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STRESS RESILIENCE DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT LEADERS AT FAITH-BASED UNIVERSITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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By

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David Heitman

DEDICATION

This dedication belongs to Melissa, the love of my life and my greatest encourager.

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Abstract

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Undergraduate student leaders express increasing stress levels, often leaving them unprepared to lead in a complex world of challenge and change. While higher education heavily invests in preparing graduates to think critically and lead successfully, research shows an increasing number of students display low-stress resiliency and risk-aversion while struggling to cope with challenge and failure pre- and post-graduation. This study, conducted at faith-based Christian universities during the COVID-19 pandemic, used grounded theory to generate a generalizable leadership stress resilience model that explains: (a) Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress; (b)The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions; (c)The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress; and (d) The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress. This study informs student leadership development for higher education professionals in the critical area of stress resilience and reveals insights into the formative role faith has on leaders, particularly the influence of faith on leadership stress coping. Three meta-themes of student leader expectations, processing student leadership stress, and the role personal authentic faith played in developing stress resilience versus an obligatory faith that compounded stress emerged. The leadership stress resilience model assists in mapping and

forecasting stress to better understand the convergence and compounding effects of stress. While existing scholarship covers leadership development and leadership stress, little was previously known about the influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions.

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CCCU	Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
CFC	Chief Financial Officer
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
DTR	Defining the Relationship
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
GEN Z	Generation Z
GPS	Global Positioning Systems
GT	Grounded Theory
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LSR	Leadership Stress Resilience
RA	Resident Advisor
ROI	Return on Investment
SGA	Student Government Association

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Undergraduate students express increasing levels of stress, leaving them less resilient to lead in a complex world (Barker et al., 2017; Karaman et al., 2019; Mangan, 2020). Students who display low-stress resilience and risk-aversion behavior are susceptible to feeling overwhelmed during college and struggle with similar feelings in post-graduation life (Acharya et al., 2018). Undergraduate student leaders navigated ever-increasing stress levels due to a convergence of significant challenging factors during the 2020-2021 pandemic. The academic year 2020-2021 saw a merging of significant pressures that disrupted young adulthood's critical developmental period characterized by change and transition with student mental health concerns on the rise (June, 2020). Current student leaders felt particularly burdened by the stress as they led their peers during this time of pandemic guidelines and uncertainty, pushing some student leaders to strike, and even quit (Mangan, 2020). Furthermore, student leaders of color navigate the challenges mentioned above with the additional burden of a lived experience of bias and fear during a time of national social unrest, further compounding their stress (Torres-Harding et al., 2020). It is increasingly apparent that undergraduate student leaders need to develop the capacity to manage their stress as leaders in today's world. If there was ever a time to invest in developing student leaders' stress resilience, it is undoubtedly now.

McGonigal (2015) suggests that a common coping mechanism of attempting to avoid stress rather than to face it actually increases stress for the majority of people. She contends that stress can be reframed from something negative to something positive by individuals and leaders to heighten performance and develop relationships. While stress is unavoidable, a leadership

stress resilience model can help student leaders cope and bolster their leadership capacities in the face of stress. Rather than wasting energy in stress avoidance and risk aversion, understanding stress can help develop student leadership competency and resilience.

The links between stress and increased anxiety and depression are widely accepted (Cain, 2018). Studies showed that stress due to COVID-19 escalated physical and mental health concerns for college students across the nation (Bono et al., 2020; Kecojevic, 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Moriarty et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). The current generation of undergraduate students known as "Generation Z," those born between 1999-2015, is dealing with new levels of stress according to researchers (Kinnaman, 2018). As a person who works with student leaders, I was curious to see if student leaders at faith-based institutions cope differently from their counterparts at non-faith-based institutions. Given all this, a significant opportunity presented itself during the COVID-19 pandemic to create a leadership stress resilience (LSR) model for developing student leaders at faith-based institutions. Without such a model, there is a high probability that these student leaders could graduate without the skills and competencies necessary to manage their stress and to lead effectively in an increasingly complex world (Eisenbarth, 2019; Eisenbarth, 2012; Jennings et al., 2018).

This research focused on creating a generalizable model of leadership stress resilience that can be used to help develop undergraduate student leaders at faith-based institutions while taking into account experiential learning, student development, and transformational leadership understandings. Stress and coping with stress involve several essential factors. In this chapter, I explain what undergraduate stress looks like, and then explores the role that resilience and perseverance play in coping with stress. Next, a discussion on how experiential learning plays a crucial role in leadership development and the importance of critical thinking skills in

developing stress management competencies. Finally, an analysis of how the Christian faith and transformational leadership can help frame stress management among developing student leaders (Bass, 1990; Timms, 2018).

Stress

The university years can be some of the most exciting but stressful times in a person's life, during which students may face stress personally, socially, academically, and economically (Astin, 1993; Civitci, 2015). Undergraduate students often come face-to-face with the responsibilities of life for the first time; this typically includes being responsible for their personal health, studies, finances, and planning for the future (Cress & Lampman, 2007; Darling et al., 2007). Socially, students begin the developmental age and stage where familial, interpersonal, and romantic relationships are all changing (Magolda, 2014). The future of these key relationships can be uncertain, adding further stress to students during college (Chao, 2012). In a pre-pandemic study, EVERFI (2019) found that as many as 78% of college students reported feeling overwhelmed by all they had to do, 74% felt exhausted (not from physical activity), 67% felt sad, 51% felt things were hopeless, and tragically 13% seriously considered suicide. These findings illustrate high levels of stress and stress-related symptoms among undergraduate students. Early COVID-19 research shows the rate of depression on the rise since the beginning of the pandemic (Bono et al., 2020; Kecojevic, 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Lumpkin, 2021; Moriarty et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). A study by the Healthy Minds Network and the American College Health Association conducted between the months of March-May, 2020 included 18,000 college students from 14 different campuses revealed that over 60% of college students were very anxious about how long the pandemic could last and about the possibility that the people they

care about contracting COVID-19; two-thirds of the respondents indicated that their financial situation had become more stressful because of the pandemic (June, 2020).

Unfortunately, adverse mental health indicators such as anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation are becoming more prevalent among college students and Gen Z, creating a mental health crisis for colleges and universities in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2020; Lumpkin, 2021). Student leaders desperately need coping skills and critical leadership competency development both for the health and thriving of themselves and for the peers they lead (Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Mangan, 2020; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2018). This study explored whether the Christian faith provided a meaningful sense of hope and aid in coping for leaders in the COVID-19 world (Denu, 2020) and was an essential factor in student perception of campus community vitality (Fosnacht & Broderick, 2020; Komives et al., 2020). Coping with stress is a genuine challenge for student leaders, requiring resilience and perseverance.

Resilience

Research in resilience psychology during the last ten years has begun to focus on the level of persistence demonstrated in the face of adversity (Duckworth, 2015; Schriner, 2010). Resilience, according to the American Psychological Association (2020, p.1), is "adaptation in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or stress: family/relationship problems, health problems or workplace/money issues." A necessary trait for overall success in college, career, and life in general, persistence coupled with an optimistic attitude, led researchers to investigate to see if resilience was an inherited trait or something that can be taught and developed (Schriner, 2010).

Grit is more than stubbornness but a particular type of realistic optimism that never gives up (Stoltz, 2015). This idea of grit is further expounded upon by Willink and Babin (2017) who argue that a perseverance mindset can be taught and applied to leadership development. Individuals who possess genuine grit have higher levels of optimism, self-critique, possess a perseverance mindset, and demonstrate a continued drive for self-growth (Duckworth, 2016). Researcher Carol Dweck (2015) introduced significant research findings in an individual's ability to achieve and overcome challenges given what she termed a "growth mindset." A growth mindset helps understand how a student's perception of their abilities directly influences their motivation and achievement, so much so that merely changing a student's perspective can boost their achievement (Dweck, 2015; Claro, 2016). According to these researchers, there seems to be no shortcut for genuine grit; however, student leaders are able to develop specific skills when challenged firsthand and persevere through them with a mind to achieve.

Experiential Learning

Higher education in the United States concerns the value of student return on investment (ROI) (e.g., time, effort, and money) and students' needs for intentional leadership capacity development leadership efficacy (Komives & Sowcik, 2020). The concern includes employability and a student's personal leadership development of stress resilience, and true grit necessary to cope with life and leadership stresses to help them succeed during and after completing college (Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Pittman, 2010). There is considerable attention aimed at the value proposition of a university degree and ongoing national debate around the ROI of the collective time and resources it requires to successfully complete college. The implied expectation that students will graduate with those competencies necessary to succeed and lead in a complex world of uncertainty is often taken for granted (Fox, 2018). But many

wonder if this assumption is correct. According to The Chronicle of Higher Education, 60% of colleges and universities in the U.S. missed their enrollment goals in the Fall 2019 semester (Carlson, 2020) before the COVID-19 pandemic. A recent Clearinghouse report published by Inside Higher Ed shows Fall 2020 enrollment down a further 4 percent from last fall (Amour, 2020). This indicates that there may be a cultural value shift currently taking place in America. While educators grapple with these new realities and attempt to respond accordingly, undergraduate student leadership programs are poised to integrate models that engage students and contribute to new conceptual frameworks for developing student competencies and career readiness (French, 2017; Komives & Sowcik, 2020).

Research strongly suggests the power of first-hand student leadership experience is able to transform the leadership development process by focusing on experiential education, which the literature describes as *learning by doing* (Walter & Marks, 1981). Komives & Sowcik, (2020) underscore the value of leadership programs and important role co-curricular experiences in student leadership development. Going back to founding pedagogical research ties the lived student experience to lasting holistic learning development and growth of the individual (Kolb et al., 2001). The Association for Experiential Education defines experiential education as

> ...a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection on increasing knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities. (Association for Experiential Education, 2020, p. 1)

This connection of person and place through experiential learning originates with education theorists John Dewey (1938) and Paulo Freire (1970). According to these research theorists, knowledge is an action-oriented process, one to engage in, immerse oneself in, and incorporate into a self-discovery and development cycle. Dewey (1909) termed "reflective thinking" as the "active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in light

of the ground which supports it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (p. 9). Models of university student leadership development vary but, on the whole, represent a relatively young and emerging field in terms of pedagogical development; such programs utilize experiential competency-building outcomes to evidence student leadership growth (Jenkins, 2013).

While developing future leaders is a commonly stated outcome of higher education, educators find it difficult to maximize instructional and experiential opportunities for student learning and engagement to meet the challenging demands students face both now and, in the future, (White & Guthrie, 2016). Compounding this, recent studies show students experience virtual "Zoom video conferencing fatigue" and a strong "aversion to online learning" (Anderson, 2020) Researchers, Unger & Meiran (2020), revealed that students were anxious and battled boredom in an all-online learning experience. Educators and scholars must explore and develop models of student leadership that further integrate competency-based learning and experiential pedagogy to ensure students can lead well in the face of societal and organizational challenges (French, 2017). Understanding the many developmental leadership frameworks and how they directly tie to competency-based learning outcomes has been the focus of several recent studies across a wide range of fields and disciplines (Tucci et al., 2019). An examination of which developmental leadership frameworks engage students and meet the challenges and stressors students face today is necessary at this time in history (Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Komives & Sowcik, 2020).

Critical Thinking

While student leadership programs have growing opportunities and resources (Komives & Sowcik, 2020), these programs historically have not always emphasized stress management education or included critical thinking to help students cope with stress and anxiety caused by a

crisis experience (Powley & Taylor, 2014). Authors Powley and Taylor (2014) offer the vital insight that critical thinking skill development holds solutions for how students might navigate and lead through stressful situations. Critical thinking harkens back to learning theorist Dewey (1909) and his term, reflective thinking, which he again further defines as the active process whereby learners engage the realities of their entire experience, including those inevitable stress-inducing encounters. Rather than passively taking in information around them, students who develop critical thinking skills can make meaning, harness belief, and proceed with action (Baxter Magolda, 2014; Kiltz, 2009). Critical thinking actively engages students in the stressful experience itself, decisive for intellectual development involving students' abilities to identify issues, evaluate evidence, and deduce conclusions (Tsui, 2002). In short, critical thinking helps student leaders' personal transformation through knowledge acquisition that will empower them to take action and manage their internal stress and external crisis successfully (Baxter Magolda, 2014).

Transformational Leadership

Komives et al. (2011) refer to a model of integrating student developmental stages and expanding the leadership development practice to address such student leadership needs as critical thinking and resiliency development. Their work is similar to Bass' Theory of Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership theory embodies four key leadership factors, known as the Four I's: Inspirational motivation (vision), individualized consideration (mentorship), idealized influence (legitimacy), and intellectual stimulation (challenge) in developing critical thinking in student leaders (Bass, 1990). Timms (2018) further developed Bass' model, defining transformational leadership that embodies producing change and developing lives through authenticity, inspiration, empathy, and innovation. Although

scholarship exists describing these leadership approaches, none yet offer a praxis model to include intensive formative leadership stress experiences. Additionally, these approaches address the students in general and do not focus specifically on students from faith-based institutions. Instead, current models focus on skill-building and short-term interventions rather than fostering leadership capacity by developing critical thinking competencies and growing leadership identity over more prolonged and more intense stressful experiences (Komives et al., 2005).

Understanding the Leadership Stress Resilience (LSR) model locates the student voice using grounded theory data methodologies. Employing the transformational leadership approach is not meant to limit or influence the data in any way but supports the LSR model grounded in the data. An intentional degree of critical experience is necessary to develop the "Four I's" of transformational leadership (Albritton, 1998) and Timms' (2018) four transformational leadership attributes necessary for producing change and building lives. Educators can use the LSR model as a learning source to meet undergraduate leadership needs for personal growth, competency building, and leadership identity and resiliency development (Allen & Hartman, 2009). Before this study, little was known about how these fundamental leadership approaches informed the design of new models for student leadership development resulting in a lack of focused leadership opportunities in the young discipline (Jenkins, 2013). This study will incorporate Timms' (2018) refinement of Bass's (1990) "Four I's" as a general construct to examine those variables necessary for the design of the LSR model for transformational leadership.

Faith

This study considered the integral role faith plays in the lives of developing undergraduate student leaders at faith-based institutions. Students may choose to attend private, faith-based institutions for more individualized attention and a holistic approach to the learning experience (Huegel, 2016). Faith is strongly tied to student perception of the campus environment and personal sense of community (Fosnacht & Broderick, 2020). A strong positive connection exists between spirituality and leadership (Komives et al., 2020). The question this study asked was do faith-based views of stress experiences help, or perhaps even hinder, stress resilience in developing student leaders? Does faith influence a leader's sense of identity and perception of the communities in which they lead? While there are many faiths, this study specifically looked at the faith of student leaders from Christian faith-based universities.

A Christian faith-based worldview sees a metanarrative in the biblical scriptures that speaks to character formation and leadership development, in the face of conflict and stress that often defies the odds and demands faith, thereby developing a people of faith (Jensen & Martel, 2015). Faith will be viewed as separate from corollary terms such as general belief, religion, and spirituality. Faith is often seen as an essential aspect of overall student health and resilience and holistic wellbeing in the literature (Astjn et al., 2011; Pfund & Miller-Perin, 2019; Wang & Distelberg, 2019) and positively associated with leadership development (Komives et al., 2020). Indeed, as the ROI of a higher education faces increased public and private scrutiny, competency, and leadership development models that foster critical thinking and stress resiliency through experiential approaches can help develop student leaders. An LSR model that considers a student's personal faith is central to a better understanding of how leaders at faith-based colleges and universities build stress resilience.

The Problem of Practice

Undergraduate student leaders express increasing stress levels, leaving them unprepared to lead in a complex world of challenge and change. While higher education heavily invests in preparing graduates to think critically and lead successfully, research shows an increasing number of students display low-stress resiliency and risk-aversion while struggling to cope with challenge and failure pre and post-graduation.

The Purpose of the Dissertation Study

This study, conducted at faith-based universities during the COVID-19 pandemic used grounded theory to generate a generalizable leadership stress resilience model that explains:

1. Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress at this time

2. The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions

3. The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress

4. The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress

Significance of the Study

This study informs student leadership development for higher education professionals in the critical area of stress resilience and reveals insights into the formative role faith has on leaders, particularly the influence of faith on leadership stress coping. The word *cope* in research question four was selected as a neutral term to describe how individual leaders experience and address stress. While existing scholarship covers leadership development and leadership stress, little is known about the influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions.

On a deeper level, this study explored the dynamic role faith played in the lives of the leaders themselves and the communities in which they lead during the COVID-19 pandemic. The collected data from the study challenges existing assumptions of the faith and leadership interplay. Study findings contribute to the body of literature by offering new insights for stress

resilience development models for student leaders and leadership in general. These contributions inform the student leadership development literature in undergraduate student stress resilience and critical thinking competency development.

Outcomes from this study can assist in designing programs and integrative models that engage students and provide new conceptual frameworks for developing student leadership competencies and career readiness. The study also identifies measurable ways of applying experiential education methodology to design and apply student leadership development models. The study of the student leadership experience directly benefited current student leaders with essential processing skills, further aiding them in their stress coping success. Results from this study inform future transformational leadership model creation and competency metrics for leadership program assessment and measuring best practices. The outcome of this study can assist in the redesign of leadership programs to enhance more significant student learning and engagement and provide students with vital critical thinking competencies needed to succeed and thrive during their university experience. While this study focused on undergraduate student leaders, results from this inquiry may help create generalizable models that can be adapted and employed by leadership development educators and practitioners across a wide range of professional fields.

This study contributes to understanding how students themselves develop as leaders using developmental frameworks to demonstrate leadership competencies related to stress resilience. Insights from this study can be used by higher education professionals to define and build leadership competencies for both academic and co-curricular disciplines. Leadership programs, student leaders themselves, and the broader campus community also benefited from the student leader participation in this study that fostered leadership stress processing. The

holistic health of student leaders directly impacts the overall success and health of the entire institution. Research findings can have a positive ripple effect as student leaders lead their peers toward those healthy practices that they experience firsthand.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded theory research takes an inductive approach to evaluate participants' direct experiences when developing original theory void of the influence of pre-existing theory (Charmaz, 2014). While there are undoubtedly theoretical frameworks that speak to student leadership development, as of this writing, there are none that speak directly to current student leaders' stress resilience in general and to student leaders from faith-based institutions specifically. Undergraduate student leaders serving during the 2020-2021 academic year faced an unprecedented convergence of challenges and a range of significant stressors with the reality of distance learning, pandemic risks, social justice issues, political polarization, and economic uncertainty. Grounded theory allows for the unfiltered voice of today's student leader to be heard in new ways that led to the development of the LSR model that supports student leaders.

Current student leader voices will create a conceptual framework and the LSR model to help educators and fellow student leaders develop necessary stress resilience. Allowing the data to speak for itself addresses the current gap in understanding of developing student leaders today and supports the positive findings of Komives and Sowcik (2020) to establish and enhance undergraduate leadership programs. Student leadership development theoretical frameworks are used in Chapters 5 and 6 as an analytic lens to help better understand the research findings. Grounded theory uses theoretical frameworks as an analytical tool to help readers locate concepts derived from data findings (Charmaz, 2014). Findings and the emergent LSR model

help students navigate the inevitable stressful and stress-filled transformational moments as they develop as leaders.

Delimitations

This study took place during the 2020-2021 academic year while experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic. Undergraduate leadership development programs at Christian faith-based institutions in California, other than the one I work at, were examined. The study's perceived limitation is the narrow focus on Christian faith, which does not address a broader faith spectrum. However, the LSR model can be further developed to investigate how other faiths, besides Christianity, influence leadership stress resilience. Grounded theory examined current undergraduate student leaders actively participating in leadership development programs—further information appears in this dissertation study's recommendations section. Participants previously served in formal student leadership positions for one semester (approximately four months) or more.

Due to COVID-19, many student leadership programs were significantly altered to incorporate hybrid and socially distanced learning that changed over the course of the academic year. Participants served in hybrid and remote learning contexts for at least part of the year. How these changes impacted the student leadership experience directly was taken into account. While this study focused on undergraduate students at traditional four-year private, faith-based universities, findings may apply well beyond the research context. See Chapter 3 for more information regarding the research and format of this study.

Summary

Undergraduate student leaders experience increasing stress levels, leaving them unprepared to lead in a complex world of challenge and change. While higher education heavily

invests in preparing graduates to think critically and lead successfully in their respective fields, research shows an increasing number of students display low-stress resiliency and risk-aversion while struggling to cope with challenge and failure post-graduation. The purpose of the study was to generate a generalizable leadership stress resilience model, grounded in data, that seeks to (a) understand why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress, (b) the influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions, (c) the various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress, and (d) the role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress.

This study can inform student leadership development and leadership development programs for higher education professionals. Data collected from the study contributes to the body of literature by offering new insights into leadership stress resiliency models for undergraduate student leaders. This study's outcome can assist in designing programs and integrative models that engage students and provide new conceptual frameworks for developing student leadership competencies and career readiness. A review of the key concepts pertaining to student leadership development and stress resilience will be coupled with a comprehensive look at how grounded theory will be employed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

While research shows undergraduate students who engage in co-curricular activities such as student leadership indicate higher degrees of satisfaction and academic achievement, they are also susceptible to the adverse effects of stress (Civitci, 2015; Van der Meer et al., 2019). Student leadership can be a significant formative experience in students' lives and pivotal to their future career success (Kiersch & Peters, 2017; Komives & Sowcik, 2020). Still, being a student leader may compound the undergraduate's inherent stress facing academic, personal-social, and emotional demands typical in the collegiate experience (Fox, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2018). This grounded theory study addresses the need for a leadership stress resilience model for undergraduate student leaders that will aid in their continued leadership development, promote individual health, and advance career readiness.

The question of whether a student's faith influences stress resilience is of particular interest as this study takes a holistic view of student leadership development at faith-based universities (Daniels, 2017). The use of grounded theory allows students themselves to speak directly to the stress demands of being a student leader in today's challenging world of pandemics, social unrest, economic uncertainty, and political polarization (June, 2020; Lyons et al., 2018; Pendakur & Furr, 2016; Redman-McLaren, 2017). A proper understanding of grounded theory, including its inception, evolution, and particular usage in this study, is necessary for understanding theory and model formation grounded in the data. Therefore, this literature review will not provide the typical extensive coverage of the salient research topics in

the literature but will offer a brief introduction to student leadership development and stress resilience, and a comprehensive overview of constructivist grounded theory used in this study.

Student Leadership and Stress Resilience

The leadership qualities instilled in undergraduate students today will forge our world's institutional and political leaders tomorrow. Ensuring that student leaders are ready to deal with the myriad stresses of the modern world is, therefore, a critical task for higher education (Skalicky et al., 2020). A Barna Research Group study (Kinnaman, 2018) names Generation Z (Gen Z) students born between 1999-2015 as a generation of change; they are hyper-connected "screenagers" and career-driven, having grown up during the 2008-2009 financial crisis and now presently experiencing a second economic crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Gen Z is a generation of gamers that learn by failing; this generation grew up playing games. They also learn by doing in collaboration, and often don't have the patience to 'waste time' learning (Aurther & Rutledge, 2020). The Barna study findings also reveal Gen Z lives in a relativist post-modern world where only 34% believe lying is wrong, and truth can change over time (Kinnaman, 2018). Living in a hyper-connected relative world in constant change can be challenging and inherently stressful. Reacher and author Karen Twenge (2017), in her aptly titled book, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy--and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood--and What That Means for the Rest of Us*, suggests the overuse of screens (e.g., phone, computer, tablet, TV, etc.) correlates to a decline in mental, physical, and social health and wellbeing. Gen Z students report a decrease in overall happiness and an increase in stress due to a rise in screen usage (Twenge, 2017).

Students are now on screens more than ever given the plethora of video conference meetings (e.g., Zoom video conferencing) required for distance learning and staying connected,

and lack of in-person activities. Catalano's (2021) recent study on social media usage during the COVID-19 showed an increase in social media was "detrimental to college students' mental health and wellbeing," while a decrease in use "was significantly correlated with improved psychological wellbeing" (p. 1). The stress and pressure of modern society during the 2020-2021 academic year was at unprecedented levels with the convergence of a pandemic, social justice issues, economic decline, and political polarization.

Society today requires student leaders to navigate ways forward amid significant challenges while successfully managing their stress (Wang et al., 2016). Our present stress-filled reality would seemingly only compound the inherent tension of being an undergraduate in general and a student leader specifically (Acharya et al., 2018). How educators adapt to Gen Z learning styles and rethink program design is critical at this time (Aurther & Rutledge, 2020). Future research will bear this out as most of the literature cited here pre-dates 2020 and underscores a stressed reality of undergraduate students in the United States before the COVID-19 pandemic.

A generalizable leadership stress resilience model for developing undergraduate student leaders has never been more critical than right now, as stress among college students has long been a significant health concern (Barker et al., 2018; Karaman et al., 2019; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2018). Stress levels are at critical levels today due to the additional challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, overt and systemic racism, protests, an economic crisis, and a presidential election (Mangan, 2020). All eyes are on current and future leaders. Emerging leaders must possess a high degree of stress resilience in addition to other critical leadership competencies to keep up with the ever-changing environment and to be successful in their present and future leadership roles (Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

The focus on undergraduate student leadership development programs began rapidly expanding in the 1990s. The burgeoning field now composes leadership majors and a complement of co-curricular leadership training and development programs on campuses nationally and worldwide (Dugan & Komives, 2007; Komives et al., 2011). Dugan and Komives (2007) cite psychologist Patricia King, highlighting her belief that one of the essential and most challenging roles of higher education is to develop students who have the integrity and strength of character to be future leaders. This statement is reinforced by Dugan and Humbles (2018), stating that student leadership programs benefit from discussions of socio-cultural issues as the main finding of a national study in student leadership development. It is argued that higher education institutions have a mandate to develop socially responsible leaders (Dugan & Humbles, 2018).

