing purpose, and the development of integrity. Overall, the vectors do not follow strict pathways or sequences, but they can build off each other or interact. Chickering's theory uses the seven vectors to show what "contributes to the formation of identity" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 66). The vectors can be a way of understanding how an individual thinks, feels, or believes, but also include relationships with others. As the students develop upon these vectors, albeit all at different rates, they may find themselves reevaluating issues or beliefs that they had previously.



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Developing competence is the first vector, wherein a student works to understand. These competencies can be wide-ranging, from understanding and working towards relationships with others, to developing a physical skill or gaining additional intellectual knowledge. For a student facing a restrictive sanction, the time of being constrained from their building, peers, events, or academic institution could allow for that competence growth. This could be through maneuvering into a previously unexamined path, such as an internship, working with counselors, or any number of external agencies. Administrators, when enacting restrictive sanctions, are hoping that students are learning and developing additional skills with their time, not just waiting for time to pass before attempting a return to their previous status quo.

The second vector is about managing emotion, which is often critical for students whose sanction may have been caused by an emotional outburst or reaction. This vector includes individuals learning to truly understand emotions, and how to effectively express that emotion, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. In late adolescence and/or early adulthood, life often becomes more complex, which, in turn, allows for complicated emotions. In the case of restrictive sanctions, managing emotion is important in two ways. First, there may have been emotion that erupted into an incident that led to the sanction. The student may need to learn to more effectively express emotions in the moment. Second, there is the emotion after the sanction as well, when the student may be hit with a further wave of emotions such as sadness, frustration, loneliness, or other negative feelings. Administrators issuing restrictive sanctions need to understand the emotional toll of the sanction, especially for students who may not be as adept at managing their emotions. However, there may be a positive impact of a restrictive sanctions as well. By having been mandated to keep distant from identified areas/groups/scenarios, students

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may better be able to understand and control their emotions. This vector seems to be one that is largely influenced by restrictive sanctions.

It is also important for students to come to grips with their own autonomy by taking responsibility for themselves. The third vector of moving through autonomy to interdependence extends from the previous vector of managing emotion. Achievement in this vector involves a student becoming emotionally independent in a way that they have more initiative and do not need as much approval from others. While they recognize their individuality, they also understand how they play a part in society as a whole. For sanctioned students, a sign that a student has developed this third vector occurs when the student stops blaming others for their actions. Their friends nor the school are the reason they received a sanction, instead, it is based on their actions. This mindset of being autonomous also combines well with the development of mature relationships, which is Chickering's fourth vector. In this vector, students work to better understand and appreciate others. When applying this vector to students facing restrictive sanctions, it is important to recognize that students may be influenced by those around them. Again, this is something to consider both for when the incident occurred and also while the student is constrained from something they value. Sometimes, students need to reevaluate their friendships or mentors in their college setting as they relate to their future goals.

Several of the final vectors, such as establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity are also crucial pieces of development that administrators hope for when issuing a restrictive sanction. Through a challenging moment, administrators are hoping for students to develop and treat the sanction as a learning opportunity. While there is also an element of safety involved, many disciplinary sanctions are marketed as developmental as well. Through restrictive sanctions, students can hopefully find integrity and purpose. They can reflect

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on their intent behind gaining a higher degree and what values or morals they stand for. They can answer the questions of why they are paying for college and what is their end goal after they complete their schooling. These vectors also mix with developing identity. They all can be self-reflective, which some students can find on their own while others need help to do.

Chickering's vectors are an important lens through which to examine college students as they are issued restrictive sanctions or afterward because it assists in generating an understanding of the sanction's ramifications. It seems as if the rationale for many restrictive sanctions may stem from an underdeveloped vector, for example, an emotional outburst of someone who has not fully developed emotionally yet could manifest in an incident worth of a severe sanction. Since Chickering's vectors are not constructively hinged on one another, but instead all can move forward independently, one may be able to study isolated vectors to see the impact of a restrictive sanction. For instance, an exploration into whether restrictive sanctions have positive or negative influences on an individual's ability to manage emotion would be informative. By understanding where a student is on any of these vectors over the course of their sanction, this study could offer insight into the effects of a restrictive sanction on any patterns in identity development.

### ***Schlossberg's Transition Theory***

Beyond examining how a student may develop or change in response to their restrictive sanction, it is important to consider the change issued by a restrictive sanction to the student. Upon being issued a restrictive sanction, students have a lot of transitions forced on them, many of which may have been unexpected. Schlossberg's theory is focused on how people handle change and transitions. Within the theory, transitions are defined as "any event or non-event that result in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 39).

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Transitions can be anticipated or unanticipated, or could even be a non-event, where something that was expected to occur did not. There are several examples of transitions in college, such as many students are leaving home for the first time, may have a new roommate, need to make new friends, and need to become used to appropriately scheduling completion of their classwork. Regardless of the type of transition, Schlossberg outlined four pieces, the four S's, that impact how someone handles a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (IBID, p. 28). While these four factors may seem self-explanatory, a brief overview is included here. Situation is explained as everything surrounding the specifics of the transition. Put simply, situation is the set of circumstances that encompass the transition. What is the transition? Was it expected? How does the affected individual view the transition? When working with someone who is going through a transition, it is important to understand the situation as fully as possible so one can carefully consider all the factors at play. Self is another piece of understanding transitions. When considering this second S, one would consider the person's characteristics and how they may view their own life. Some of the questions that may be addressed are: What is someone's outlook on this transition? Are they optimistic in this case? How is their ego? Are they someone who typically fights for themselves or just gives up?

Each of the next two S's has three parts. Regarding support, one considers the type, the function, and the measurement. For example, what type of support will work best in this scenario? What function does that support serve and how will it be measured? Various degrees and ways of support can be applied, but each person will require a unique level of support depending on the situation. The same unique approach applies to strategies. Strategies are the final S of the theory. Obviously, strategies involved the actions one implements during their transition. There are three types of strategies described in the theory. There are strategies that

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change the situation, strategies that impact the meaning of the transition/problem, and strategies that aid in managing the outcome or aftermath of the transition.

Schlossberg's stance regarding transitions seems to be quite appropriate in the greater conversation of restrictive sanctions. Restrictive sanctions are, without a doubt, a large transition to deal with, but overall, college presents various other transitions as well. Factors identified in self that influence how one handles their restrictive sanction transition, or return from a restrictive sanction, include much of the demographic information with which people may be defined. Categories, such as socioeconomic status, race, and gender, factor into how a transition presents itself to an individual. According to Schlossberg's theory, an individual's self is defined by those demographic factors included in the situation, but also their unique personal sense of determination, optimism, and outlook with which they will broach the transition. Each student has a different combination of all these factors and personality traits, so as they experience a transition such as a restrictive sanction, they will react in their own unique way.

Social factors also play a major role in coping with a transition. This is something that many scholars point to as a key for success (Anderson et al., 2012; Astin, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995). When serving their restrictive sanction, who does the student have for support? How does one's family react? What do their friends think? How does the overall community view the situation? The stark differences in support networks can play a pivotal role in the transition. If a student leaves their academic environment and is left in an unhealthy environment, they may not be able to adequately develop through the sanction.

The situation itself is another factor in Schlossberg's transition theory. All the factors play into the eventual restrictive sanction matter. Was the timing of the sanction impactful? What caused the situation and how appropriate of a response does the student think a restrictive

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sanction is? Combined with the specifics of the situation, the strategies that the student uses to efficiently cope with the situation are also important.

Clearly, a restrictive sanction is a large transition for students. They are unexpectedly not returning to a space, group, or activity that they intended to take part in. They may have to move or have to face their disappointed families. However, college, from the first year to graduation, repeatedly poses a series of stark transitions. Stresses, such as exams, social pressures, financial crunches, time demands, lack of sleep, career development, and others, provide consistent and new transitions for students to tackle. The four factors of self, situation, social, and strategies uniquely play a role in how students respond to their new status quo; however, they do not need to go through this adjustment period alone. In fact, many adults in a transition require assistance in their situation (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 37). By understanding these factors for each individual, this study was better informed on how students cope with the transitions themselves.

Schools, and many researchers, are already acutely aware of the stress of transitions in college students. Much of the research and time committed to this topic is targeted at first-year students. Freshman seminars, orientations, and consistent check-ins are peppered throughout students' first year in the college environment. That first-year transition is monitored to be as smooth as possible. However, one could argue that later students are often left without such a level of care, and students who issued restrictive sanctions may receive even less. Restrictive sanctions, and the incident that led to the sanction, have distinct impacts on the students they affect. Using the lens of this theory helped guide this study toward the answers regarding the outcomes of a restrictive sanction and the cause of that outcome.

Recognizing that a restrictive sanction could be an abrupt transition for a college student, Schlossberg's theory was applied to understand the implications of the sanctions. By framing

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their analysis in this way, it was possible to appreciate and isolate the uniqueness of the different variables surrounding each student and specific situation. When combining this with labeling theory and how they both play into Chickering's theory, this study's analysis became more robust. As a student internalizes and deals with the social stigma, the influence of the restrictive sanction begins to rear its ugly head. Further, applying these student development theories resulted in an understanding of the impact of these restrictive sanctions on the students they are issued to. Student affairs professionals aim to educate students outside of the college classroom and by utilizing these student development theories, the aim of this study was to understand if restrictive sanctions aid in a student's development. As discipline has changed over the eras, the call for equitable and educational sanctions has grown. Through understanding the distinct college student transition of a restrictive sanction, one will be able to more appropriately assess the impact on development.

For this study, transition theory makes its mark in two ways. First, transition theory may be part of why the student was issued a restrictive sanction in the first place. The student may not have adequately transitioned to college or whatever unique circumstance was surrounding them on campus. Through understanding their sanction further, both in terms of the timing and the cause, this study was able to may be able to probe further in interviews on how a student was adjusting to a transition. A student could directly recognize they were struggling to fit into a new environment, and the transition could help the student explain or make meaning of their incident.

Second, transition theory is relevant post-sanction as the student transitions from their original status quo to their new normal. Through questions about what the student is currently doing on their sanction and how they have transitioned into their new normal, this study resulted

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in further insights about how students make meaning of their sanction, and some developmental changes that they reported.

### *General Strain Theory*

General Strain Theory is a sociological and criminological theory that addresses how individuals react to achieve social expectations based on the pressures of their community. “General strain theory (GST) argues that strains or stressors increase the likelihood of negative emotions like anger and frustration. These emotions create pressure for corrective action, and crime is one possible response” (Agnew, 2001, p. 319). While not all incidents that result in restrictive sanctions are crimes, there is a connection between social pressures and how a student may act. General strain theory posits that an individual acts out as a way to cope with their stress or distress. Of course, not all individuals react with “crime” as GST admits, but the theory explains how some individuals respond to their circumstances. One such strain or stress that often leads to a reaction is something perceived as “unjust.” as it lends itself towards stirring up anger (Agnew, 2001, p.327). “Anger fosters crime because it disrupts cognitive processes in ways that impede noncriminal coping; for example, it leads individuals to disregard information that may help resolve the situation, and it reduces the ability to clearly express grievances” (Agnew, 2001, p. 327). While not all students who have been issued restrictive sanctions will have acted in anger, it is not a large leap to explore how pressure or expectations led a student to behave or react in a certain way. In a developmental state of still attempting to figure out who one is, confusion or anger may arise when one’s assumed identity is challenged. The academic type who fancies themselves as the most intelligent in the room may react upon the receipt of a bad grade. The macho alpha male may react when his masculinity is questioned in front of his peers. The stress of not living up to societal expectations, or to compound the issue, the



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confusion of where one fits within those societal expectations may lead to more grievous outbursts.

Using Strain Theory was an intriguing way to analyze this study as it took some self-reflection by the participants to truly be uncovered. Through questions around if the student found their sanction fair, what caused their sanction, and if they were expecting this level sanction, this study included determining if the participant was striving toward a goal or felt societal pressure for some achievement. Understanding the causes of whatever policy violation led to the restrictive sanction is a useful tool to utilize when investigating how a student makes meaning of their situation as well as what resources or supports would be beneficial to them. By thoroughly understanding the strain a student was, or is, under, this study resulted in a better understanding of how the students make meaning of their circumstances.

### *Integration of Theories*

Each of the above four theories helped shape the study and provided guide rails for analysis. Upon a student's sanction, they face a transition of being within their college social norms to being labelled as someone outside of them. While the student will be grappling with the external social elements of this, there is also an opportunity to view their moral development based on their understanding of what happened and why. Through utilizing Schlossberg, this study resulted in a framework of how to analyze a student's change through the four S's. By understanding the student's situation, self, support, and strategies, I gained insight into the world around the student who was describing their lived experience. Each S has its own implications for how the student feels, what they can utilize to cope, and how they generate meaning from their circumstance. For example, if the student has significant supports from their family, they may feel differently in their sanction than someone who does not have that same support.

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Alternatively, if the school provides supports and strategies for dealing with the transition on and off of a restrictive sanction, the student may reflect positively on the institution. To provide further insights, Chickering's, Strain, and Labeling theories were used directly with Schlossberg's theory so that I could understand the situation, which has impacts socially and on the student's self. Using Chickering's Theory of Development, alongside Schlossberg's S for self, I believed the vector where an individual comes to understand themselves as a larger part of society and/or relationships would provide insights on how the students view themselves and the community around them. On the flip side of this, I used labeling theory to understand more of how the students feel about how the community views them. Through understanding the Saints and the Roughnecks, being labeled, or even the perception of being labeled, can have a direct impact on an individual's beliefs or actions, and therefore, labeling theory would present itself in the lived experience of the students participating in this study. Finally, general strain theory was an important consideration to view the students' lived experiences, both right before they were issued their sanction as well as through their experience on the sanction. Was it a strain that caused the student to act in a way that received a sanction or was it a situation where, while on a sanction, the student was struggling with the strain of the sanction while attempting to return to normal? All of these theories provided insights into the lived experience of the students and combined, serve as a general theoretical framework of this study.

### **Understanding the Restrictive Sanctions in College**

To best understand the topic of restrictive sanctions, literature from the fields of education, psychology, sociology, and developmental sciences were utilized to shape this study. Understanding a study surrounding college level restrictive sanctions requires a look into the gap in the research as well as the history and impacts that educational discipline have on other types

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of students. The following section is broken up by key topics to give a broader view of the relevant parts of this study. Table 2 presents an overview of how this study gained an understanding around the broader environment of restrictive sanctions through providing a summary of each section and the resources used to inform this literature review.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Resources Used to Explore the Restrictive Sanctions Environment*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Summary</b>
<b>Purpose of Punishment</b>	Punishment has five recognized purposes: deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation, retribution, and restitution.
<b>History of Higher Education Discipline</b>	Higher Education Discipline has changed through the centuries. Early discipline included corporal punishment before growing into the philosophy of <i>in loco parentis</i> . More recently, zero-tolerance policies and restorative justice practices have been utilized to correct or address student behavior.
<b>Social Development</b> (Related to Educational Punishment)	Social implications for students are wide reaching after being issued a punishment. Students face social backlash and a disconnect with their school or teachers. Students feel that they may not fit in a school settings and are likely to get in trouble again.
<b>Identity Development</b> (Related to Educational Punishment)	Educational sanctions can have a large impact on how one views themselves and their role in the educational environment. School years are largely formative and without proper supports; a sanction can attribute to an individual developing negative beliefs about who they are.

