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10-7-2023

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Isabelle Burns
Gonzaga University

Michael DeLand
Gonzaga University, deland@gonzaga.edu

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Recommended Citation

Burns, Isabelle and DeLand, Michael, "Troubled Fun: Experiences of Joy and their Implications for Mental Health in Young Adults" (2023). *CURCI Student Research*. 1.
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TROUBLED FUN: EXPERIENCES OF JOY AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUNG ADULTS

By Isabelle Burns, in partnership with Michael Deland, Professor of Sociology and Criminology

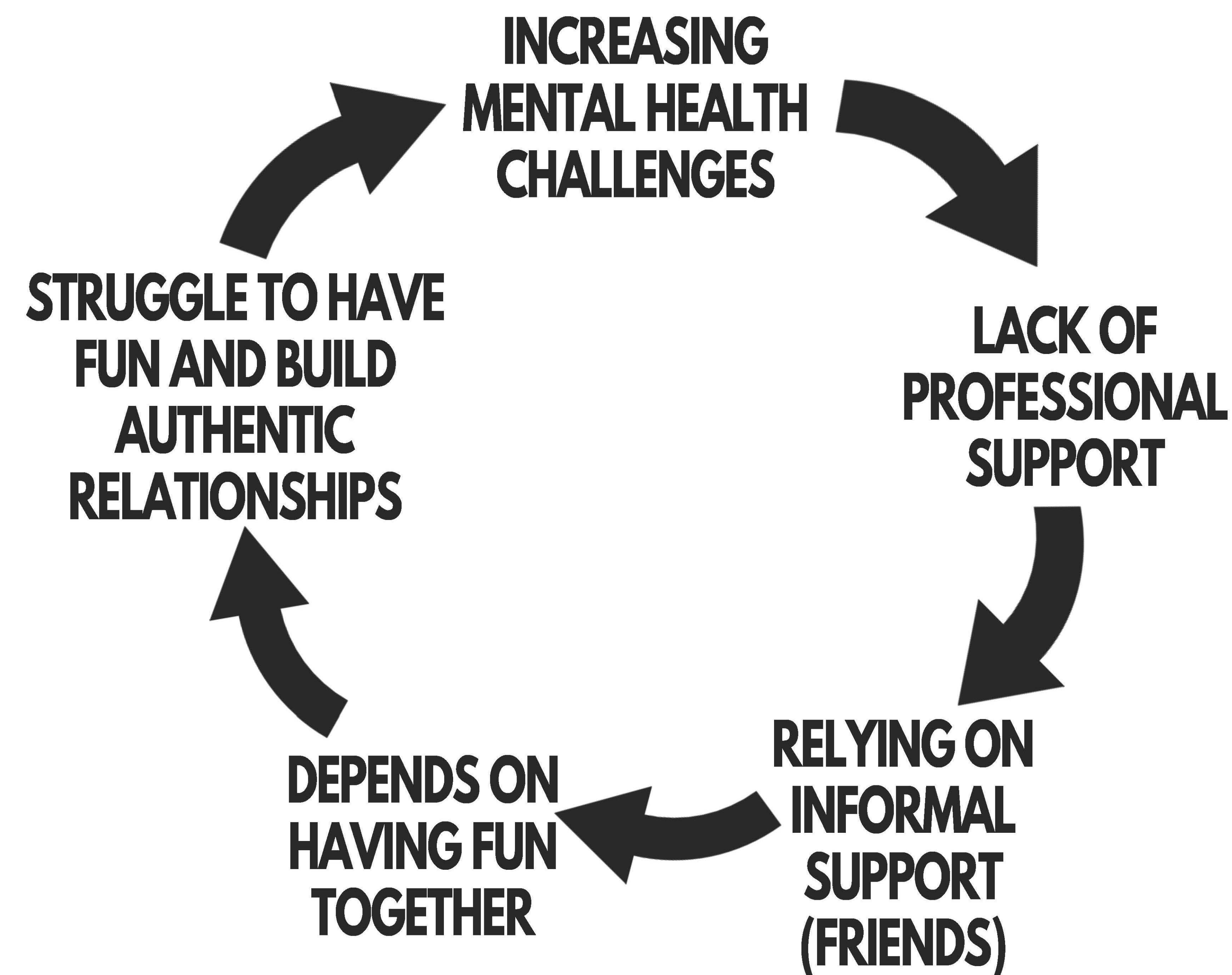
EMAIL: IBURNS2@ZAGMAIL.GONZAGA.EDU & DELAND@GONZAGA.EDU

Background:

- Almost 75% of undergraduates nationwide reported moderate or severe psychological distress (National College Health Assessment)
- Researchers are attributing this crisis to insufficient sleep, social media use and/or abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual or emotional abuse, low social support, trauma, etc.
- Only 25% of students with a mental health problem seek help at all (Beresin, Et. All, 2017).
- Many colleges and universities lack sufficient on-campus mental health resources. 95% of community colleges and 58.8% of traditional universities have no on-campus psychiatric services (Katz, Et. All, 2014).
- Because of this, informal social supports are extremely important
- When measurements/studies of happiness and wellbeing are conducted, often fun is nowhere to be found in the questions (Fincham, Et. All, 2016), this is where our study comes in!

Research Questions:

- How do young adults have fun together, and what are the personal, social, emotional, and relational barriers that make having fun hard?
- What are the consequences of struggles to have fun for their mental and emotional health?



METHODS:

- Analyzed anonymous undergraduate reflections of fun occasions to generate new ideas for another round of data collection
- Preparing 2-part survey and interview procedure with GU students and students from other Spokane colleges: public/private/community college

1. Start with a written reflection a time they had fun/tried to have fun

2. During in person interview ask details, further questions about regularity of scenario, how they felt in certain moments, etc.

Emerging Themes on 'Fun Trouble':

- Trying to appear normal/engaged when feeling that they don't quite fit
- Managing people who have different expectations of oneself
- Acutely aware of how others must be seeing oneself
- Some of the time, "fun trouble" bonding people together-sometimes against common "enemy" or other

Implications... So, what?:

- How can the study of joy and everyday life of young adults inform interventions to assist those who are struggling to build authentic and joyous social relationships?
- We aim to develop implications for student affairs, counseling centers, university administrators, and for students themselves