Entire institutions are placing significant strategic efforts in developing current students with the necessary leadership competencies campus-wide (Ashby & Mintner, 2017). The future leadership of America and the world seemingly depends on getting this right. Faith-based institutions further look at specific character formation that impacts leadership and how leaders manage stress in relation to their faith. Critical student leadership development with this generation of student leaders calls for, amongst other things, the ability to handle adversity and build self-efficacy in a changing world (Katsioloudes & Cannonier, 2019; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2018; Ngui & Lay, 2018).

The Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (2011) states in "The Role of Student Leadership Programs" section that "Leadership is an inherently relational process of working with others to accomplish a goal or to promote change. Most leadership programs seek to empower students to enhance their self-efficacy as leaders and

understand how they can make a difference…" (p. 3). However, while the importance of self-efficacy for student leaders is recognized, the student leaders' voice has been mostly absent from previous research. It is essential to hear from the student leaders themselves when developing theory, or a working leadership stress resilience model, which is needed now more than ever. What are student leaders saying about their experiences? How are they coping with the compounding stresses of today? Where is the direction of leadership heading and where does it need to go according to current student leaders?

This study used grounded theory to generate a generalizable leadership stress resilience (LSR) model that enables undergraduate student leaders to understand and manage their stress. Such a model promotes healthy and resilient ways for leadership coping and development and contributes to overall students' career readiness. The LSR model emerged directly from interviews with current student leader participants that explained: (a) why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress, (b) the influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions, and (c) the various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress and (d) the role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress.

Faith View

In light of the current stress and disruption, a faith worldview can offer insights into student leaders' development (Astin et al., 2011; Astin, 2004; Komives et al. 2020). Recent articles are just beginning to discuss the importance of understanding how to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic that has changed everything about the higher education system in less than one full academic year. Additionally, research has long underscored the need to address systemic racism and the number of inequalities in society, including higher education (Squire et

al., 2018). Christian ideals of loving thy neighbor, being a good Samaritan, and Christ's servant example are all relevant to developing leaders who will meet these challenges (Jones, 2020).

Faith foundations may offer insights and strength to face an ever-changing world (Chang, 2020). Faith has a central role in establishing core mission and calling in the life of leaders and faith-based institutions (Baldwin, 2020) and offers viable solutions for developing community and meaningful social connection and community while remaining socially distanced (Bazemore, 2020). Faith formation is shown in the research to establish through the crisis and challenge on the most individual and personal levels for undergraduate students (Liang & Ketchem, 2017). Faith is often seen as essential to developing student health and resilience and overall well-being in the literature (Astin et al., 2011; Astin, 2004; Pfund & Miller-Perin, 2019; Wang & Distelberg, 2019). Understanding faith development in emerging adulthood and the potential for leadership development and stress resilience in the face of present disruption is paramount (Astin et al., 2011; Astin, 2004; Komives et al. 2020).

This study focused on hearing the student leaders' voices and their personal views of faith and how it informed their outlook and practices to better understand this critical moment in time and the dynamic role of faith. The participant's voice is essential to the formation of grounded theory and model development. No qualitative methodology gets closer to hearing the participants' student story and voice than grounded theory (Brown, 2012). A grounded theory approach to theory generation and model creation is derived directly from the most critical voices on university campuses, the student leader's voice. What does stress look like, feel like, and is faith relevant to the process of "sense making" and a general understanding of developing student leaders? It is essential to understand how and why grounded theory develops theory and model creation. Specifically, I employed constructivist grounded theory in this study that

answered questions like those posed above. A full explanation of the grounded theory

methodology will make up a significant portion of this chapter and serve as a foundation for

Chapter 3.

Grounded theory is a discovery-based approach to meaning-making, where the data

precedes a review of the literature. A comprehensive review of the literature typically follows

the findings as additional data sources in grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Straus, 1967).

The outline of this grounded theory dissertation study includes a discussion of grounded theory

itself in this chapter, a detailed overview of grounded theory in Chapter 3, and a review of the

pertinent literature in Chapter 5 and 6 (see Figure 1 for a grounded theory (GT) stress resilience
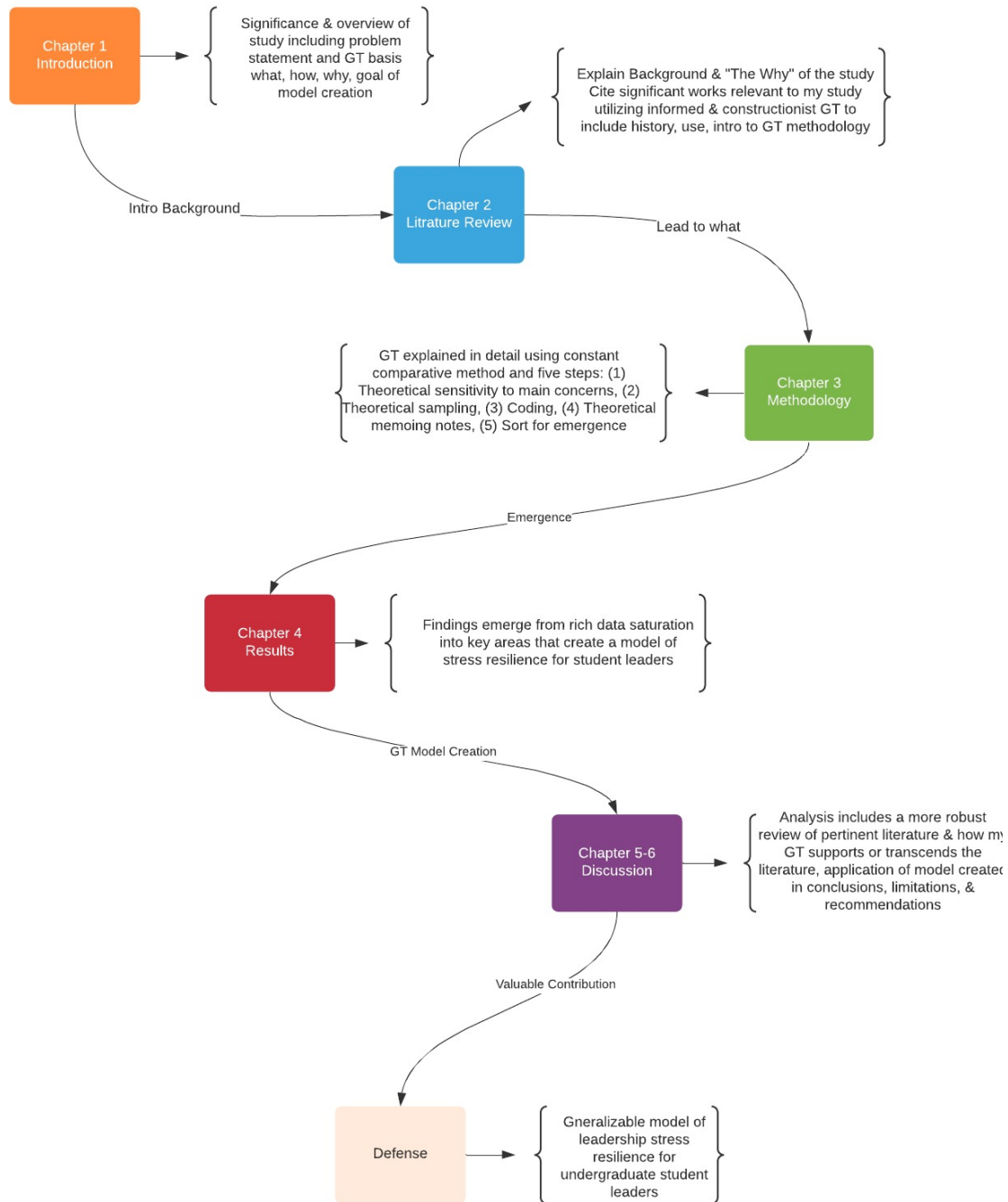
study concept map).

Figure 1. Grounded theory (GT) Stress Resilience Study Concept Map.

Background of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory allows for new theory to emerge directly from the data without the inherent need to prove or disprove existing views, making it both accessible and one of the more complicated research design methodologies to apply (Birks & Mills, 2015). Rather than employing a current theoretical framework for this study, it is essential to allow the students to speak and be heard without outside influence. This is why I specifically chose grounded theory over other qualitative methodologies such as phenomenology or case study.

It was precisely this freedom of inquiry that led founding researchers, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, to develop a theoretical framework that guides the discovery and generation of new theory directly from the data while simultaneously verifying it in the process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Their scholarly interest was the impetus for publishing *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* in 1967 following a joint research study on the "Awareness of Dying" that examined participants' final experiences during the conclusion of their lives (Birks & Mills, 2015). Forming new theory from the data struck a chord with social scientists, which proved to be a catalyst for updated versions of grounded theory by a "second-generation" of grounded theorists (Morse et al., 2016). A later debate arose between Glaser and Strauss over how data was collected and organized. The disagreement led to much contention regarding the influence of specific internal methods of data collection and interpretation which could restrict the freedom of data emergence following the publication of Strauss and Corbin's text, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Babchuck, 2011; Howell, 2013). Current literature will often refer to two main types of grounded theory, a traditional or classical Glaserian grounded theory and an evolved Straussian version of grounded theory (Morse, 2016;

Tie, 2019). Still, it is worth noting that the two founding theorists maintained a personal and professional relationship until Strauss died in 1996 (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Glasser's focus on grounded theory methods, rather than forming a methodology of theory creation, is outlined in his text *Basics of Grounded Theory,* where he highlights an adherence to the strict concurrent data collection process, analysis, and development of the "core" emergence of data (Glasser, 1992). This process is now commonly referred to as the constant comparative method, a systemic analysis of data by the data concurrent during the collection process (Tarozzi, 2020). However, a specific set of practices in the research design itself must be considered a grounded theory, which subsequent grounded theory researchers have further developed into a methodology of sorts (Charmaz, 2014). Regardless of the evolutionary process, grounded theory continues to attract and inspire researchers who desire the freedom to let the data emerge independently. Strict data emergence eventually forms specific central core findings that are moved forward by distinct Classical, Straussian, and Constructivist methodological and philosophical approaches to conducting grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

The discussion thus far includes Glasser representing classical grounded theory and Strauss (and Corbin) an evolutionary development of the theory; constructivist grounded theory provides the next seminal step in the grounded theory timeline (Ramalho et al., 2015; Birks & Mills, 2015). Researcher and author Kathy Charmaz first discussed constructivist grounded theory in "Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods," cited in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Edition)* in 2000. In 2014, Charmaz released the text, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis (1st and now 2nd Edition).*

She outlines the centrality of data coding and analysis in all three grounded theory forms, focusing ultimately on constructivist grounded theory. Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory builds upon Glaser and Straus' foundational grounded theory framework by acknowledging there are building blocks and a process to construct theory.

Constructivist grounded theory is the approach taken in this qualitative research study. Charmez's constructivist grounded theory is designed to understand developmental social processes such as stress in undergraduate student leadership development and is well suited to this study's purpose. Described aptly as the "road less traveled," the famous Robert Frost poem by the same name was captured in an article entitled "When Novice Researchers Adopt Constructivist Grounded Theory: Navigating Less Travelled Paradigmatic and Methodological Paths in Ph.D. Dissertation Work" (Nagel, 2015). Leadership itself is a foray into the unknown, and grounded theory allows for data emergence as part of unfolding steps in the journey of discovery.

The constructionist grounded theory approach adopted is a thousand-mile journey consisting of single steps borrowed from a Chinese proverb ascribed to Lao Tzu (Le Guin, 2019). The constructivist approach can simply mean the logical construct or build of a theory or model sequentially step-by-step from the data itself. The constructivist grounded theory journey consists of three main steps in the data coding process; a pivotal addition to classical Glasserian grounded theory but much less involved than Strauss and Corbin's methodological coding steps (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These constructivist steps include (a) initial or open coding, (b) refocused coding, and (c) the construction of grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

Charmaz, initially a student of Glaser and Strauss, developed an approach to coding that resists Strauss and Corbin's rigid, formulaic axial coding. Instead, she builds or constructs

theory with flexible coding guidelines that promote "imaginative engagement with the data" (Charmaz, 2008, p. 159). Charmaz insists that embracing ambiguity and developing receptivity is central to understanding data emergence. Grounded theory genesis and constructivist coding techniques, including memoing, constant data comparisons, and theoretical sampling, should be used in emergence (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Constructivist coding techniques and their use in this research study are further elaborated upon in detail in the methodology Chapter 3 of this study.

The first analytical step of initial or open coding, according to Charmaz (2014), springboards from two central Glassiarian questions, "What is the chief concern of participants?" and, "How do they resolve this concern?" The answers to these two central underlying questions yield rich data insights (p. 116). The researcher allowed the data to emerge unhindered by strict coding methods and theoretical cues which enable data themes to surface from participants "in vino" codes, coding participant language used in interviews (Charmaz, 2014). The next step requires a refocus coding of significant or recurring data revealed during the initial open coding process that appeared to move understanding forward or carry significance to the participants or the phenomenon at hand (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). It is at this point that grounded theory techniques of theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation, and in particular, memoing become vital to identifying significance in the findings, which will ultimately lead to the development of conceptual understanding using the constant comparative method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Charmaz, 2014).

A constant comparative method is an inductive approach to analyzing the data by the data, followed successively by constructivist sequence of analyzing data with code, code with code, code with category, and category with type, which generates more abstract concepts

(Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Coding in grounded theory using constant

comparison is a methodological approach to fact-checking data against itself when each new

piece of data-informed by the previous data in a process whereby the whole is defined (Glaser &

Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative approach helps researchers avoid assumptions and

prejudgment of the data and lets emergence come directly from the data rather than I's pre-

existing theory or bias (Charmaz, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The idea is to bring forth the

most real sense of the phenomenon and understand reality directly from the participants and raw

data itself rather than by inference or outside efforts to support or refute existing theoretical

claims (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). See Figure 2 for a grounded theory concept map of this study

below (adapted from Siguake & Swansi, 2020).
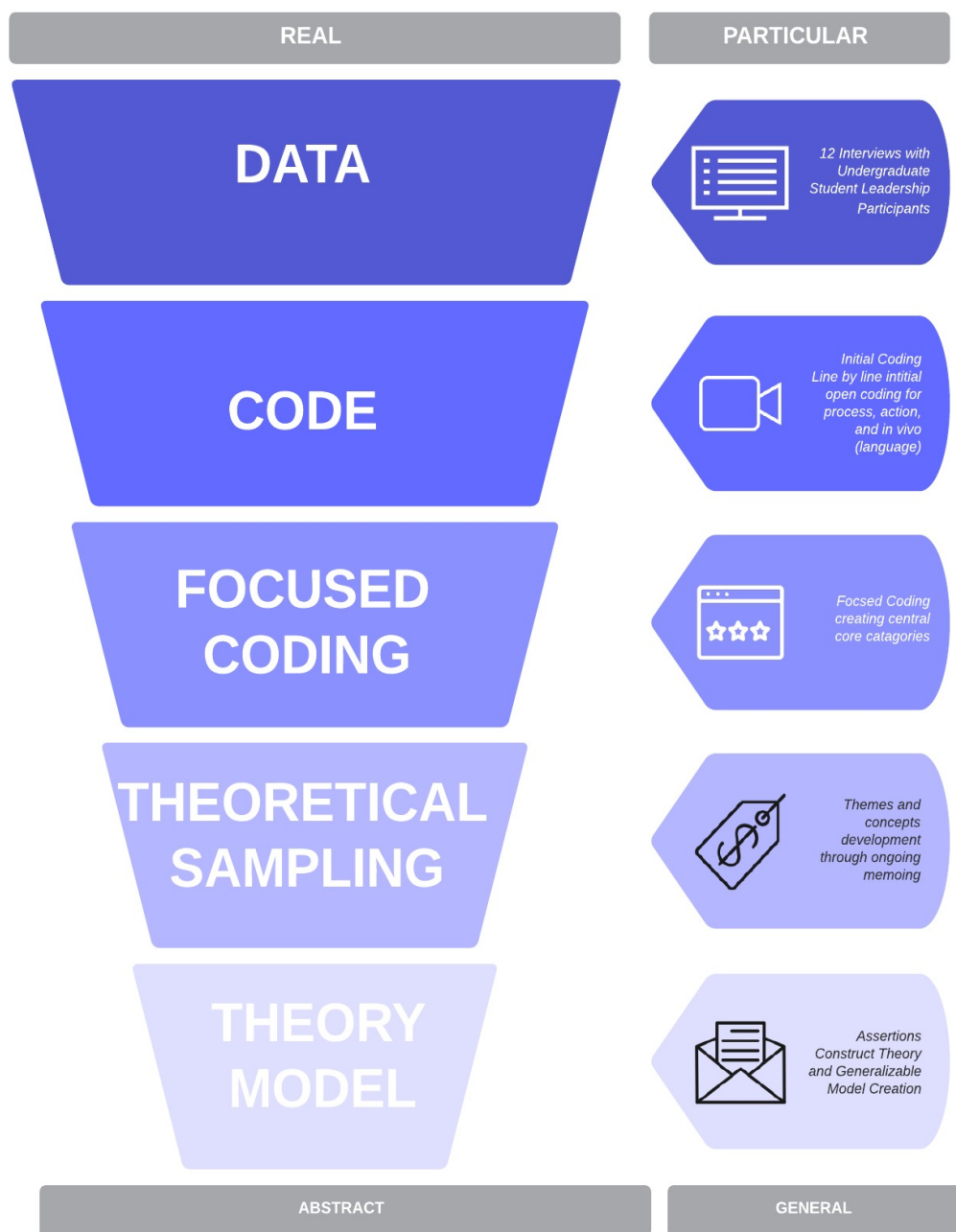
Figure 2. Grounded Theory Concept Map (adapted from Siguake & Swansi, 2020).

While there is a great deal of freedom in the seemingly simple steps and techniques used, constructionist grounded theory is not without its qualitative challenges in a post-positivist era of research (Nagel et al., 2015). Grounded theory seeks causal explanations and moves from specific data points to generalizable understandings, instead of the post-positivism view relative and resistant to generalizations (Charmaz, 2014; Panhwar et al., 2017). Nagel et al. (2015) outline a few of the problems for a positivist grounded theory framework, including (a) facing bias toward post-positivism, (b) limited qualitative mentors with constructionist grounded theory experience, (c) no real consensus on methods used, (d) a lack of respect for alternative approaches within grounded theory, I varied terminology and blurred procedures to methods, (f) and a lack of general understanding or openness to constructionist grounded theory because it is a relatively new approach with few examples. Ironically, an additional challenge of grounded theory is *a priori* literature review requirements, which is frowned upon in classical grounded theory since this may influence data collection and analysis prematurely, creating influence bias for I (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 2001; Siguake & Swansi, 2020).

According to grounded theory founders, Glaser and Strauss (1967), all data are relevant, including the literature; therefore, the literature review concerning the data collection is also appropriate only after the data is collected. Glaser and Strauss (1967) view the literature instead as a source of data to include an essential part of the data analysis itself, something unique to grounded theory. In most traditional research methods, the literature precedes the research and sets the stage for understanding the subsequent research study and data findings with preexistent knowledge (Creswell, 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Grounded theory, however, lets the data have the first word. For this reason, a literature review conducted before data collection is

limiting and a potential source of bias that could influence the unfettered emergence of data

findings in grounded theory (Ramalho et al., 2015).

John Locke's *Tabula Rasa* or blank slate is not realistic or honest when I join the research

process. In humility, Charmaz (2014) acknowledges her use of reflexivity in informing

constructivist grounded theory for this very reason. Reflexivity is simply what a researcher

brings to the research prior to data collection, including their own experiences, interests, and

expertise related to the research topic. The honest acknowledgment that these preexist and

become a part of the research process itself is important to recognize (Charmaz, 2014). In short,

a researcher's reflexivity informs the research and is a significant reason for consistently

applying the constant comparative method to ensure the groundedness of theory in the data

(Ramalho et al., 2015). The next section acknowledges researcher reflexivity in understanding

how data will be collected, coded, and interpreted.

Summary

The purpose of this grounded theory literature review was to introduce the timely need

for a stress resilience model in undergraduate student leader development. A generalizable

model grounded in the data that allows students themselves to speak to the challenges of being a

current student leader in today is needed (June, 2020; Lyons et al., 2018; Pendakur & Furr, 2016;

Redman-McLaren, 2017). A general understanding of grounded theory, including its inception,

evolution, and particular usage in this study, clarifies the process of theory and model formation.

As previously mentioned, this literature review is not typical but included a brief introduction to

the central research topics of student leadership development, stress resilience, and an overview

of constructivist grounded theory used in this study. A further review of the literature will

follow in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 to discuss where the research findings fit and extend the

current literature of student leadership development. Once more, constructivist grounded theory

was discussed here with a detailed explanation of grounded theory methodology in Chapter 3,

key findings presented in Chapter 4, and a final review of pertinent literature informs the study

findings in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Study

The university years can be some of the most exciting and stressful times in a person's life. Undergraduate students may face stress personally, socially, academically, economically, and so forth (Civitci, 2015). Often students come face-to-face with the responsibilities of life for the first time being responsible for their health, studies, finances, and planning for the future (Cress & Lampman, 2007; Darling et al., 2007). Socially, students come to the developmental age and stage where familial, interpersonal, and romantic relationships are all changing, and the future of these critical relationships is uncertain (Chao, 2012).

Couple the stress of being an undergraduate student with the inherent stress associated with leadership, particularly peer leadership, and undergraduate student leaders are in great need of coping skills and critical leadership competencies both for themselves and for those they lead (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2018). All of this is further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic which placed student leaders on the front lines where they not only have to navigate strict guidelines but lead their peers to do the same (Mangan, 2020). The convergence of developmental realities with pandemic and racial justice issues during the 2020-2021 academic year raises leadership's challenges even further for student leaders of color (Torres-Harding et al., 2020). Future leaders must learn stress resilience during their undergraduate years to be successful leaders in an ever-increasingly complex and polarized world.

This study used grounded theory to generate a generalizable leadership stress resilience (LSR) model that explained:

1. Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress at this time

2. The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions

3. The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress

4. The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress

Undergraduate student leadership development is readily available in the literature (Chickering & Gamson, 1997; Komives et al., 2005; Komives et al., 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020). It will come as no surprise that stress and fear cripple leadership, as documented in the research literature, even amongst undergraduate students (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2018). However, it remains unknown how undergraduate students experience and cope with stress as leaders in faith-based institutions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding how a student's faith influenced their stress and leadership development addresses a current gap in the research literature and presents an area for fruitful inquiry. Critical knowledge of a person's belief structure may impact how leaders navigate stress in healthy or unhealthy ways.

Understanding stress coping pathways within leadership praxis and student development constructs can help prevent burgeoning leaders from being crushed, crippled, or conformed by stress and fear. Christian faith recalls Jesus' number one commandment (according to the number of times found in scripture) to "fear not." The majority of the time, the command to "fear not" is specifically directed to current and future leaders (Jesus' very disciples). This study looked specifically at undergraduate students in Christian faith-based leadership development programs from two private Christian liberal arts universities in California.

Grounded Theory Methodology

This study uses a grounded theory methodology. As Glaser and Strauss describe it, grounded theory "is the discovery of theory from data" (1967, p. 1). This central idea sets grounded theory apart from other qualitative methodologies, focusing solely on building theory

from the data collected rather than proving or disproving existing theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This research inquiry establishes a generalizable leadership stress resilience model to help develop undergraduate student leaders using grounded theory methodology.

Charmaz (2008) describes the necessary theoretical frameworks essential to constructing a grounded theory that allows for data emergence. This study used grounded theory constructivist coding elements to capture the unfiltered student experience, understanding that student perception is limited and imperfect and often needs to be reframed (Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory typically aims for more substantive data sources to reframe and address real-world situations and circumstances experienced by actual people instead of using formal theory as research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, grounded theory is useful for an inductive approach to understanding undergraduate student leaders and their unique personal experiences of leadership stress (Glaser, 2001).

However, Brown (2015), describes the challenges of embarking on using grounded theory from her own substantial experience using the methodology first-hand. She underscores the difficulties of using grounded theory as (a) "virtually impossible" to understand grounded theory methodology before using it, (b) requires courage to allow the research participants to define the research problem, and (c) to "let go of I's interests and preconceived ideas to trust in emergence" (p. 252). Letting go and allowing the theory or model to emerge from the data is inherently ambiguous and stressful for this researcher. Much in the same way, leaders must navigate stressful unknowns, so must grounded theory researchers embark on a methodological journey that will allow them the freedom to comprehend the participants' experience itself better.

The benefit of using grounded theory in this study is well worth the effort. "Stories are data with a soul and no methodology honors that more than grounded theory...the mandate of

grounded theory is to develop theories based on people's lived experiences rather than proving or disproving existing theories" (Brown, 2015, p. 252). Grounded theory calls to developing leaders and pathfinders who want to see beyond the horizon line to understand the lived experience to make meaning. What better way to study current undergraduate student leadership stress than to experience a similar degree of pressure and risk emergence of the unknown in pursuit of where the data might lead?

Study Design

Glasser and Strauss (1967), and further refined by Glasser (1978, 1992, 1998, 2001), grounded theory informed the foundations of the research plan and led to the constructivist methodology of this study. I adopted a similar version to Brown's (2015) grounded theory approach used in her research on vulnerability as a model which consists of the following five essential coding techniques: (a) theoretical sensitivity, (b) theoretical sampling, (c) coding, (d) theoretical memoing, and (e) sorting. Coding techniques were discussed briefly in Chapter 2 but are laid out here in five techniques used in processing participant data. Coupled with Brown, a constructivist approach to grounded theory helped build a theoretical model step-by-step as outlined by Charmaz (2014). These constructivist steps include (a) initial or open coding, (b) refocused coding, and (c) construction of grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

Charmaz (2014) outlines three necessary constructionist steps for gathering "rich data" utilizing "intensive interviewing" techniques consistent with grounded theory. Participant data is subjected to initial coding, which develops crucial focus areas or cores using a sequential memoing system as part of the constant comparative analysis. Each new piece of data fits into and informs the data-whole. Theoretical sampling from these key focus codes or cores developed study findings' basic construct the point of data saturation (Charmaz, 2014).

Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory builds upon classical Glaserian grounded theory foundations, offering a logical and comprehensive way of "constructing" theory grounded in this study's data.

I practiced theoretical sensitivity by seeking out participants' main concerns, listening, and seeking clarity around how participants experienced and addressed stress as developing student leaders. While familiar with undergraduate student leaders from faith-based institutions because of professional work experience, I recognized personal reflexivity and the desire to understand better how student leaders cope with the significant amount of stress currently faced. A sincere desire to hear the participants' voices and develop a leadership stress resilience (LSR) model that can help student leaders cope with the ever-increasing anxiety and overwhelming stress they face as leaders was the driving factor. It was a pleasure to witness data emergence as it evolved and developed a richness of its own (Siguake & Swansi, 2020).

Unique to grounded theory is the extensive use of memoing or systematic note-keeping or journaling (Glasser, 1978). Rather than adopt Corbin and Strauss's complex system of axial coding techniques, I utilized Charmaz's refinement of Glaser's foundational work in grounded theory, which makes extensive use of memoing to formulate themes from the data. However, a tracking spreadsheet was created to track the data systematically. The data findings developed into a generalizable LSR model that assists in developing student leaders. The constructivist grounded theory concept map outlines these steps in figure two (also seen in Chapter 2).

The research study's first goal was to understand undergraduate student leaders' main concerns about managing stress and developing student leaders in the process. The integration of these central grounded theory components used the constant comparison method of data analysis described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Categories eventually began to take shape by

continuously comparing the data around central themes or data cores. Once main participant concerns emerged from the data, I constructed the LSR model from the data to help undergraduate student leaders at faith-based universities cope and manage stress successfully. The LSR model fits the data and can be used by student leadership development practitioners and educators, especially those at faith-based institutions to further develop student leaders.

I asked the following three crucial questions during the research journey, again modeled after Brown's study (2015): (a) What are the students' main concerns concerning stress? (b) What does it look like when undergraduate student leaders manage stress in healthy ways? (c) How can this information be used to inform the creation of a model for developing more stress-resilient student leaders? These general internal interview questions served as a conversational framework that applied the central research questions during the participant interviews and helped establish initial open coding (see Figure 2 on p. 47). The goal was not stress avoidance or stress elimination but to identify participant stress sources to aid with stress coping. Learning to lead is inherently stressful and understanding how undergraduate student leaders view, manage, and respond to stress was the central aim of this study.

Study Participants

The study sample included current student leader participants from two separate Christian faith-based institutions in California, similar to the one at which I work. Twelve student leader participants took part in voluntary interviews conducted one-on-one with me using Zoom video conferencing. The number of participants led to sufficient data emergence to answer the research questions for the purposes of this dissertation study. According to Charmaz (2014), 12 interviews are sufficient to discern "common views and experiences among relatively homogenous people" (p. 107).

After receiving approval from the research site institutional review boards, participants were recruited through an open call from student development colleagues at each institution. Not all student leaders who responded were selected. I could not assume the relevance of identity data, including race, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, and ability (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001). That said, the use of purposive sampling ensured that a diverse group of undergraduate student leaders participated and yielded the best data for this study (Glaser, 2001). Participant inclusion criteria focused upon those undergraduate leaders who were elected or selected to fulfill a minimum of one academic year in a specified student leadership role and bear the title of a student leader on their respective campuses. Such leadership positions may include but are not limited to resident advisors (RAs), orientation leaders, or student government association (SGA) members. No more than seven participants came from any one of Christian faith-based institutions. Twelve participants garnered the rich data necessary to reach a data saturation level to meet the fundamental goal of understanding participant core concerns.

Traditional undergraduate student leader participants were in their second year of full-time academic studies or higher and held a current student leadership position upon which they were interviewed and selected for a specified leadership role at their institution. The majority of the undergraduate student leaders received some compensation or scholarship for their leadership service and participated in formal leadership development training further distinguishing them from voluntary student leader roles. Participants had first-hand leadership experience from which to speak and were invited to share what they are comfortable with related to past or current stress experiences directly or indirectly associated with their student leader role. Participants completed a short biographical and leadership history questionnaire (see Appendix

A). Each participant provided a completed informed consent form before conducting the research interview (see Appendix B).

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviews began with a set of open-ended questions related to participants' past leadership history and current leadership role(s) and responsibilities before focusing on participants' specific stress experiences using questions derived from the study's four central research questions outlined above (Charmaz, 2014). Interview questions were open-ended to elicit detailed responses from participants and included additional prompts as needed to garner further clarity (see Appendix A). Directed follow-up interviews were conducted with six available participants to gain further necessary data to assist with the development of emerging core themes.

This study gathered a rich data set surrounding the topic of undergraduate student leadership stress utilizing open-ended questions, framed to invite participant insights, and first-hand accounts of stress resilience, and use of coping mechanisms. Due to COVID-19 limitations, these interviews took place via Zoom video conferencing. Interviews took approximately 45 minutes and were video recorded with participant consent for data collection purposes. To facilitate the best communication, participants were required to have their video on. All information was kept confidential and used only for the purpose of this study as previously described. Each participant received a $25 thank you coffee or Amazon gift card for completing the interview.

Data sources came from 12 student leadership participant interviews and grounded theory literature review. Interviews were conducted individually by I utilizing an adjusted conversational interview to facilitate a grounded theory methodological approach (Glaser, 1978,

1998). Interview questions supported the main four research questions (see appendix A). The

inquiry journey began with casting the net wide. Participant responses were transcribed and

processed line by line using initial and focused coding methods to move data from specific to

more generalizable concepts to shape theoretical building blocks. Again, interview questions

grounded the central research questions of:

1. Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress at this time

2. The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions

3. The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main
   concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress

4. The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress

Before I addressed the topic of faith directly, he allowed this important variable to

emerge from the participants themselves. Careful consideration was given to how faith was

explored during the interviews to not influence participant responses. Direct faith questions were

sensitively asked during the second half of the interview. After analyzing data from the first

interviews, I incorporated additional questions related to faith and stress to clarify emerging

themes with participants.

Theoretical sampling was the primary form of data analysis used while conducting this

study and aided in the construction of the LSR model. Theoretical sampling required

simultaneously coding to analyze data during the data collection process using the constant

comparative method described earlier (Glaser, 1978). The procedural coding steps used in

grounded theory reframed the data in new ways providing theory emergence from the data

(Charmaz, 2014; Siguake & Swansi, 2020).

Coding and continual memoing are an integral part of all grounded theory methodology

and was used through the data analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 1978, 1998,

2001; Siguake & Swansi, 2020). Again, conversations were recorded and transcribed electronically to ensure accuracy through Zoom video conferencing capture. I used the constant comparative method to analyze data line by line utilizing an ongoing memoing system to enhance theoretical sampling. Memos in traditional Glaserian grounded theory "capture the emergent concepts and their relationships...with the primary focus of the analysis to identify the participants' main concerns and the emergence of a core variable(s)" (Brown, 2015, p. 258). Follow-up interviews allowed for member checking increasing data validity. Memos further developed themes throughout the interview process. Coding was done manually, line by line, as Glaserian-grounded theory frowns upon using computer software (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001). Capturing and storing this data will be assisted by the use of annotated Google docs and a stress resilience focused coding outline using the original four research questions from this study (see Appendix C).

Grounded theory researchers must allow data to conceptualize - this is paramount (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001). Data core themes naturally emerged from the data rather than arranging the data into predetermined categories. Findings relied on the richness of the data and direct participant quotes found in Chapter 4. In most qualitative methodologies, data are analyzed and coded based on themes, grounded theory seeks out participant's action words used to code for meaning-making (Charmaz, 2014).

The constant comparative method was utilized as an ongoing process to categorize emerging main concerns from the participants helping systematize memos for writing Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001; Charmaz, 2014). Grounded theory's inductive methodology of data collection grounded data directly from the participants' felt stress experiences (Charmaz, 2014). Finally, incorporating an organizational system of data coding,

using an adapted spreadsheet template from author Charmaz (2014), helped develop logs for interview memoing to help identify focused themes of stress resilience as they emerge (see Appendix C). Ongoing memo writing and a personal researcher's journal for reflective review and data comparison aided the process of the model formation based on the emergent data findings, explained further in Chapter 6 .

The Researcher

I personally experienced four years as an undergraduate student leader and have close to 20 years of experience working with developing undergraduate student leaders at faith-based and non-faith-based institutions in the United States and Australasia. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Business Management and Communication and a Master of Arts in Education and Counseling from a faith-based university and am currently a doctoral student in education leadership and innovation. I received qualitative research design instruction through doctoral coursework and use of multiple grounded theory texts to equip the grounded theory research in this study. I have overseen the hiring, training, and development of hundreds of student leaders during the last five years at a faith-based institution and witnessed first-hand the opportunities and challenges of leadership stress in the lives of undergraduate student leaders. I acknowledge my use of reflexivity in informing constructivist grounded theory for this very reason. Reflexivity is defined by Charmaz (2014) as what a researcher brings to the research, including their own experiences, interests, and expertise related to the research topic, with the honest acknowledgment that these preexist and become a part of the research process itself. In short, my reflexivity informs the research and it recognizes the need for consistently applying the constant comparative method to ensure the groundedness of theory (Ramalho et al., 2015).

Ethical Considerations

This study is University of the Pacific institutional research board (IRB) approved and worked with those participants who wished to share their personal leadership experience with stress. Written consent and the right to withdraw, or ongoing consent, was made available to all study participants. All interview participants received confidentiality and were advised that they can speak in complete confidence knowing all names of individuals and institutions will be anonymized. Furthermore, I emphasized the importance of this study in understanding the experiences of students who attend Christian faith-based colleges and universities in the United States . To avoid any conflicts of interest or risk data bias, no student leaders that I currently supervise or have supervised in the past participated in this study. In my current position, I oversee the hiring process, leadership scholarship, compensation, and academic grades earned by student leaders in an academic accredited leadership course. Therefore, I interviewed undergraduate student leaders from two similar faith-based institutions in California. Field notes and memos did not include any identifying information. All participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

Literature Analysis

Grounded theory differs from most methodologies concerning the traditional literature review. The literature review itself is considered data in grounded theory. Data from literature review was used to inform the study following data collection and appears in full in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Allowing data to emerge without obstruction is central to utilizing grounded theory methodology (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001). Grounded theory enables the research questions to emerge from the data itself (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001). That said, a fundamental review of the literature includes leadership development and student development theory, as well as an

overview of stress and resilience amongst developing leaders. A full literature review of student leadership development and current stress research helped to further qualify findings and ground the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Trustworthiness: Evaluating Grounded Theory

According to Glaser, "grounded theories are evaluated by assessing their fit, relevance, workability, and modifiability" of the data findings (Brown, 2015 p. 259). Categories of the theory must fit the data. The theory or model must be relevant to the action of the area of research studied and applicable to the felt stress experiences of developing student leaders (Glaser, 1998; Siguake & Swansi, 2020). Grounded theory is only relevant when it allows the core themes to emerge. Any outside molding of the data is a violation of grounded theory methodology (Glaser, 1978, 1998, 2001; Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz, 2011).

Therefore, the data must be grounded upon its unfiltered self - to ground upon another concept, notion, or theory does not allow findings to speak for themself but to adopt the voice of another; data possesses its own voice and is free to form its own conclusions, theories, and models (Glaser, 2008). Brown (2015) suggests that workability is achieved if the theory can explain what has gone on, predict what will go on, and interpret what is going on in an area of substantive or formal inquiry. Two evaluation criteria must be met to ensure a potential theory works (a) the categories must fit and, (b) must "work the core," meaning the core of the phenomenon going on where the author "has conceptualized the data in a way that accurately captures the participants' main concerns and how they continually address those concerns" (Brown, 2015, p. 259).

An essential concluding principle of modifiability dictates that any emergent theory grounded in the data must continuously be open to being informed by new data (Glaser, 1978).

In other words, grounded theory allows for the continuous discovery of new data to inform the research process, decision making, and overall theoretical picture of the developing model for student leader stress resilience. To further ensure the data's validity, I used secondary follow-up interviews member checking to verify that the interview interpretations were accurate. Member checking provided participants the opportunity to correct any potential misconceptions and add any additional relevant data.

Summary

This chapter outlined the study's purpose and how the study design answers the central research questions using constructivist grounded theory. The discussion included an overview of the methodology, design, sample, data collection analysis, introduction to the author and study participants, literature analysis, and trustworthiness of grounded theory. A constructivist grounded theory approach developed a generalizable leadership stress resilience model for undergraduate student leaders at faith-based institutions. Undergraduate participant data directly contributed to the LSR model formation based upon the participants' shared experiences coping with leadership stress. Chapter 4 presents the study results to develop the LSR model utilizing the methodology described here in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

Undergraduate student leaders navigated ever-increasing stress levels due to a convergence of significant challenging factors during the 2020-2021 pandemic. The purpose of this research study was to identify those stress factors by investigating four central research questions, namely, why and how student leaders experience stress, the influence and impact of stress, how student leaders cope with stress, and the role faith plays when stress is encountered. If there was ever a time to invest in developing student leaders' stress resilience, it is undoubtedly now.

Chapter 4 outlines the findings related to each of the four central research questions that guided this inquiry. Each research question resulted in five to eight themes developed from the emergence of core categories utilizing grounded theory methodology. Each theme includes the number of participants who self-identified with the findings and qualitative narratives to support the theme. In keeping with constructivist grounded theory, significant memoing enhanced the raw data collected from initial interviews with twelve participants and follow-up interviews with six participants. A constant comparative methodology was employed throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing of the findings. This often included going back to the original transcripts and the interview videos to capture the true essence of core themes. Both sets of interviews produced the robust theoretical sampling reported here.

This chapter begins with a rich series of metaphors participants used to describe what it was like to be an undergraduate student leader at a faith-based university during the 2020-2021 academic year and COVID pandemic. These powerful student leader images provide a

meaningful backdrop to help frame data findings. Contextual clarity will begin with brief demographic descriptions of the twelve participants. I am grateful for the opportunity to know these developing student leaders and look forward to introducing them under pseudonyms derived from faithful women and men found in the Biblical narrative. In addition, the two participant research sites were both Christian faith-based universities in Southern California and will go by the pseudonyms Fidem and Fidelium; faith and faithful in Latin. It is important to note that both institutions require all of their students to complete several biblical studies courses to complete a degree. While many faith-based universities desired to remain as open as possible to provide the best student experience, Fidem and Fidelium were completely online during fall 2020 with hybrid (virtual and in-person) instruction during spring 2021. Both institutions offered limited residential housing for undergraduates that increased capacity during spring 2021. Managing the COVID impact and county guideline changes presented significant challenges for both institutions. Table 1 provides the pseudonym, age, gender, ethnicity, institution, major, academic year, transfer, first-generation, international student, leadership role, number of years in leadership, and other involvements for all twelve participants. The table reflects information about the participants at the time of the study (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographic Description of Participants

Pseudonym: Sarah	
Age: 20 **Institution:** Fidelium **Major:** Elementary Education **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role:** Resident Advisor (RA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Church youth ministry intern, student worker, missions	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** White **Academic Year:** Junior **First Generation:** Yes **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** One year

(Table 1 Continued)

Pseudonym: John	
Age: 20 **Institution:** Fidem **Major:** Music and Worship **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role:** International Program Coordinator **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Church ministry intern, worship team leader	**Gender:** Male **Ethnicity:** Asian **Academic Year:** Senior **First Generation:** No **International Student:** Yes **Number of years in leadership:** Three years
Pseudonym: Mary	
Age: 20 **Institution:** Fidelium **Major:** Intercultural Studies **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role:** Resident Advisor (RA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Worship team leader, Sunday school teacher	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** Asian **Academic Year:** Sophomore **First Generation:** Yes **International Student:** Yes **Number of years in leadership:** Two years
Pseudonym: Deborah	
Age: 20 **Institution:** Fidelium **Major:** Education and Philosophy double major **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role:** Resident Advisor (RA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** University and Church missions	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** White **Academic Year:** Sophomore **First Generation:** No **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** One year
Pseudonym: Esther	
Age: 21 **Institution:** Fidelium **Major:** English and Studio Art (double major) **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role:** Resident Advisor (RA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Teacher Assistant (TA), Sunday school teacher	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** Asian **Academic Year:** Senior **First Generation:** Yes **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** Three years
Pseudonym: Martha	
Age: 19 **Institution:** Fidelium **Major:** Biology Pre-Medicine **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role:** Senator, Student Government (SGA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Air Force ROTC, non-profit board, local service	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** Black or African American **Academic Year:** Sophomore **First Generation:** Yes **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** Three years

(Table 1 Continued)

Pseudonym: Mathew	
Age: 19 **Institution:** Fidelium **Major:** Psychology **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role(s):** Senator, (SGA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Church youth leader	**Gender:** Male **Ethnicity:** Hispanic or Latino **Academic Year:** Sophomore **First Generation:** Yes **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** One year
Pseudonym: Lydia	
Age: 21 **Institution:** Fidelium **Major:** Film **Transfer student:** Yes **Leadership role(s):** Resident Advisor (RA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Visual and Performing Arts worker	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** White **Academic Year:** Junior **First Generation:** No **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** One year
Pseudonym: Mark	
Age: 21 **Institution:** Fidem **Major:** Interdisciplinary **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role(s):** Alpha Lead Intern, Orientation **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Working three jobs, community service	**Gender:** Male **Ethnicity:** Native Hawaiian **Academic Year:** Senior **First Generation:** No **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** Three years
Pseudonym: Elizabeth	
Age: 21 **Institution:** Fidem **Major:** Psychology and Humanities (double major) **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role(s):** Resident Advisor (RA) **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Writing coach, psychology research assistant	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** Asian **Academic Year:** Senior **First Generation:** Yes **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** One year
Pseudonym: Rebecca	
Age: 19 **Institution:** Fidem **Major:** Allied Health, Psychology minor **Transfer student:** No **Leadership role(s):** Alpha Leader, Orientation **Other involvements (work, service, relationships):** Nonprofit volunteer	**Gender:** Female **Ethnicity:** White **Academic Year:** Sophomore **First Generation:** Yes **International Student:** No **Number of years in leadership:** Two years

Pictures and Metaphors of Leadership

Asking participants to describe what it is like to be a student leader using a picture or metaphor was a powerful way to convey the uniqueness of what it was honestly like to be a developing student leader at a faith-based institution as the COVID pandemic stretched into 2021. Specifically, participants were asked before the second interview to consider what picture or metaphor they would use to describe what it was like to be a student leader at this time. Their responses were both rich and revealing. These images helped frame the findings in Chapter Four and are discussed further in Chapter Five. Extended direct quotes help to better explain the participants' unique experiences during such an unprecedented time. Quotes were edited for clarity while keeping participants' meaning intact. Of the 12 participants, six shared images are presented below in the order they were received.

A graduating senior and interdisciplinary major, Mark found himself serving a very different third year as a student leader at Fidem than what he had expected. In addition to being a lead intern role for student orientation and engagement, Mark was employed in three additional jobs to help pay for tuition while working around his leadership roles and focusing on graduating at the end of the year. Mark stated the image he thought best summed up the year was of him being "stretched out, spread too thin, pulled in, and flattened." This image aligned with other participants who shared similar sentiments of being spread far too thin.

Deborah recalled a picture that came to her during prayer in Fidelium's prayer garden at the start of the year. Like so many other student leaders, Deborah returned before the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year for leadership training, not knowing what to expect as a first-time Resident Advisor (RA). When asked to describe her leadership experience, she

immediately went back to the prayer garden, August 2020, before the fall semester. Deborah

painted a vivid picture born out of prayer,

> I recall spending some time praying in the prayer garden and just kind of being like, okay, "God, like what's your vision for me for leadership this semester?" I remember thinking a lot about the idea of a torchbearer, kind of like the first person who is going forward. I don't know if it's a cave or if it's like the person who's leading an army or something. There's usually someone who's like first. It had the idea of being very scary in a sense like you're the first person going forward, there's no one ahead of you. You have the light and are going into a darker space. It was just this idea of, like, "Okay God, I feel like I'm stepping forward, I feel like this is what I'm supposed to be doing, but I genuinely have no idea what this is going to look like." It just carried a lot of weight for me, this idea of being a person to bring light into an unknown territory into "What does this look like?" Nobody's ever been an RA under these circumstances. It was definitely an image that I thought about a lot. How can I continue to walk forward when there's nobody ahead of me who's done this before?

Deborah certainly was not alone in feeling like they were leading into a great unknown.

There often seemed to be more questions than answers as campuses like Fidem and

Fidelium instituted COVID protocols and guidelines to keep up with ever-changing

county mandates.

Luke is a numbers guy, an accountancy major, and perfectly suited to serve as the

Student Government Association (SGA) Controller at Fidem. Clarity and order are high

priorities for Luke. However, the pandemic disrupted many of the known quantities Luke

needed for accurate budgets, staying organized, and navigating communication almost entirely

via Zoom (virtual meetings). With so many unknowns, answering budgetary questions became

much more difficult. Luke described his leadership experience this year as "explaining

something to someone with short term memory, they keep forgetting, and I don't know if it is

because they don't know or don't care, but I find myself repeating the answers a thousand times

to the same questions." Though Luke shared his image with a smile, his tone revealed how

frustrating this could be to someone who places a premium on clarity and order. Leading when

there are more questions than answers and when answers are not heard or recalled was challenging for Luke.

Mary is full of life and energy. She is a confident and relatable RA who oversees a floor of mostly student-athletes. Mary also happens to be an international student concerned for her family experiencing COVID back home overseas. Mary was also unsure how she would connect with her assigned residents since she was not a student-athlete herself but soon discovered that these student-athletes viewed her as a "safe person" when residents began confiding in her. Many universities took the approach of grouping student-athletes together in the residential living areas to limit COVID exposure. Student-athletes practice, travel, and compete together, so it made sense that they should also live together. Mary happened to be assigned a floor with all student-athletes but earned the trust of her residents she fondly referred to as "her girls." Mary said the image of a "charger" and "energizer for my girls" best described her leadership experience this year.

> They (Mary's residents) come to me when they are really drained. They just don't want to talk with their teammates and with their coach and everything, so they go to me. They run every problem they have and basically asked me for advice like what to do, how to balance academics and sports. They ask me for prayer, so when they're very drained, and their emotional capacity and their mental health are just slowly decreasing, they go to me with everything in life, with their families, with their love life, and everything. I feel like they just come to me when they're physically drained or emotionally drained.

Mary saw herself as a charger that her residents could plug into and get filled back up.

Martha continued the idea of connection with her image of "everyone on a team holding hands to do their part." It is crucial because "everyone around impacts the others," Martha said. When asked if things looked different during COVID, she said most definitely. "It is harder to connect with people on a screen and not know what is going on with all the changes." Martha served as a class senator for Fidem's Student Government Association (SGA) and shared that it

is the SGA's responsibility to help be the student voice on-campus. In addition to her SGA role, Martha is an active Air Force ROTC cadet and studying biology on a pre-med track. Her image of leadership being stronger when students stay connected resonated with many of the participants.

Connecting with other students proved challenging for many student leaders due to restrictive protocols mandated by the ever-changing COVID guidelines. Senior and third-year RA Esther served as one of Fidelium's only returning student leaders. Her recent experience during COVID felt "restrictive" in comparison to her prior student leadership experience. She described her leadership experience as a "canyon." Esther shared that her image represented her efforts to lead and help her residents across a chasm or void. "With all the restrictions," Esther shared that she felt like,

> There's like a canyon, and sometimes there's a bridge there, but sometimes it feels like you're just throwing stuff at students, things that they need, and sometimes it just falls into the canyon, and it doesn't reach them, even though you're trying to help them. Sometimes the bridges are there if they're allowed to be there, depending on circumstances.

Many student leaders, like Esther, felt like they looked for bridges that were simply no longer there, forcing them to either find or build new bridges.

These images evoke a strong sense of what student leaders wrestled with during the pandemic. More pictures and metaphors will appear throughout the findings, but keep in mind the student leader spread thin, venturing into the dark, communicating to those with memory loss to recharge and stay connected with fellow students they lead across the canyon divide. The following findings unpack the experiences of undergraduate student leaders facing significant stress. Why and how student leaders experience stress, the impact this has on them as developing leaders, and the vital role faith plays will now be described in detail.

Research Findings

Initial and focused grounded theory coding raised eight core themes related to the research questions (a) why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress, (b) the influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions, (c) the various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress, and (d) the role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress. Thematic concepts were further developed through ongoing memoing to allow for the emergence of the findings. Each of the four research questions follows a similar structure, starting with (a) the number of participants who identified with the theme during the initial interview, (b) the number of participants who affirmed the theme during the second follow up interviews, and (c) key quotes, language, action, and imagery used by the participants to articulate their individual experiences related to the emergent theme. These themes best account for findings from the student leaders themselves.

Why and How Undergraduate Student Leaders Experience Stress

The research study aimed to discover why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress. Participants were asked the following four questions: (a) What is the best thing about being a student leader? (b) What are some of the more challenging aspects? (c) Can you tell me about a time when you experienced stress as a student leader? (d) What do you feel are the leading causes of stress for you and other student leaders at this time? Participant responses led to rich data that focused coding to eight core themes. Each theme best captures why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress. The themes are shared in no particular order.