### *Purpose of Punishment*

Sanctions, put bluntly, are types of punishment. As mentioned previously, the school or institution may have a variety of rationales for why they are implementing the sanction, but regardless of why, it is clear there is a reason to truly issue the punishment to the student. Often, punishments are polarizing. Those who may have connections to the punished decry the punishment; whereas, those negatively impacted by the policy violation, such as victims or

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survivors, may even believe the punishment is not severe enough. It seems that the overall fairness of punishments can be viewed as subjective. Indeed, even the most strident decriers of punishments most likely believe in some sort of punishment, even if not in that specific case or situation. Overall, humans exist in societies that are governed by laws or rules, both written and unwritten, and expect that their peers will adhere to these laws. Due to this, “there are few social practices more time-honored or more widely accepted throughout the world than the practice of punishing wrongdoers” (Hampton, 1984, p. 208). The idea of punishment is not what is debated, instead the debate is always surrounding who or why. Regarding the purpose of punishment, there are a few theories on the core of why societies punish. Punishment has five recognized purposes: deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation, retribution, and restitution.

Deterrence is exactly as it sounds. Punishments are meant to deter someone from committing a crime or breaking a policy. This punishment addresses the one who committed the infraction as well as the larger public viewing the entire situation. As Hampton asserted:

Punishments are like electrified fences. At the very least they teach a person, via pain, that there is a ‘barrier’ to the action she wants to do, and so, at the very least, they aim to deter. But because punishment ‘fences’ are marking moral boundaries, the pain which these fences administer (or threaten to administer) conveys a larger message. (p. 212)

Alongside deterrence, retribution is a factor of every punishment. Those in the society around the wrongdoer, or accused wrongdoer, want that person to be adequately punished for a crime. Through this, the society can achieve a certain satisfaction that their societal processes are working effectively, and it works to certify the overall societies laws, rules, or views.

The other purposes of punishment, incapacitation, rehabilitation, and restitution are not part of every punishment, but instead, can begin to form the outlines of several distinct

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punishment pathways. Incapacitation makes it so that someone cannot violate the law or rule again. Examples of incapacitation include incarceration or, more severely, the death penalty. At the college level, the restrictions placed on students may work as ways to incapacitate them. Restitution is a financial response to the individual's wrongdoing. They have to pay for what they did. This often is for the benefit of someone who was individually wronged or in the case of a larger community, paying to restore a communal good. Finally, rehabilitation is an attempt to alter an individual's behavior. The punishment works to change how someone would move forward through education or new practices. At the college level, many sanctions are defined as educational and focused on getting a student to better, or more safely, conform to the expectations of the community. All the defined purposes of punishment arise when examining the purpose of punishments in college. When considering restrictive sanctions, it is clear that these are not only about incapacitation, but also work as deterrents, and ideally, as a way to rehabilitate a student.

Of course, punishments are not solely for the individual. There is communication to the community with the issuance of every sanction. This communication can operate in two main ways. The first way aligns with deterrence. Much like on the individual level, the punishment itself aims to stop others from acting in such a way. As a community sees a harsh punishment take place in response to a crime, they will think twice before acting in the same way. However, there is also a communication from a punishment that works to assuage the community sentiment. "Ordinary people not surprisingly become more and more hostile toward criminals. They lose their interest in "reforming" offenders and instead want them punished, as severely and cheaply as possible" (Cullen, et al., 2000). The punishing body works to define the punishment based on the level of crime, but also off of the opinion of the surrounding community. The

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punishment works as a “symbolic non-acquiescence or ‘Speaking in the Name of the People’” (Feinberg, 1965). To this end, there is a reason why different cultures have their hierarchy of crimes and punishments. While certain crimes are universally toward to upper end of the spectrum, others will ebb and flow in each culture’s own view. DiIulio (1997) explained that Americans in the mid-1960s wanted policies that would limit the return of people who assaulted, raped, robbed, or murdered, to the streets. While public perception will change with the era and area, the values of the community are communicated to inform a punishment. However, the reverse is true in the way that punishments also work to communicate meaning to the broader community.

### *History of Higher Education Discipline*

Beyond understanding theories that apply to restrictive sanctions, it is important to detail the historical context of how student discipline has come to how it is currently constituted. This overview of discipline in schooling covers topics on both the K-12 level and the postsecondary level. There have been changes through time in what is expected of schools and their students, all of which tie to the beliefs and issues of society at that time. To better understand today’s context, I needed to understand how we have gotten here.

As one can imagine, student misbehavior and the subsequent discipline has been a part of education since the beginning of formalized classroom experiences. As mentioned in the introduction, schools and educational settings were tasked with morally and academically educating their pupils (Smith, 1994; Kafka, 2011). In historical examples of education, teachers and educators took the place of parents, creating the phrase many reference now as *in loco parentis*. With this ideology, educators were charged and expected to make decisions in the best interest of their students. This style of educational structure allowed educators to step in to

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respond to misbehavior as if they were the parent to the student. Early Americans, many with Puritan values, believed that the role of schooling contained a moral education in addition to learning practical skills. The authority given to educators allowed for a broad interpretation of what acceptable behavior was and what acceptable punishments were. This parental understanding made it so schools could implement corporal punishment as the response. Corporal punishment is defined as using the intention of causing physical pain to correct misbehavior (Gershoff & Font, 2016). Switches, rulers, or cowhide were not uncommon in educational settings. However, as educational innovators like Horace Mann and Philipp Emanuel von Fellenberg shared their ideas on education, physical punishment was all but ushered out. Mann (1867) claimed this physical response to be a “relic of barbarism” (p. 65). Additionally, there was a raging debate on if punishment was the best way to morally educate someone (Kafka, 2011). While it instilled fear and “ultimately lead to compliance,” it was unclear if the problems were truly being remedied (Kafka, 2011, p. 17). While not as socially accepted, corporal punishment still is legally allowed in 19 states as the U.S. federal government allows states to make their own laws on the topic (Gershoff & Font, 2016).

Through the early 1900s, ideas regarding how students were supposed to be handled when acting out in the classroom began to change (Kafka, 2011; Smith, 1994). The rise of secularism in education brought forth the idea that the emphasis of education should be more practically based than moral. Post-World War II thoughts on “problem behavior” grew from chewing gum and noise to lack of respect, theft, and vandalism (Mowen, 2014). A landmark case, dealing a blow to the *in loco parentis* ideology was *Dixon v. Alabama State Board of Education*. This case granted higher education students the right of due process in their

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disciplinary procedures. Students could not be expelled without a hearing, which took away some of the parental, all encompassing, power of the educators.

When the country was also grappling with the Civil Rights Movement, which brought violence, protests, and the issues of free speech to the educational setting, major changes were made in student discipline. In response to the times, courts ruled that students do not rescind their first or fourth amendment rights. Again, the ruling limited the power of the *in loco parentis* ideology. With more and more media coverage into student movements, like Vietnam protests or the tragedy that was the Kent State shooting, the rise of fear in schools and the thought that schools needed to be stricter on their students returned. One outcome to arise from the multitude of responses to student discipline was the zero-tolerance policy of the 1980s and 1990s. “Zero-tolerance policies grew out of drug enforcement policies established in the 1980s at the federal and state levels” (Allman & Slate, 2011, p. 3). Zero-tolerance policies were an effort to make schools safer for students and educators alike. The growth of security measures like police presence or cameras became commonplace. The rise of zero-tolerance policies was parallel to the social concerns regarding school safety. Zero-tolerance policies are, just as they sound, policies put into place to remove students who break certain rules, often with severe sanctions to promote safety (Meek, 2009; Mowen, 2014; Tebo, 2000). This quick response to a student’s behavior can put educators in a bit of a bind. Items or actions that may fit a description of a “weapon” or “drug” create a situation where students are removed from their educational setting, even though there was no intent to cause harm (Allman & Slate, 2011; Mowen, 2014; Tebo, 2000). The most common sanction issued on behalf of a zero-tolerance policy violation is a suspension, one of the most severe restrictive sanctions. In 1994, the federal government required schools to mandate a one-year expulsion if a student brought a weapon to school (Meek, 2009). Based, in part, on



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zero-tolerance policies, suspension and expulsion numbers have skyrocketed in recent years (Meek, 2009; Mowen, 2014; Tebo, 2000). This becomes especially troubling when coupling this data with these student's rates of perseverance towards degree completion. Not coincidentally, Wehlage and Rutter's (1986) study showed that school discipline was a factor in predicting school dropout rates.

While mainly seen in the K-12 range, zero-tolerance policies can also be implemented at colleges and universities, although oftentimes the policies are written into the school's code of conduct. However, zero-tolerance policies clearly are not without flaws. In fact, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008) found that there is remarkably not much information that supports the effectiveness of a zero-tolerance approach. "Moreover, zero-tolerance policies may negatively affect the relationship of education with juvenile justice and appear to conflict to some degree with current best knowledge concerning adolescent development" (APA, 2008, p. 852). As an alternative, the APA actually suggested the use of other responses that prevent or respond to misbehavior that do not limit educational opportunities. Part of that suggestion is in response to the recognized flaw in zero-tolerance policies that they are inequitably applied across different demographics, most specifically, race. While more specifics are discussed in the Restrictive Sanctions and Demographics section of this paper, a disproportionate number of students affected by zero-tolerance policies are brown and/or black. An important consideration when reviewing the history of discipline in schools is a society's history with race. In the United States, many policies, overtly and covertly, have systematically oppressed large numbers of minority groups. Educational policies are no exception. Across the nation, on average, Black students are issued the restrictive sanction of suspension two to three times more often than their white counterparts. In certain states, the disproportionate exclusion rates for Black students jump

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to six times more likely than white students (Heitzeg, 2009). For a population of approximately 17% of the population, Black students are about a third of all suspensions and expulsions (Witt, 2007). White students often are given medical interventions instead of the zero-tolerance response. This racial disparity plays directly into a systematically racist school-to-prison pipeline.

Another way of addressing crime or other offenses is the notion of restorative justice. This approach has been put into practice in a number of communities and continues to grow within the higher education environment. With roots dating back to the 1970s, this process of is not meant to be a one-size-fits all approach nor is it meant to be a complete substitute for responses to the most severe crimes. At its core, restorative justice is about making things right and alleviating harm. Instead of issuing a punishment solely as punitive measure, restorative justice aims to get offenders to take responsibility for their actions, gain an understanding of the harm they have caused, and provide an opportunity to *restore* some of the wrong they have done. Victims of a crime or infraction are often part of the process, especially to help the offender make meaning of their actions. Important to this study, part of restorative justice is support for integration into the community instead of being cast out as part of their punishment (Menkel-Meadow, 2007; Zehr & Gohar, 2003). When put into practice, there is not one path forward for an offender. The process of restorative justice is often facilitated by a third party where both the offender and the victim can share their experiences and come to a point of, hopefully, moving forward. People-centric, restorative justice hinges on the view that the crime is not a violation of law or state, but instead, the crime is a violation of another or one's obligations (Zehr & Gohar, 2003). With many colleges and universities intending to develop the whole student, teaching how to understand the impact of one's actions seems in line with that way of developing students

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(Clark, 2014). However, as each restorative justice process happens on an individual level, there are considerations of inequity or inconsistency that can raise concerns. As a newer method of addressing behavior, restorative justice could become a bigger part of the educational landscape as it becomes more part of the punishment conversation.

An additional rising trend in discipline is a tension regarding sexual misconduct in colleges and universities, as well as some of the later grades of K-12. In the public setting, there are strong divisions regarding how schools should adjudicate allegations of sexual misconduct and/or Title IX violations. As seen by varied recommendations of the Obama administration and Trump administration, how schools should respond to Title IX violations has become a public arena for debate. Obama era recommendations and policies pushed for survivor reporting support and trauma-informed investigations (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The Trump administration rolled back many of those recommendations as some believed that the approach was so survivor-centric that it inappropriately stacked the deck against students accused of violating policies (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Regardless of the policies and procedures surrounding a Title IX investigation, many students found responsible for violations are often restricted from parts of their campus life or even required to vacate campus. These sanctions are often for two main reasons. First, schools attempt to create a safe place for the survivor to continue their education, but second, there is a punishment for the alleged perpetrator implied in the sanction. Being a challenging topic to investigate, as oftentimes there are no witnesses nor additional pieces of information beyond each students' account, the choice to implement major sanctions or not has devastating repercussions either way. When a student is found responsible, suspensions and expulsions are routinely used for Title IX violations. This strong response is typically used to assist in providing

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a survivor with a safe, non-triggering educational setting. However, Title IX violations and the subsequent institutional response to each case are typically lightning rods for criticism, especially when they gain additional media attention.

Many institutions have received backlash regarding their response to sexual misconduct, which plays into the larger conversation regarding #MeToo, and overall sexual discrimination. One of the toughest pieces of Title IX violations for students found responsible, in comparison to typical rule or policy violation, is the social label associated with the sanction. When the school issues a restrictive sanction to a student for a Title IX violation, that student has the possibility of being publicly perceived as a sexual offender or rapist. While exceedingly challenging to be perceived in a way that one does not define oneself, restrictive sanctions often come with labels or new ways to identify socially. This social labeling or impact is an unwritten new normal for students on these sanctions.

### **Developmental Impacts**

College years are a majorly impactful time for many. When considering that traditionally aged students attend between the ages of 17-22, the brain is still forming and for most students it is one of the first times that they are living on their own. College is known to be a developmental place on many fronts: academically, personally, and socially. For this study, the social and personal developmental impact were determined to more closely align to this study's questions.

### ***Social Development***

The most severe restrictive sanctions are the ones that fully exclude a student from their campus environment: suspensions and expulsions. The argument that, for school-aged students, these exclusionary sanctions are similar to the prison system has its merits, even beyond the connection to the school-to-prison pipeline that many reference when speaking about this topic.

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While there is a strong connection between students who are issued an exclusionary sanction and future time in a correctional facility, the parallels between the systems are more than just the pipeline from one to the other (Noguera, 2003; Perry & Morris, 2014; Weissman, 2015). To start, both institutions now often have guards or law enforcement present, metal detectors, and cameras around every corner, others have routine drug sweeps (Noguera, 2003; Mowen 2014). It is no coincidence that the parallels lend themselves to social labeling.

Put plainly, one is relocated to prison for two main reasons, to be separated from society and to hopefully learn to correct their behavior. Regardless of the intention of the imprisonment, society is telling the subject that they do not fit into the larger community. “Punishment *communicates meaning* surrounding values, norms, and group and place identity” (Perry & Morris, 2014, p. 1070). With this in mind, it is important to understand how a student truly makes sense of their sanction which places restrictions on them. Are these students internalizing hidden meanings that are unintended through the sanction or are they taking the time away from schooling to better understand themselves or the circumstances?

