



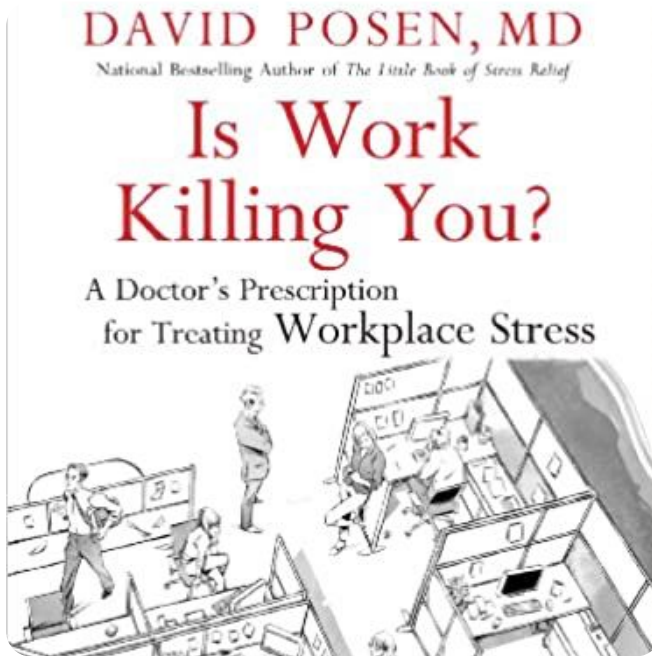
AAAL 2021 Graduate Student Panel

# Balancing the **Holistic** Experience of Being a Graduate Student

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"**Work-life balance** was the most consistent stress-related measure predicting **low job satisfaction** and **negative health symptoms**."

(Catano et al., 2007)



"**Overwork** is seen as **strength**, and **work-life balance** is viewed as **weakness or self-indulgence**."

(Posen, 2013)

# Graduate Life Challenges

- **Navigating** unfamiliar institutional systems
- **Learning** to carry out independent and significant scholarly work
- **Passing** qualifying exams
- **Establishing** working relationships with faculty and peers
- **Negotiating** political and interpersonal drama
- **Subordinating** your own interests for another person's agenda
- **Competing** for limited resources
- **Juggling** other concerns:
  - Health
  - Family
  - Romantic relationships
  - Economic burdens (e.g., debt, rent, food, travel)
  - Living in unfamiliar cities/towns
  - Maintaining outside interests

But grad school is a **temporary** stop



1. Be intentional
2. Cultivate sustainable habits

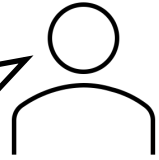
“To be sure, in American higher education today, significant numbers of men and women faculty of all races and across all disciplines and institutional types report that they **experience extensive levels of work-related stress**.... [I]t is critical that we...**strive to develop habits of conducting our work and our lives in ways that promote both our own and others’ well-being.**”





← and students!

(Lindholm & Szelényi, 2008)

# Checking In

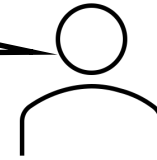
**“Who am I?”**  
**“What makes me whole?”**  
**”What/whom do I value?”**  
**“What are my life priorities?”**



-  *Research, teaching, service?*
-  *Education, work, leisure/play?*
-  *Knowledge, people, money, things?*
-  *Intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual, relational pursuits?*

# Altruistic egotism

How am I?



- Treat your self-care as a sacred obligation...  
non-negotiable
- **You must first take care of yourself to be useful to others.**

# Altruistic egotism

- **Challenge** destructive thoughts
- **Get** enough sleep
- **Communicate** with healthcare providers
- **Practice** things that sustain you (*gym, yoga, journaling, meditation, prayer, relationships, hobbies*)
- **Know** your (sub)optimal times of day (see Casanave, 2020)
- **Don't apologize** for self-care