Leading peers - "An odd paradoxical relationship." Leading peers emerged as an "odd paradoxical relationship" for many of the study participants. Nine out of 12 participants mentioned experiencing challenges inherent to leading their peers. In contrast, all follow-up participants confirmed that leading peers was complex because their peers often did not understand what student leaders do. Martha stated, "Other students don't really know what leaders do behind the scenes." Participants described peer-to-peer leadership as a "weird dynamic" because they are also students. Balancing a modicum of leadership authority within peer-to-peer relationships appeared new, unfamiliar, and slightly awkward for participants. Sometimes this authority required enforcement of university policies and rules. Mary quickly pointed out that she does not like "to be perceived as superior to other people." John described peer-to-peer leadership as "an odd source of stress," especially when it came to confrontation. Deborah found herself questioning how to be professional and relational when dealing with issues of student dishonesty. Unfortunately, peer-to-peer leadership proved to be even more stressful during the pandemic.

COVID further exacerbated the stress associated with peer-to-peer leadership, especially when Fidem and Fidelim relied on student leaders to enforce institutional COVID rules and protocols. Deborah elaborated further during a follow-up interview,

> Maintaining COVID protocols, that's been something difficult to do peer to peer where it's someone who's my age, and I don't want to come off as, like, overbearing, but also I don't want to come off as having no authority whatsoever. So I definitely say it's hard. Leading peer-to-peer can definitely be a source of stress.

Mark pointed out that peer-to-peer leadership was more challenging when leading "people that you're close with." Esther agreed, suggesting that the challenge is particularly felt for first-year leaders. However, the most significant peer-to-peer stress findings were related to the inherent conflict between the perceived student leadership purpose to build community and COVID-19-

related rule enforcement, such as social distancing, which appeared contradictory. The conflict between student leadership purpose and community building, with the unique need to enforce health and safety protocols such as social distancing, will be elaborated upon further in the findings. COVID made the inherent stress presented by the peer-to-peer leadership all the more challenging.

      Duality of student and leader - "Get sucked in; becomes an identity." Many student leaders expressed an inherent challenge of working and leading in an environment where they are students and leading their peers. Ten out of the 12 participants found it difficult to separate the dual roles of both student and student leader for various reasons, including proximity, role expectations, and balancing time commitments. Five of the six follow-up interview participants affirmed their pressure to be exemplary students and student leaders. Sarah described her role as an RA as much more than "a 24-hour job; it's hard for all student leaders across campus to have work-life balance; this is such a non-traditional job that I feel like I'm always working and the line between work and life gets blurred." The RA role required student leaders to live on-campus as engaged community builders and included being on-call for their residents when needs arose. Sarah took calls and texts from her residents, who were locked out of their room when she was on a date with her boyfriend, even though she was not officially on-call. She said her boyfriend asked her about her boundaries with the job but confessed once she saw one of her residents in need, she would have just worried and would not have stopped thinking about whether the resident was able to get into their room.

      Other participants highlighted how difficult it was to have school and work all in the same place. Proximity came up in the interviews multiple times, which some described as personal and professional boundary issues and others carried to the point of becoming a

leadership identity they assumed. The majority of participants felt that they were always a student and a leader simultaneously. Sarah articulated that "it (the student leadership role) is way more than a 9-5 job; you get sucked in; it can become an identity." Some participants felt that because they were both students and leaders; there was an unspoken expectation to be "the face of the university." During COVID, student leaders were under similar obligations as university employees and expected to uphold the rules and protocols. Student leaders were to model conduct and behavior accordingly. Participants said they felt specifically asked as student leaders to help keep the university open. In other words, student leaders assumed frontline leadership to help curb potential COVID outbreaks amongst their peers.

During a follow-up interview near the end of the spring 2021 semester, Deborah shared her exhaustion with keeping up both roles. In response to hearing me describe the emerging theme of the duality of student and leader, she said,

> Yeah, definitely I would say that that has a lot of stress, because sometimes it's like, oh my gosh, I just want to relax and just be able to get through these next few weeks or just this week or this day or whatever, but it feels like there's additional pressure, that I need to be my best self still, you know to be on best behavior, being, you know, super sweet all the time to everybody that I'm interacting with. So, I definitely feel like I'm not able to just relax as a student sometimes.

Being an undergraduate student can be inherently stressful, especially for the five senior participants preparing for graduation, which will be discussed further in the findings. All follow-up interviews took place the week before finals after a long and hard 2020-2021 academic year. Each participant mentioned how "drained" they felt and how difficult it was to finish strong. Lydia, a visual and performing arts student who spent late nights and weekends building sets and filming, and Martha, a biology pre-med student, mentioned they both had significant academic responsibilities that did not decrease simply because everything else in their lives increased.

Performance doubt - "What if no one shows up?" When asked about the current

challenges facing student leaders, John quickly shared,

> Doubts, I think, have been the big one for me. There's sometimes, especially as a
> program coordinator, I planned events, and there has been a lot of fear and doubt like
> 'Okay, what if students are not engaged, what if they don't consider this helpful, what if
> you don't see any productivity?

Student leaders expressed a sense of doubt related to their leadership performance. Nine out of

12 participants mentioned some form of doubt lurking underneath the more seen part of their

leadership roles. Participants identified leading student events and programs as outward-facing

leadership responsibilities. Four participants affirmed this was true in their experience. During

the follow-up interviews, Esther shared that she had doubts about putting on events. She decided

to switch from "active programming" events to more "passive programming" that included

dropping off cookie-making ingredients on the doorsteps of her residents so that they "could

make cookies together without really being together." Mary proactively asked for regular

feedback from her residents before planning events to avoid "creating programs and events that

students don't want to do." Mary shared how disheartening it was to plan events that residents

said they would attend only not to show up. Mary felt that this was dishonest of her residents

and was immensely frustrating to her.

Most participants defined leadership success in terms of attendance numbers at the

programs and events. Participants also questioned their worth as leaders based on how interested

other students were in their events and programs. Some leaders began to question if their efforts

were worth it. Deborah captured the sentiment when reflecting on the lack of response at her

events. She, along with others, began asking questions like, "Does anyone care? Is all the effort

meaningless?" Participants shared that not having their efforts recognized by those students who

they led was discouraging. While John and Deborah questioned their overall leadership impact

due to a lack of response, Luke turned the question toward those led. He openly wondered how

much students cared if they were not going to show up for events that they said that they wanted

to see. Either way, Elizabeth found herself having to self-motivate to do anything halfway

through the year. After having little attendance, she confessed,

> I know [programming is] important, but I really don't feel like it anymore. It can get a little bit disheartening when we feel like we are putting in a lot of effort, trying to make things go well, or trying to connect, but it's not really bearing any fruit. It can feel pretty discouraging, and now I'm kind of self-conscious like "Oh, do they not like me" like if I thought doing something right, and you know how do I get them to connect with me more, but I try my best not to take it personally. It's disheartening when I have 10 residents, and I plan an event, and maybe only one person shows up. I know the probability is pretty low for 10, and one is better than none, but still.

Navigating COVID-19 restrictive protocols proved to be very difficult and unmotivating

for students in general and particularly the student leaders in this study. Students were already

busy with typical undergraduate challenges; COVID added even more barriers that may have

impacted participation in events. Mark expressed a high degree of doubt about events and

programs that were no longer mandatory due to county and institutional COVID restrictions. "I

don't think those programs are going to be well attended at all," he said. Deborah agreed,

"Yeah, I think performance doubt is probably less with other jobs but very much so with this job

and under the circumstances, with COVID and programs being online. I think that the stress or

pressure and doubting were very present." Participants specifically mentioned stress increased

the pressure to appear perfect as a leader causing them to doubt their performance. While

COVID negatively impacted their efforts to create programs and events, many participants also

experienced leadership doubt based on their perceived performance. "We know our programs

aren't for everyone but looking back (on low attendance), it is definitely defeating," Mark

concluded.

Overcommitted and overwhelmed - "I suck at saying no." Participants were unanimous in feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed in their student leadership roles during the 2020-2021 academic year. "I suck at saying no," Sarah said bluntly. When asked about whether she felt overcommitted and overwhelmed this year, Mary laughed out loud and said, "I don't even know what I need to say to that one just, I have to agree!" Being overcommitted and overwhelmed captured the general stress of managing being both a student and student leader, not to mention other student responsibilities such as work, service, relationships, sports, etc. The consensus was saying no was challenging, and participants often felt guilty when they did, even when they knew saying no was the right thing to do.

Student leaders appeared to carry a lot of expectations. These expectations seemed to come from others and themselves. Time and schedule management, the idea of "my plate is too full," was a metaphor used by multiple participants. The stress was described as anxiety-inducing, frantic, hard to focus, doing the job, and regularly feeling overwhelmed. Student leaders are "trying to balance everything," Mark said, considering that he is graduating senior, has three outside jobs and is taking 18 units. Participants said being overwhelmed was a common experience for student leaders in general. "The most challenging aspect is probably time management and finding the solution when there's not much you can do. With time management, I think, since I have a busy schedule, trying to keep up with my job and my schoolwork can sometimes be a lot. I realized that for me to really be a leader, I have to put my school first so making sure that I do my school first and then lead," Martha reflected. However, she continued, "When my friends invite me to go to the mall, there is the real fear of missing out." Martha confirmed the fear of missing out (FOMO) is something many student leaders wrestle with. Lydia shared that "trying to fit everything onto my plate," was "really stressing."

Deborah recalls a helpful exercise she did with her RA team where they drew their various commitments onto a paper plate to help them process and reflect all that was actually on their plates. Many participants shared that they had more on their plate than they could successfully handle and recognized this as a growth area for further development.

Balancing competing priorities minus an entire team and ever-changing information due to COVID were significant factors in student leaders feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed. Luke and Mark both pointed out that due to COVID restrictions and budget cuts, they were serving on less than an entire team. "It caused me to do more work than was necessary," Luke said. He continued by sharing a general saying that had developed on his SGA team "try not to drop the same ball twice,' because it was inevitable that at least one ball was going to drop; just be sure it wasn't the same one." Sarah admitted that she would sometimes "genuinely forget" and felt pressure to prioritize all her commitments which caused momentary forgetfulness. It often wasn't until a ball dropped that she remembered what it was that had been forgotten.

COVID impact - "COVID was a series of slow letdowns." Every theme reported thus far has expressed a significant level of COVID impact. As a stand-alone theme, COVID findings emerged into two main categories (a) constant change and (b) inherent contradictions. Every participant spoke to the ever-changing nature of COVID and the associated county and institutional COVID rules and regulations, which seemed to contradict the participant's perceived leadership purpose of community building directly. COVID's two main challenges were a significant source of stress for student leader participants. COVID's universal disruption impacted student leaders in unique and disparate ways. While entire countries and local governments grappled with managing the pandemic, so did faith-based universities like Fidem and Fidelium located in restrictive California counties.

What seemed to be particularly difficult and demoralizing for participants was trying to lead during a time of constant change. Institutions had to make decisions based on the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and county guidelines as the pandemic evolved. These guidelines were often in conflict with one another, which did not make it easy for universities to change protocols. As mentioned earlier, many faith-based universities attempted to remain as open as long as possible to provide the best student experience. For Fidem and Fidelim students, this translated to a barrage of emails with "the latest updates" that began in the summer of 2020 and continued throughout the academic year. Student leaders expressed how hard it was to plan with all the changes, changing information, and inconsistent health and safety guidance. Matthew was "hired late" when an elected SGA member decided not to return to campus when changes with the 2020-2021 academic year were announced during summer 2020. Matthew shared he felt "disconnected" as a commuter student and a late addition to the SGA team because students could only meet online at first. Matthew said he felt this artificial reality significantly "delayed team development." For Matthew and many others, the prolonged stress of an entire year of COVID changes was exhausting. Luke also noted a "loss in team dynamic when everyone wasn't in the same room." The feeling was further exacerbated with the "extra work" SGA had to manage being short-staffed; one team member did not return and was not replaced "due to budgetary reasons." Martha expressed that she "felt the extra burden" of knowing some of the changes in advance following an SGA meeting with Fidelim's president and executive leadership team. "All the changes can be unmotivating," Martha explained. Mary pointed out that "our county is very restrictive" and that she understood Fidem was trying to stay open but faced an uphill battle. Deborah reflected on both of the COVID theme categories during her second interview,

> Yes, I totally agree on both of those (categories) I think, especially with the first one (change), it felt like there was often a source of tension with certain people would be like, "Oh well, I just heard on the news that we're now in this tier so why is Fidelium not doing these protocols?" Or someone's like, "Oh my gosh, we're back in that tier. Why is this happening? Why are we allowed to do this?" I felt like there was a constant disconnect between what was going on globally or nationally and what was going on with our school and our county. There was this constant disconnected information that people were hearing—and then asking *me* like why can't we do this?

Mark solemnly stated that he felt, "COVID was a series of slow letdowns."

The inherent contradictions student leaders felt from COVID changes represent the second category under this theme. Fidem and Fidelim asked student leaders to help lead and model the campus community's newly instituted health and safety protocols. In the case of residence life, RAs were even requested to enforce protocols. Deborah, a Fidelium RA, reflected on being hired "pre-COVID" and her role change, "I certainly had unmet expectations; this is *not* what I signed up for." RAs, in particular, felt the paradox and pressure to be both "a community builder" and "reporting peers for rule-breaking" at both Fidem and Fidelium. Mary shared the rule enforcement expectation at Fidelium "put a strain on relationships and community building," furthering her view that "COVID is polarizing people and their personal beliefs about many things." Sarah, Fidelium RA, felt COVID regulations created distance, was an "anti-community building," and posed a real challenge to bringing people together. Multiple student leaders expressed disrupted leadership expectations when their institutions placed a burden of responsibility for COVID policy enforcement on them.

RAs felt the "rule enforcer" expectation was a paradox and counter to building community they viewed as their primary leadership objective. Participants shared that community building is traditionally the central aim of residence life programs and why the RAs chose to be leaders in the first place. Multiple RAs felt keeping people accountable to adhere to the institution's protocols was an unwelcome change to their role. Such changes were not what

they were expecting. Lydia related a story about welcoming her first-year residents with a

simple visit to get frozen yogurt near Fidem's campus. Lydia's internal conflict between what

she felt she was supposed to do as a leader under the circumstances reflected many student

leaders' struggles. Lydia recalled,

> I feel like the bigger part of my job is to try and build community and build relationships and really bring people together, on the floor, especially freshmen and transfer students and people who, you know, don't have any connections. Your job is to get them really plugged into the community and partner with the school, which is kind of hard, but, yeah, I think my favorite part is the community. My job is to build community. I get paid to build community, which is really fun since I'd be doing it anyway, you know, whether I had this job or not. Attending events and dinners and all this stuff, so I think that's my favorite part, and it's so people-centered and never feels like a job. But I am unsure of our guidelines with COVID, like what we can or can't do. And so, I planned to get food off-campus, and then we had a meeting the next day saying we couldn't do this. But I was like; it's too late for me to cancel because I was planning on going. It was that night. It was probably the most stressful time because I'm not supposed to do this, but I didn't know I'm not supposed to do this. And now, like I can't cancel, everyone's planning on going in one hour, and it's probably the most stressful time questioning, do I tell everyone and cancel and follow the rules? I didn't know it was just really stressful; I'm like, what do I do?

When I asked how she ended up processing the decision, whatever the outcome was, Lydia said,

> I just kept it, and I sent out a text. I'm like, "Hey guys make sure when they get to the thing, we're just getting frozen yogurt sitting outside, like make sure everyone stays seated for me; show our masks, and we're distancing ourselves to be as safe as possible." And then, after that, like I'm not going to do another one, you know, but I felt like it would be really mean to just cancel it on everyone like an hour before, especially for all the freshmen. They were ready to build community, so yeah, maybe that's probably not like what I should have done, but I was just yeah.

This real example revealed value conflict influencing many student leader's decision-

making. Furthermore, the resulting ambiguity after keeping the community-building event

despite recently changed guidelines to the contrary underscored how stressful it was for

developing undergraduate student leaders like Lydia during the pandemic. Debora felt a certain

pressure from the institution to "keep the university open." She shared,

I feel like it's been like four different jobs in one year because it has constantly changed so much from even month to month, semester to semester it's changed. That you know me as a student leader, we are the people who are directly upholding our community standards right now at Fidelium, specifically COVID standards and other standards that wouldn't exist in a normal year for RAs. I think a lot of the stress now is coming from that. How do I, both uphold these rules, and how do I do that in a loving and gracious way so that I can still, you know, help people get to know each other and create community, to an extent, but also knowing how important it is for us as student leaders to be upholding these things? And that's pretty much the only reason Fidelium can stay open. If you know, people like leaders and us are maintaining these standards and are upholding these rules and are keeping people accountable. So, I think a lot of the stress is just coming from again, how do I hold these two opposites where on the one hand, I need to enforce these things, it's important, and I need to keep people accountable, but at the same time, I want to create community. And I don't want to be someone that people fear or don't want to be around or don't want to see in the halls because they're nervous about being around me or something. So again, I think trying to hold both of the realities of the job and do that well is stressful. Two things that normally wouldn't exist very well together, and right now, we're trying to figure out how to do that, and what does that look like? The trickiness of this dynamic that we're trying to uphold certainly feels like a tightrope walk sometimes of how we can find the perfect balance and not fall too much on one side, so yeah, probably a lot of the stress as of right now is originating from that.

Esther, a third-year RA, appealed to students' wellness, "COVID guidelines are counter to what students needed. Students' need for community is affecting their mental health." Even Matthew, a commuter student, and SGA senator felt living off-campus that "COVID separated the community and created uncertainty with all the changes." He went on to express, "Looking around, I don't see things getting better anytime soon."

Online and Zoom fatigue - "Zoom is convenient but very unmotivating." Most learning and leadership moved to various online instruction and communication forms due to COVID and distancing protocols. The most common form of communication and teaching took place over Zoom. The majority of participants shared a mixed love-hate relationship with Zoom and reported experiences of "Zoom fatigue." "Zoom fatigue is a real thing," Sarah shared in her initial interview. Student leaders expressed the challenge of keeping up with COVID policy changes; students were not checking their emails and showed a general lack of interest in virtual

programs and events planned and hosted by student leaders. According to participants, trying to create a virtual community was "hard, bizarre, fatiguing, exhausting, not as impactful, and disconnected." Mark summed up the stress caused by online and Zoom fatigue, "Zoom was easier but a lot less motivating."

Martha thought the online realities contributed to "a loss of joy" and a general sense that being virtual "made simple things harder to manage." Luke noted challenges his SGA team had connecting and getting work done remotely, "Being all online meant more administration work and fewer relationships. With all the required online classes and meetings, students didn't want to come to an optional SGA meeting or event." Multiple participants shared that they felt students simply ignored virtual events. Even Mary, typically a very positive and proactive leader, definitely agreed that being online was "very unmotivating." Mark and the orientation team at Fidem were left to create a hybrid online orientation and socially distanced move-in for over 1,000 new students. "How can we complete the mission of helping new students connect to the university when everything is fully online?" Mark said, shaking his head.

Team stress (interpersonal) - Miscommunication and increased workload. Student leaders worked closely with their teams to navigate external stress but sometimes experienced stress from within the group itself. Seven participants specifically mentioned that they experienced stress with the teams they were leading. Follow-up interviews concurred that teams played a significant role in how they experienced and dealt with stress. Rebecca shared about a time when only four members of the much larger team showed up to set up an event,

> I had stress, freaking out like oh, how are we going to get this done, how are we going to get all of this finished, are we going to stay up all night and do this? And so, that was a big stress, for me, I stressed about a lot of things. I freaked out. I'm like, if one thing goes wrong, I freak out and stress, which is not good, but sometimes it keeps me going on things.

She continued to unpack how miscommunication on the team led to team members not doing their part. Sarah reflected that her team of RAs was forced to work closely together to open the halls during the spring semester after being primarily online during the fall semester. This experience bonded them, but it also proved challenging because "we were always together, always talking about work, and I had to get away sometimes."

Team dynamics played a big part in how student leaders experienced stress. Mary shared how it was hard to build consensus with her RA team. Esther and Martha shared that navigating interpersonal conflict and the differing opinions on their respective teams was stressful. As shared earlier, Luke felt the "loss of team dynamic" because they were "no longer in the same room" due to COVID protocols. He went on to explain that he felt "there were stunted growth opportunities, miscommunication, and more work for the team" because their SGA was "meeting online and short-staffed due to budgetary constraints." "It felt like working harder with fewer people," he said. Again, Matthew, a late SGA hire, said, "COVID delayed group development" and that he "felt alone and disconnected from the team" for the entire fall semester. Esther shared she was on a smaller RA team of five that connected well early on but slowly drifted apart as the year went by. "It was hard because not everyone (RAs) showed up because of COVID, which resulted in more work for everyone and caused tension sometimes," Esther shared. Martha agreed, distance with her SGA team meeting virtually meant "I could not really see them, so I didn't always know what was going on. When I did see them (later in person), I could see that they were stressed out." Mary, an RA self-described as a "confrontational person on my team," suggested that teams can be stressful but that it is better to "address problems right away, so people know where you stand."

Accounting for the Data

Deborah quipped, "I hate to say 'unprecedented' for the 80th-billion time, but it really has been an unprecedented year." The causes for how and why undergraduate student leaders experienced stress during the 2020-2021 academic year were many. Student leaders experienced stress when leading peers, separating the duality of being both a student and a leader, performance doubt, feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed, dealing with the challenge of COVID, Zoom and online fatigue, and interpersonal team stress. These eight major themes accounted for the data coupled with the participant stories bringing their stress-filled leadership experiences to life. The first research question simply looked at the causes of stress. The second research question will now explore the overall impact of stress on student leaders.

The Influence and Impact of Stress

The second aim of this study was to investigate the influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions. Participants were asked the following four questions: (a) What is the best thing about being a student leader? (b) What are some of the more challenging aspects? (c) Can you tell me about a time when you experienced stress as a student leader? (d) What do you feel are the leading causes of stress for you and other student leaders at this time? The responses led to rich data that was raised through focus coding to eight core themes. Each theme captured the influence of stress reported by the twelve student leader participants. Again, themes are shared in no particular order.

Good and bad stress - "There is a fine line between motivation and being overwhelmed." One of the more unique findings was the distinction participants made between "good stress" and "bad stress." Good stress was described as motivational and bad stress related to the negative consequences commonly associated with stress. While "good stress" was only

directly shared by three of the 12 participants, all six follow-up interviews confirmed that stress

could be viewed as motivating. However, participants were quick to qualify for any benefits

derived from stress. Deborah pointed out that "there is a fine line between motivation and being

overwhelmed (by stress)." Finding this line while avoiding feelings of being overwhelmed

seemed essential to all the participants when discussing the benefits of stress. Yet participants

could not name when, when, and how such a line would be drawn given their own experience,

other than to say, it was a very "fine line" indeed.

Rebecca self-identified as someone who "stresses out a lot." "Even if one little thing

goes wrong," Rebecca said, she stresses out.   At the same time, however, Rebecca also shared

that she felt stress was her "superpower."

> For me, it's a very weird concept because I was talking about this with one of my leaders the other week about how stress is always good for me because it gets me even to work harder than I have done before. I don't know, it's a weird thing, but it's always like my kind of superpower in leadership, you'd say.

Sarah shared a recent observation her boyfriend made about how she handled stress,

> My boyfriend said that I have yet to go a day without talking about being an RA, are you stressed? And I was like yeah, I'm stressed, but I'm like a good stressed, and he's like are you sure it's good stress and I was like I mean I'm happy, so I think it's good stress. Yeah, I definitely think people have probably noticed my stress, but it's not even in a negative way for my boyfriend. He would say, "You can tell that Sarah really likes being an RA, but she is also really stressed about being an RA because it's kind of all she talks about right now."

Sarah's "good stress" seemed to reveal that she was happy and placed value in her leadership

role as an RA.

Good stress had other benefits as well. Mark shared during a follow-up interview about

the continual balance between being motivated and being overwhelmed, "Good stress forces me

to use my time better." Luke went on to say that he needs "a little stress to get things done" and

was motivated by the pressure of goals and deadlines. When hearing about the description of

good stress from other student leaders, Esther confessed that she "just saw it as motivation" and didn't recognize it as good stress but could see the positive role stress could play. Martha qualified stress by how a person "controls their stress." Controlling stress could be "motivational or stress over every little thing and become overwhelmed." During the interview, she highlighted the choice leaders make regarding their stress that determines the difference between good and bad stress. Finally, Mary pointed out that good stress could have a relational component to it. She suggested student leaders should consider "being needed and managing the needs of yourself well so you can help others manage their needs." Mary shared personally that her family overseas were struggling financially due to COVID but that they were mutually inspiring one another to do well despite the stress. "I agree," she said,

> Some stress for me motivates you to become stronger in a way, like my family back home, they're not doing really well, they're not going out or whatever, having fun, but then it motivates me to really work hard in my studies. I would make it like to be positive when I share with my mom, I got good grades or got an A. It costs them to be like, "Oh, even if we're suffering here, then you're being successful there and makes me happy, and it makes them happy," so I think that's like a good example of how bad stress can also cause good stress.

Nevertheless, Deborah concluded that it is undoubtedly "hard to stay within the bounds of good stress."

Perfectionism - "Performative pressure." Nine out of 12 participants specifically mentioned stress increased the pressure to appear to be a perfect leader. Some confessed that they placed this pressure on themselves, while others wrestled with the challenge of being a "perfect Christian" and the "face of the university." Follow-up interviews agreed with the notion that perfectionism is impossible to obtain but equally hard to ignore as a student leader. Several participants expressed fear and doubts that they would not "get it right" at some point as a leader.

On the whole, participants described this form of stress as a pervasive pressure to fulfill an ideal version of themselves as leaders.