In a school setting, it comes as no surprise that students struggle with that sense of not fitting in after being ostracized and these students may begin to internalize the labels that have been placed upon them (Noguera, 2003). As students begin to believe these things about themselves, they are also feeling discriminated against and perceive a stigma from classmates and teachers when they return to the academic setting (Quin & Hemphill, 2014). Of course, the policy infraction that the student is alleged, rightfully or wrongfully, of doing would seem to have a major impact on how their networks view them. Anecdotally, alcohol or lower end drugs like marijuana, would seem to receive more of a social pass from a student’s peers when compared to something like violence or sexual misconduct. While different cultures, geographic

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regions, or circumstances would likely rank the complete list of infractions in unique ways, one of the most damning areas of infractions has to be sexual misconduct. Similar to how in the prison system, sexual offenders are often targeted by other inmates, students accused of sexual misconduct on their college campus could fall out of favor for even being considered as someone who violated the policy (Scrivens & Ricciardelli, 2019). As each policy infraction has its own social meaning, one could logically ascertain that the more severe the sanction would lead to varied social impacts as well.

In their study, Quin and Hemphill (2014) found that teachers were less likely to engage with the student returning from suspension than the student's peers. This lack of support lends itself to further behavioral issues, the lack of a mentor, and a negative impact on academic achievement. Beyond these factors, this othering can also lead to a certain level of attrition. In fact, in Martin's et al. (1999) study, the biggest factor in students leaving was not an academic failure, but social isolation. In the case of exclusionary sanctions, students may not return to campus when allowed based on the fact that the sanction has ripped them from their social scene and comfort. While many higher education institutions focus time and effort on integrating first-year students, one could imagine the challenge of transitioning back to a campus that has previously shunned them, with a support network who have moved on, while not having any active support from the school. The second and third research questions of this study target this circumstance. Regarding returning to campus, an excluded student may identify supports that are missing, which would ease the transition or may be beneficial to have had at their disposal while away from the community. Secondly, administrators and researchers can make estimates or conclusions to how the impacted students' environment may have changed, for example, socially, financially, or personally. However, the aim of this study was to have the students who

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were issued restrictive sanctions identify specific and important changes that correspond with being removed from various parts of college.

The separation of restricted students is a way of social sorting (Noguera, 2003; Weissman, 2015). With the idea that schools play a role in future career placements, a student who is out of the classroom is not set up for as much success. For example, these restrictive sanctions can “send strong socialization messages to students that can affect their emerging self- and social identities” (Haight et al., 2016, p. 236). It can impact their social status and self-worth. According to Quin’s and Hemphill’s 2014 study on K-12 students’ experiences of school suspension, 42% of students responded that they “will be suspended again” when asked how much the suspension helped solve the problem that led to the sanction. With nearly half of the students expecting another suspension, it seems that they have either internalized that they are not wanted, or do not think they fit into the school setting. When K-12 students realize that school is “not working for them,” based on multiple negative interactions, they can begin to act out and may not feel they have an incentive to comply with school rules (Noguera, 2003). Trapped in a downward spiral, once students do not feel that they belong in their school setting, they are likely to re-offend in some way (Perry & Morris, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Weissman, 2015). Again, through this study addressing how students make meaning for their restrictive sanction, a focused response can be applied by colleges to aid students facing similar negative experiences, if similar trends hold true in college students. Gaining insight into how these restrictions impact the students will allow for key improvements, both proactively to reduce the number of severe sanctions and reactively to respond to common student experiences.

The physical space created by implementing restrictions on a student is not the only distance the sanction creates. The school issuing a punishment is a way for that community to

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communicate with a student that they, or their actions, are not welcome. These sanctions are something of a social label for a student, a scarlet letter. Upon their return to their original status, if they return, students are found to be treated differently by teachers, may have a social stigma about them, and may feel that they do not fit in a school setting. This othering may lead students to believe that school is not right for them or that they cannot achieve society's expectations and, therefore, do not choose to apply themselves to school rules or fitting in. The strain of trying to achieve what is expected of them, goals set forth by a social network, or even the pressure of what these students think is expected of them may be too much for them in college. Without remedying or addressing that strain that may have caused the student to act out, issuing a restrictive sanction may just exacerbate everything. Understanding how students make sense of their sanction, and what supports they believe would be useful while sanctioned, may illuminate some common stressors surrounding the sanction which may prove beneficial to the students and the institutions. This added knowledge may highlight specific areas that an institution may need to provide further resources in to eliminate or lessen stressors for their students.

Students returning to their academic environment may not have the support they need, which often leads to further incidents (Noguera, 2003; Quin & Hemphill, 2014; Welsh & Little, 2018). "A large body of research has shown that labeling and exclusion practices can create a self-fulfilling prophecy and result in a cycle of antisocial behavior that can be difficult to break" (Noguera, 2003, p. 343). In fact, exclusionary sanctions are "associated" with recidivism and further behavioral issues (Weissman, 2015). Students, regardless of how they spend their time away, are expected to return to the classroom with a new understanding of their incident or a change of behavior. However, in Quin's and Hemphill's (2014) study, over "73% of previously suspended participants selected either "not at all" or "a little bit" when asked how much being



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suspended helped to solve the problem (p. 56). Going even further beyond recidivism in the school setting, Martin and Halperin (2006) found that educational dropouts in the K-12 setting are three and a half times more likely to be incarcerated at some point in their lives when compared to high school graduates. If the majority of students do not change their behavior, or at least their mindset regarding the behavior, it makes sense how they may repeat it. If the students are not learning from their restrictive, exclusionary sanctions, but in fact, being pushed further towards social outsiders and repeat offenders, it calls into question how well these students are being served.

### *Individual Development*

As one of the preeminent voices in student development theory, Tinto (1993) noted that an entrance into college is considered something of a rite of passage for a student who must acclimate from their previous culture into the new college's culture. This integration into the academic and social communities of their campus is a critical factor in student success (Museus, 2007). Upcraft and Kramer (1995) found that college students' success had interplay with their ability to develop feelings of intellectual and academic competence, establish and maintain relationships, an exploration of their identity, key career decisions, and feelings of civic engagement and personal responsibility. All of this is to say that student success in college seems to delicately balance on a variety of elements beyond the classroom. While there may be some understanding of college involvement and subsequent academic success, the research does not follow the student who has some or all of these other elements stripped away from them and is labeled as an outsider to their college campus community. In Robeson's (1998) qualitative study, students who were reinstated after an academic suspension gave personal accounts of their time away. Common characteristics in these accounts included searching for identity, experiencing

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emotional upheavals, facing changed perceptions from professors, and a strong family influence on their motivations and decision making (Robeson, 1998). In this study, students are sanctioned, up to and including suspensions, for behavioral incidents, not academic related struggles. They will inform me of their experiences while serving a restrictive sanction and how they have made meaning of that time.

When issuing a restrictive sanction, the hope is that the sanction may evoke change in the student it is issued to on an individual basis. Instead, the research into the effectiveness of more severe restrictive sanctions, like suspensions, shows the opposite. K-12 students who have been issued an exclusionary sanction are likely to have another infraction at some point in their academic career, but moreover, are more likely to be incarcerated later in their lives. More and more, higher education institutions are being tasked with educating the whole student. Often, college is not seen as solely a place for students to participate in academic classes, but instead, students are expected to grow, develop, and understand the world around them through experiences outside of the classroom.

With this development outside of the classroom, many of the students will be grappling with their identity and with relationships. For many developmental theorists, as early as Piaget, school years are considered to be crucial developmental years. With educational settings often being a large factor in identity development, it is important to understand how restrictive sanctions play a role in the students experiencing them. The following section, I utilize ideas from psychosocial development, labeling theory, student involvement theory, and transformational learning theory to examine restrictive sanctions' impact on identity development.

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Erik Erikson (1997) posited that through adolescence, young people are coming to grips with their identity and looking for mentors or leaders. In such a volatile stage, it is crucial that adolescents have time to figure out what and who they are. Erikson asserted, “Basic patterns of identity must emerge from (1) the selective affirmation of repudiation of an individual’s childhood identifications; and (2) the way in which the social process of the times identifies young individuals” (p. 72). This identity formation is important as society begins to gain an interpretation of a person, in addition to the individual coming to an understanding of who they are and how society views them. In regard to students who have been issued restrictive sanctions, they may begin to feel like social outcasts or “dumb” if the punishment has an impact on their academics to the tune of lower grades. Many students who struggle in school describe themselves as “just not good at school,” when, in fact, they are smart, but other factors may be limiting grades or test scores.

Through restrictive sanctions, students may begin to feel their identity is one that does not fit into the community, and in turn, the community, oftentimes unknowingly, has doomed the student to be something of an outcast (Erikson, 1997). In essence, while a restrictive sanction may be viewed as a temporary removal from an educational setting or privilege, it may actually have longer-lasting impacts as students embrace their estrangement as part of their identity. Students being issued restrictive sanctions are being labeled as something, often negative, or are coming face-to-face with the idea that they are not reaching their goals. Part of the issue with being found responsible for a violation is the punishment, but in some cases, there is also a factor of being labeled as responsible for that act. This labeling of a student can be hugely impactful on their identity development and how they view themselves. Taken to the broader number of restrictive sanctions, the large disparity amongst races rears its ugly head. Utilizing the oft

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studied K-12 suspension, it becomes clear that restrictive sanctions are not equitably issued. With higher numbers of minority students suspended, they are also being unfairly labeled at higher rates as well. These students are being systematically told that they are problems and disturbances. They may start to internalize those thoughts and begin to behave in a way that more overtly fits that label. Beyond being ostracized from their peers, which is explored further below, these students are being told by authority figures, often who are white, that they do not belong in a school setting and are trouble. As that label is applied to them, students may believe they are not right for school or that they are a problem, which, in turn, may lead to further societal complications.

Additionally, Erikson agreed that a large piece of development comes in the form of relationships. Again, the restrictive part of these sanctions creates more of a problem than one may assume. Not only is a student physically removed from their peers, barred from events or privileges, or held back from opportunities, but they are also somewhat of a black sheep upon their return, as they have been singled out from the crowd. “The greatest danger of isolation is a regressive and hostile reliving of the identity conflict and, in the case of a readiness for regression, a fixation on the earliest conflict with the primal Other” (Erikson, 1997, p. 71). It is important to know what the biggest changes are that students experience through their sanction. Social impacts, both from external sources, but primarily from peer groups, can have large impacts on the student’s development and confidence moving forward.

However, there is a possibility that a student’s identity could transform through their restrictive sanction experience. Using Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, a restrictive sanction could serve as a disorienting dilemma that kickstarts developmental change. In Mezirow’s theory, adult learners “transform his or her frame of reference to fully understand the

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experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). Mezirow’s theory calls upon “critical self-reflection” wherein an adult learner comes to understand new perspectives, values, and beliefs. In the case of a restrictive sanction, students may take this alone time or time away to reflect on how or why their actions were unacceptable and how they impact the world around them. This is not to say that all students do not understand the rationale behind their sanction, but instead, some may be able to be critical in their reflection of how they behave or interact with the world. With this theory as a lens, through their sanction, one may begin to make new meaning of their world or their circumstances and therefore, the restrictive sanction is a way to create transformative learning. However, Mezirow explained that educators typically need to aid in this transformation. Mezirow (1997) stated:

To facilitate transformative learning, educators must help learners become aware and critical of their own and others’ assumptions. Learners need practice in recognizing frames of reference and using their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective. Finally, learners need to be assisted to participate effectively in discourse. (p. 10)

There is an argument that restrictive sanctions are beneficial for the student removed or barred from their environment as it can lead to positive reflection and understanding. However, if that is the case, most schools do not provide their professionals with the guidance on how to facilitate this reflection in their students. Students are left on their own during their sanction and therefore, may not be as likely to truly learn from their experience or positively develop their identity.

While it is not widely assumed that a sanction makes large scale positive impacts on the student, this transformative time is addressed by all three research questions. There is the potential that a student makes meaning of their sanction and creates internal positive change. With this case, it

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would be important to understand how the student came to this reflection as many institutions would then try to utilize key supports to recreate a similar experience for all their sanctioned students. Using Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, restrictive sanctions may serve as a catalyst for critical self-reflection and evaluation. When coupling this with Erikson's ideas surrounding identity development, it is not surprising to imagine how a restrictive sanction may lead a student to reevaluate their situation and come to new understandings about their identity. By excluding these students from this area, these sanctions may have real impacts on a student's identity development as well as how they view themselves in relation to school and their peers.

Through understanding the history of educational discipline as well as the social and individual impacts educational discipline may have on students, the gaps in the research surrounding higher education restrictive sanctions becomes further heightened. Each of these elements plays a part in the current status quo of college sanctioning and the student's experience will further illuminate our understanding of them all. To provide a framework of understanding, the following section contains a discussion of the theories shaping this study.

### **Gap in Restrictive Sanctioning Research**

Although the study's inquiry is based on student identity development and sociological impacts of restrictive sanctions, further literature is needed to fully understand the circumstances of these sanctions. Many institutions utilize student discipline as a way of protecting their community, instilling, or cultivating moral values, and training further personal intellect (Dannells, 1997). In his study, Dannells (1997) focused on student discipline and maintained that it is an excellent opportunity for developmental efforts and improvement. Extrapolating from this, restrictive sanctions, such as suspensions, are supposed to be educational for the student, while also maintaining the safety of the campus environment. Overall, many institutions ascribe

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to the belief that sanctions are an educational tool, even the most restrictive ones like suspension. While suspensions are solely a part of the broader definition of restrictive sanctions, they provide a clear insight into how institutions may view this type of sanctioning. “It is difficult to identify a college or university conduct code that does not list suspension as one of several types of sanctions” (Stimpson & Janosik, 2007, p. 496). Needless to say, restrictive sanctions are a widespread response to student behavior for colleges and universities. With that in mind, understanding the impact of this nearly universal response to misbehavior is paramount. Dannells (1997) also found that since student discipline is so complex and affects a multitude of personal and societal variables, it should be further examined for improved understanding and improvements. Finally, Dannells called for institutional research on existing student conduct programs regarding their effectiveness. With these identified research topics, it seems clear that there are gaps within student discipline at the college level, most specifically, with the use of restrictive sanctions. With many institutions utilizing this type of sanction, research needs to be conducted on the lived experiences of the students sanctioned in this way to better assess the effects of the implementation of restrictive sanctions.

Understanding restrictive sanctions on the individual level will be beneficial for future students subjected to the sanctions, but by understanding the full landscape of restrictive sanctions, this study will also better prepare the institutions issuing them to address any potential issues. The literature on student development, the history of higher education punishments, and suspensions at the K-12 level were used to assist me in gaining an understanding of the environment around restrictive sanctioning at the post-secondary level. The decision to highlight suspensions at the K-12 level is due to three main reasons. The first is that suspensions are one of the most, if not the most, restrictive of sanctions. Second, K-12 suspensions can take a variety of

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shapes, from out-of-school to in-school, which align with the variety of restrictions colleges may implement on their students beyond sending a student home. Finally, K-12 suspensions are one of the most often studied phenomena so much has been made of these sanctions.