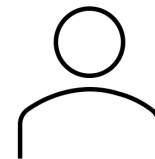
# Community

**“Am I cultivating and sustaining my connections with other people?”**

**“Am I being honest with others?”**

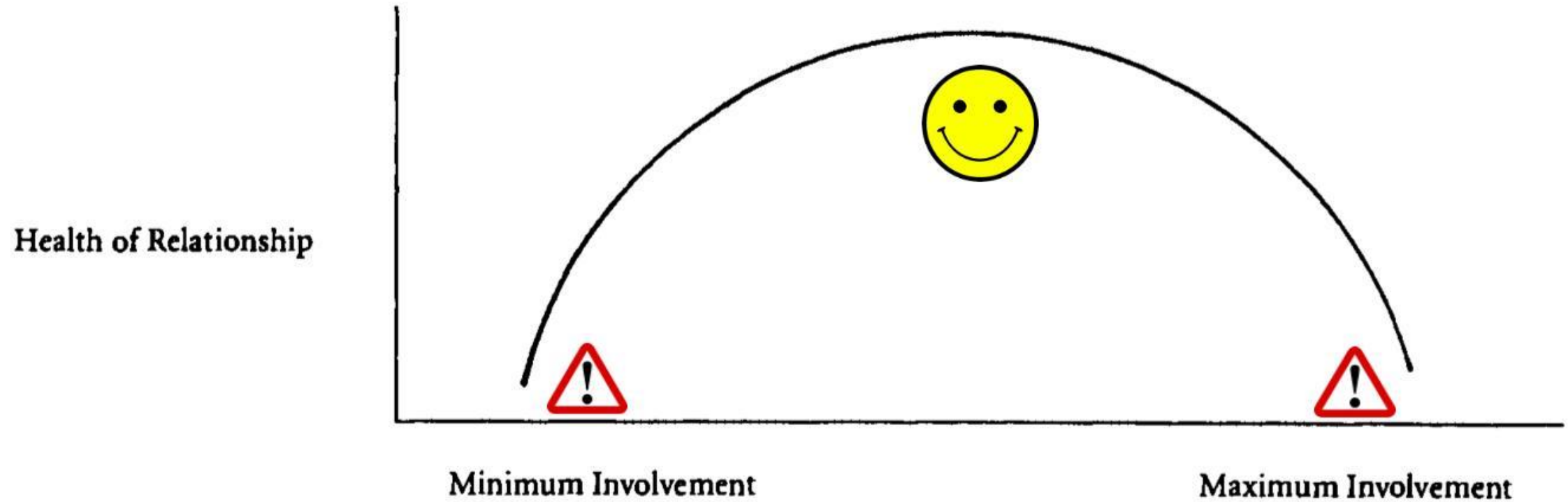
**“Am I being kind to and caring for others?”**

**“Am I allowing others to care for me?”**



# Mentors, Dementors, & Tormenters

- **Cultivate** good mentors
  - peers, professors, people at your and/or other institutions, academics and non-academics
- **Pay attention** to role models
  - identify (un)sustainable practices and attitudes
- **Be** a mentor to others
- **Recognize** that your professional relationships may have “lifespans”
- **Revisit** your associations and “contracts”



**Figure 15.1. Health of Relationship and Level of Involvement**  
Cummings (1996, p. 148)

# Mentors, Dementors, & Tormenters

“As expectations change, it is essential to revisit the terms of the initial contract, so that **progress (or lack of it) can be honestly assessed and new goals and expectations established**. In our view, this periodic reassessment and recalibration is critical for healthy and productive collaboration. The **psychological contract** should be a **living, fluid agreement**. It should be **open to renegotiation, to expansion or contraction, as history and circumstances dictate.**”

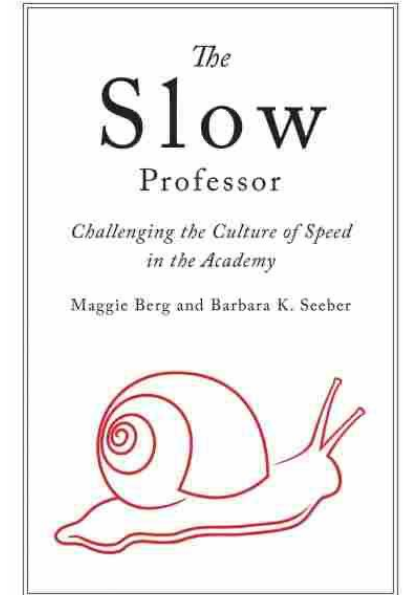
(Kramer & Martin, 1996, p. 172)

Working  
slower,

Working  
smarter

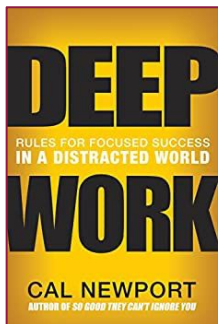
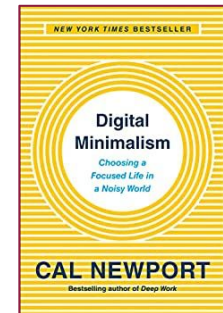
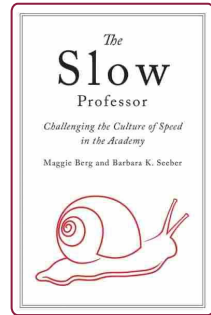
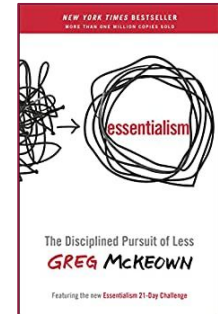
“If you are struggling to regain work-life balance, most academic time management literature will not leave you comforted. **You may actually feel that you are not working hard enough.**”

(Berg & Seeber, 2017)