"Performative pressure" was a term used by Deborah and best captured this idealized version of leadership. Grounded theory promotes participants' *in vivo* language to convey the rich meaning in the findings (Charmaz, 2014). Deborah defined performative pressure as the following,

> I think it is the pressure always to be put together, to be presentable, to be, as you know, as gracious and kind as possible, to stop everything that you're doing to have a conversation with someone. So, this is probably what performative pressure would be. I think there is a large amount of performative and even spiritual pressure put on our RAs or student leaders. I know for me personally, I definitely tend to be someone who's just very hard on myself and feels the need to appear presentable and put together at all times. Still, I think as an RA, and as a student leader, that pressure is tripled because you know you can't run into a resident in the hallway and be anything less than on your best behavior and your kindest and your most encouraging self. You know all of these things, and of course, those things are so important, and I want to be that. Still, there are definitely times where I'm exhausted or have not gotten enough sleep, haven't eaten that day, and I'm not feeling well or just not feeling necessarily in the mood to have a whole conversation. But I know I feel the pressure that as an RA, this is what I should be doing. And again, this is so important and so needed to get to know people and help create that community. Still, I think definitely performative pressure, and now even more so with COVID upholding a lot of guidelines and conduct standards is to make sure that we're always upholding the standards. And for me, that hasn't necessarily been too difficult because I think I've gotten very, very used to that. I recognize its importance, but just being looked at by other people and other students is like, "Okay, are we upholding the standards as an RA, or are they always wearing a mask?" Are we always doing these things, and you would hope to say that all RAs are? All student leaders are upholding these standards, but there's definitely that pressure as well, I think, genuinely.

Elizabeth concurred that she regularly felt the need to "have everything together" as an RA because she thought she was being looked at "as a responsible person." John wrestled with perfectionism, expressing fear and doubts of "not getting it right," and there being a continual "internal pressure." He related that one time it took him over an hour to send an email to a group of students, "I had to check over the email 20 times before I could send an event announcement." John shared that he felt pressure since his student leadership role was his "first real job."

Participants indicated that pressure came both from themselves, their institution, and sometimes even their faith.

"Good Christian perfectionism" is not helpful, according to Mark. He continued, "I want to have the perfect or best version" that "you are being observed" as a student leader continuously, "I think I push myself because I thought that that's what I was supposed to do, rather than wanting the accolades, I think it was more I did it because I thought that that's what a good person did and I thought that's what a Christian did." Multiple participants shared that student leaders were known for being high achievers and perfectionists. Sarah spoke of her RA team as "a bunch of overachievers and perfectionists." She also found it difficult to reconcile the increased pressure to be "perfect at a Christian school," something she said that she had not considered before being interviewed for this study. "Looking professional" and "having it all together" was very real to Mary's experience as well. Participants openly questioned whether perfectionism was possible to achieve or even reasonable to expect.

Esther confessed that she still felt like she was "letting people down" even when setting boundaries and saying no. The pressure to be perfect seemed to take on a relentless or inevitable tone during the interviews. Luke self-described as a perfectionist, stating that he kept high expectations of himself and that "his quality of work reflected on him." He also acknowledged the impracticality of perfectionism, saying he felt "forced into the 'don't drop the same ball twice' mentality." "The time it takes to make everything perfect doesn't exist. Just don't let the same ball drop twice," Luke said. Martha simply described the impact of perfectionism as "overthinking things." "I realize I can't be perfect, and trying to figure out how to balance it all is hard," she concluded.

Uncertainty - "COVID has taught us nothing is guaranteed." COVID appeared to generate collective anxiety characterized by overthinking due to the pressure to keep up with all the changes to health guidelines. For some student leaders, this led to a more fatalistic outlook. All 12 participants cited uncertainty as a result of the stress experienced from COVID as student leaders. Follow-up interviews confirmed a general sense of stress-induced uncertainty based on specific leadership experiences during the pandemic. Uncertainty was linked to COVID impact, changing guidelines, and communication.

Matthew shared,

I guess it's the uncertainty right now. A lot of us really, really want to go back to school, and we've been in meetings, you know where they've (the school) been talking about trying to put us back on campus and what that would look like, stuff like that, but you know. If you see, you know, just check what's going on outside; it doesn't look like it's really getting any better. So the university can be saying one thing and telling the students one thing, but in reality, those plans might actually not end up happening, they might fall through, so I guess just uncertainty.

Mark, who helped plan new student orientation for incoming students, said it was challenging to keep up with the ever-changing COVID guidelines, "I had to be flexible and have multiple scenarios ready," regularly dealing with "unrealistic expectations." Rebecca said, "Last minute changes," and some of her team "staff not showing up," were the most significant sources of stress, leaving her uncertain. Mary shared,

Last semester was really stressful for me as a student leader because Fidelium sent an email like, "Oh, we are going back to the campus," and then another email like, "Oh, we're not going back on campus," and then we're going back again. So, the institution's management sometimes stresses me out as a student because their policies change a lot, and they don't have specific information. And there's a lot of mismanagement, sometimes when it comes to the institution, they would tell this or that, or we should do this. That, like all the policies, social distancing six feet apart, wearing masks, but sometimes when we see the administration and other people in a higher rank in the institution that is not following the rules, and I'm kinda like, "Wow!" You respect them, but they need to be a role model to all the students, but they're not doing it. I think that's only one part of what stresses me out, like other people who are in the higher positions at Fidelium don't follow what they implement.

"If COVID has taught us anything, it is that nothing is guaranteed anymore," said Mark. Martha agreed, COVID compliance was complicated because students and student leaders "never really knew what was going to happen because things were always changing." Deborah shared these are "unprecedented times for the 80th thousandth (sic) time, but there's been a lot of stress with all the COVID uncertainty and wondering what my role is supposed to look like." Esther found herself "overthinking things because of all the stress." Luke also described his role as the SGA Controller as "unprecedented" when asked to budget with "no real information or certainty." He noted the difficulty of "multitasking without clarity makes it hard to focus...I stress about future stress." Other participants shared general anxiety about the uncertain future. Mary said she simply had to "trust in God's plan," given all the uncertainty.

Burnout and breakdown - "Ghosting." Eleven out of 12 participants mentioned experiencing a stress response akin to burnout or breakdown. Different words were used for feeling "overwhelmed, extremely anxious, frazzled, exhausted, reaching a breaking point, mental breakdown, and otherwise burnt out." While language varied, a pattern of denial and prolonged stress often led to an abrupt withdrawal by student leaders. For some, removing themselves from the situation appeared to be a self-protection behavior participants called "ghosting, hiding out, or going rogue." Curiously though, was how these student leaders seemed to communicate openly about burnout stating that it is often discussed openly amongst their team as almost "a badge of honor." However, a more troubling level also emerged one of real burnout, where student leaders would "disappear for sometimes a day or so," not tell anyone where they were, and pretend as if nothing happened upon return. Whether participants withdrew for self-protection, used the term burnout openly, or denied any personal experience of ghosting, it was clear that stress led to burnout and breakdown, according to the findings.

Luke used the term "frazzled" to describe how he felt after prolonged stress leading him to take a "recharge day, a getaway, a day to self" after feeling like he "couldn't do anything effectively." Sarah shared that she and her RA team had "a mental break down,"

> I was talking about this with my team because we all last Thursday just kind of had a mental breakdown, as silly as it sounds. We had been working so much, and we had residents moving in, and then we're doing meal deliveries, and the COVID crazy, and we are all very, very stressed, and it felt like everything we needed to get done just wouldn't get done. And I think it presents itself in one of two ways with student leaders from what I've noticed: There are the student leaders who say, "Yo man, I'm so stressed, but at least we're stressed together," and it kind of becomes your personality trait. I know that sounds silly, but, like in college, it feels like part of your personality trait sometimes is talking about how stressed and busy you are. It's almost a bragging right, you know like you talk to friends, and you're like, "Oh my gosh, I got like three hours of sleep last night, and that's not something that's like 'Oh no, Sarah, are you fine?" No, you're like, "Oh my gosh, you're really busy you only got three hours of sleep well like guess what, I only got four hours of sleep" you know, like it almost feels like this weird college bragging right because it's a collective shared experience where we're all stressed and not getting enough sleep. And so I think I've noticed with student leaders this tends to be the route we take a lot. So, like, "Oh yeah, I spent this many hours decorating my floor like I never want to paint again." Or, "I was in the RA office till midnight because duty took so long." And you're like saying it in a complaining way, but you're also like deep down you're kind of bragging about it in a weird sense. The other thing I've noticed is that, honestly, we just kind of shut down. I think the nature of student leaders is that we tend to be people who, even if you're introverted, are just a 'doer.' That's something I've noticed we're not really the best at setting boundaries. I don't know what it is about us. I don't know if that's just maybe my team and my personal experience, but we all suck at saying no. And so we say "yes, yes, yes, yes, yes," and then one day we just are like okay we're done and, ghost mode, like we take a day, we shut down we don't do anything, you don't hear from them, and then like the next day you act as nothing happened. I think those are kind of the two ways I see stress in my life. I'm definitely guilty. I do both of those just depends.

Esther described the change to her RA responsibilities as "policing and just a job" due to COVID rule enforcement. She said she felt "burnout and less enthusiasm to be an RA" and would occasionally "withdraw and hide." "I feel like there is a little season of burnout every year of being a student leader," Esther confided. Lydia simply said, "I can't fit everything on my plate." Mark opened up, "I hit the breaking point more than once this year." More about Mark's critical breaking point in the grief and loss section of the findings. "Most students experience

burnout and reach a breaking point," according to Luke. "We (student leaders) put on a strong

face and just keep going, but I'd be surprised if there's a student at my university that hasn't

burned out." He continued, "It feels like you can't take a day off, but even the CFO at my

university I spoke to recently took a day off because of all the stress going on right now."

Deborah shared that while she didn't experience burnout personally, she certainly saw it in her

teammates. John, an international student leader, closed with this powerful account:

> I hear a lot about how students are so overwhelmed. And we call it breakdowns because
> sometimes we will just crash because we can't hold on anymore. With all the stress and
> anxiety that comes with student leadership, honestly, yeah, we always talk about it; we
> kind of joke around like how we're having mental breakdowns, but I don't think those are
> jokes. I think it's really coming from their heart; they're really seeking help, I guess. But
> unfortunately, I haven't seen any way to help that mental breakdown, to prevent that
> mental break. We kind of assume that 'Oh, this is inevitable, this happens to everyone,'
> so I think we're just going with the flow, but I'm actually curious. I would love to see if
> there's any way we can do anything to help that, but honestly, I think every student goes
> through a mental breakdown. Maybe it's a learning process; I'm not sure. I just had a
> similar response of being so overwhelmed, like you're so stressed to the point you just
> give up everything at the moment. You're not giving up your work, but just giving up at
> the moment. I mean, I would normally sit in my car after a long day commuting, so I
> would just sit in my car by myself. I've been there a lot of days; I would just cry like I
> don't know what to do. And then yeah, just like I didn't really express my mental
> breakdown to other people. But I would just kind of cry on my own and just kind of
> move on.

Discouragement leading to apathy - "They don't care, so why should I?" Perhaps a

precursor to, or maybe a result of, burnout and breakdown is the discouragement and apathy felt

by student leaders due to stress. As time wore on, participants expressed that they simply "had

nothing left" and were brought to a place of caring less about their role and responsibilities.

Participants expressed a sense of being worn down to feeling increasingly apathetic, a

concerning phenomenon also found in the irritability theme. Eight of the 12 participants

mentioned feeling discouraged or apathetic due to stress, with four out of six participants relating

specific experiences with apathy during follow-up interviews.

Deborah said she never really felt a strong sense of apathy but that "there were definitely times where it's like 'What are we even doing? Why does this matter at all?'" She continued to say that she could easily understand if someone did feel apathetic. When no one showed up for an event when efforts were not valued, or people were too busy to attend, "it is disappointing and discouraging," Mary said. Elizabeth agreed that a lack of participation was discouraging and made her feel "self-conscious." "I have to be self-motivated when I really don't feel like it (leading)," she said. Mark shared that his leadership position was an "emotionally draining role at times" and made the observation that servant leadership gets "taken advantage of."

Lydia, a film student, said, "Stress blocks my creativity and motivation… it makes the leadership role feel like a job; college is already inherently stressful." There appeared to be a lack of interest amongst the student body as time went on during the 2020-2021 academic year. Luke noticed this lack of interest among students, "They (students) do not check their emails anymore." "I have nothing left for dead week and finals. I definitely feel the 'senior slide," he continued. "I'm just not going to do it (role). I used to care but don't anymore; how much should I care if those that we're leading don't care?" Luke said. In a more telling example, Elizabeth surprised herself when she realized that she had not unlatched the deadbolt to her apartment door for over three days. "I hadn't gone out in over three days and didn't even realize it until I unlocked my door." She shared that she would hardly ever be in her room during a normal year, but due to social distancing, she was losing track of time during COVID. Luke reasoned, "I'm also graduating soon; I'm going to conserve my energy for the future."

Irritability - "Loss of niceties over time." Only a few participants articulated the irritability finding directly. However, prolonged stress did cause participants to feel "worn down to shortness." As time went on, participants began to notice increased levels of irritability

among teammates and students in general. Luke observed that as time passed, SGA members were getting short with each other. "Towards the end, we began to lose niceties with one another," Luke said. Martha shared that she could become "irritable and angry" due to stress, especially when she had to "communicate everything using email, and it was not going well." She described virtual communication as a source of a lot of pressure. During the last week of classes, Mark told his girlfriend that he might be "more irritable than usual because of everything going on (leadership and academics)." Esther confessed that she became "more sad than irritable." Even Debora shared that she felt "a little bit irritable with people caring less and less about rules as the semester is coming to a close. I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, nobody's carrying anymore. We're so close to the end. Can everyone just keep it together for a few more weeks, and then you can go home or something?'"

Unhealthy lifestyle - Sleeping and eating. Participants recognized they had not cared for themselves as much as they usually would have due to stress. Two primary areas of unhealthy lifestyle reported were lack of sleep and poor nutrition. These practices accounted for the majority of the findings related to the stress impact on student leaders. While only three participants referenced sleep and nutrition during the initial interviews, all six follow-up interviews confirmed a growth area. Additional lifestyle feedback appears in the self-care category under research question three. Noteworthy was the absence of more typical unhealthy lifestyle practices such as screen usage (Netflix binging), alcohol, drugs, promiscuity, etc. Fidem and Fidelium both require and uphold a community lifestyle agreement that precludes many of these behaviors for all students, especially student leaders.

As noted earlier in the burnout and breakdown findings, student leaders are often guilty of sacrificing sleep. Sleep deprivation can be expected for college students in general, but

Martha noted that stress caused her to lose sleep and skip meals, "Typically, when I'm stressed, I'm getting less sleep, under five hours typically. Sometimes it's a really bad habit, but I skip meals; they take a little bit more effort to make." Mark's eating habits also changed when stressed. "I eat out a lot more when stressed because I don't have time to shop for healthier food," Mark confessed that he is not where he wants to be health-wise but said he plans to exercise and eat better after graduation. Lydia shared,

> I think just having too much on your plate, like having too many things going on or that you have to do, leads to a lack of sleep. When I stay up really late working on homework, I have to get up early for a class, and I feel it's a cycle. I get really stressed out, and then I'm really tired, and then I don't perform well, and then I get a headache, and I have to go to bed and take a nap. Kind of like the cycle of no sleep and stress, and sometimes it's one or two in the morning doing my homework. I'm like, "Oh no, I have to wake up at this time for this meeting," and then I'm going to be so tired throughout the whole day, but I have this thing to do, and I get preemptively stressed for the stress I'm going to feel the next day.

Luke pointed to social distancing requirements as a source for lack of healthy accountability. "COVID has kept people inside all day. We used to have family dinners in our apartment, but with no one around, it's hard to keep accountable." Deborah provided a more positive view, "I actually noticed my self-care is a little better, and I am eating better because I'm not out at a bunch of events where there's food right now."

Personal loss - "I'm experiencing loss too, am I allowed to grieve?" Personal loss was a robust finding not necessarily due to the number of times it appeared but because it revealed such a deep sense of pain for participants when the theme did appear. Mark reflected on the moment he heard the news about changes impacting his senior year, "Hearing about my senior year and learning that it would be all online and not really having any time to process what that would mean for me as a student, I never really stopped to pause and give myself space to reflect on some of those moments." Mark was responsible for leading a significant service trip that year to inner-city Los Angeles for new students. The trip was an annual culture-carrying part of

Fidem's orientation program, one that Mark had attended as a new student himself and led in

subsequent years. This year was extra special because of exciting changes made by a planning

committee Mark had been a part of and because it was his senior year. Mark shared his loss after

hearing this trip was canceled due to COVID:

> Honestly, I hate to say it, but I think I reached a breaking point. I can remember one night specifically. I just needed a break, and I remember driving. I just drove into LA. I remember just driving, and I don't know why I drove to LA, but I just chose to drive through LA at like 11 at night and just kind of drove through some of the streets, and I think it all just hit me right then. And I began to feel all the, yeah, just wishing that I could have been there and walking students through some of the streets over there and just being able to give them that experience. And then also just realizing for myself that I will never have that last time, being able to go on that trip that I had always thought I would. Honestly, I think that came from a moment of me wanting some kind of escape from what was happening here and, yeah, wanting to get away.

Deborah shared a recent conversation she had with fellow leaders on the topic of personal loss,

> This is a conversation I've had with a lot of people talking about feeling sometimes, you know, for those of us who maybe haven't actually lost a family member to COVID or someone close or something like that, it feels like there's a level of like "Oh, am I allowed to grieve for the things that I've lost?" I haven't lost people or friends, but I've lost many experiences or a lot of time or lost a job or things like that. I think there's a huge element of grief and loss and even an element of almost questioning, "Oh, am I allowed to experience this, and am I allowed to sit in this because other people have had much worse?" I haven't had any experience of other people who have really lost people, who have had people close to them pass away. So I think there's definitely that level of grief and loss and questioning almost the validity of your grief and loss. So, I think everyone is grieving and has lost something in some capacity, even if it's a small thing due to COVID.

Every senior student leader participant mentioned that they felt a sense of loss due to

COVID impacting the experience of their final year in college. Many wondered about

graduation and the culmination of their academic achievements and their time as student leaders.

Seniors also expressed uncertainty and a sense of loss concerning what future faced them as they

embark with their degrees and leadership experiences into a world still recovering from a

pandemic.

Accounting for the Data

Stress impacted undergraduate student leaders at faith-based institutions in a variety of ways. COVID exacerbated pre-existing stress points for student leaders. While a more positive motivational and value-revealing stress experience emerged for some, many participants felt pushed toward perfectionism, experienced troubling degrees of uncertainty, burnout and breakdown, discouragement and apathy, some irritability, and unhealthy lifestyle behaviors around sleep and nutrition. Personal loss and questioning the appropriateness of expressing grief was telling. While the first research question simply looked at the causes of stress and the second research question explored the overall impact of stress on student leaders, the third question will look specifically at how student leaders coped and managed their stress experiences.

Coping With Stress

The third aim of the study identified the various processes and strategies student leaders employed to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress. Participants were asked the following three questions in this section: (a) How do you feel stress impacts student leaders? (b) Can you describe the events that led to a time when stress impacted you as a student leader? (c) Do you feel the amount of stress would differ if you were a leader at a non-faith-based institution? The responses led to rich data that was coded and raised to eight core themes. Each theme captures how participants managed and coped with stress. Again, themes are shared in no particular order.

Supportive supervisor - Advisor, guide, model, supporter, encourager. Direct supervisors play a significant role in helping student leaders manage their stress. Ten out of 12 participants mentioned their immediate supervisor was or, in some cases, could have been more

helpful in managing stress during their student leadership experience. Eight participants

expressed positive regard for the support and encouragement they received from their supervisor.

However, two participants shared that they wished they had more support from their supervisor.

The lack of supervisor support was cited as an additional source of stress for both participants.

Noteworthy, participants never gave their supervisor a neutral response; responses were either

positive or negative, demonstrating the power supervisors have to address the stress concerns of

student leaders.

Regular direct feedback was significant throughout participants' accounts. Elizabeth

appreciated her supervisor's accountability concerning her student leadership role and managing

personal and professional priorities. "Leaders need leaders," Sarah said, explaining how she

appreciated the model her supervisor was to her. Mary described her supervisor as a good

listener who is able to keep her and her RA team accountable with truth and encouragement.

"My supervisor was helpful because they could understand where I was coming from," Esther

said. Both Martha and Deborah said their supervisors were relatable and "could understand what

we're going through better," being closer in age to them. Mark shared that his supervisor did a

good job providing time to reflect, check in on them, and provided a "pulse check on the team

meeting agendas."

Supportive supervisors help student leaders process stressful situations. The student

leadership role is challenging; Esther recounted a challenging incident:

> In my first week of school, I had a parent yell at me and told me that they needed to
> speak with my supervisor, saying that they didn't like the roommate their daughter had.
> That was very stressful, and I was like, is this going to be like every single week? Do I
> have to talk to these families every week? Luckily, that was the only time I had a bad
> interaction with a parent, but it was still very stressful. The parent was yelling at me, and
> I didn't know how to walk away or remove myself from the situation. I think what
> helped is talking to my supervisor afterward. My supervisor told me that's not part of
> your job. You're not supposed to be dealing with parents who don't like how things are

or don't like the way that the school is being run or things like that; that's not up to me. That was my supervisor's job. If I went back, I know that I would probably have more confidence in confronting the parent, not obviously in a rude way, but telling them that that's not part of my job and not be as scared. I'm pretty sure I looked scared when she was yelling at me. I think I'd be more firm in knowing my job, like knowing the boundaries of what I'm supposed to be doing.

Esther's experience and other examples underscore the importance of a supportive supervisor to help student leaders process and learn from their stressful experiences. However, not every participant shared they had an adequate amount of supervisor support. Luke shared he had had help from his SGA advisor (supervisor), particularly at the beginning of the year, but less as the year went on and not as much as desired. John felt his supervisor was "too busy."

My program director is very busy, so I've been carrying this burden of executing a lot of events on my own. There are certain days when I would basically plan everything, and I just send her the information, and she would verify it looks good and say, "Let's go with it." So, a lot of stress comes when I feel like I didn't have enough support from my supervisor. I know she has a lot on her plate, but it's kind of difficult when I feel like I'm carrying this program on my own when there's not enough feedback. I would just go with my plan, but I think that causes stress in me when I don't feel like I have enough support or feedback.

However, supervisors can model and help student leaders create healthy boundaries. Esther shared that her supervisor helped "recognize burnout" and gave her the tools to "say yes and no based on my priorities."

Pause - "Taking five minutes saved me so many times." Space to stop and the process looked different for each participant, but a healthy theme of pausing emerged from the data. Six out of the 12 participants mentioned taking a pause helped them cope with stress. All participants agreed this practice would be helpful during follow-up interviews. The pause category was different from the earlier mentioned burnout and breakdown where ghosting behavior presented more as escapism rather than stepping back to take a momentary pause that

participants used to describe how they managed stress. It is also worth noting that categories such as exercise and prayer, discussed further below, have a pause-like quality.

Pause simply meant giving yourself permission to "stop, breathe, and refocus," according to Luke. "Students are going non-stop," Mark shared, "taking a nap saved me more than once." Sarah specifically used the word "pause" to "take time out to be aware." Every once in a while, student leaders must "step back and get perspective to reprioritize their values and goals," Lydia added. John shared earlier about the lack of supervisory support, adding he likes to go away to meditate and be reminded of why he "was so drawn to the job" in the first place. "Oh yeah, this is actually what I really love to do. And then I'm motivated again because I'm reigniting that passion in me, and then I'm able to continue going forward. So that restart is the process of how I like to meditate," John shared.

Rebecca learned a pause-like stress-coping process as a high school leader who continued to use it in her current role.

> When stress hits me, I go off and make my pros and cons list, and I think about it. I like to take five minutes to myself and just think about if I keep on doing what I'm doing, what's going to happen, or if I stop, consider my options, and then do it. I think once I have that talk to myself for like five minutes and put it all together, that's what allows me to keep on going, and my stress break makes everything work out a lot better.

Sarah shared something similar,

> My word lately is I'm just going to PAUSE because I don't have to create a solution immediately. A moment not to fix. We (student leaders) are a bunch of fixers who never take a moment to think about what we actually need to fix or how we're actually going to fix it. Rather than immediately being like, "Okay, this is what we're gonna do, this is how I'm going to fix it," because half the time, that's just going to create another problem when you're not creating time for yourself to rest (pause).

When asked how long he meditates, John said 30 minutes in a local park. The length of time did not seem to matter as much as the actual act of taking time to pause. "I take ten minutes away to take a deep breath," Luke shared. Martha takes anywhere from a two-minute walk to

longer ten-minute breaks to gain "perspective, to stay positive, learn what to change to do better," and pace herself "one week at a time." Regularly taking breaks helps Mary process. Deborah's supervisor modeled a "very beneficial pause, prayer, and reflect" rhythm to their RA team meetings. "These times really help us connect," Deborah said.

Organization and prioritization - "Google Calendar is my best friend; it calms me." Student leaders shared that staying organized and prioritizing responsibilities helped them navigate during times of stress. Ten out of 12 participants specifically mentioned organization and prioritization as a meaningful way to cope with stress. Every follow-up interview confirmed that using tools like Google Calendar helped participants stay organized and meet their student leadership responsibilities. Controlling their schedules and priorities was important to participants, especially during the pandemic.

"Google Calendar is my best friend; it calms me," quipped Mark. Mark also used the term "staying ahead of the power curve" to remind himself to stay on top of his responsibilities and manage his time well before minor stressors become more enormous stressors. Luke had a logical approach to competing demands, "Don't procrastinate, prepare ahead of time, have contingency plans, but remember to pray and let go of what is out of my control." "Be sure to give yourself enough time to get things done," Lydia stated practically. Martha agreed, "Organization, planning ahead, and scheduling actually calms me down," she said, pointing out that school work was a top priority for her that she consciously prioritized over student leadership responsibilities. "Time management and organization," along with "goal setting," helped manage personal "bandwidth," according to Esther, Sarah, and Elizabeth.