Students' perceptions of restrictive sanctions, the effects of the sanction, and the relationships established between the students and their institution are important because they directly affect the student experience. Students who have been issued a restrictive sanction have to grapple with more than just phenomena of being removed from a certain space or group. In fact, they have to come to grips with their temporary new normal, while also balancing what this means socially as well as personally.

While schools typically can justify the use of a restrictive sanction as a way of maintaining safety or order, the student sent away or constrained is left trying to rationalize what happened and what it means for their life. Through gaining information on how a student "makes sense" of their sanction, this study was designed to better understand the college students and behavioral sanctioning. With this understanding, colleges and sanctioned students will be better served to address any potential negative repercussions of these restrictive sanctions. A study of suspensions due to zero-tolerance policies at the K-12 level showed a negative impact on childhood development as adolescents receive severe consequences related to "poor judgment" even though their brains are developmentally still immature (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). There is an impact on self-development, but also their social development. This imposed marginalization impacts students' understanding of themselves and their future much more than just the time away from school (Noguera, 2003; Perry & Morris, 2014; Quin & Hemphill, 2014).



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### Chapter Three: Methodology

#### **A Qualitative Approach to the Inquiry**

To describe the lived student experiences with restrictive sanctions, I conducted a qualitative study. Qualitative inquiry is a way to investigate the human lived experience and the importance of the participant's perspective. In turn, that perspective informs the personal meaning held by the participant (Creswell, 2009). Specifically, this qualitative study involved an exploration of students' experiences after being issued a restrictive sanction from their post-secondary institution based on their behavior. As the experiences of these students was not previously known, it was important to me to capture their experiences through the student's words and actions instead of preconceived criteria or analytical themes.

#### ***Utilizing a Phenomenological Study***

To complete this study, I implemented a phenomenological approach. Put plainly, phenomenological studies are a way of examining an event or phenomenon through the lens and words of those who lived it. Phenomenological studies are designed to take into account participants' personal perceptions of the topic being studied (Casmir, 1983). By using the phenomena of experiencing a mandatory restrictive sanction, I was looking into a group of students that have multiple commonalities to explore what the students share beyond the sanction itself. What are the lived experiences, their common feelings, successes, and challenges? How do these students internalize the restrictions and what do they report as impactful to their identity development? I was not looking at the sanction itself, but instead "how such objects are perceived or what they mean" to the students who were issued restrictive sanction (Giorgia, 1997, p. 236). As the research participants were the ones to provide the insights around their experience, there was no right or wrong to the study, only personal descriptions. A

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phenomenological study allowed me to understand how the participants understand themselves and the world (Smith, 1996). The combination of understanding themselves and the world dovetails nicely with this study's research questions, as this study explored the student's lived experiences, changes within themselves, and how they interacted with their support system.

As mentioned earlier, there is a wealth of information on the restrictive sanction of suspension at the K-12 level, so I needed to be sure that they could bracket out any information that I may have brought into the study. "Phenomenological research requires an attitude of wonder that is highly empathic. The researcher strives to leave his or her own world behind and to enter fully, through the written description, into the situations of the participants" (Wertz, 2005, p. 172). It was critical for me to leave my past career behind to truly let the participants share their description of events. However, as part of the phenomenological study, I also interpreted the results I gathered from the participants. After data collection in surveys and interviews, I combed the information for shared themes.

By being able to collect the accounts of the students through their own words, I was able to generate themes, and to a certain point, interpretations. "A phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon as experienced by several individuals. Knowing some common experiences can be valuable for groups such as therapists, teachers, health professionals, and policymakers" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.80). By having this valuable insight, higher education policymakers will know what parts of their restrictive sanctions are impactful, both positively and negatively.

Often, phenomenological studies often may utilize interviews of participants. Based on the location of the interviewer and the research participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom. Prior to the interviews, several targeted survey

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questions were sent to each participant to review and respond to. However, through the later interviews, the participants spoke further on their experience with restrictive sanctions, including topics that were not addressed earlier by specific questions in the survey. Participants were “free of value judgements” from the interviewer as they shared their situation solely from their own experience (Wertz, 2005, p. 172).

I “bracket[ed] past knowledge about [the] phenomenon, in order to encounter it freshly and describe it precisely as it is” (Giorgi, 1997, p. 238). As I had a history with restrictive sanctions, albeit administering them instead of being issued one, it was important for me to utilize strategies that did not lead to assumptions or predispositions. A key strategy was in data collection where semi-structured interviews, with open ended questions, “ensure that a broad coverage of issues is achieved,” and I asked “focusing but not leading questions” about the phenomenon (Chan et al., 2013, p. 5). The interviews were conducted in this way and participants were able to elaborate on topics they felt comfortable sharing further information on.

### ***Researcher Positionality***

For this study, I was responsible for the creation of the questions asked with the survey and interviews of data collection, the recruitment of participants, the confirmation of the transcription of the interviews, the defined themes found in the participants’ responses, and the overall reporting of this study’s findings. Combining these key roles with the persona and background provided in the introduction, it became clear that I would be a distinct part of this study. That being said, in this study, it was critical for me to not color the results of the research, so a phenomenological study served as a way to maintain participant voices. Through the use of open-ended survey questions and semi-structured interviews, I provided a framework for the participants to operate, but the participants were the ones to fill in the content of their lived

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experiences. By yielding the floor to the participants to share their viewpoint of their circumstances, I was able to remove more of myself from the narrative.

Through my time as an educational administrator, I previously worked with students issued restrictive sanctions and therefore had somewhat of an understanding of what was expected of these students on behalf of their institution. However, this study aimed to look at the restrictive sanction through the lens of the student. Based on my time within higher education administration and my studies in the discipline, student development theories shaped how the analysis of the data could be conducted but complimented that with a phenomenological style allowed for me to place the participant in control of the data or viewpoints they share. Reviewing the results of this phenomenological study through my own experience within higher education, student development theory, and through the parallel to the criminal justice system that has been outlined by the school-to-prison-pipeline, outlined the framework of this study and worked to eliminate personal input, while still building on theoretical foundations. As a result of this study, I have provided conclusions on the impacts of restrictive sanctions and how institutions may alleviate or address any potential repercussions of the sanctions.

### **Setting and Participant Selection**

#### ***Institutional Setting***

This study was conducted with participants who attended 4-year colleges and universities in the Northeast United States. The Northeast United States was outlined to extend from Maine to Virginia, and the city of Pittsburgh was set as the western-most point. The overall size of the school ranged from just above 1,800 undergraduate students to 17,000 undergraduate students. This study includes sanctioned students from a variety of institutions to make the findings more general, but also to assist in participant recruitment. The inclusion of multiple universities

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illuminated common experiences across these restrictive sanctions instead of highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of one institution's student conduct programs.

### *Participants*

The population of this study is students who, based on their behavior or actions, had been restricted from entering a place, participating in an event or action, or removed from an environment during their undergraduate years. Initially, I aimed to work with current students who were currently on or serving the restrictive sanction that they had been issued. To begin my process of recruiting participants, I reached out to institutions where I had previous colleagues or connections who worked in student conduct. I explained my study and asked if they would be willing to ask some of their sanctioned students if they would be interested in participating. Regardless of my previous connection with my colleagues, the leadership of the institutions I outreached would not permit an outside researcher to work with their students. The study grew to include previous students, alums, or graduates to gain access to a wider population of participants, but also allowed the study to gain insights in longer term implications of the sanctions. Instead, this study utilized convenience and purposeful sampling to outreach and select previous students for participation (Creswell & Poth, 2017). I asked around through my network of peers, friends, and coworkers to see if anyone knew of a student or former student who fit my study's profile. By finding participants individually, instead of through their institution, a level of institutional control was removed. When I found a potential participant, they were sent an email explaining my study and what they would be requested to do if they were to join as a volunteer. A copy of the participant recruitment email can be found in Appendix A. As the search for participants was by word-of-mouth and referrals, the overall population that I was able to connect with was relatively small, totaling 13 identified individuals.

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The response rate of the 13 individuals who received the recruitment email was low. However, five participants did respond and matched the following conditions: 1) they had been issued a restrictive sanction that limited their actions or participation in college events or groups, and 2) the sanction was for a minimum of one semester.

Through a variety of outreach, networking, and participant recruitment, I collected a group of participants across a variety of variables. Table 3 includes a synopsis of each participant's alleged infraction and the corresponding punishment

**Table 3***Study Participants by Policy Violation and Sanction*

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Description of Alleged Policy Violation</b>	<b>Sanctions Issued</b> (Restrictive Sanctions marked with an *)
<b>Participant 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided peer with homework to copy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expelled</li> </ul>
<b>Participant 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtained a fake ID</li> <li>• Caught underage in local bar</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Probation</li> <li>• Loss of Study Abroad Privileges</li> </ul>
<b>Participant 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drank alcohol under the age of 21</li> <li>• Possessed alcohol as a minor</li> <li>• Hospitalized based on alcohol intake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Probation</li> <li>• Required Therapy Sessions</li> <li>• Restricted Housing Selection</li> <li>• Alcohol Education Class</li> <li>• Alcohol Rehab Meetings</li> <li>• Scheduled Alcohol Tests</li> </ul>
<b>Participant 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alleged to have stalked another individual</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One year suspension from campus, campus activities, enrolling in classes, and/or attending anything that had the university's name on it or on university property</li> </ul>
<b>Participant 5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ran naked through public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One semester suspension that got extended to two</li> <li>• Six Required Therapy Sessions</li> <li>• Reflective Essay</li> </ul>

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Overall, the participant list included differences across the following variables: gender, race, geographic area, policy infraction leading to the sanction, and the resulting sanction. The inclusion of these differences allowed for the research results to focus solely on the restrictive sanction similarities as opposed to the combination of shared external variables with the restrictive sanction, for example, male students experiencing restrictive sanctions. Table 4 contains the breakdown of participants and their circumstances.

**Table 4**

*Breakdown of Study Participants by Demographic Descriptions*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
<b>Gender:</b>	Male: 4 Female: 1
<b>Race:</b>	White: 4 Non-White: 1
<b>Home Geographic Location:</b>	Maryland: 1 Massachusetts: 1 New York: 1 North Carolina: 1 Virginia: 1
<b>Institution Location:</b>	New York: 3 North Carolina: 1 Virginia: 1

Overall, all the participants in this study were traditionally aged college students at the time of their sanction. While the sanctions took place at various times and for different reasons, all the students were subjected to a sanction that restricted their social involvement with their institution, family, and/or peers.

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### **Data Collection Procedures and Tools**

As data collection for this study is based on qualitative methods. A brief, open-ended survey was sent to all participants prior to interviews and subsequently guided the semi-structured interviews. This survey is in Appendix B. The interviews provided the bulk of the phenomenological substance for this study. The lists of prepared questions for the semi-structured interviews are in Appendices C and D.

### ***Survey***

An initial survey was circulated to all potential research participants to explore initial topics related to their restrictive sanction. Thirteen sanctioned students were sent the survey. While the survey provided to a larger population of students, any participant who submitted survey results was interviewed as well, regardless of institution, policy violation, or student class year.

The survey collected much of the demographic information of the participants, but also, in the spirit of phenomenology, allowed for open answered, written responses to questions. This began the participants explaining their experience in their own words and through their own viewpoint. Overall, the survey explores the restricted student's policy violation, the participants' insights into why they acted in a way that caused their sanction, their understanding of the sanction, what they are doing during their restricted time, their interpersonal connections, and any additional commentary they may have had. The survey was completed prior to any interviews.

Survey results helped to report on demographic information and provide the participants' initial thoughts into the main research questions. Most directly, the final survey question regarding how the participant would describe their sanction experience begins to outline the first



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research question of how students “make sense” of the sanction. This “making sense” piece of the survey provided initial insight in the participant’s personal experience with the sanction as it spoke to a perceived fairness or unfairness. Additionally, the survey question probing about the participants’ sense of if the sanction is fair or not also speaks to how they made sense of the sanction.

### *Individual Interviews*

Participants engaged in two semi-structured interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes each. The semi-structured interviews allowed for the participants to explain and share key aspects of their restrictive sanction experience, their understanding of the sanction, the causes of the sanction, what interpersonal connections they have fostered, and other comments they may share of their experience of being restrictive from their group, area, or event. These interviews, conducted remotely by Zoom, were recorded and later transcribed via the application Descript. After the application transcribed the interviews, I assigned tags for speakers and listened through the interviews while reviewing the transcription to confirm accuracy. Appendices C and D provide examples of the lists of the questions to be asked in the semi-structured interviews. As the appendices indicate, the interviews are truly the mechanisms used to uncover the research participants’ experience and directly tie to the research questions. The first set of interview questions, coupled with my understanding of the survey results, aimed to answer the first and third research questions examining how sanctioned students make sense of their sanction and what supports are needed or utilized. The first interview questions directly asked about the supports offered to the students while restricted and allowed for the students to extrapolate further of supports they feel may have been useful, if any. Regarding how the students make sense of their sanction, the first interview probed for how just the students believed their sanction

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was. Phenomenology was a main pillar of how the interviews were set up and conducted. For data collection in the interviews, I wanted to place as much of the control onto the participant. Of course, there were standard questions for each participant to explore, but through their responses, the participant could steer the interview to new areas based on their own lived experience while on sanction. Subjects like “fairness” or “impact” allowed for the participants to interpret the question in their own way, influenced by their own experience, and subsequently give an uninfluenced account of their time on sanction. For me, by understanding the baseline of if the student expected or thought their sanction was fair, it would be easier to understand the developmental journey the student may have through their time away when reflecting on the impact the sanction has had on them, both in positive and negative ways. Through gaining insight into the participants’ understanding of their sanction, as well as what the student actually did during their time of being restricted, I was able to further recognize how the participant is making meaning of their sanction as well as the incident that initiated the sanction.

The first interview questions provide insights from a sanctioned student perspective of what goes on during these restrictive sanctions, what supports would be beneficial to a sanctioned student, and the direct impacts of the sanction. Through understanding how the student views the incident, which led to their sanction, as well as the positive or negative impacts the student has identified as connected to the sanction, the interviewer gained insight into the research question pertaining to how students make sense of restrictive sanctions. The answers to interview questions surrounding “fairness,” “impact,” or “expectations” probe a research participant to further understand how sanctioned students view their sanction.

Additionally, the first interview consisted of questions regarding how the student spent their time while restricted from their college group, event, or environment and what support they

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utilized. Through the answers to these questions, the third research question was addressed. The structure of how a student uses their time while on restricted status may provide unidentified support structures. However, the interview also directly asked what supports the students believe were useful, lacking, or needed.