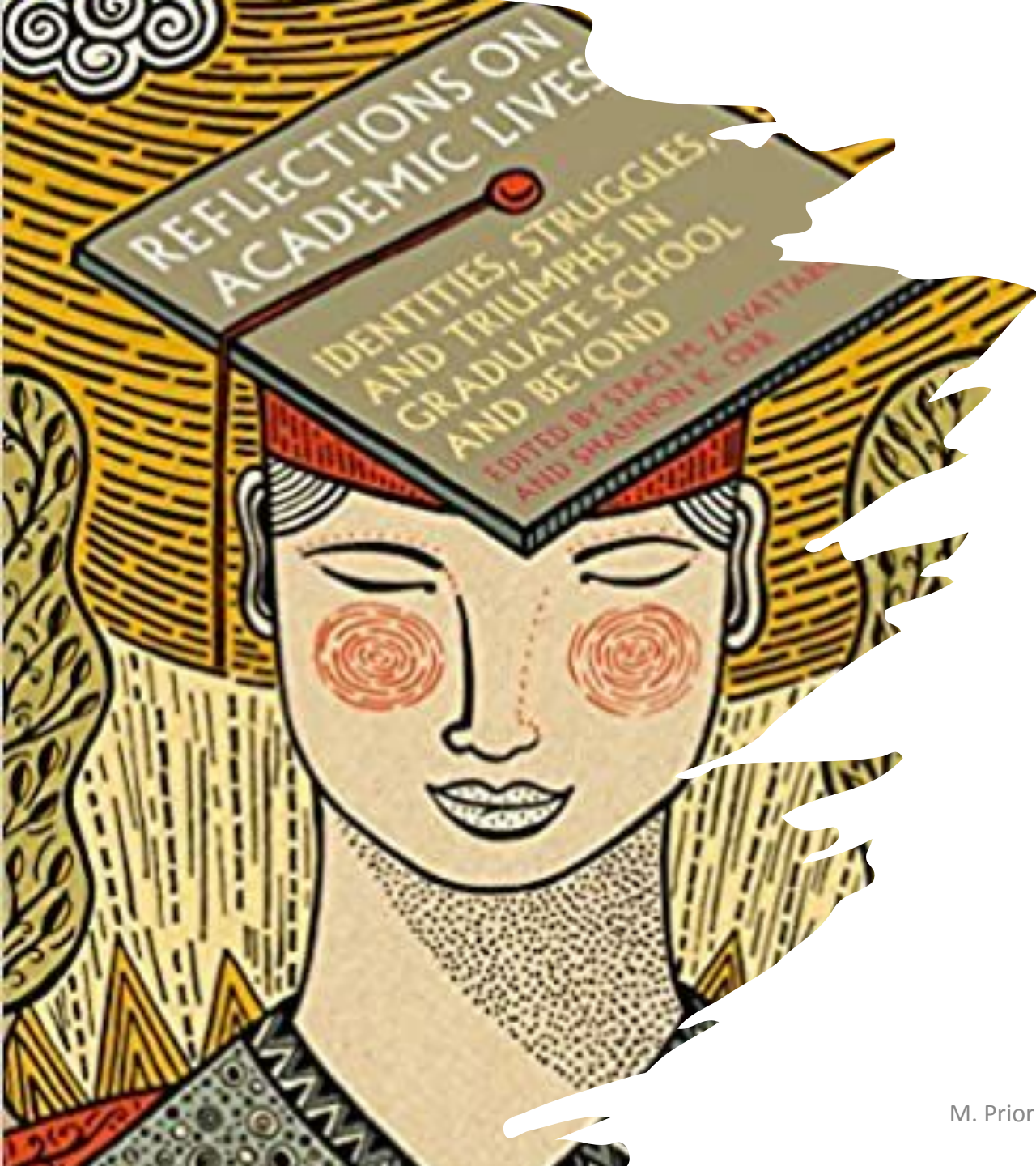


Working  
slower,  
  
Working  
smarter

- If **you** don't prioritize your time, **someone else** will
- Schedule regular **"e-holidays"**  
(turn off the devices!)
- Reassess where you are **investing** your life and self-worth (and how much)
- Reassess **"productivity"**  
(Is it realistic? Is it sustainable?)







When we are overwhelmed, it is easy to get sucked into the frantic pace; when work–life balance is careening out of control, it seems impossible to take an hour out of the day to “do nothing.” Yet, **that’s precisely when we need self-care the most.** As you make time for yourself, you will find that rather than taking away time from all those work and home demands, **self-care will actually make your efforts in these areas more productive.**

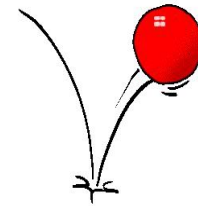
(Zavattaro & Orr, 2017)

Saying “Yes”  
Saying “No”

- If it’s not a “**Yes!**” it probably should be a “**No**” or a “**Not right now.**”

- Managing *fear* and *guilt*

- Becoming *resilient*



- ~~Work-life balance~~ □ *Life balance*

- Being and becoming *whole persons*



Remember,  
we have  
resources!

- Mentors
- Professors
- Peers
- Professional associations
- Professional blogs
- YouTube Channels  
(e.g., Jan Blommaert's channel, Green Renaissance films)
- Apps  
(e.g., Headspace, Talkspace, Sanvello, Exhale)
- Books and articles
- Healthcare providers
- Counseling services
- Employment services
- Care communities & support groups

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