Participants remarked that not feeling prepared was undoubtedly a consequence of stress. Luke expressed annoyance when others on his team were not as prepared or organized as him,

"It made things harder for everyone else," Luke said. Mary made a case that leaders must "be

organized and manage their time well, including making time for themselves, but not to keep

their eyes on themselves but be able to look outward," this is an important "leadership

responsibility."   "I like to set a good example and be able to be there for others," she continued.

"How can I help and be available for others, as a leader, if I'm not organized myself?" she asked.

Mary went so far as to share that she even schedules chores and leaves room for spontaneity on

her calendar. Mark's Google Calendar is color-coded by activity type; academics, student

leadership, work, and church service all have separate colors. Elizabeth described her schedule

in terms of "the bare necessities. You have to prioritize your responsibilities," she said. No

doubt this would have been more difficult during COVID suggested Deborah, who said, "staying

organized was hard during COVID; it was a lot easier to stay at home and do Zoom." Yet the

vast majority of participants agreed with her when she said, "I love my Google Calendar!"

   Personal boundaries - "Don't let others control you." The majority of student leader

participants said having healthy boundaries with themselves and others helped positively address

stress. Eight of the 12 participants specifically mentioned "boundaries" by name when making

simple yes and no commitments. Boundaries revealed participants' priorities and were often

seen as a growth area by many of the participants. All six participants confirmed the importance

of establishing healthy boundaries as student leaders during follow-up interviews.

   Personal boundaries generally took the form of commitment making around

relationships, work, and academics. These commitments were defined by how and when student

leaders said "yes and no." The inability to do so often led students like Sarah and Lydia to feel

"overwhelmed and overcommitted." "Saying no is a real growth area for me," said Lydia. "I

suck at saying no and need better boundary management," stated Sarah as she discussed her

limitations and taking personal responsibility in her leadership and academics. Martha candidly said, "It's hard saying no, FOMO is real," or the fear of missing out.

Some student leaders described various disciplines they built into their everyday lives to help them keep healthy boundaries. "I never take my homework into my bedroom or eat in front of my computer," said Elizabeth. She also shared how she turned her phone notifications off and made sure she prioritized uninterrupted sleep. Mark said he had to learn personal boundaries, "It took time over multiple years in the leadership role to learn boundaries and to turn off my e-notifications," he said. Luke subscribed to a particularly regimented morning routine to start each day.

Being an international student, Mary realized that fellow RAs on her team asked her to cover on-call shifts over long weekends because they knew that she would be on-campus having nowhere else to go. "I don't mind covering for people who have a real need and plan ahead," she said, "but I also feel the freedom to say no if others didn't plan well; don't let others control you." Others like Esther struggled with feeling guilty for saying no. "I feel like I still let people down when I say no," she said even when she thought saying no was the right thing to do. Martha concluded that boundaries work better when "you have real relationships with people, you can understand and respect one another's boundaries better." Deborah shared that she, too, struggled with personal boundaries and saying no to things. She described herself as being "guilty of overextending" and was working on establishing better boundaries so she could "enjoy" her role more and "not be drained." Setting and keeping healthy boundaries can be difficult. Mark shared,

> I think that the challenge is feeling like you can't set healthy boundaries because what you're doing is this service for others, and I don't think that's wrong, but I think it's wrong to think that you can't set healthy boundaries for yourself. I think words like sustainable or unsustainable come to mind. I think people can and should push

themselves through a busy week or a busy couple of weeks. Still, when it becomes a regular thing to constantly feel like you never have enough time to pause and stop or always feel like you're behind or when students can't feel like they can get to a place where they feel healthy and rested. I honestly think there are sometimes when it's an unrealistic expectation for students to balance. I mean, for some students working and being a student leader and doing 19 units is not unheard of at all. I'd say ultimately, I think students have the responsibility to choose for themselves what they should take on. But I think that a university that says that they value student leadership and a co-curricular learning environment where things like this are important to the whole development of students, in addition to academics, I think that they should make space for that. I think that that is something that's not done well currently. I don't think that universities are really coming alongside and partnering with some of these co-curricular activities, as well as they could.

Mark cited the inequity felt when academic policy accommodations are made for student-athletes but not for student leaders. The idea of inequity will be discussed in further detail at the end of Chapter Four.

Self-Care - "Care for the soul can be a lot of things." Self-care often appeared in the language used by participants due to the everyday use of the term. However, findings show participants had diverse views of what exactly constituted self-care. The self-care theme closely related to research question two and the impact stress caused participants. Many of the self-care approaches appeared to be in direct response to managing stress in their lives. Combining time to pause, prayer, time with friends, and exercise, for example, witnessed a linking or coupling of multiple self-care practices used to cope with stress. Participants simply referred to many of these methods as self-care. Ten out of the 12 participants specifically mentioned self-care or physical activity related to self-care when asked about coping with stress. All participants confirmed the value of self-care during follow-up interviews. Deborah shared her thoughts on self-care during her follow up discussion,

I think that there's a lot of questions of what self-care really is because self-care isn't always; sometimes, I joke and say I'll put on a face mask or watch a movie or something but is that really self-care? What's really taking care of myself look like? Do I actually need to go on a run? Or do I need to actually deep clean my whole room or something? I

feel like self-care gets a weird reputation, but I think it can be a lot of things, and it can a lot of the times be things that maybe we wouldn't think of us as restful but that are actually caring for our soul and our well-being.

A good working definition of self-care is those things or activities that take care of our soul and well-being. For many participants, self-care means exercise, sleep, and nutrition. Martha enjoys practicing yoga, and John regularly meditates in the park. Mark said he wished he had more time to cook for himself and looked forward to taking better care of himself following graduation. Mark did share that he enjoyed hobbies such as surfing, welding, and being creative. Several participants commented that being "stuck inside due to COVID" made them want to go outside more for walks and runs. "I feel ten times better after a run," said Matthew, who now runs regularly since COVID began. Deborah and Lydia both enjoyed playing instruments to relieve stress. Deborah said that she would feel a negative physical response from stress and believed countering this with positive physical activity was helpful. She said, "A stress ball or something tactile" was beneficial for her. Elizabeth highlighted that self-care should be prioritized and scheduled self-care activities on her calendar and her daily list of to-dos. Mark also shared that he has a morning routine that includes exercise and eating well to start each day. Mary was the same, scheduling her eating and exercise habits, which she always said were essential for her life because her parents were nutritionists. Finally, walks were an excellent way to get away from screens, according to Esther and Elizabeth.

Community - A support system inside and out. The majority of participants shared that meaningful friendships and other outside relationships helped them cope during stressful times. While participants pointed to fellowship and community after being asked explicitly how they managed stress, relationships were mentioned throughout the participant interviews. Furthermore, all follow-up interviews affirmed the importance of student leaders having good

friends and a supportive community. Accountability, honesty, and encouragement were the positive core attributes of a supportive community both inside and outside the university.

Elizabeth shared the importance of friends to help with accountability and how COVID negatively impacted this since she was required to live alone. "With no one here to be concerned about me, I have to be concerned and motivate myself," Elizabeth reflected. Luke stressed the importance of "peer accountability" and being able to "learn from peers." He, too, mentioned something of community that was lost for him while the SGA met remotely. He felt this robbed the team of the ability to "learn from one another" since they could not meet in person. Deborah agreed that being open and honest with good friends was encouraging and helped her stay accountable to her leadership role and life as a student.

> Community definitely is so important, and I think, since the first interview, I have felt lost a little in the past year. But definitely, having solid people surrounding you and supporting you can help with stress so much because, even just having someone to encourage you, who knows what you're going through or what you're working through is so important, so yes, community is a huge factor.

While COVID complicated community, participants shared creating a sense of community remained vitally important to them.

Community was essential to have outside of the university as well. Sarah shared that having an outside community and relationships away from her university and job helped develop a healthy identity beyond leadership roles and being a student. Time with friends inside and outside of their leadership position was necessary, both Martha and Mark shared. "Having good people is important; having the wrong people around you can affect how you lead," Martha continued, "You need a good support system." "Having a smaller core group is very helpful when leading under stressful situations," Luke added. During a follow-up interview, Esther responded how it had been more challenging for her to have community this year because most

of her friend group had recently graduated. Now the majority of her relationships were online. Esther will later share how her faith community away from campus met her need for community as it did so for many other student leaders. Faith community findings are shared in length during the final research question.

Team - Openness and honesty. Student leaders recognized teams forged from those critical relationships with their teammates were vital for stress support. Five out of the 12 participants explicitly spoke about their teams being a significant source of support during stress. Conversely, teams could also be a source of additional stress due to team dysfunction. Credence for healthy leadership teams came from all six follow-up interview participants. Team openness to discuss and share stress was welcomed and viewed as supportive by participants. Similar to the supportive supervisor findings, the impact of teams on participants was never neutral. Student leaders either recognized the positive support received from their team or felt they needed more help from their team. Unfortunately, some student leaders indicated that their team was a source of stress for them. Either way, having a supportive team seemed to be a significant way for student leaders to cope and manage stress.

"We can discuss what is stressing us out as a team," Esther highlighted when she shared about her team's openness with one another. Her team was a support to her during the stressful times of leadership. Mary and Mathew both spoke of having supportive teams in terms of honesty and openness. Mary shared that when you are open about what is causing you stress, "What is really going on, you know where everyone stands." Deborah agreed, "I can be candid with my team and my boss," she shared when asked what helped her cope during stressful times as a student leader. Luke shared that while he would have liked more involvement from the

SGA advisor (supervisor) throughout the year, he greatly appreciated his regular one-on-one

meetings with the SGA student body president.

> The President and I met a lot because of SGA politics and stuff, and she has been very helpful, like how she manages stress, and she's there. She'll say, "Yes, you need to make sure you don't burn out," and all that stuff, and she's like, "I'm watching you to make sure you don't get to that point." She's very intentional about helping me manage stress, which has been a different experience. She said in the same way, "I'm gonna watch you, and you watch me," we would actually make sure neither one of us gets to that point. We communicate openly about this and make sure we're both good, so we don't have all that stress; it's more of a communicative thing and well-being. It's not just on me. Stress doesn't just affect me; it affects us all. It's good to know that they're looking out for me. That's been a good development.

> However, not all teams functioned well, according to some participants' experiences.

"Honestly, it's not the best team dynamic and has added stress," Mark confessed. He continued

to explain that he had the opportunity to work with many students and had other student

leadership friends, RAs, etc., but that this year there "has been many different work styles" on

his team that made him even more stressed. Sarah shared that even on supportive teams, she

sometimes needed to take a break from her fellow RAs to avoid continuously talking about work.

Sometimes it felt like she was "at work all the time." Martha shared that being a part of a "good

team is fun when everything is flowing well" but acknowledges that this takes work to happen.

Mary concluded that being honest led her team to develop a good "chemistry among the mix of

introvert and extrovert members" and to "stay humble" since she said, "Everyone is still

learning."

Ask for help - "Help; stress is kicking my butt!" One of the hardest things for several

student leader participants to do was ask for help when experiencing stress. Asking for help

emerged as a growth area for student leaders who often focused on helping others and providing

resources that they could also benefit from. Taking advantage of these resources was something

multiple participants said they should do more of. Six participants mentioned seeking help from

outside individuals or sources was helpful to alleviate the negative consequences of stress. In comparison, three participants specifically said that they benefited from personal counseling or therapy. All follow-up interview participants affirmed the value of asking for help when coping with stress. Asking for help typically came from a person (supervisor, peer student leader, or other) or a resource such as counseling support services.

Luke said he often reached out for help with specific questions or tasks related to his role, including meeting with Fidem's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) for budgetary matters or the SGA president for student leadership guidance. When asked how he learned to pause and breathe, a coping theme identified earlier, Luke said that he and his father had experienced the benefits of anger management therapy in the past and continued to practice these techniques in his current role regularly. Deborah shared that prior therapy for anxiety helped her identify and counter the physical effects of stress with more tactile responses such as a stress ball, playing an instrument, or going for a walk. Participants shared that past counseling and therapy experiences helped them manage current stress levels. Rebecca employed a simple pause process mentioned earlier that she learned from leadership training on stress management. She shared that by taking time out to collect herself for five to ten minutes, she could think through the issue(s), prioritize the following steps, and "keep moving forward." "I am often surprised by how it all works out when you stop and think about things then keep going," Rebecca recalled.

Participants like Sarah mentioned that student leaders are aware of their institutional support and care resources since they often refer other students to them in leadership roles. She suggested student leaders could also benefit from partaking in these resources themselves. Martha shared how students can seek advice both in-person and online now. She indicated that online resources were available to students during COVID and remote learning. "Asking for

help is something I wish I would have done more of," Deborah confided. For Deborah, perfectionism or "performative pressure" kept her from asking for help as a student leader. Esther agreed, "I found it hard to ask for help and didn't ask as often as I probably should have." Mary pointed out that asking for help requires "humility and strength." She said that leaders who ask for help "model trust" to those they lead. "Asking for help is modeling good health and an example to those that you lead," Mary concluded.

Accounting for the Data

Student leaders employed several processes and strategies to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress. Of these, participants identified support from their immediate supervisor, teammates, and community, along with an ability to pause, organize and prioritize, establish good personal boundaries, and practice healthy self-care as viable ways to alleviate stress. There were a few outliers worth mentioning. Behaviors commonly associated with the undergraduate demographic, retail therapy, Netflix, and social media only appeared once. In other words, participants were not turning to these types of behaviors to cope with stress. Also noteworthy were participants' general recognition that stress coping was an area of leadership growth. For instance, John stated that he resorted to a "just suck it up attitude" when it came to stress and could do better. "Stress is kicking my butt! I need to grow in prioritization," said Elizabeth. "I'm guilty of overextending myself and need to work on balance and being more efficient with my time," confessed Deborah, who shared that the stress was not necessarily coming from her leadership role or the university but was primarily a "self-pressure" or "performative-pressure." Mark, a senior third-year student leader, concluded,

> For me, when I think of stress, I think of avoiding stress rather than dealing with it. I honestly don't know that I would have a good answer if you asked me how I actually deal with stress that I can't avoid. I think I'm someone who doesn't deal with stress well. And stress is pushed through until I feel like I can't take it anymore. I would say yeah, my

main strategy is to avoid stress and to avoid putting myself in situations where I feel a lot of it, but as far as how I deal with it once it comes, I don't think I have a healthy way of doing that.

The first research question looked at the causes of stress, the second research question explored the overall impact of stress on student leaders, and the third question explicitly saw how student leaders coped and managed their stress. The fourth and final research question will explore the role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress.

The Role of Faith

The fourth and final aim of the study was to discover the role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress. Participants were asked the following three questions: (a) Do you feel that your faith influences how you view and manage stress? (b) Has faith helped or hindered the way you view and handle stressful situations? (c) If you were not a person of faith, how might you view and manage stress differently, if at all? The responses led to rich data that was coded and raised to four core themes. In addition, a contrasting finding based upon what participants said it would be like to lead without a personal faith was included. Each theme best captures the relationship between faith and stress, as reported by the 12 student leader participants. Again, the themes are shared in no particular order.

Turn to God - "God already walks with me." Student leader participants unanimously reported awareness of God's presence in their lives during times of heightened stress. Faith recalled and reminded student leaders that God was present with them at the moment, that God was in their midst, inviting and available for them to turn to when stress levels rose. Often participants would turn to God in times of desperation, exhaustion, and feeling overwhelmed. Data revealed a specific moment where participants acknowledged God and his power and presence in their lives during times of stress. While student leaders expressed their faith through

prayer and scripture, two sources of communication explained next; it was the sense of relief, comfort, and peace participants derived from a vital personal faith relationship that best captured the phenomenon of God's presence.

"I don't need to search; he (God) is present," said Matthew, who explained that it was only his faith in God that helped him to "de-stress." Deborah shared how she could always turn to God, "He (God) already walks with me; I don't need to search because he is present." Elizabeth described the benefit of God's presence in a single word, "decompress." Sarah explained that she could go to God with the "full weight of leadership as a student leader." COVID only added more weight for Elizabeth, who shared a problematic experience helping a friend whose family member died due to COVID earlier in the semester. John explained that he turned to God "during mental breakdowns." "When I feel so helpless, God turned out in those moments. God helps us within our limits. Don't forget that God's grace is sufficient in our weakness," John said, paraphrasing a biblical reference from 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Multiple participants shared that God's presence and grace helped them with their limits and their thinking. Mark pointed out that "Jesus never ran anywhere (in the gospel accounts). He wasn't in a rush and is a great example of how to lead." Luke shared how he could have "faith even amid burnout." "There is an overwhelming peace in surrendering; God is always there when all else fails," said Sarah. Martha confessed, "Sometimes I put too much on my plate; turning to God is the only thing that de-stresses me." Luke continued that he felt he could "partner with God through the strengths he has given me" and that he could see that "God has gifted me to lead." For Luke, this came from a place of turning and relying upon God and his plan through consciously choosing a personal relationship with him which required "asking for wisdom and strength."

Communication with God - Prayer and scripture. The common thread of prayer and scripture regularly appeared in the participant responses. These two mediums were used to communicate with God. Specifically, participants heard from God through scripture and spoke with God through prayer. Scripture often provided participants with perspective and meaning during times of stress. At the same time, prayer practiced both privately and collectively connected participants relationally with God and others. Shared experiences of corporate prayer with fellow student leaders were vital to participants. Seven out of 12 participants cited prayer and scripture as essential ways faith played a role in helping them cope with stress. According to follow-up interviews, every participant confirmed the value of prayer and scripture in fostering a genuine faith relationship with God during times of stress.

As many participants simply put, "prayer is talking with God," Martha said. "Praying is important to me," Matthew shared,

> Personally, I prayed about the stress (specifically caused by COVID), and I give it to God, first and foremost, and I just pray that his will be done over mine or the schools. I mean, it's almost like an indescribable and overwhelming peace that can come from truly just, you know, surrendering.

Private personal prayer was helpful for John, who shared that he did not like to show his emotions to others but could "vent to God" when he was feeling afraid or frustrated. Rebecca shared that when she took a "pause," discussed earlier in research question three, she also had the opportunity to pray to God.

When asked if the amount of stress would differ if she were a leader at a non-faith-based institution, Mary was quick to respond, "I wouldn't have others to pray with and encourage each other with scripture." Prayer provided participants a communal experience with God and with others. A community of faith discussed later in the findings helped Elizabeth "relieve all that's on my shoulders," something she regularly experienced when she prayed with and for others.

Community of faith - "Christian community is a shared faith experience." Healthy community and relationships with others presented themselves many times throughout the study. Whether it was a supervisor or team relationships, friends, and family, the importance of a vital faith community came as little surprise. Six out of the 12 participants specifically mention the benefit of being an active part of a faith community, with follow-up interviews confirming this critical finding. Participants cited two different faith communities they were a part of; a faith community on-campus as part of attending a faith-based institution and a community of faith off-campus, typically a Christian church or Christian Bible study group.

Matthew paused to consider what it would be like to lead at a non-faith-based institution before sharing the first thing he would miss was the "faith community" and "shared beliefs" that were an absolute "comfort" for him. Faith provided common ground that helped Luke see "different perspectives through a common faith," describing the experience on SGA as "dynamic." Building community was a unique part of what it meant to be faith-based. Lydia explained the contrast she experienced transferring to Fidelium from an out-of-state public university. "Faith opens us up to relationships with others and to seek help," Mary observed from her role as a second-year RA. As shared earlier, praying together as a community of faith was instrumental in helping Esther feel "relief and a weight lifted from her shoulders" when others prayed for her. Many participants shared that they took part in and regularly led Bible studies and prayer groups in their residential living areas. Mary shared that she helped lead an on-campus Bible study as part of her RA role. In addition to having a community of faith on-campus, a community of faith off-campus also appeared to be helpful.

"I need people in my life, who see me as something other than an RA," shared Sarah, "I think it is important for regulating stress to have a community and identity outside of your

student leadership position." For Sarah, this was a faith community outside of Fidelium where she could actively participate in a separate "Christian community," which she described as a "shared faith experience." Esther agreed, sharing about the value of having a community outside of the university "far from campus and a totally different community." Having a spiritual mentor outside his direct supervisor "helps keep things in perspective," reflected Mark. Whether on-campus or off, being an active part of a community of faith was considered essential for participants. Unfortunately, some participants like Deborah shared that they regretfully "lost my faith community a bit with COVID" but hoped to get this back when things changed.

   Perspective - "I am not the savior of this program." Faith provided participants with perspective and insight into the current stress experienced as a student leader. In a sense, perspective is the culmination of how faith played an important role in helping student leaders cope with stress. Turning to God, pray and read the scriptures to the larger community of faith provided participants with a healthy, more accurate perspective of their experiences and themselves. The majority of participants felt that faith provided them with a sense of purpose, gratitude, and hope, which were vital for developing stress resilience. All 12 participants said faith shifted their perspective and provided helpful insights into their stress experiences. Follow-up interviews further revealed the importance of faith for leadership motivation and purpose. Faith's perspective went beyond simple encouragement. Multiple participants described a more sobering, truthful, gritty outlook because of how complex their stress challenges were. Findings revealed that only a vital personal faith reframed these challenges and strengthened personal resolve, while faith in name only proved to be counterproductive and caused more stress for participants.

For Esther, a third-year Fidelium RA, faith was credited with helping her be the most successful RA she could be by providing insightful perspective. "Burnout is not going to define me; knowing God will be glorified in the end has really encouraged me the most," Esther proclaimed. Many participants shared how faith relieved the pressure of being defined by their leadership position and released them of unreasonable expectations held by themselves and others. "I get to partner with God, not be the savior of the program," shared Luke as he discussed letting go of meeting self-imposed expectations. Mark, a third-year leader and senior holding down three outside jobs, reflected that his family's "high work ethic" he was raised with may not be healthy or resonate any longer with his understanding of faith. Serving in the leadership role for God provided Mark with purpose and a forward-looking perspective, "I'm not going to get caught up in the title; I'm here to pass on my leadership to the next generation." Martha also saw her leadership role with a bigger picture perspective, "I want to give glory to God; to do it (her SGA role) for God, not for the title." With God's glory as the goal, Martha shared that her leadership took on a "higher purpose" and helped her account for "everything happening." In short, "faith brings perspective and helps with prioritization," Martha observed.

"Faith gives a higher purpose to everything happening. Faith gives me a hopeful and positive outlook that the outcome will be good," Rebecca shared. Like her, many participants shared that they too saw faith as a source of strength and hope. Faith provided Matthew the perspective that there was always something more, "something better when I surrender to God." This type of faith helped Deborah find balance and the view to look to the future and appreciate the meaningfulness of her leadership role with "gratitude and humility." Lydia enjoyed the opportunity to have a faith perspective after transferring to Fidelium from an out-of-state public

school. "Faith helps you know what is really important," she said. This "bigger picture helps keep things going," said Luke. By faith, "God helps my mind and my thinking," said John.

Faith also helped participants forgive themselves and others. Sarah shared a lot about her struggle with perfectionism and credits faith with helping her with the concept of forgiveness. "Faith exposes shame and reveals our commonality with each other," Sarah observed. "Everyone struggles with different things. Faith brings a perspective that 'God's ways are higher than our ways,'" Mary offered, quoting from Isaiah 55:8-9. As Esther shared earlier in the communication with God finding, "The Bible says not to live by a controlling fear of like 'Oh I'm gonna mess up, and I'm not going to be able to live,' so I think in some way there is freedom, there is freedom in Christ, to know that you're not bound by your sin, so I think there's just a lot more joy." Faith offered a perspective for participants to see themselves and others more clearly in their leadership roles. Sarah shared a powerful eyeglasses metaphor to describe how her leadership position helped her see those at her faith-based institution more clearly. The following is a long quote but helpful to understand how genuine, authentic, gritty faith shatters pretenses.

> It's a little discouraging, especially in the Christian context of being at a Christian university. I think we live in and have these nice glasses of the Fidelium world in the bubble and think that no one is going through hard things because we put on this perception of being happy or being good all the time, and that's just far from true. I wish there were a willingness to talk about the fact that we're all going through the same struggles. I think if we were all going through the same struggles and knew we were all going through the same struggles, rather than putting on this perfect Christian kid persona, I think the problems would still exist, but you wouldn't feel the need to hold it in until it explodes. I think, spiritually speaking, it's been eye-opening to realize I can't hold that weight, and so who, who is that we're going to go to? Well, for me, I only feel like I have one option for an immediate release of that weight, and that's to give it to God because I'm incapable of fixing it right away, especially when I know someone who *is* capable. I think that's been an eye-opening experience. Still, it's also happy, you know, you hear about like family members dying of COVID, that's sad, that's heavy, or students going through really deep sin struggles and are really dealing with a bad mental health crisis is like it's hard to see your peers when there's this comfort in the Fidelium

lens of like everything's good and dandy. But as an RA, I think you lose those glasses, I think they become cracked, they still exist, and you can still see through them, and I still love the good parts of Fidelium, and I still think I see through those glasses, but there are just cracks in them every once in a while. And I think those happen in those moments of deep hard conversations where I'm like man, it brings a lot of things like "Man, we're all really sinful, and we're not talking about it," and then "Lord there are really horrible things happening. Where are you?" I think that's been really interesting having the cracked Fidelium glasses on. I think other student leaders would say the same thing. I think that this is a shared experience. When you're a student, you don't know everything that's going on, and then you become a student leader, and you don't know everything, but you know a lot, and you learn a lot about your peers and your students, and you hold that and your glasses become fogged and cracked, and it's a weird experience. Because I'm a junior, so I went two years of having this perception of Fidelium and Fidelium students and my peers. And now, my glasses look a little different, my prescription has changed, and that's interesting. It's hard but not bad; it's just difficult, I think.