The second interview explored the social and developmental implications of restrictive sanctions and is further focused on the second main research question. By asking the participants to assess how their peers and parents may have viewed them, I gained insight into the social strains on the participant. Additionally, through having the participants reflect on their own internal experience throughout a restrictive sanction, I gained an understanding the additional impact of the sanction on development.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

I used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to address the data collected. To begin, themes were found in the key words and phrases from the sanctioned student's written responses from the survey. However, in IPA, the semi-structured interview transcripts are where a researcher can truly engage with the data to attempt to make meaning of it. "Meaning is central, and the aim is to try to understand the content and complexity of those meanings rather than measure their frequency" (Smith & Osbourn, 2007, p. 66). The interview portion of the research was captured both through an audio recording and through my notes. The interview questions were spaced out on a Word Document that served as a guide for the interview, but also served as a note-taking tool for me to capture participants' answers to the questions, additional comments or questions brought out in the course of the conversation, and any observations deemed noteworthy.

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IPA requires a researcher to engage with the transcript with an interpretive relationship. With the interview transcripts fully completed, I read through each numerous times. “It is important in the first stage of the analysis to read and reread the transcript closely in order to become as familiar as possible with the account” (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 67). Interesting or striking items will be annotated. After several passes through, I then read through the transcript looking for themes. “Here the initial notes are transformed into concise phrases which aim to capture the essential quality of what was found in the text” (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 67) The entirety of the process, from the initial transcript, to the striking notes, to the identified themes, were treated as data and serve purpose in comparison across participant accounts. The themes were then listed out and considered for connections between each. “The next stage involves a more analytical or theoretical ordering, as the researcher tries to make sense of the connections between themes which are emerging” (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p.70). The themes were categorized and checked back against the participants’ own words and if themes were found to not truly fit back with the transcripts, they were dropped. The emergent themes from the interviews were used to write something of a narrative account of the lived experiences of the participants

### ***Ethical Considerations***

A consent form was provided participants to share their rights within the study and was additionally addressed the early stages of the Zoom interview (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The consent form directly addresses: (1) the overall plans and purpose of the study, (2) information regarding the participant’s right to leave the study at any time, (3) the participant’s rights to confidentiality, and (4) the participant’s rights regarding email and online communications.

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To make sure of confidentiality, contact with volunteer research participants occurred through email and Zoom. When utilizing the electronic components, participants were offered an opportunity to use new accounts or pseudonyms to protect their identity. Emails were mainly be used for introductions, to schedule interview meeting times, and to share video conferencing information. Proper precautions and steps were be taken to ensure email communication and participant identities remain private. These precautions included: not including any sensitive or identifying information about the participants within an email, allowing for the participants to utilize email accounts of their choice, including fake, new, or “burner” accounts to not include personal information, and not sending mass emails to all participants but instead sending each participant an individualized email.

The students’ anonymity is protected through the use of pseudonyms in this presentation of the research. No clear identifiers are used to single out research participants. Additionally, due to the potential stress of the research and/or the uncovering of bad or unpleasant memories, participants were reminded of their right to not participate as well as any counseling services their institution may provide.

To address validity concerns, as previously stated, all interviews were recorded by the video conferencing software in addition to my notes and observation. This multi prong approach helps to triangulate the essence of the interview and what was at the core of the participants’ responses. Finally, I practiced journaling to document myself as a research tool and to help measure participant responses.

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### Chapter Four: Findings

The intention of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of college students who experienced a restrictive sanction. The data for this study was collected using a short survey and personal interviews of college students who had each experienced a restrictive sanction in their own unique circumstance. With this data and through further analysis, this chapter contains the findings that are used to answer the research question: How do college students make sense of their experience during and after a behavioral restrictive sanction?

Certain themes emerged from the interviews including: Ostracization from the institution, perceived labeling from administration, a retreat to individual or small group reliance, reassessing priorities, and a change toward a resigned or pessimistic view of their circumstances. Outside of their own experience and the personal impacts of the sanction, many participants shared a belief that higher education institutions need to reconsider their sanctioning practices to a more individualistic response per each student. For quotes or descriptions of the participants' experiences, all students interviewed were given pseudonyms to protect their identities

In summary, the findings of this study are broken into two main areas, social and personal impacts. Socially, participants all reported distance that grew between them and their institution. They felt as if their school was not looking out for their best interests, but instead, solely looking out for the school's priorities. Participants felt labeled by their institutions, either implicitly or explicitly, and perceived judgment from their administrators or community that coincided with that label. In response to the growing distance from their institution and to escape a feeling of judgment or labeling, participants also shared that they tended to keep a smaller social circle. For personal impacts, this study found that participants reassessed their priorities in

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their college setting after receiving their sanction. This reprioritization was a noted positive outcome from the sanction. However, another personal outcome from restrictive sanctions was the participants gaining a more pessimistic outlook on their circumstances and a jaded view of some relationships, primarily with their institution. In the sections below, each themes and findings of the study are described in more detail.

### **Social Impacts**

As one would assume, having to deal with a restrictive sanction has a significant impact on one's social experience. The restrictions bring forward social dynamics that cannot be ignored or fully hidden. There are direct implications like the student and the administrator sanctioning them, but also indirect implications, like the student having to navigate their new normal while adhering to the sanctions that limit their social maneuvers. The following sections outline three key themes that arose from the participants' accounts of their experience with restrictive sanctions.

### ***Ostracization from the Institution***

A recurring theme that arose in the interviews is the development of distance between the individual who is sanctioned and the institution that sanctioned them. At a first glance, this makes clear sense as those being punished are often upset by those doing the punishing. For the participants that did not believe that they truly did something wrong, it seems obvious that they would not believe that they deserved to be punished, and if one does not believe they should be punished, they would clearly be upset or frustrated by being issued a punishment. Del Toro and Wang (2021) found in their study that students feeling their punishment was unfair may have compromised social or interpersonal resources. Of the five participants in this study, all five deemed their sanction as "unfair" in the moment, with three continuing to believe that their

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sanction was unfair and two changing their opinion as they reflect on the situation. With this feeling that their sanction was unfair, the participants align with Del Toro's and Wang's (2021) findings and have a compromised relationship with their institution. What is interesting is that for the students who did not deny that they did something wrong, like Participants 1, 2, 3, and 5, they still had feelings that the institution treated them harshly. While the harsh punishment could be a way for the institution to deter additional students in the community from acting in a similar way, it also provides a bit of credence into the idea that some of the participants had that the institution was making an example out of them. By feeling used in this way, the participants did not feel as if they were getting a fair deal.

This initial reaction or feeling of being wronged by one's institution, an institution that the individual chose to attend, is part of what makes the divide between the student and their school. Participant 2 stated that the experience of being sanctioned "definitely changed the way I saw my school that I had previously really liked." Participant 2 noted that they did not think the sanction from the school itself was unfair. However, they found it odd how the institution would deliver the student, who is "not particularly legally savvy" to local police without any additional support. Participant 2 continued to state that prior to this occurrence they did not "really expect that bad things [were] going to happen to you within the school bubble." This removal of naïveté or the feeling of no longer being protected by the school led to a sense of distrust and a breakdown of the good feelings toward the institution.

That level of distrust can also stem from a belief that the school was looking out for itself compared to trying to help the student. Nearly all the participants, in one way or another, referenced the school seeming to prioritize its own self-interest. Participants described how they believed that their institution was implementing the sanctions to absolve themselves from legal



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ramifications if anything were to happen in the future. Participant 3 claimed that the whole process “felt like they (the school) were trying to protect themselves” instead of truly implementing sanctions designed to help. Participant 5 provided similar feedback and explained that in addition to the restrictive sanction, they were required to attend a specific number of therapy sessions. Participant 5 stated that they were, at that time, not truly ready to reflect through therapy and therefore “it felt like the school was sanctioning me to protect itself.” Participant 5 continued to say that the sanctions did not feel like they were “about healing, repairing harm and restoring people,” but instead, there was a feeling that the institution did not care about the sanctioned students. The belief that the school or institution was prioritizing its wellbeing over the sanctioned students became a wedge between the participants and their institutions, which led to a lessened connection to their school.

That distance between the institution and the sanctioned student was not solely emotional. Participants 1, 4 and 5, put physical miles between themselves and their campuses. Participant 1 was sent away, Participant 4 removed themselves from their institution before their sanction process was complete as they did not think the process would be “looked at equitably and fairly,” and Participant 5 was initially banned from campus, but then decided on further travel due to complexities in their sanctioning. The idea and feeling of being removed or needing to be away from campus is another manifestation of emotionally creating distance from the institution. There is a certain feeling of othering when away. With the atmosphere of their sanctioning surrounding them, Participant 5 thought to travel internationally. They recalled thinking “this is absolutely terrible. I hate being up here. I can't spend another semester here. I'm getting out, I'm leaving this country. I'm going to go somewhere else.” The need to separate from the campus can be seen as a physical portrayal of feeling disconnected from the institution. As

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mentioned previously, Participant 4 left prior to even receiving the sanction. "I came home late. Just before Halloween. You know, I decided that I should remove myself from campus." While not removing themselves from the area, Participant 1 stayed in the city of the institution, but found it challenging to engage with classes and projects they were committed to. "I, myself, wasn't in it. I just... I couldn't really keep up with it. Um, I really cared about it [the projects] and I wanted, I wanted to try, but I just couldn't. My heart wasn't there, you know?" After being dealt the sanctioning blow, these students felt it challenging to engage with their campus community. Things like day-to-day social interactions can lend to feelings of disapproval which further drive a wedge between institution and individual (Angelakis et al., 2018). To be clear, the participants did not say that they were socially ostracized by their peers. They had varying commentary on their friendships and relationships with their institution's faculty, but none reporting feeling shunned by these groups. As Participant 2 explained:

I'm not loyal to the school as an institution, I'm loyal to the friends and the experiences that I had there that were positive. You know, I made really good friends. I had a really positive experience on sports teams and some of those people that I stayed in touch with and stuff like that. But I would say I'm not a school spirited alum in the same way where I would donate to my college or I would actively participate in a lot of alumni relations type things.

The general experience was a distancing from the idea or essence of the institution. There was less school pride. The participants felt less connected to the institution as a whole, but instead, connected to the people they knew or trusted. To view this in light of the first sub research question, it seems that students living a restrictive sanction felt a distinct shift to feeling distanced from their institution. They felt that they were no longer as innately or subconsciously

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connected to the school that they chose years earlier. While participants had various conditions to their restrictive sanctions, they all felt a decrease in the personal connection with their institution. There is a natural feeling of distress when ostracized (Over & Uskul, 2016). Based on the conditions of their restrictive sanction, this decrease was a result of anything from fully being cast out of their campus to even just limited in their decisions. The individual often perceived a lack of trust from their institution which resulted in a corresponding reaction from the student. This reaction is similar to relationships people all have in intrapersonal dynamics. When someone judges them, wrongs them, or doesn't trust them, they often do not trust or fully embrace that individual in response. This could be something of a defense mechanism. As social creatures, when one is cast out of a certain situation or social group, there is a natural reaction to those who shunned. The experience of a negative social interaction heightens some people's desire to be alone, become more social, or act out aggressively (Ren, et al. 2021). In this study, participants reacted in a way of retreating from their institution or had aggressive or frustrating feeling toward their school. This phenomenon of losing faith in one's institution or becoming less prideful can be seen as a reaction to feeling othered. When coupling that with the research questions, two thoughts come to light. First, the lived experience of students on restrictive sanctions includes a distancing from their institution after the sanction is implemented. Second, these students did not have a positive connection with their school to maintain a feeling of belonging. This resource could be a staff member or mentor that is provided by the school to help the student understand that their actions have been sanctioned, but as a person they are still welcomed in the community. Institutions can influence student belonging and success through their policies, structures, and programs designed to promote student effort (Tinto, 1993). While the students did not explicitly say that they sought out a resource like this, it became clear

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through the interviews that many of the negative repercussions of the restrictive sanctions could have been addressed or alleviated through a positive personal connection with the institution.

### *Perceived Labeling from Administration*

Another part of the participants' new view of their institutions seemed to stem from the theme of labeling. Many of the participants perceived that, through their incident and subsequent sanctioning process, they had been labeled by their institution. This feeling of labeling corresponds with the previously discussed distancing between the institution and the student. While the labels varied per circumstance, none were positive in nature. These stigmas were a common factor for participants and correspond to pieces of the other finding. For example, a common response to stigma is a level of reclusion. Having this negative title affixed can work to create a preconceived notion about oneself. Those in the community who do not know a person's character may believe things about them based on their social stigma or label.

For Participants 1 and 4, the label was directly related to their policy violation. Through their alleged action, and the corresponding implementation of a sanction, they were being told that they were perpetrators of that policy violation. Much like how someone who kills someone else can be given the title of murderer, these two participants were being tagged by their alleged infraction. When Participant 1's accuser was asked if Participant 1 violated the code, the accuser actually "laughed a lot and then said yes." So not only was Participant 1 to be issued a sanction, but to at least to one accuser, it was also laughable that any grey area was being considered when convicting Participant 1 of being a cheater. For Participant 4, they were sent away from campus with a notation on their transcript that labeled them as a stalker. These labels can somewhat damn those to whom they are affixed. If the label is shared with future interactions, there are immediate judgments made based on the label. The stigma surrounding the labels could cause

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additional damage or challenges (Angelakis et al., 2018). After being labeled “a cheater,” the academic community may be concerned with how Participant 1 fits into their environment. A new institution or new professors could associate harmful stereotypes about Participant 1’s character or drive to be successful. While in the academic world, working towards a degree, the inherent dark mark of being a cheater could have created undo distance between Participant 1 and the academic community. For Participant 4, the stigma of being alleged to have violated Title IX is just as daunting. Without truly understanding Participant 4’s actions or alleged violation, quite a few stereotypes could be generated regarding who Participant 4 is. These beliefs would place a stain on anyone’s reputation long before knowing Participant 4 as a person. The severe repercussions of the Title IX process, both in the intended sanction and the unintended repercussions that coincide, are magnified by school’s investigative processes into the matter. Participant 4 was branded with the title of “stalker” and the stigma of violating Title IX without believing or knowing they did anything wrong. With Title IX violations carrying such a strong negative connotation across society, no one wants to be label as such and most of the time, alleged offenders do not agree that they are even in violation. The charged environment surrounding Title IX empowers the stigma of those alleged of violating the policies.

Both Participants 1 and 4 took intentional measures to confirm their privacy and did not freely share their experience with others. As Participant 4 stated, “unless it was need to know, people didn't get to need to know.” These more overt labels, ones that could be affixed to transcripts and follow these students to other institutions have big implications on the individual. In the circumstance that one does not believe that the label truly is appropriate, like Participant 4, for example, the label is an unfair blemish on one’s record. However, even for Participant 1 who understand their behavior was a policy infraction, the label can impact their moves in the future.