At this point, I shared with Sarah that he thought her cracked eyeglasses were a great metaphor but pointed out that glasses typically help people to see more clearly. I followed up by asking if she felt like she could now see greater clarity as a student leader. Sarah continued:

"Mm-hmm, that's a great question. I think I see more accurately. Now that I'm an RA, I think my prescription is more accurate. I think that the average Fidelium student is looking through rose-colored glasses or like virtual reality. If we're going with the metaphor of seeing only what we want to see, or what the university wants us to see, or what peers want others to see. Right, I think we're all guilty of this. We put forth what we want others to see us as. I think in a Christian context, there's this idea of like you're in Chapel, and everyone's raising their hands in worship, and you're like in the worst place in your spiritual life, but you still raise your hands and worship because you're like "Am I missing something right now? Every other Fidelium student is clearly feeling this, so what's wrong with me?" And I think that now I can go to a Chapel and look around the room and understand why people are raising their hands and may not actually be feeling it. I don't know their hearts but, I think I would, in the past, before being an RA, I would have walked into a room and felt like I was the least spiritual person in the room, or I was the only person going through problems, or everyone else is just way better at this than I am or has way more Bible knowledge than I do. And now I think, because I have the RA glasses, and it's not to make me feel better, but because I know other people are going through problems. I'm not saying, "Oh, I'm better off than that girl who's really struggling;" it's "Oh my gosh, I am not alone in my struggle." And yet we've put forth this like chipper "I'm a Fidelium student," who our problems are always prefaced with I'm really struggling right now, but God is good, which is a fundamental truth, but I think we never get down to the actual hurt because we don't want people judging us. We think that we're less spiritual or that our walk with God is really bad, or that we're a horrible Christian or a really bad person. Being an RA, you skip all the formalities, and you know just to get to the root of like "Dang this person's really hurting," and so you

really hear the like yuck, and that God is good comes after. But you don't have time for that all the time. As an RA, you just hear our student body is hurting right now. You hear the personal accounts, and overall, you know the truth. I think we're closer to the truth. And so, I think now I have more clarity about what our campus is actually like, which is necessary if I'm going to be serving our student population.

Hindrance - Expectations of "a good Christian." Sarah shared her experience with cracked glasses because of her student leadership experience to underscore how faith can be misused to create a false perception. An artificial perfectionistic faith perspective led participants to feel increased pressure and stress. Faith-based universities like Fidem and Fidelium indeed have higher expectations of their students, translating to even higher expectations of their student leaders. However, it was experiences like Sarah's that provided student leaders the opportunity to develop "accurate" clarity about how their faith engaged the stress around them. Eight out of 12 participants positively associated faith and spiritual pressure to their experience as a student leader at a faith-based institution. However, many of the participants articulated having the personal perspective, as seen in Sarah's eyeglasses metaphor, as necessary. A vital faith instead of manufactured or obligatory faith made the difference between whether faith played a positive or negative role in how student leaders cope with stress.

Many participants felt an increased pressure and responsibility when representing God and their university as a student leader. While student leader participants valued the commitment, suggesting it was motivating, purposeful, and meaningful, the extra pressure compounded by the inherent need for some participants to "be perfect" made the stress "an impossible standard" to uphold. "The idea of a good Christian" did not help the stress he felt as a student leader, Mark reflected. Martha said she thought that she had to be "the face of the university" and therefore could not make a mistake. Esther reasoned that there was an added pressure at faith-based institutions to "not mess up." She shared that she feared being a

hypocrite and somehow disqualifying herself to lead if she made a mistake. John pointed out an

unspoken expectation for student leaders to fulfill pastoral care responsibilities for their students.

John tried to be a good listener and pray for international students stuck overseas due to the

pandemic. Lydia felt it was easier for the leadership role to become your identity at a faith-based

institution, "not to mention there are more Bible class requirements." Esther simply said, "I just

feel bad sometimes for missing devotions or Sabbath, like it's one more thing," and she did not

want her faith to be that. Deborah shared where she thought much of this false pressure came

from:

> I do think part of that (faith pressure) comes from being at a Christian university because I often found that there's a Christian church culture that really encourages people to always be presentable and always be put together, not to be less than. Not be less than their kindest and their most gracious self. I think that it definitely can be a lot, and I think that sometimes it feels like there's a lack of permission just to show up, as you are. I feel like that pressure sometimes feels doubled or just amplified for student leaders because vulnerability is a hard thing, and vulnerability is even harder when you have many more people looking at you. I think that, yes, I do feel some of that pressure at a Christian university where you will rarely run into someone who isn't wearing a very nice outfit and isn't put together and says when you ask them how they are say "Oh my gosh amazing, God so good," and all these things. So yes, I think the pressure definitely feels amplified being at a faith-based university.

Accounting for the Data: The Role of Faith

Faith did play an essential role in how student leaders cope with stress. An unhealthy or

manufactured and obligatory faith caused student leaders at faith-based institutions more

pressure and stress. Only when faith was authentic, lived out, and applied to their challenges and

experiences did faith provide many positive outcomes, including an enhanced awareness of

God's presence, increased communication with God, a supportive community of faith, and an

invaluable perspective. Equally important is what participants shared when asked if they were

not a person of faith. Coping with stress minus a vital faith showed not only did the findings

mentioned above reverse, but participants took on a more fatalistic outlook, becoming self-

reliant, prideful, disconnected, and without grounding. Several participants mentioned their relationships would be distanced, resulting in their feeling more closed off and less likely to ask for help. Others turned to personalized self-care, increased exercise routines, and partook in other healthy outlets. Deborah said she would continue to be a person of faith of some sort, "a spiritual person who probably meditated a lot." Others said they would employ more unhealthy numbing habits such as drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity. Esther shared that she would be more "self-centered," playing into what she described as the self-centered culture promoted through social media. She feared it would stunt her ability to "develop real relationships, to listen well or ask good questions."

Never Thought of Before Now

The question yielding the richest responses came at the very end of each interview. Every participant was asked if there was something they might not have thought about before that occurred during their interview. The six participants who agreed to complete the follow up interview also had the opportunity to reflect on the time that had transpired between the first and second interviews, spaced between the beginning and end of the spring 2021 semester. For many, this was the first time they said that they had the opportunity to process their stress. Several participants said they had never been asked about their stress as a student leader. Some made insightful connections between faith and stress, while others shared significant leadership discoveries. All of the participants were grateful for the opportunity to discuss their student leadership stress. They said they felt this was an important study, especially if their unique experiences during COVID could help future leaders develop stress resilience.

"Every generation has stress, but this is a unique time and a unique experience," Martha said, referring to her leadership experience as an SGA senate member during COVID. Mary

shared that she had never had the opportunity to discuss stress as a student leader, despite being a very active second-year RA. "I never really broke down the causes of stress before. I just thought 'my job is stressful' but never saw all the different reasons why it was stressful," Mark realized. "I hadn't thought about how I actually cope with stress. No one asked, and I never really considered the stress; I normalized it and just kept going with it. How you cope wasn't really in my mind when I thought of self-care," John added. Student leaders like Sarah made similar insightful observations when discussing the positive and negative effects of stress. "When it comes to good and bad stress, good stress serves a higher purpose, bad stress is pointless and causes needless worry, but good stress can lift performance (do better under pressure), bad stress can come from busyness," and was not helpful to student leaders Sarah suggested. "Talking about it (leadership stress) out loud, I realize now that faith does affect my stress," Lydia said, "Faith for me has been more of a gradual realization." The interplay between faith and stress was dynamic and revealing for many participants. "College is a self-centered time; student leadership provides the opportunity to take faith seriously and serve others," Esther stated.

The role faith played in how student leaders cope with stress was dynamic. Many participants shared how stress provided a unique window into faith and what it meant to be a student leader at a faith-based university. While Mary pointed out that "leaders need to have personal integrity," others like Sarah and Deborah shared that Christian universities can unintentionally be a source of stress pressure. Deborah had the opportunity to think and process what it meant to experience the additional pressure she felt leading at a faith-based institution. Deborah asked herself if pressure from the outside would be different at a non-faith-based institution based on a similar question asked during the initial interview. She concluded, yes, but

wondered why, where would this pressure be coming from? Deborah shared that she discussed

the question with other student leaders and "prayed it through from the first interview." Deborah

gave the example of a recent conversation with a friend fired from their student leadership

position for "breaking leadership contract." She said that there needed to be a restorative and

redeeming process.

> I have mixed feelings about things like that (friend being fired) because I would hope that
> a faith-based institution could be a place where if you're actually deeply struggling with
> something like that, you could come and have a restorative healing process rather than
> fearing that that's going to make you ostracized from the community because I think
> that's the absolute opposite of what Christianity should be, it should be a community
> where you're actually able to be open and honest with the things that you're struggling
> with and not fear that you're going to be kicked out of the school or something like that.
> So yeah, I think all that to say is I thought a lot about that question, and what that means
> for students in general, what that means for student leaders, so I really appreciate you
> asking that question.

Deborah and other participants demonstrated a real depth of processing given responses like this,

making follow-up interviews very rich and rewarding.

Reexamining institutional expectations surrounding how student leaders are viewed and

treated appeared to be a need expressed by many of the participants. Participants shared concern

for future student leaders in three separate accounts and if enough student leaders would apply

for the coming year. Mark shared upfront that he did not usually have time for optional

commitments but made time to meet me for two interviews because he genuinely believed in

developing student leaders and thought Fidem could do better. "I think the university is going to

have to realize that if they want to keep student leaders, they're going to have to make changes,

and they're going to have to start supporting them." Mark continued,

> More standardized and formalized training is needed across student leadership at the
> university to give leaders something that's going to be useful, making sure that we're not
> just giving them the training that they need for our (university) uses, but that we're
> actually developing them and giving them tools that they need to be better leaders or just
> better people themselves, better students, not just better workers so they can serve our

program. Are we actually helping them to develop holistically and to prepare them for either work or leadership, whatever they're getting into, giving them a relevant experience that we're trusting them with programs that are actually going to help them to develop some of these skills that could be useful in future internships or jobs? Give them more help to feel like this experience isn't just about what we can get from them, but that we can partner and give them opportunities. I think universities that say they believe in co-curricular learning have to show it. Let's say we believe in learning, both in and outside the classroom. That looks like working alongside student leaders the way they do with, say, athletics. Professors are often very accommodating for student-athletes who need to make adjustments for sports. It sounds ridiculous almost at first for a student leader to ask for that, but when you think about it at the same time, they're volunteering a lot of hours for the university. And I don't know, I don't think that it should be treated the exact same way, but I think student leaders deserve to be treated better than they are now. There has to be some sort of partnering; it can't just be student leaders gotta figure out how to manage it. I think that student leaders deserve better, and I hope that, yeah, whatever your work ends up being, student leaders deserve to be advocated for and cared for. Being able to see that our students deserve to be cared for and work hard, they work hard for the university and deserve support. Because student leaders care for people, I think they deserve to be cared for, and so I think if I have anything else to say, it's just that I'm a huge advocate for student leaders.

Summary Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to help develop a stress resilience model for undergraduate student leaders at faith-based institutions by investigating four central research questions, namely, why and how student leaders experience stress, the influence and impact of the stress, how student leaders cope with stress, and the role faith plays when stress is encountered. Chapter 4 outlined the findings of these four central research questions in detail. Each research question section resulted in five to eight themes developed from the emergence of core categories utilizing grounded theory methodology. The chapter began with a rich series of metaphors participants used to describe what it was like to serve as an undergraduate student leader at a faith-based university during the 2020-2021 academic year and COVID pandemic. These vivid pictures included light in the darkness, holding people together and attempting to reach across a canyon without a reliable bridge. Student leaders experienced stress when leading peers, separating the duality of being both student and leader, performance doubt, feeling

overcommitted and overwhelmed, dealing with the challenge of COVID, Zoom and online fatigue, and interpersonal team stress. The impact of this stress on student leaders included a positive degree of motivation and a negative tendency toward perfectionism, general uncertainty, burnout and breakdown, discouragement leading to apathy, irritability, and experiences of personal loss. Student leaders coped with stress through their supervisor, taking a pause, organization and prioritization, healthy personal boundaries, self-care methods, good community, a healthy open team dynamic, and asking for help. Faith played an influential role in how student leaders cope with stress. Their Christian faith led participants to turn to God, communicate to God through prayer and scripture, and increase perspective. Some negative stress impacts were uncovered when participants held superficial or obligatory views of faith and were quick to say that this type of faith was an additional source of negative stress. Participants also shared rich insights that they had never considered before to round out the findings. Chapter 5 will discuss these findings and how they lead to a generalizable stress resilience model to help understand and address undergraduate student leader stress. This final comment from Deborah, summarizes the relief many student leaders felt to close the 2020-2021 academic year, "I'm excited, but it's bittersweet to be done with being an RA; also, a little bit of a relief, kind of ready to say 'Really, okay, we did it!"

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Someone once compared leaders to teabags; you never really know what leaders are made of until they are in hot water. Undergraduate student leaders at faith-based universities experienced unprecedented challenge and stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of the pandemic, the 2020-2021 academic year included a divisive political election, a boiling point in racial tensions, and economic uncertainty amidst the backdrop of the pandemic. This study's original intent was to investigate a concerning trend of increasing stress and anxiety among developing undergraduate leaders before the pandemic. Recent events, however, influenced the path of the research; the impact of a true convergence of the stress-inducing crises described above, further justified the need for a grounded theory research study. Existing theories about student leadership stress development are no longer sufficient to address the current impact stress is having on undergraduate student leaders. New theories and models are required to help explain and support developing student leaders in the short-term as they emerge from the pandemic and in the long-term as student leaders continue to grapple with and respond to effects of the pandemic

Undergraduate student leaders in this study expressed increasing stress levels, leaving them unprepared to lead in a complex world of challenge and change. While higher education heavily invests in preparing graduates to think critically and lead successfully, research shows an increasing number of students display low-stress resiliency and risk-aversion while struggling to cope with challenge and failure pre and post-graduation (Barker et al., 2018; Karaman et al., 2019; Mangan, 2020). The need for stress-resilient leadership has never been greater due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of the study was to use grounded theory to generate a

generalizable model that explains:

1. Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress

2. The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions

3. The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress

4. The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress

This study informs student leadership development for higher education professionals in

the critical area of stress resilience. This inquiry reveals insight into the formative role faith has

on leaders, particularly the influence of faith on stress coping amidst a pandemic. While existing

scholarship covers leadership development and leadership stress, little is known about the impact

of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions. In addition, the unprecedented nature of a

pandemic provided a unique look at how leaders developed under significant change and stress.

Outcomes from this study can assist in designing programs and integrative models that engage

students and provide new conceptual frameworks for developing student leadership

competencies and career readiness.

Every generation raises leaders to meet the challenges of their times. This generation's

time is unlike any other and will give rise to leaders who must lead in an uncertain, unpredictable

world that Morgan (2021) describes as the ready or not world in which we now find ourselves.

Chapter 5 discusses the study findings beginning with a brief background and overview of

student leadership stress before examining the evident and not-so-apparent data discoveries,

including several surprises. In keeping with grounded theory, the discussion includes existing

literature highlighting consistencies and inconsistencies of those studies cited and the findings of

my study (Charmaz, 2014).

Due to the unparalleled times in which this study took place, findings will present a unique student perspective and extend current leadership development literature in many ways. The discussion is organized around each of the four research questions, followed by a description of the study's limitations. While Chapter 4 reported the student voice centering the data squarely on the student leader experience itself, Chapter 5 will discuss the findings, implications, and conclusions based on what student leaders said. Three meta-themes and a generalizable leadership stress resilience model emerged and will be examined further in Chapter 6.

Background

The research results agree with Barker et al. (2018), Karaman et al. (2019), and Mangan (2020) when they say undergraduate students express increasing stress levels, leaving them less resilient to lead in a complex world. Students who display low-stress resilience and risk-aversion behavior are susceptible to feeling overwhelmed during college and struggle with similar feelings post-graduation (Acharya et al., 2018). It is becoming increasingly apparent that undergraduate students need to develop the capacity to manage their stress as leaders in today's unparalleled times. The 2020-2021 academic year was a convergence of significant pressures that disrupted young adulthood's critical developmental period characterized by change and transition, with student mental health concerns on the rise (June, 2020). If there was ever a time to invest in developing student leaders' stress resilience, it is undoubtedly now.

Findings, Implications, and Conclusions

Before COVID-19 (B.C.), many New Year's church sermons in January, 2020 included a play on the 2020 vision theme for the year ahead. The year began with high hopes for clarity and vision, and although not expected, like the tea bag, COVID-19 undoubtedly revealed a lot of things. The images the undergraduate student leaders in this study used to describe their

experiences as they wrestled with high degrees of stress during the pandemic were also telling.

The images they used to describe these experiences included being spread thin, venturing into

the dark, communicating to those with memory loss, recharge and stay connected with

community, and leading across the canyon divide. The images and findings frame the

experiences of undergraduate student leaders facing significant stress. Why and how student

leaders experience stress, the impact this has on them in the developmental stages of leadership,

and the vital role faith plays will now be discussed using grounded theory.

Constructionist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) provides a helpful methodology for

analyzing and interpreting the data that best captured the stress student leaders struggled with.

Conclusions were derived from a thorough constant comparative process which included

regularly returning to the interview transcripts (raw data) to ensure theoretical sampling

supported emergent core themes. I wanted to observe exactly what was said, preserve the

student leaders' voice, and validate study findings through strict emergence. During the data

collection, care was made not to inject my thoughts and to preserve the role of interviewer to

accurately capture participant responses. I did make notes in a dissertation journal of personal

thoughts, feelings, and conclusions following each interview, which appear here in Chapter 5,

Chapter 6, and Chapter 7. Findings evolved and are reported here after analyzing data and

reviewing these documented thoughts. Findings are presented logically, beginning with

undergraduate, undergraduate student leaders, and undergraduate student leaders during the

COVID-19 pandemic.

This study coupled two inherently stressful experiences. Being a successful

undergraduate student is stressful, and the role of leadership is stressful. Combined, the unique

stress experienced by undergraduate student leadership provides a perfect opportunity to develop

leaders (Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Maykrantz & Houghton, 2018). The original intent of this study was to investigate existing student leader stress but this inquiry was heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A once-in-a-hundred-year pandemic provided a fascinating backdrop for an entirely new perspective on developing undergraduate student leader stress resilience. The study now becomes a snapshot in time to capture this unique developmental moment for undergraduate student leaders.

Unprecedented and universally disruptive, COVID-19 added compounding degrees of challenge to something that was already inherently stressful; namely undergraduate student leadership (Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Morgan, 2021; Kecojevic et al., 2020; Moriarty et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2021). The study's intent was to understand exactly why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress at this time.

Why and How Undergraduate Student Leaders Experience Stress

The pandemic was a *ready or not* experience for leaders everywhere (Morgan, 2021). Undergraduate student leaders understandably did not feel ready; nothing had prepared them for the degree of disequilibrium felt during a year of constant change. Student leaders experienced a wide range of fluctuating expectations. Most student leaders in this study were hired for the 2020 - 2021 academic year before March 2020, when the first real impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt. Student leaders arrived at the start of a modified 2020 fall semester with drastically different expectations for their role than when they were hired. COVID-19 changed what was expected of everyone, including the role of student leaders.

The causes for how and why undergraduate student leaders experienced stress during the 2020-2021 academic year were many. The study found that student leaders experienced stress when leading peers, encountering the duality of being both student and leader, performance

doubt, feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed, dealing with the challenge of COVID-19, Zoom video conferencing and online fatigue, and interpersonal team stress. These eight themes emerged from the data coupled with participant stories that brought their stress-filled leadership experiences to life. Each of these eight themes is discussed below.

Leading peers - "An odd paradoxical relationship." Leading peers emerged as an "odd paradoxical relationship" in the words of one student leader. Relationships are a vital part of developing undergraduates (Astin, 1993). How students begin to think critically and develop personally and socially are integral to traditional undergraduates' identity formation (Astin, 1993; Baxter Magolda, 2014; Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2010; Hamrick et al., 2002). Astin et al. (2011) added that students' spiritual and religious development is also formative during this time. Chickering and Gamson (1997) make the connection that stress is an inherent part of the student's psycho-social development. First-year and developing leaders experience an added degree of responsibility to steward the entrustment of leading others as student leaders (Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Moss, 2021). Many participants grappled with what it meant to lead their peers. The power dynamic of a leadership role and title often challenged students to define and redefine their peer relationships (Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020).

In student vernacular, defining the relationship (DTR) can extend beyond the romantic context. Redefining friendships and relationships for student leaders based upon their leadership role was a new and unfamiliar power dynamic for participants. Contextualize for a pandemic, and current student leaders felt particularly burdened by the stress of leading their peers during massive change and uncertainty. According to Mangan (2020) some student leaders were pushed to strike and even quit because of the extra burden imposed on them by the university due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be discussed later. The study revealed that student

leaders became increasingly self-conscious as they entered in roles of student leadership.

Student leader participants were self-aware and actively worked not to appear better than others.

Christian student leaders, in particular, were conscious of the need for consistency; word and deed alignment was paramount to avoid the dreaded accusation of hypocrisy. Multiple student leader participants expressed not wanting to appear better than others because of their leadership role. Multiple participants stated the leadership role was not about title or power but of influence and making the collegiate experience better for their peers. Esther, a student leader participant, introduced in Chapter 4, acknowledged that the student leader power dynamic was something she struggled with and should be a topic that is addressed with first-year leaders. Educators and student development professionals have the opportunity to utilize existing developmental theory to help first-year and maturing student leaders process interpersonal leadership (Astin, 1993; Komives & Sowcik, 2020). Faith-based institutions can tap into stewardship, servant, and transformational leadership in profound and meaningful ways for holistic student leader development (Komives et al., 2020; Timms, 2018).

Duality of student and leader - "Get sucked in; becomes an identity." Many student leader participants expressed an inherent challenge of leading and working where they lived. The age-old question of when is a leader not a leader, can and did apply to student leader participants (Kellerman, 2018; Martinez et al., 2020). After all, when is an RA not an RA? RAs are required to live and serve in the same location. COVID-19 required that RAs also quarantine and shelter-in-place in their place of work and residence. Lifestyle roles require student leaders to navigate the duality of being both student and leader, to learn and live out their leadership. Student leaders should not be left to figure it out on their own, however. Supportive supervisors and coaching can help student leaders establish healthy personal and professional boundaries. The

traditional undergraduate age and stage is the perfect time to ask and answer questions of identity and develop healthy relationships (Astin, 1993; Baxter Magolda, 2014; Evans et al., 1998; Evans et al., 2010; Hamrick et al., 2002; Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020).

Boundaries that were already fuzzy became increasingly blurred during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and shelter-in-place orders. Esther shared an RA story akin to being a working mother during the pandemic when her residents kept interrupting her in her apartment to request assistance during her Zoom virtual conferencing class. She shared how hard it was to live, work, and study all within the same apartment for an entire year. Institutions like Fidem and Fidelium leaned on student leaders, especially RAs, to work, lead, and study where they lived while still enforcing COVID-19 protocols. Student leader participants revealed a feeling of being taken advantage of by their peers and their institutions due to a lack of boundaries and unclear role expectations. Both instances involved participants feeling that they were being taken for granted. It was apparent that most student leader participants felt this at some point during the pandemic year but had not stopped to consider it was taking place. Many participants shared that they had not even considered the causes of their stress, just that they were stressed, and it had something to do with having a stressful job and COVID-19. Whether participants did not know how or did not make time to process was unclear. Through the study I detected a felt need for student leaders to process their stress experiences. Other factors discussed later compounded this phenomenon, but for now, the duality of being both student and leader was not always apparent, was exacerbated by COVID-19, and student leaders suffer from an inability to process stress in healthy ways.

Performance doubt - "What if no one shows up?" Students expressed doubt about their leadership performance based upon event and program attendance. Participants viewed

these functions as the outward-facing or "seen" part of their role upon which to judge whether they were a good leader or not. Right or wrong, most participants defined leadership success in terms of attendance numbers at the programs and events, which is typical for developing leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). Participants in my study openly questioned their worth as leaders based on how interested other students were in their events and programs. Given leadership identity formation discussed above, pressure to produce verifiable results, under restrictive COVID-19 protocols, I recommend "success" for student leaders during the pandemic year should be redefined. Recalibrating how individuals viewed their performance during acute stress caused by the pandemic was necessary (Morgan, 2021; Perry, 2021). Events and programs, in general, were not well attended during the pandemic. In person events were limited due to social distancing and virtual event attendance was also down due to screen fatigue. Some leaders began to question if their efforts were worth it. All combined, student leader participants expressed personal insecurity "doubting self" based on unmet performance expectations. One participant called this nagging feeling "performance doubt." Student leaders appeared not to permit themselves to redefine their expectations amidst high degrees of stress and restrictive COVID-19 guidelines. It is not uncommon for developing leaders to experience imposter syndrome and feelings of not measuring up (Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019). I found that leader insecurity coupled with the instability of the pandemic compounded stress for those who looked to validate their leadership based upon program and event attendance. Many student leader participant expectations were simply unrealistic.

Overcommitted and overwhelmed - "I suck at saying no." Student leaders were unanimous in feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed in their student leadership roles during the 2020-2021 academic year. As both student and leader, the expectations participants carried

while leading peers and pressure to perform well all contributed to participants feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed. Student leaders are typically more involved than the general undergraduate by nature (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). However, the central issue was self-identified by one participant who said she simply "sucked at saying no." The trouble, of course, is that by saying yes to everything, undergraduate students may effectively say no to things because they have no margin (Porru, 2020). Margin is something student leaders have to learn how to build into their lives so there can be elasticity to expand and contract when demands or stress or a pandemic, for example, happen.

COVID-19 was not the sole cause for student leaders to feel overcommitted and overwhelmed; participants shared that they were already at the tipping point prior to the pandemic. The pandemic merely presented a significant source of stress for student leaders who found time management a challenge to begin with. According to many participants, student leader plates were overfull already. Data from this study indicated that the pandemic redefined and reshaped priorities for student leaders. Overall, student leader participants wanted to do a good job and greatly benefited from training and accountability to help them manage their time and energy well. Prevention planning and accountability can set student leaders up for success and should be considered. Based on my findings, student leaders were primarily left on their own to determine how much they could take on and remain a student leader. While undergraduate student leaders are adults responsible for their own decisions, it is not uncommon for future employers to limit outside work involvement, especially if they negatively impact performance. In addition, many participants shared that they had more on their plate, taking into account course loads, leadership expectations, outside employment, and service, than they could

successfully handle. The findings from this study revealed that student leaders recognized this as a growth area and are open to further development.