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Outward labels like these can serve as additional punishment as alternative institutions will view them in a light that often results in preconceived notions. Additionally, if on transcripts, these labels can impact the future of the individuals even further as the notation will arise in background checks for employment or other positions. While neither of these students had these labels permanently added to their transcripts, the outward labeling of the student as a policy violator can feel as if the institution is branding you with a dark mark that has a direct impact on one's future. In their lived experiences, both students took measures to ensure that their transcripts would not reflect their infraction for the fear that it would have a lasting impact.

Participants also felt less overt labeling through their sanctioning process. Participants 3 and 5 shared their experiences with the administrators issuing their sanctions. Participant 3 "felt like they (school administrators) just thought I was stupid. And not in an academic way, but just 'you're making bad life choices.' Or 'why are you in college?'" Participant 3 explained that through their sanctioning process, the administrator would repeatedly ask why they acted the way they did and would seemingly ignore what Participant 3 considered to be common knowledge regarding college students.

He would ask something like: 'why would you drink when you're underage?' Uh, what do you want me to say? One, this was just like scary. And then two, you know they're talking about possibly kicking you out of school and everything like that. So yeah, you're trying to answer questions that don't have an answer or, at least they don't have a good rationale. Like when asked: 'why would you do this?' Well, it was an accident... I did not intend to send myself to a hospital. 'Why would you just drink beer that someone else brought?' This is just a stupid question. And then it's just infuriating a bit when he just seems so far removed from the life of a college student. Like I get it, we're not supposed

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to do it as it is against school policies and illegal. You're the dean of college students, you know this happens. Everyone does this, pretty much. I don't know, he just seemed out of touch, I guess.

Through questioning how and why Participant 3 ended up in the situation they were in that led to the policy infraction, Participant 3 felt that the questions were posed in a condescending manner. A manner that was questioning Participant 3's judgment, intelligence, and maturity. Participant 5 had a similar experience when interacting with the administrator who issued the sanction:

He had no care for me. He was like, you know, 'this kid did this bad thing and I'm exacting like righteous punishment upon them.' And I remember he very clearly felt that way. That I did a bad thing and I was going to get punished for it. And that is what is right in the world. Um, that was kind of, at least, my experience of it. That was the only kind of perspective that he took. It was not like: 'man, you made a horrible mistake and I'm sure you feel terrible about it.' None of that. No. And honestly, he kind of kept that perspective the whole way through the process.

The belief that an administrator thought you were stupid or that you were a bad kid that deserved punishment was not a feeling that went away. Years later, these participants still feel that way. This situation echoes a quote from Maya Angelou, which is "People will forget what you said... but people will never forget how you made them feel." Through experience of feeling belittled or judged, these participants received an unspoken label that is on par with outward labels experienced by Participants 1 and 4.

This unspoken labeling also has a direct impact on the lived experience of students who have been issued restrictive sanctions. These labels impacted their experience in two ways. First, in a way that is very similar to the previous section, students feel a distance from their institution.

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This can manifest in a variety of ways. Participants 3 and 5 felt personally attacked or singled out which resulted in this distance whereas Participants 1 and 4 had more of a forced physical distance created due to the sanction itself. Both styles of distance have an effect of the student's thoughts on their institution. The feeling of belonging or acceptance is gone. The students begin to feel like outsiders or as if they are not wanted. Additionally, when feeling labeled by the administration, the student does not know who has heard and come to understand them in light of the label. While the administrator who adjudicated the conduct case will have an understanding of the student and the subsequent label, the student does not know who else has seen or become aware of their status and what meaning that individual would have made about the student's character. There is uncertainty on the student's behalf of who may have knowledge of their circumstance and subsequently, who may be viewing them in light of the label that has defined them. If a student's professor came to know of their sanction, the professor may make judgments on the students based on that label that are not even related to the initial action which resulted in punishment. For example, a professor may have assumptions about a student's behavior based on their knowledge of the sanction, which may affect non-related decisions like an extension request for an assignment. The shroud of mystery surrounding who knows the sanction and what meaning they make of it can lead the sanctioned student to be more standoffish as they are unsure of who already is judging them. Moral sources of stigma have been associated with ostracization or additional negative outcomes (Zhang et al., 2020). Again, similar to the previous section, this feeling could be addressed by having an assigned personal connection help the student through their sanction. However, the lived experience as a result of the labeling, overtly or more subtly, is a feeling of not belonging.



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The second main way these labels influence the students they are affixed to is by creating a feeling of shame or embarrassment. Many of the participants kept their incident and label to themselves. They did not publicly brandish the incident about, but instead tried to wrestle with their new identity in private. Participant 4 spoke at length regarding keeping this on a “need to know” basis. Participant 3 would not tell his social network for years about what was going on in their life at that time. This hiding of the incident and/or label is due to the shame, embarrassment or assumed reaction of others regarding the label. However, the concealment of the root of the stigma can have negative effects as well, like added stress to keep things hidden (Zhang et al., 2020). For the participants who were leaving their school, they did not want the label to impact their future plans, whether it be a transition to a new institution or their work. All of the participants were concerned about how others would view them in light of their label. Keeping things at a “need to know” basis limited the number of individuals who could judge or make meaning of the incident and label. The participants did not want the labels they had been given to come to define them, so they often hid their circumstances from those around them. This secrecy adds to a growing stress and weight on the student and plays into an overall negative experience while on a restrictive sanction.

In short, the labels associated with restrictive sanctions have a distinct impact on the student’s social world. They often retreat from the institution that has labeled them and tend to hide this label from their surroundings. The extra effort and internal stress create a negative overall experience and can lead someone to feel very alone in their experience. Participant 5 mentioned that a support group could be beneficial for creating a community of shared experience. This speaks to the feeling of being alone, but also is a suggestion for a solution.

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*Retreat to Individual/Small Group Reliance*

With the prior themes of exploring how the participants felt estranged from their institutions and potentially hiding a bit due to their personal scarlet-letter-like label, it makes sense that another theme that arose from this study was a student relying on themselves or on a small, core group. After being issued their restrictive sanction, and any spoken or unspoken labels, it was clear that the experience of a restrictive sanction tended to close or constrict the student's circle of trust. Through retreating to relying on oneself or a small group, the risk of being ostracized again is reduced (Ren et al., 2021). For some, they retreated to the understanding that they could only count on themselves. For others, they circled their social wagons to those who were worthy of trust and those they could count on for support. It was clear that the restrictive sanction experience was not something that one would desire to share with everyone due to a level of embarrassment or shame; so, therefore, only a small group would be trusted on the journey.

Participant 3 explained, "I kind of learned a lot about myself that like, what I'm willing to fight for if my back is pushed up against the wall and I feel like there's no one there for support." This belief that one has to, or wants to, fight for themselves came up in a variety of ways. Participants felt that they could not rely on their college and therefore, they had to rely on themselves. Although, most did not go through this experience completely alone. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 all mentioned some support stemming from their families. These supports were often in helping fight through the sanctioning process. This included giving pushback to the institution, hiring or providing legal services, and a general sense of care. Participants 1 and 2 have parents who were attorneys and, therefore, looked into the legal proceeding of the institution. Participant 1's mother "looked into getting a lawyer who like, was associated with all

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this in [the area] ... they just wanted to see what they could do within the bounds of whatever legal system the committee had set up.” Participants 4 and 5 had the help of their parents to obtain legal counsel to help negotiate the sanction and ensure a fair process. “They were there 100%.” Parents were utilized as a resource to help fight back, or at the very least, even out a power dynamic with the administrators.

Of course, parents were not solely a positive interaction for students on restrictive sanctions. Parents also were described as “disappointed” and “very upset,” but were almost universally included in the experience of these restrictive sanctions, whether the student wanted them in it or not. Participant 2 explained it this way:

I would say that what scared me the most was having to tell them. I have this conversation with my parents and ultimately disappoint them. The semester's almost over it's, you know, the school ramifications are manageable. I can make it through the rest of semester and keep my head down and just do my work and be done with it. That's not a problem. But it's not a pleasant conversation, obviously, to have with your parents and admit you just did something dumb.

Participant 3 had a similar situation. “I didn't want to talk to my parents or family because, I felt embarrassed and like shit, ashamed and like an idiot. And I mean, my parents were very upset with me after I told them what happened.” So, while parents provided a certain level of support, they were not universally providing solace to students on restrictive sanctions. The other core group that these students relied on were their friends.

While friends were not always privy to the situation, they would provide some sense of normalcy during the stress of a sanction. Participant 5 noted, “A couple of friends in particular were, were very supportive of me” and that “a lot of the people in my immediate social sphere

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took the perspective..." that the sanction was ridiculous. For Participant 3, friends "were like a little escape when hanging out with them because it was different, you know? My social life was the only real escape and [the sanction] kind of affected that." Beyond being an escape, friends could also serve as a support service in a troubling time. Participant 2 contended, "I think that my long-term life friends, who I was friends with at the time, are the ones that truly supported me. We became better friends and they were really helpful and we got closer." Friendships were utilized in a variety of way based on how student with a restrictive sanction wanted to engage them. They can be core supports through the tribulations, they can be an escape, or they can be left out entirely. However, the core social network around the sanctioned student was a key component to facing their sanctions.

These small groups were a vital element to the lived experiences of students on restrictive sanctions. These groups served as supports. They served as an escape from the pressure or negativity of the sanction. They also served as a safe space from the uncertainty of not knowing how a larger community viewed the students or their sanctions. Having a support system becomes a vital experience of those issued restrictive sanctions. As the student loses trust or distances themselves from the overall institution, they are driven into a smaller group that they feel comfortable and supported in. This can be a bit of a positive as it can deepen preexisting relationships outside of the institutional relationship, but at the same time, this small group reliance also can create an overall feeling of distrust toward the outside world.

This theme of reliance or commitment to small groups is something that may serve as a good strategy for alleviating negative consequences. Implementing small, trustworthy groups may allow for students to find solace in the shared experience while maintaining relationships with a broader group of individuals beyond family and core friendships. However, it is unclear if

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any small group would work in addressing a student on a restrictive sanction or if the individual retreats solely to preexisting relationships.

### **Personal Impacts**

In addition to the social aspects addressed in the earlier themes, the lived experiences of those issued restrictive sanctions also include impacts on a personal level. These themes, reassessing priorities and a change towards a resigned or pessimistic view of their circumstances, highlight how restrictive sanctions have both intentional and unintentional implications for those they are issued to. One could argue that part of the intent of a restrictive sanction is to call to light the student's actions and how they are prioritizing their activities while at college. Through reassessing their priorities, the sanction is imploring the student to reset and recommit to truer intentions. However, in addition to getting the students onto a hopefully better track, these sanctions also seem to install a bit more of a negative worldview into the students they are issued to.

### ***Reassessing Priorities***

A positive theme that came from this study was many of the participants stating that they reassessed their priorities in life, recommitted to a priority that they may have strayed away from, or found a purpose that they previously had not defined for themselves. All the participants were able to reflect or reassess their circumstances, while working through their restrictive sanction to come to a new understanding of what they needed or wanted to accomplish.

After feeling as if they were stripped of their student identity, Participant 1 ended up transferring to a new institution and rededicating themselves to their studies. "When I got into [new institution], I sort of reprioritized and I realized that I owed [a mentor who helps facilitate the transfer], I owed him to do my best if nothing else." This recommitment to doing one's best,

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especially in the academic space, was not uncommon. Participant 4 mentioned, “In the prettiest ways: I would describe [the sanction] as a bump in the road that allowed me to reprioritize and get focused on what I actually wanted and knew I was it expected to accomplish.” This reprioritization had a direct impact in the classroom. Participant 3 and 4 both noted an uptick in their grades after they reapplied themselves to their coursework. Participant 3 stated, “I started trying harder in school and then the next year, my senior year, um, that’s where I got my best GPA” while Participant 4 explained how since their sanction they “have since gotten an associate’s degree from [a local] community college, transferred to [new institution], and I’m set to graduate in May with honors.” While reprioritizing academics was a common theme, it was not the only topic that individuals committed to.

Other participants recommitted themselves to non-academic priorities. Participant 5 even stated that through their time on restrictive sanctions, they found their purpose in life:

It really was life changing. It gave me a sense of purpose in life and showed me that I... Yeah, it gave me a sense of purpose that I had never really had before: serving people and trying to make the world a better place. And that's what I've been trying to do ever since in different ways.

This opportunity to truly find a purpose came from the time away from the institution, classes, and the social scene surrounding college. Participant 5 was, while away from all that, able to focus on themselves and come to reflect on who they truly were and who they wanted to be. Participant 3 had a similar story in the sense that they found themselves through the tribulations dealing with a restrictive sanction. “I kind of learned a lot about myself like what I’m willing to fight for...I saw that I was able to get good grades, and it made me realize what I have and where I really applied myself a lot.” Having a better understanding of where they wanted to apply

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themselves gave these participants a better direction for their future. Participant 2 took a different approach while considering their priorities. Participant 2 reassessed their friendships for who they wanted to truly surround themselves with. “It was a moment of growth for me, realizing who is the person I want to be friends with. And who is a person I don't need to be friends with.” This assessment of one’s social circle and who they want to surround themselves with is also a key piece of understanding future priorities and goals.

For each of the participants, their lived experience included a reflective period where they reassessed their priorities. While the priorities differed for each of them, this reflection was important as they moved forward toward new goals or what they deemed important. While the participants did not explicitly identify this theme, they all spoke to some sort of reflective experience while on their restrictive sanction. This may be an intentional part of the restrictive sanction. A way to redirect a student’s intention toward what the institution deems more important. However, it is interesting to note that this reflectivity, as much of a positive result of the sanction as it is, was not recognized by the students. It was happening somewhat subconsciously or in a way that the students did not give credit to the sanction to facilitating this reassessment. In fact, oftentimes, the institutions did not have an adequate plan for shining a light on this positive result of these sanctions. Participants 3 and 5 explained they were requested to go to therapy, but when issued as a punishment, people may not be as willing to open up or reassess. The reassessment seemingly cannot be forced, however, it is important for validating the sanction to provide the student some insight into how the sanction is positively enabling personal growth within the student. This positive output is important, especially considering the next personal theme detailed in this study.

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*Change Toward a Resigned or Pessimistic View of Their Circumstances*

While the reassessment of priorities may be an intended outcome of the restrictive sanction, the second personal theme does not seem to be intentional. Participants shared, both through direct statements as well as through wording when describing their worldview, a certain level of resignation or pessimism about their circumstances. Childhood trauma has been studied and shown to have negative repercussions for adult personalities (Meyer & Carver, 2002). It is not out of the realm of possibility to assume that a college punishment could be a trauma of sorts, especially in the developmental years of university. Upon getting issued a punishment, participants often shared a more neutral or negative perspective. Participant 2 asserted:

I guess really what happened was I think it cracked some of my naiveness of being a college student and thinking that everything that happens on a college campus is a bubble and you can do whatever you want. Like nothing can hit me. I'm invincible. Um, this gave a more realistic lens.

But the realistic lens was not only for the college experience. This new view of life carried forward for other participants. Participant 3 had a strong reaction when asked how their restrictive sanctions changed how they viewed themselves:

I just can't take things for granted, like life isn't going to be easy. There's not always going to be people there that have your best interests at heart. I just felt like afterwards, and during it, I finally had a reason to like push myself. No one is holding my hand anymore. Like, this is it. This is the real world, I guess. Um, and it kind of, I don't know, made me less optimistic about things. And like more jaded too. Like, when people say everyone's nice, or like schools are - using today's words- a "safe space." You know, there's really no such thing. If you follow everyone's rules, maybe you know that like



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people will be there, but as soon as you go against anything you lose the rose-tinted glasses that you wear.

This view on the world not being a kind or easy place came out in other participant accounts as well. Participant 4 thought their sanctioning process was unfair and, in some ways, rigged against them. The processes that were set in place by their institution to protect them were not fairly utilized. Participant 5 also lost faith in how the school would handle their return to campus and how the institution would abide by their processes. When combined with the reassessed priorities, this general it-is-what-it-is attitude allowed for the participants to proceed with their lives without too much concern for another sanction or issue. Through this resigned or pessimistic view, participants stated that they had varied levels of concern for social norms. Participant 2 mentioned becoming “more straight and narrow about some routine legal things” to avoid being compromised by a system that would not help them or being understanding. Conversely, Participant 1 explained they, after an initial depressive state, became “both more risk averse and risk tolerant as a result of the sanction. In like, I didn't feel beholden to systems in the way that I used to be.” This mentality plays a part in the idea that bad things or punishments are going to happen regardless, so one might as well live their life in the way that they want as it will not have an impact anyway.

This experience of becoming more pessimistic or more realistic about one's circumstance is a very interesting repercussion of restrictive sanctions. The theme exhibits a potentially life changing impact that may not be fully intended during the institution's implementation of the sanction. While the sanction may be intended to inspire reflection or a change socially, it surely is not intended to cast a dark cloud over the student's perspective on life. This lasting implication is the sole negative personal consequence of the restrictive sanctions. Even for participants who

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were years removed from their restrictive sanction, their view on their reality was a bit clouded by their resigned or pessimistic viewpoint. While these participants are not wholly pessimists, they were not portraying optimistic traits through their interviews, including conversations regarding their futures outside of the sanction. It seems that having the “bubble” or perceived safety of the college campus stripped away led participants to take off the rose-colored glasses.

### **Feedback on Higher Education Sanctioning Practices**

One factor that was universal in this study was that none of the participants were truly surprised to receive a sanction. They were all understanding that, based on their behavior or perceived behavior, they would be issued a sanction. However, through the discussions around the sanctioning process and the issuance of the overall sanction, the participants provided feedback on the processes and sanctions that they experienced.

One idea of note was the sanctions that were being issued were not individualized to fit each unique circumstance. In the earlier section detailing the distance created between the student and their institution, it was clear that the students were offput by one-size-fits-all sanctions from an administration that preached education and self-improvement. The sanctions did not seem to be serving the purpose of helping individuals, but were instead, “about just, like, sanctioning kids.” This statement is in direct opposition to the idea that the sanctions issued by the institutions are intended for the betterment or learning of the individual. As mentioned in the literature review, many institutions preach learning and development as key intentions or goals for their sanctions. Instead, a number of participants viewed their sanctions as a generalized checkmark that the institution responded to the student’s behavior. Without an individualized approach, the participants did not feel as if they were seen or heard by their institution.

Participant 5 suggested that the “school needs to take the time to figure out what's actually going

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on with these people so they can figure out what real solutions to their problems are and make the process more about healing, repairing harm and restoring people.” This sentiment was shared by Participant 1. “Ideally, the punishment would fit the crime in some capacity, right. There would be a scale. Death isn't the only option for anyone who commits a crime. I think [expulsion] is the university equivalent of an execution.” They continued that there should be a scale for what aligns with the “crime” and that “reasonable determinations could be made.” Participant 2 found that their “punishment fit the crime,” but were offput with how the institution handled outside legal concerns.

Participants also struggled with sanctions that they felt did not work for them as individuals. Participant 3 was mandated to attend alcohol addiction seminars. Participant 3 felt, through attending the sessions, that they were almost a mockery to people with “consistent problems” as they were attending based on a single mistake and not a recognized problem. This rehabilitation session was not useful to Participant 3, and they did not feel that it addressed the core circumstances that got them sanctioned. Additionally, forced or required therapy was labeled as a sanction that did not work as it cannot be forced. Authentic reflection cannot be mandated so a therapy session for someone who is not ready to reflect was deemed to be useless. “They (sanctions) only matter if the person takes it upon themselves to make them matter. And like, to be honest with you, the first six weeks of therapy did nothing for me because I didn't buy into it.” While participants understood the requirement of a punishment of some sort, they acknowledged that the institution needed to be more deliberate with how they doled out these sanctions and more intentional with understanding how to help students reflect on their actions.

Of course, while considering sanctions, higher education institutions are not only thinking of the individual, but also the larger community. As discussed in Chapter 2, the propose

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of punishment is beyond the individual level in its own intent but is also subject to appeasing the larger community's sentiment. When considering punishments at the college level, the institution needs to take into account the impact on the student being sanctioned but also the overall feel from the community that is harmed or the surrounding community which the student is part of. Many of the participants did not answer or speak on the community's feelings when answering the questions in the survey or interviews, but this topic could be interesting to explore in an additional study. While participants can recognize their actions being in the wrong, many did not speak to the feeling or sentiments of their community.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study captured the lived experiences of individuals who were issued and completed a restrictive sanction. Through the surveys and interviews with five participants, with varying background and circumstances, I was able to obtain themes from three main areas. In a social sense, research participants shared that their experience with restrictive sanctions had created a sense of distance with institutions that issued the sanction, they felt labeled in a way that reflected their incident, and they retreated to rely on themselves or a small group. For personal impacts, restrictive sanctions seem to have allowed for individuals to reassess, and potentially reset, their priorities for the future. However, the sanctions or sanctioning process also seemed to reset the students' outlook to be more realistic or pessimistic. A level of optimism or seeing the good in things was stripped away. Of course, all these themes appeared in different ways or in their own unique style based on the lived experience of the participants. Additionally, all participants, though not explicitly asked, shared their thoughts on the sanctioning process and how their institutions handled the situation.

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Chapter four contained the findings of this study in core areas to set up the next chapter's discussion. With the overall research question of this study being: How do college students make sense of their experience during and after a behavioral restrictive sanction? The impacts both socially and personally begin to add color to our understanding of their experience.

### **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This chapter contains a summary of key components of this study. It includes a discussion of the findings included in Chapter Four, while incorporating key concepts from the literature. To understand the themes, it is also important to understand the context of the students' situation as well. For example, the social impacts are in the unique circumstance of a college environment. For many, there was a clear entity responsible for their situation and that entity was their institution. In a social regard, this fact created a wedge, of varying degrees, between the individual and their school. On a more personal level, this punishment seemed to shape the individual's worldview. As college often is described as a bubble, there is a certain level of impunity for the students there. However, when that bubble is burst, the growing feeling of resignation to a situation, a feeling of loss of control, or pessimistic about circumstances creeps in.

In addition to a discussion of the themes in a broader context, this chapter provides recommendations based on the findings as well and future research considerations. The findings will be discussed based on the main research question and the two sub questions. The first sub question will be addressed in the discussion of the social and personal impacts, and the second sub question will be covered in the discussion of implications and suggestions.

#### **Discussion of Social Impacts**

The social impacts of restrictive sanctions are not wholly surprising to me. In fact, the smaller themes of ostracization from the institution, perceived labeling from administrators, and a retreat of self-reliance or a core small group seemingly play upon each other. As one is issued a punishment from their institution, there is a divide between the two parties. The student feels, in a way, that they are being told that they do not fit or they are not part of the social norm that

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constitutes campus. They are othered. It is an “us vs. them” feeling about the relationships. A feeling that has the student essentially looking at their institution and believing they are not wanted as one of that community. Based on this othering, the students find comfort in their trusted small group that continues to accept them for who they are. Breaking down each of these interconnected themes is important to truly understand the phenomena that these students are engaging with.

### *A Disorienting Dilemma*

Using Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, this restrictive sanction experience could serve as a disorienting dilemma that initiates a student’s developmental change, and not in the way that the school intends. In Mezirow’s theory, adult learners “transform his or her frame of reference to fully understand the experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). A prominent sentiment of these sanctioned students is that the school is not truly looking out for their best interests. Instead, the institution is looking out for the best interests of itself. As a result, the students may begin to view the school in an entirely new light. They start to see more and more of the school’s actions as self-serving instead of for the good of the community. This jaded view and corresponding ostracization of these students should be something that greatly concerns the institutions as college campuses claim to be a place that strives to build community.

Universities often value their students’ perceived sense of belonging toward the school to as college students’ sense of belonging affects their subjective well-being and retention rate (O’Keefe, 2013). Many institutions rely on the commitment of their members for financial gain through continued tuition, charitable gifts, and the donation of time and services. After experiencing a restrictive sanction and developing a belief that the institution is looking out for itself, these students may view alumni events as another self-serving activity by the school.

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While the overall numbers of students who are issued restrictive sanctions are a minority of the student population for any college or university, the ostracization of these students could come with a larger, longer-term cost than the school knows. As Participant 2 mentioned, they are less likely to engage with alum relation type events. While in the grand scheme of things, one person may not have a huge impact, their experience may have influence on future applicants and interested students. Mezirow's theory explains that to facilitate transformation, "learners need practice in recognizing frames of reference and using their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective." Additionally, learners need to be assisted to participate effectively in discourse (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). However, in the case of the participants in this study, they were left to their own devices to further understand their sanction. They often understood their incident and how it might be considered wrong, but they did not feel supported in their sanctions. Therefore, they developed meaning regarding their sanction experience and the subsequent relationship with their institution.

While sanctions at the college level have a fair bit of complications in their own right, further confusion, implications, and emotion stem from Title IX sanctioning. The debate surrounding how colleges should best adjudicate alleged Title IX violations is one that rages on the institutional, state, and even federal level. U.S. Presidents have had this topic as part of their policies. There is a consistent tug in opposite directions for providing survivors of Title IX violations safety in reporting their case and continuing their education while also providing due process to those accused of wrongdoing (Perry, 2021). "Ensuring that reported instances of misconduct are taken seriously while also providing some protections for the accused is a difficult task—one that OCR has grappled with for decades" (Freeman, 2020, p. 912). The muddy waters of Title IX create an interesting environment for those found responsible. Many of



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the students who fall into their category do not believe that they did anything wrong and therefore do not agree with the sanction. It becomes an instance that is chalked up to the institution protecting themselves legally and have given in to social pressures of the current era. However, on the flip side, when these students are not found responsible, the reporting student often has negative feelings or can feel let down by their institution. “Re-victimization of sexual assault victims or a rush to judgment to punish the accused is a form of institutional betrayal” (Stader & Williams-Cunningham, 2017, p. 198). The whole scenario can become a no-win situation for the institution, especially as more attention is paid to the Title IX topic on campuses. With at least one student feeling negatively about the interaction with the school surrounding the Title IX report, the university is going to potentially ostracize that individual with the outcome of their investigation. Title IX, however, is often more than one individual and their interaction with the school. Major groups have gotten involved, like the #MeToo movement, want answers from their institutions on how decisions are made in these cases. With this in mind, even more is at stake for the institution as they consider their relationship with a broader community based on the outcomes of a conduct case.

### *Labeling*

Another piece that shapes the student and institution relationship is the perceived label that the student feels is given to them from the institution. This further drives a wedge in the relationship as the student may feel that the label should not be used to define them or may not agree with label. While research, such as studies from Noguera (2003) and Quin and Hemphill (2014), into labeling often show that the individual internalizes the title or is at risk for recidivism, a key component of the labeling is the othering or stigma associated with it. In this study, the feeling of othering or stigma was not from peers, but instead, from the institution

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itself. Again, this factors into the damaged relationship between student and school. For those who did not believe they has been treated fairly by their institution's policies or procedures, such as Participants 3 and 4, the new label may stir up a resentment. For others, the label may factor into how they come to behavior or express themselves.

Bring this consideration to the Title IX discussion also illuminates just how impactful that labeling piece can be. While many of those accused of violating a Title IX policy may not believe they did anything wrong in the moment, or even ever, there is a widespread aversion to being labeled a rapist or something similar. In society, rapists are known to be bad people. The image of a rapist is a twisted, evil individual out with the intention to do harm. Needless to say, no one wants to be considered by that title. Presumably, the institutions do not want to be the entity that is issuing it either, however, they end up in that position by presiding over Title IX cases where finding a student responsible for a violation is, in essence, unintentionally giving them that title.

To combat some of the intensity of vocabulary, institutions sometimes try to temper their wording through the situation. Administrators, even those in the profession, can be uncomfortable using words like rape. To that point, Yale University had a 2013 case report that used the terminology of nonconsensual sex in place of rape (Cruz, 2019). The idea that administrators cannot even use the phraseology or wording in a case report makes it even clearer than an individual would not want to be labeled in that way. However, in the situation of being found responsible for a Title IX violation, and especially when there is a corresponding transcript notation, the label that is associated with the finding can be a heavy weight on an individual.

While some believe that a core piece of restrictive sanctions is that it removes its subject from the circumstance or community that led to undesirable behavior, the labeling that

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corresponds with sanctions may have an adverse impact. In their study, Novak and Krohn (2021) found “youth who are suspended experience significant immediate and longer-term decreases in their association with prosocial peers and involvement in prosocial activities” (p.741). So, while the punishing group is intended to remove negative influences from the student, the student is also losing connections which would be more positive. This loss of positive groupings could drive the student further into negative or undesirable behavior, but also plays into the student’s social isolation.

### *Suggestions and Next Steps*

To remove some of the potential labeling and any corresponding ill-will, institutions should focus their sanctioning processes solely on the action and less on the individual. Participant 5’s experience of feeling that the administrator believes them to be a bad person who deserves “righteous punishment” can be, and should be, avoided through focusing on the action instead of one’s character. This way, the individual will hopefully feel less judged by their institution, and therefore, less defensive. If one is not in a defensive mindset, they may be more open to reflection, which all parties benefit from. This labeling is also part of what may drive individuals into self-reliance or their small groups. They are retreating to a safety where they are not judged. Something that could help to facilitate this could be restorative justice. Through a conversation of understanding how their actions impacted another or the overall community, the student may come to an affix any punitive response to their actions instead of to themselves.

Additionally, a key of restorative justice is the integration of the offender into the community. This support could be key in remediating the feeling of being ostracized or even the retreat to relying on a small group. While restorative justice may not be the sole answer in addressing behavior, especially more egregious violations, it can be used in partnership with

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other institutional responses to promote understanding. Interestingly, restorative justice has been recommended as a positive solution to Title IX complaints. At first glance, this seems to be a troubling response to a sexual assault or other violation as it opens the door to potential triggering events for the reporting student. However, in a situation where both parties agree, this solution could provide a way forward for all involved. In a session with a trained facilitator, both individuals could describe their view on the situation, what happened, and how it has impacted them. At the end of a successful process, a reparative plan is put into place. Plans could include items like rehabilitative measures for the offender, stay-away provisions, educational sessions or and community service. According to advocates of the process, restorative justice program staff would follow up with the offending student to be sure that the plan is completed and with the reporting student to see that he or she is receiving support and not experienced retaliation (Fuchs, 2021). This way of responding to cases could also remediate further community backlash as both the reporting and responding students would have to agree to the plan. Additionally, by providing staff support to both students involved, the institution is also may assist in keeping students engaged with the community and preventing isolation.

That social support is something that is truly crucial for traditionally aged college students. A sense of social belonging provides meaning in life and promotes a greater sense of psychological well-being (Lambert et al., 2013). When considering that college is often a developmentally impactful time for young adults and their growth into a confident future, the negative implications of being othered or completely removed from a campus community cannot be overlooked. Participant 5 noted that their time after being issued their sanction was quite dark and sad. Their mental health suffered. For college students, even the lower perception of support from peers, the university, and faculty is associated with lower levels of educational success and

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engagement with others (Goodenow, 1993; Neel & Fuligni, 2013). If one considers the developmental impact, both personally and socially, as well as the educational ramifications, one can intuit that the sense of belonging in one's community is hugely important for a student's personal mental health or overall well-being. The mental impact of restrictive sanctions should be considered, and potentially addressed, when being issued to these young adults.

The social elements of labeling and feeling othered from their institution based on restrictive sanctions mirrors parts of the experiences in K-12, but there are further complications at the higher education level. For the most part, college costs a significant amount more than K-12 educations as even public institutions of higher education can cost thousands of dollars a year where public K-12 schooling can be free. When considering the price of higher education as a factor, the student being directly removed from the campus by the school or even the indirect consequences of the restrictive sanctions such as feeling less connected, the financial implications of a restrictive sanction can be staggering. If the student cannot graduate on time, loses credit hours that they have previously paid for, or if they decide to leave their original institution due to a lack of trust or community, the student could be facing thousands of dollars in fees, tuition, or future earnings. Of course, as is the case of Participants 4 and 5, a student can work while away from their campus. However, the differences between short term temporary work during the semester of a restrictive sanction compared to graduating on-time and beginning a career are distinct. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the average individual with "some college" would be making \$874 a week, while one who graduated would be making \$1281 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019, Median weekly earnings \$606 for high school dropouts, \$1,559 for advanced degree holders). While not a perfect comparison, there is something to be said that the difference in earnings and career trajectory within the job are vast. Further research

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should be considered for college students who have been issued a restrictive sanction and their college and beyond earnings. The impact would include their earnings as well as any financial hit they take based on the sanction. The implications could be a hidden repercussion that is only exacerbated by the current student loan crisis.

With the growing costs of higher education, there is a push for being extremely intentional on where students choose to pursue their degree. With this, the selection of the school is a large choice of young adults. It is a preferred selection instead of being based on the location of one's home. There is often a sense of pride and commitment to this new institution. However, with the institution issuing a restriction sanction and the student feeling rejected, it can be a feeling like unrequited love. This sense of rejection, as well as the financial implications, being ostracized from one's choice school can create a negative strain between student and school whereas K-12 students have no money or pride at stake.

### **Discussion of Personal Impacts**

#### ***Positive Outcomes***

Restrictive sanctions are not all negative. Through this study, a theme that came to light was the reassessment of priorities. Participants identified that they were able to dedicate themselves to their studies or find a new purpose to strive for. This is the sort of positive outcome that institutions are intending while issuing these sanctions. This aligns with the core beliefs that post-secondary institutions are about educating the whole person. The education of the whole person entails the academic pursuits in the classroom, but also enabling the growth of the social being outside of academics. In fact, the Association for Student Conduct Administration, one of the leading professional organizations in this area, proclaims their mission as “engaging and educating students to be better citizens by guiding them towards

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ethical decision-making and accountability” (“About ASCA,” n.d.). Through helping students find their way or rededicate themselves to their studies, these sanctions are helping students to brighter futures.

However, after a restrictive sanction, students seem to shut down or close off the part of their life that got them into trouble and instead double down on their academic pursuits. Of course, the sanction itself does not command an academic dedication, but instead, many of these students seemed to make this step on their own. For Participant 3, they felt that through their sanctioning process, they were being judged as “stupid,” so the drive to succeed academically was something of a rebuke to that. However, for other participants, it is interesting to consider this renewed academic intentionality as blossoming from a different intention. Implementation intentions are “if-then plans that connect good opportunities to act with cognitive or behavioral activities that will be effective in accomplishing one’s goals” (Sheeran et al., 2005, p. 280). For the students doubling down on their academics, their reaction to the sanction, which also could include avoiding or limiting their exposure to what got them into trouble in the first place could be a way of consciously or subconsciously initiating implementation intentions. To better manage their goal pursuits, these individuals are “promot[ing] need-satisfying experiences” through succeeding academically and dedicating less to “need-frustrating ones” (Bélanger, 2019, p. 353). While maybe not overt, social acceptance and the growth of one’s community of friends is a goal of many young adults in college. If through that pursuit, one is punished by their institution, the goal could become frustrating, resulting in the student distancing themselves from that. Instead, they can dedicate themselves to an academic achievement goal, one shared by them, their family, and the college. With nothing to get in the way of this pursuit, it can become more need-satisfying and serve as a positive output of the sanction. The institutions could do

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more to help facilitate this. According to Mezirow (1997), “to facilitate transformative learning, educators must help learners become aware and critical of their own and others’ assumptions” (p. 10). By assisting these students on their journey through their restrictive sanctions, administrators may be able to augment their assessment of priorities. However, it is important to not impact the student’s critical reflection on their priorities as this is the most positive theme that emerged from this study.

### *Additional Outcomes*

Not all the personal impacts of restrictive sanctions were positive. The other large theme that arose from this study was the student’s distinct, resigned viewpoint on their circumstance. However, commonly, this viewpoint trended further to a level of pessimism. This installed negative outlook is not intended as an outcome of the sanctions, but it is something to very much consider while moving forward. The majority of the participants in this study noted a depressive state after being issued their restrictive sanction. This negative outlook is something of a learned helplessness or conditioned negativity. Based on the participants’ powerless position of having the sanction placed upon them, often without much say in the matter, the expectation that something else bad will happen to them arises. In studies at the K-12 level, often times when asked if the suspension affected the student’s future behavior, the student replies that it did not and they will probably be suspended again (Costenbader, 1998, p. 71). This feeling that the school will punish them again is not entirely what was present for higher education, but an overall negativity that mirrored that feeling lingered. In another tangential study of students who dropped out of their K-12 education, Arkin and Cojocaru (2020) found their participants expressed “they will never “amount to anything,” show[ed] intensive concern about life going forward, or express[ed] lack of control over the present and, in turn, the future as well (p. 19).



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The negative mindset has mental health implications and may impact the overall effectiveness of the sanction in conveying any learning.

While short term sadness is to be expected after being punished, institutions need to monitor the overall mental health before any tragedy may occur. This pessimism is something that can shape one's path forward and the choices they make. As Noguera (2003) found in the K-12 years, recidivism is high for those issued restrictive sanctions. With this it-is-what-it-is attitude, it would not be farfetched to see recidivism with college students too even though none of this study's participants did. Similar to the implication of labeling, this negativity may be curtailed through focusing on the action of the infraction instead of the individual. This awareness of the implications of a sanction needs to be beyond just the individual though. An understanding of what is being communicated to the broader community through the issuance of the punishment is also a key factor to consider. For example, in Title IX, institutions need to consider the reporting student's reaction to any sanction or non-sanction. The school needs to provide mental health support to all those connected or impacted by the sanction or inaction.

### **Study Implications & Recommendations**

The implications of this research serve to improve higher education sanctioning for addressing student behavior. Restrictive sanctions, of course, come for a reason. The argument is not to do away with them completely, but instead, to add further supports to them to increase the effectiveness of the sanction. Participants in this study argued that reflection cannot be forced or initiated before the subject is ready. This idea is compounded with the one's social power. Guilfoyle et. al. (2022) predicted that social power would relate to apology and non-apology. "Apologies involve acknowledging the transgression, taking responsibility, expressing remorse, saying sorry, providing remediation, and assuring victims that the offense will not occur again"

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(Guilfoyle et al., 2022, p. 1). These apologies can be challenging due to self-image, pride, or other social considerations. Similarly, reflection could follow a similar pattern as one will have a tough time reflecting on wrongdoing if they hold themselves higher than the transgression. To further reflection, a true understanding of the issue, those harmed, and larger implications is important, alongside any time needed to reset one's understanding.

Additionally, the observation was made that a one-size-fits-all approach is not an appropriate way to instill growth and learning. However, tied hand-in-hand with the one-size-fits-all approach is a question of ethical equity. Higher education institutions often have a canned response for each policy infraction as a way to equally respond to students and deny a bias. While this is appropriate to a degree, in practice, the process is flawed. With different students coming from different backgrounds and circumstances, the same sanction will strike different students in different ways. The loss of a semester's worth of credits and time may mean a slight setback to one student. However, it could mean the complete end of another student's post-secondary educational journey. Higher education institutions need to understand the different circumstances before enacting a just punishment. While this means understanding their background, it also means understanding where they are mentally too. Are they ready to reflect? Are they predisposed to a certain belief about therapy? Where does the student stand in their understanding of their infraction? With the answers to these questions, administrators can join the student on reflection and learning or growth. In turn, the student will be given support from the institution in a way that does not feel as if they are being singled out or shunned. Having that coach or support through the process makes things significantly less scary but also creates a community connection for the student to maintain their connection to the institution. That connection could be the link that truly allows for self-development and positive association with

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the school. As Erikson (1997) explained, young adults are looking for mentorship. This relationship with an administrator, or even an older peer who experienced something similar, could also combat the social isolation that often results in recidivism or as found in Martin's et al. study (1999), students leaving their institution. This connection to a therapeutic mentor to help through the sanction journey would go a long way in alleviating some of the negative repercussions experienced by those on restrictive sanctions.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

This study shared the experience of students issued restrictive sanctions based on their behavior. Given that much of the research of this kind exists in the K-12 arena, I suggest that similar studies in this higher education environment should be conducted to further confirm some of the findings of this study in other contexts. Due to the limitations of this study, including a smaller sample size and convenience sampling, this study should be replicated at additional institutions with a greater number of participants to understand the lived experiences. Data could be analyzed across gender, socioeconomic, geographic, and racial variables as well as by institution type, infraction, and specific sanction. Through understanding these experiences in a variety of ways, future researchers will be able to better assess the individual needs of students in specific instances.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude this study, it is clear to me that restrictive sanctions have additional unintended consequences that negatively impact both the individual subjected to the sanction as well as the institution implementing it. These sanctions serve a purpose to address undesirable actions as a way of a punishment and help to allow the student time to reassess their priorities in school or life. However, hidden within restrictive sanctions are also unintended consequences,

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such as creating a distance between the student and the school, a perceived label or character judgment, a retreat to a smaller, more trusted community. In addition to these social implications, individuals also adopt a more pessimistic worldview that they carry with them for years. It is my belief that the institutions do not intend to implement these negative consequences, and therefore, can work to improve their sanctioning process to alleviate some of the harshness. A way to address these consequences, improve the effectiveness of the sanction, and maintain the student's relationship with institution may be to implement an advisor or mentor to help the student along their reflective journey. By have someone committed to their growth, the student can uphold their relationship with the school and develop a sense of belonging that they may not have previously had while on a restrictive sanction.

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**Appendices****Appendix A: Participation Request Email**

Subject Line: Student participants being sought for a research study on college sanctions

Dear Student,

Hello, my name is Patrick Sharry, and I am a doctoral student at Lesley University conducting research on undergraduate students who have been issued a restrictive sanction from their institution based on non-academic policy violations. You are receiving this email because you have responded to outreach from your institution regarding this research and I would like to ask you to be a part of my study.

The purpose of my study is to explore students' lived experience during a restrictive sanction and will specifically look at the developmental and sociological impacts of the sanction. **The study will take place during the Summer and Fall of 2021. The total length of the study will last from August to November 2021.**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to:

1. **Sign a consent form.** The consent form explains your rights as a participant in this study. For example, since this is a volunteer-type study, if at any time you wish to no longer participate in this study, you are allowed to leave the study.
2. **Complete an initial questionnaire.** To gain initial demographic information as well as to allow for an area for participants to provide written responses. The questionnaires will be complete at the beginning. The questionnaire will take about 20 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will be completed through an online survey platform.
3. **Participate in individual interviews.** The interviews are designed to gain a more in-depth look into how the sanctions might impact student development and student reflections on the sanction. Interviews will occur two times and last between 60-90 minutes.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email with a yes. If you respond with a yes, you will receive a follow-up email with more details about signing the consent form and the next steps. You are allowed to respond to this email from an anonymous account if you so choose. If you respond no or do not respond, your email will be removed from the email list.

If you have any questions about the study, please email Patrick Sharry at psharry@lesley.edu.

Regards,  
Patrick Sharry



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**Appendix B: Restrictive Sanction Survey**

1. Gender: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Hometown: \_\_\_\_\_
4. College: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Class Year: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Reason for sanction: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Sanction length: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you think the sanction was an appropriate/fair response to your behavior? Why?
9. How are you utilizing the time while on sanction? What are you doing differently base on the restrictions placed on you?
10. Who are you in communication with most during your sanction? (more than one answer is acceptable)
11. Please describe your sanction experience in your own words:

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**Appendix C: Interview #1 Questions**

What did you expect as a result of your conduct meeting?

Can you describe the instance which resulted in your sanction?

How fair do you think the sanction is for your case? If you do not think the sanction was an appropriate/fair response, what would a fairer response have been?

How did it feel to be sanctioned this way?

How has the restriction impacted you?

How have you spent your restricted time?

How did you come to that conclusion/decision?

How would you describe the impact of the sanction?

How has the sanction positively impacted you?

How has the sanction negatively impacted you?

Which supports or services did you utilize during your sanction?

Which supports or services were unavailable but would have been useful to you during your sanction?

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**Appendix D: Interview #2 Questions**

How do you think this sanction defines you:

- as a college student?
- as a young adult?
- in other roles?

Describe your connection to your peers since being issued this restrictive sanction?

Have you experienced any social stigma due to your sanction?

How do you think peers view you in light of your sanction?

How do you think your parents/guardians/mentors view you in light of your sanction?

How do you think your professors/teachers view you in light of your sanction?

How has your sanction influenced how you see yourself?

How has your sanction affected your confidence level?

What personal changes have you noticed within yourself?

Has anyone else noted changes about you?

Do you believe you fit/belong at your university? Why?

How will your sanction impact your future?

Do you expect to “get in trouble” again when returning to college? Why?