   COVID-19 impact - "COVID was a series of slow letdowns." Every theme identified in this study included a significant level of COVID-19 impact. As a stand-alone theme, COVID-19 findings emerged as two main categories (a) constant change and (b) inherent contradictions. Every participant spoke to the stress caused by the ever-changing nature of COVID-19 and the numerous associated health and safety protocols, which seemed to contradict the purpose of their leadership roles. According to one participant, the universal disruption of the pandemic impacted student leaders in unique and disparate ways, resulting in a general feeling of "slow letdowns." However, my study showed that leaders who were able to process losses and reframe them as opportunities tended to do better. COVID-19 proved not only to be a significant source of stress for student leaders but was revealing for them as well.

   In addition to the obvious health risk, COVID-19 was entirely unknown to the world. No one knew how long COVID-19 would last, who would be sick next, and how it could spread. Morgan (2021) describes what began as a sprint soon turned into a demoralizing drudge for most people during the pandemic. There was not going to be a quick fix for a generation accustomed to quick fixes (Kinnaman, 2018). With new information constantly informing policy guidelines and decision-making, students experienced a constant barrage of updates and changes. Most changes were restrictive, limiting what could and could not be done, leading to a collective sense of letdown. While student leader participants said they understood why restrictions were happening, they could not help feel the loss as a student and increased expectations as a student leader at the same time. Like many institutions, Fidem and Fidelium viewed student leaders as a vital link to guide student behavior to meet COVID-19 protocol compliance (Mangan, 2020).

Some participants articulated they felt the burden as a leader to help keep their institutions in compliance to remain open. Given what has already been shared, leading peers, the duality of student and leader, performance doubt, and feeling overcommitted, to begin with, my study shows how student leaders must have felt trying to keep up with all the changes.

What proved to be even more stressful than constant change was the inherent contradiction student leader participants experienced because of the changes. COVID-19 protocols required social distancing. Undergraduate students and student leaders, in particular, are social. Changes required very limited gatherings, closing common community spaces, curtailing sports and other in-person activities, and a myriad of other co-curricular and community developing experiences synonymous with student life. Student leaders wrestled with the contradiction that their roles had become (Mangan, 2020). Their desire for community and expectation to be a "COVID rule enforcer" were seemingly at odds. To their credit, most student leaders saw the need for both community and promoting the health and safety of the community. These two were not hard to reconcile on paper. However, in practice, most student leaders experienced a sense of frustration and futility. The universal impact of COVID-19 changed everything student leaders had expected and looked forward to in their roles. In some cases, full job descriptions would have to be reconsidered. Whether this happened or not is an area worth exploring by supervisors and those who support student leadership development on their campuses. Institutional expectations of student leaders will be discussed later as one of the meta-themes emerging from the study in Chapter 6.

Online and Zoom fatigue - "Zoom is convenient but very unmotivating." Most learning and leadership moved to forms of virtual instruction and communication due to COVID-19 and distancing protocols (Catalano, 2021; Morgan 2020; Unger & Meiran, 2020).

The most common form of communication and instruction took place over Zoom video

conferencing. The majority of participants shared a mixed love-hate relationship with Zoom

video conferencing with participants experiencing major "Zoom fatigue" (Toney, 2021). Student

leaders expressed the challenge of keeping up with COVID-19 policy change emails; students

were not checking their emails and showed a general lack of interest in virtual programs and

events planned and hosted by student leaders. According to participants, trying to create a

virtual community was "hard, bizarre, fatiguing, exhausting, disconnected, and not as impactful."

A recent study on "e-Learning crack up" focused on psychological stress among college students

caused by online learning and loss of academic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

(Hasan & Bao, 2020). There was a general sentiment that while Zoom video conferencing was

convenient, it was also a lot less motivating for everyone. This study showed that relational

connection and community were hard to establish, something many student leaders felt central to

their leadership role (Mangan, 2020).

While not preferred, online instruction using video conference-based tools like Zoom

kept learning going and university doors open, proving an effective tool that students and student

leaders are now versatile in using (Catalano, 2021). Barring any future pandemics, online

instruction and video conference-based tools like Zoom open new opportunities as a viable

supplemental resource for universities (Toney, 2021). Understanding that there is a threshold for

undergraduate students on how much they will tolerate is equally essential according to this

study. This generation has a heightened awareness of everything globally with limitless access to

information through the soft glow of multiple screens. Establishing good boundaries and

resisting the addictive nature of screen usage among young adults is paramount (Twenge, 2017;

Catalano, 2021; Lee et al., 2021). This study showed that student leaders expressed a certain

level of diminishing marginal utility, ultimately leading to stress regarding online instruction and Zoom video conferencing usage.

Not only did the pandemic cause a seismic shift for student leaders, but the workforce changed dramatically with the advent of Zoom video conferencing. The working landscape will be different because of the remote work capabilities demonstrated during the pandemic (Morgan, 2020). Students are now familiar with Zoom video conference meetings, working remotely, and bring a unique perspective from their experience as student leaders. Initially, I was disappointed as a researcher not to be able to interview participants in person. However, students immediately engaged and opened up during the research interviews via Zoom video conferencing in ways they might not have been even a year ago. The bonus of Zoom's video conferencing was the ability to video capture interviews, which greatly helped with the constant comparative method used to ground the data. Seeing and hearing the participants again helped contextualize the transcripts and made for a more robust data analysis. There were 31 responses to the initial interview invitation and "thank-you" from all twelve participants to show that Zoom video conferencing and online communication was not always stress-inducing.

Team stress (interpersonal) - Miscommunication and increased workload. While student leaders worked closely with their teams to navigate external stress, they sometimes experienced stress from within the group itself. Team dynamics played a big part in how student leaders experienced stress. The findings showed team stress often took the form of miscommunication and increased workload due in part to COVID-19 social distancing and hiring restrictions. Participants felt team development was "stunted'' while members tried to get to know each other and develop trust virtually instead of in person. Some student leaders opted not to return once an announcement was made that institutions like Fidem and Fidelium were not

meeting in person to start the 2020-2021 academic year. Staffing gaps on teams were either rushed to be filled or left open due to COVID-19 uncertainties and budget constraints.

Teamwork can be a powerful source of motivation, yet many teams were stretched and team members were left feeling worn out and unmotivated (Mangan, 2020; Sallee, 2021). Supervisory input and support had the single most significant impact on how student leaders felt their teams functioned according to my data. However, many supervisors experienced high degrees of stress at the same time and were not always able to best meet the needs of their student leaders (Sallee, 2021). Consistency, accountability, mutual respect and support, and camaraderie were valuable benefits of being on a supportive team, noted participants. However, these benefits reversed, causing a double negative impact to student leaders who felt their team should have supported them but fell short. I concluded that rather than being supportive, these teams were a source of stress that progressively worsened as the academic year wore on.

The Influence and Impact of Stress

Stress impacted the undergraduate student leaders at faith-based institutions in a variety of ways. While COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing stress points for student leaders, some shared a positive motivational quality that emerged from their stress experiences. In some cases, the findings showed that stress provided motivation and revealed student leaders' values. However, many student leader participants felt too much stress pushed them toward unhealthy perfectionism, troubling degrees of uncertainty, burnout and breakdown, discouragement and apathy, some irritability, and unhealthy lifestyle behaviors concerning sleep and nutrition. Student leaders' reflection of personal loss and questioning the appropriateness of grief expression is telling. While the first research question simply looked at the causes of stress, the second research question explored the overall impact of stress on student leaders.

Good and bad stress - "A fine line between motivation and being overwhelmed."

McGonigal (2015) revealed that new stress science can include many upsides and further encouraged leaders to become good at stress. One of the more unique study findings was the idea of "good stress" and "bad stress." Good stress was described by participants as motivational and bad stress-related in the negative pejorative sense. Participants suggested that there was a "fine line between motivation and being overwhelmed" when experiencing stress. When and what caused stress to cross this line was unclear, but factors such as an individual's capacity, perspective, and the amount and type of stress all played a significant role. The prolonged stress of COVID-19 revealed that the length of time played an important role in participants moving from being motivated to a state of being overwhelmed by stress. Significant prolonged stress may lead to feelings of being overwhelmed (Liu et al., 2021). Past experiences also provided participants with valuable perspectives. Three participants spoke about how counseling support received for prior stress experiences helped them manage everyday stress. Stress also played a surprising role in revealing what participants valued. Participants shared that good stress helped them motivate for essential things in their lives such as close relationships, academic performance, and leadership roles.

Helping students identify what they value and leveraging a motivational view of stress can help bolster stress resilience for undergraduate student leaders. The study showed that students who can learn and grow from stressful experiences are more likely to persevere with increased perspective. Perspectives gained from the pandemic will likely help students cope with future stress if processed in healthy ways. Unprocessed stress may lead to a more negative outlook and a trigger for anxiety, depending on the stress experienced (Hecht & Oehme, 2021).

Perfectionism - "Performative pressure." Participants specifically mentioned stress

increased the pressure to appear perfect as a leader. Many student leaders described themselves

as "over-achievers and perfectionists by nature." Some participants confessed that they placed

this pressure on themselves, while others wrestled with the notion of being a "perfect Christian"

and the "face of the university." Deborah, a student leader participant, used the phrase

"performative pressure'' as an idealized leadership standard student leaders used to measure

themselves. Performative pressure on the surface appeared to be largely self-imposed but grew

in an environment ripe with comparison, insecurity, and heightened stress. The findings agree

with Kouzes and Posner (2018) who describe perfectionist tendencies as potential pitfalls for

developing leaders. Compounding the issue of perfectionism was the false "good Christian"

ideal present in Christian culture and faith-based institutions. Comparison, in this case, took the

form of feeling like student leaders were being "observed" according to many participants.

Therefore, keeping up appearances when feeling under constant observation was a natural

response. Higher standards are good, but idealism can often lead to artificial measures of rule-

keeping, robbing student leaders of the opportunity to develop for the sake of saving face and

failure-avoidance (Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

During the second-to-last interview, Deborah used the term "performative pressure" to

describe what it is like to be a leader at a Christian university. Performative pressure is a

powerful way to describe the unique additional pressure to "have it all together" as a leader.

Deborah had prior leadership experience and shared that she benefited from personal counseling

for her mental health. She demonstrated a certain self-awareness and depth of maturity in her

responses due to this. Deborah, and student leaders like her, learned skills to address the

pressure caused by perfectionism in positive ways. Supervisors who foster an open and honest

relationship with their student leaders can challenge and support them in helpful ways. Future research needs to be done on supervisor best practices in developing stress resilience. Balance as "high achievers" presents a developmental leadership learning opportunity. Universities should make supervisors aware that when stress is high, undergraduate student leaders at faith-based universities may naturally gravitate toward unrealistic perfectionistic tendencies, further compounding their stress. A sign of this will often be delayed decision making or vexation or a sense of "overthinking things," as one participant put it.

Uncertainty - "COVID has taught us nothing is guaranteed." The pandemic generated anxiety for participants characterized by overthinking due to the pressure to keep up with all the changes to health and safety guidelines. For some student leaders, this led them to adopt a fatalistic outlook. Uncertainty was linked to COVID-19 impact, changing policies, and communication. Hermanson (2021) pointed out that prolonged uncertainty with no end in sight can have adverse long-term effects on mental and physical health. Feelings of prolonged unsettledness led to a stress edginess of sorts. Participants keep waiting for the proverbial "other shoe to drop," but they never could hear the sound of the second shoe despite how hard they listened. Getting to the bottom of an "unprecedented" pandemic was a long wait because no one knew how long the pandemic would last. Students believed their institutions were doing the best they could to provide them with a viable educational experience, but with every successive email, the feeling of letdown increased. There seemed to be very little freedom or any resemblance of normal for student leaders interviewed.

Uncertainty can be inherently stressful but remains core to leadership (Brown, 2018; Kouzes & Posner, 2018). After all, if everything were sure, it would be reasonably easy to cope with uncertainty. On the other hand, leadership embodies the vivid imagery participants used to

describe their leadership experiences, a light leading out of the darkness and crossing the divide.

The pandemic propelled uncertainty to an entirely new level for everyone. Student leaders

mentioned regularly planning for contingencies and "multitasking without clarity," making it

difficult to focus. In the extreme, some participants worried about stressing over future stress

because of the high degree of uncertainty. Seniors especially spoke about the stress they

experienced concerning their future as they prepared to embark into a world emerging from a

pandemic. Heightened levels of uncertainty undoubtedly impacted undergraduate student

leadership development in many seen and unforeseen ways but little additional research on the

topic was available at the time of this study.

Burnout and breakdown - "Ghosting." The majority of participants described acute

stress responses using words such as *extremely anxious, frazzled, exhausted, reaching a breaking*

point, mental breakdown, and *otherwise burnt out*. While language varied, a pattern of denial

and prolonged stress persisted leading some participants to abruptly withdraw from all leadership

responsibilities to escape the stress. Initially, the terms burnout and breakdown seemed extreme

but for some, removing themselves from the situation appeared to be a self-protection behavior

participants called "ghosting, hiding, or going rogue." Ghosting in relationships may indicate

less satisfaction in life, loneliness, and even helplessness, according to one recent study (Navorro

et al., 2020). Curiously though, was how these student leaders communicated openly about

burnout caused by stress. Participants shared the term burnout was regularly discussed openly

amongst student leaders as "a badge of honor." However, there appeared to be another level, an

important behavioral burnout, where student leaders "disappeared" for an extended time,

sometimes a day or so, not telling anyone and pretending as if nothing had happened upon return.

Whether participants withdrew to escape their stress, used the term burnout casually, or denied

any personal experience of ghosting, the stress impact could lead to student leader burnout and breakdown.

John shared that he experienced burnout and suggested that "burnout was something every student experienced." Furthermore, John cautioned when burnout was discussed openly or bragged about amongst a group of student leaders, there is probably some truth to it. Ghosting behaviors should not be easily dismissed when casually discussed openly. Student leaders may be signaling for stress help when the word burnout is bandied about amongst peers. Addressing the topic of burnout once it is raised is vital. I recommend universities ensure they have educators and professional staff who are trained to help student leaders explore why they feel burned out, investigate causes of burnout, and brainstorm healthy ways to support those students before they disappear are critical. Planning a day away can be a healthy way to relieve stress but ghosting, escaping, or ignoring stress, presents a real mental health challenge for student leaders. Ghosting behaviors could develop bad leadership habits for the future.

Curbing "despair," in the words of one participant who felt burned out, is a significant health and wellness concern. Developing student leaders need to know how to reduce stress in healthy ways. Coping in isolation and pretending nothing happened is not healthy or sustainable, especially when dealing with the prolonged stress experienced during a pandemic (Hermanson, 2021; Son et al., 2020). When significant stress goes unaddressed, it is easier for leadership to become simply an act. Burnout becomes a genuine concern for student leaders at faith-based institutions where student leaders may be more susceptible to denial and perfectionism. Ignoring the deeper root-causes of stress may lead to other adverse outcomes for developing student leaders. Normalizing burnout as a "right-of-passage or developmental stage," as one participant put it, is also not helpful for maturing leadership. Student leaders, especially perfectionists, may

think burnout is silly and trivial, according to the study. Student leaders who have unmet role expectations or are overcommitted may also suddenly disappear to deal with their stress independently. The resultant data findings agree with existing research that having a supportive community, engaged supervisors, and stress reduction tools, especially during heightened stress, is critical (Hecht & Oehme, 2021; Hermanson, 2021; Kecojevic et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Morgan, 2021; Porru, 2021).

   Discouragement leading to apathy - "They don't care, so why should I?" Stress-related burnout and breakdown often included feelings of discouragement and apathy among student leaders. Participants expressed that as time wore on, they simply "had nothing left" and were brought to a place of caring less about their leadership role and responsibilities. Participants expressed a sense of being worn down or "drained" to an apathetic state, also found in the irritability theme. Psychologists note that intense and prolonged stress could severely impact students' mental and physical well-being during COVID-19 (Hecht & Oehme, 2021; Hermanson, 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Morgan, 2021). Student leader participants indicated feeling more self-conscious and struggled with motivation, feeling discouraged after prolonged stress. Discouragement led one student to feel undervalued as a leader, while others experienced their leadership role as merely a job. Some participants eventually arrived at feeling increasingly apathetic toward their role because of the discouragement caused by continuous stress.

   Discouragement and apathy are precursors to depression (Bono et al., 2020; Kecojevic et al., 2021; Moriarty et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). Encouraging student leaders in specific and meaningful ways may counter or stave off feelings of apathy. This research shows when students felt like those they were leading did not care, they began to question the purpose of their leadership. Undergraduate students in general displayed increasing levels of apathy, which may

have transferred to the student leaders during the 2020-2021 academic year. Pandemic-induced isolation only exacerbated discouragement and apathy (Bono et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2021). Some participants responded by shifting their priorities away from their leadership role to their academics. Many seniors began to focus on graduation and life beyond college. Participant value shifts could be attributed to feelings of discouragement relevant to their leadership roles. Student leaders appeared to conserve their energy for academics, close relationships, and other things they valued within their scope of control. Fortunately, the undergraduate schedule did not leave student leaders in this state longer than a single academic year. Without breaks in the academic calendar, student leader discouragement and apathy could lead to depression, cynicism, and even quitting (Mangan, 2020).

Irritability - "Loss of niceties over time." Prolonged stress caused participants to feel "worn down to shortness." As time went on, some student leaders began to notice increased levels of irritability with teammates and those students they led. "Losing niceties over time," as one participant put it, may be one way stress revealed itself in the life of leaders and among leadership teams. Individual personality types responded to stress differently; some responded to stress with irritability leading to anger. Some recent studies have shown an increase in mood disorder symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic (Charles et al., 2021). Anger, at its core, is a defense mechanism and a way of armoring yourself against the negative consequences of stress (Brown, 2018). While irritability appears less frequently than other themes, it can act as a good indicator of negative stress student leaders can watch out for. When student leaders are more irritable, I recommend they take stock of the amount of stress they are experiencing and use the various coping strategies shared in the next coping section. Irritability is symptomatic of more profound stress; perhaps stress built up over time and unintentionally erupted (Zimmermann et

al., 2020). Findings from this research suggest student leaders can benefit from respected people around them providing honest feedback and accountability.

Unhealthy lifestyle - Sleeping and eating. Participants recognized they had not cared for themselves as much as they would usually have due to stress. Two primary areas of unhealthy lifestyle behaviors reported in my study were lack of sleep and poor nutrition. Multiple studies have shown the adverse impact COVID-19 has had on undergraduate student sleep patterns and eating habits (Bono et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2021; Moriarty et al., 2021; Kecojevic et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020;). Sleep and nutrition accounted for most of the findings related to the stress impact on student leaders' lifestyles in this study. Taking care of these "bare necessities," as one participant called them, is critical. Undergraduate students are notorious for poor quality sleep and eating habits (Wallace et al., 2017; Zellner, 2006). Additional stress may contribute to existing bad habits making them worse. Student leaders noted that good self-care included regular adequate sleep and good nutrition in the subsequent findings section.

Noteworthy was the absence of more unhealthy lifestyle behaviors such as screen usage (Netflix binging), alcohol, drugs, promiscuity, etc. Recent studies have shown increased perceived stress and alcohol use among college students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Charles et al., 2021). Fidem and Fidelium both require and uphold a community lifestyle agreement that precludes many of these behaviors for all students, especially student leaders. This is not to say that these numbing behaviors are not happening at faith-based institutions; it is just that the data from this study did not show these practices.

Personal loss - "I'm experiencing loss too, am I allowed to grieve?" Student leader participants expressed a hesitancy to acknowledge personal loss during the pandemic. Many

participants felt that because they had not experienced death first hand due to the pandemic, they were somehow prohibited from expressing grief for their loss of time, experiences, job, finances, etc. Some participants said they felt it might somehow be inappropriate to grieve their situation in light of others' circumstances. Questioning the appropriateness to grieve made student leaders hesitate to be vulnerable with one another. I agree with Brown (2012) and Brown (2018) that ironically, being vulnerable may have created a connection between themselves and others experiencing loss, thereby robbing each other of the shared experience and mutual support. Clarity around perceived appropriateness is a meaningful conversation to have as a developing leader for two reasons; first, it leads to personal health and wellness. Second, it models to others how to be vulnerable and process their own experiences with loss (Brown, 2018). Not acknowledging something as powerful as grief because of perception is not in the best interest of anyone. All sorrow and loss are valid and should not be qualified and dismissed in light of the comparative experiences of others (Lee et al., 2021).

Senior student leader participants felt a sense of loss due to COVID-19 impacting the experience of their final year in college. Many wondered about graduation and the culmination of their academic achievements. Seniors also expressed uncertainty and a sense of loss concerning what future faced them as they embarked with their degrees and leadership experiences into a world still recovering from a pandemic. These findings concur with other recent studies which indicate a sense of academic loss for many undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hasan & Bao, 2020). Fear, grief, and feelings of loss were a part of student leader stress experience further supported by the literature (Bono et al., 2020; Charles et al., 2021; Kecojevic et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020).

Coping With Stress

After looking at the causes of stress and the impact of stress, the third aim of the study identified the various processes and strategies student leaders employed to resolve their main concerns regarding the implications and consequences of stress. The study showed student leaders used several stress reduction strategies to address their main stress concerns. Participants found immediate supervisor, leadership teammates, and community, along with an ability to pause, organize and prioritize, establish good personal boundaries, and practice healthy self-care as viable ways to alleviate stress.

There were a few outliers worth mentioning. Again, behaviors commonly associated with the undergraduate demographic, retail therapy, Netflix, and social media (Catalano, 2021) only appeared once in my findings. In other words, participants in this study did not report turning to these types of behaviors to cope with stress. Also noteworthy were participants' general recognition that stress coping was an area of leadership growth. Some participants resorted to a "just suck it up attitude" when it came to stress and said they could do better but often did not know-how. Others felt like stress was "kicking their butt!" Multiple participants desired to grow in the area of prioritization and stated they felt guilty of overextending themselves. Working on better balance and time management was a common sentiment shared by student leader participants. Coping skills can play a moderating role in self-leadership and stress among college students (Maykrantz & Houghton, 2018). While the first research question examined the causes of stress and the second research question explored the overall impact of stress, the third question looked specifically at how student leaders coped and managed their experiences with stress.

Supportive supervisor - Advisor, guide, model, supporter, encourager. Direct supervisors play a vital role in helping student leaders manage their stress (Mangan, 2020; Sallee, 2021). My findings concur with this view as student leaders reported their supervisors often had a direct hand in hiring, training, and supporting student leaders in their respective areas. Student leader feedback suggested supervisors provided helpful ways for them to cope with stress. Conversely, the lack of a supervisory presence became a source of additional stress for student leaders. Noteworthy, participants never gave their supervisor a neutral response; responses were either positive or negative, further demonstrating the power supervisors have to address the stress concerns of student leaders. Regular direct feedback from supervisors was significant and much appreciated by the participants.

"Leaders need leaders," said one participant. Others added they enjoyed supervisors who could relate to their experience. Two participants mentioned their supervisors were closer in age to themselves and could connect with what they were going through. Regardless of age disparity, proactive supervisors who regularly "checked in" provided accountability, including exercises such as a "pulse check on the team meeting agendas" that were appreciated and seen as an essential way to cope with stress. Supportive supervisors also helped student leaders process stressful situations. These supervisors were able to address needs, "establish healthy boundaries, model appropriate behavior, be an advisor, guide, model, supporter, and encourager" according to participants (Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2018; Sallee, 2021). However, one student stated that their supervisor appeared to be too busy to help them, which was identified as a significant source of stress for that leader. Supervisors' stress levels and perceived busyness directly impacted the student leaders they supervise (Hermanson, 2021). COVID-19 increased the stress levels of supervisors, which, in some cases, had a negative roll-

on effect on their student leaders. Yet, supervisors have the opportunity to model and help student leaders create healthy boundaries because of how influential they can be (Sallee, 2021).

The impact of an engaged supervisor in the life of a student leader cannot be overstated. Stress coping implications of a supervisor who takes time to know and invest in their students will be rewarded with stronger leaders for their efforts. Interestingly, this researcher saw considerable growth in participants between the first and second interview rounds. The trade-off of not being their supervisor provided a safe place for students to talk about their stress experiences, free of judgment. Research shows that community and trusted individuals who listen and support greatly benefited undergraduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). Perhaps there is something to be said for a neutral party the students were so willing and appreciative of the opportunity to process their stress experiences.

Pause - "Taking five minutes saved me so many times." Space to stop and the process stress looked different for each participant. A healthy theme of "pause," in the words of one participant, emerged from the data. The pause category is different from the earlier mentioned burnout and breakdown theme, where ghosting behavior presented more as escapism for participants rather than the regular rhythm of stepping back to take a pause. Choosing to stop or step back and pause described how some participants effectively managed their stress response. Student leaders reported "going non-stop." I observed that student leaders were looking for permission to stop, breathe, and create space to refocus. Those that permitted themselves to pause said it "literally saved their lives many times." So why don't all student leaders practice pause? There could be many reasons, but stress tends to discount the worth of taking a break (Bono et al., 2020; Moriarty et al., 2021). However, my data points to a different conclusion indicating that pausing can help with better decision making. Far from wasting time, taking a

brief pause, nap, walk, prayer, conducting a needs assessment, writing pros, and cons lists, and other forms of stepping back helped student leaders move forward more effectively. Practices like these were also supported in the literature for student wellbeing during COVID-19 (Bono et al., 2020).

Establishing a discipline like pausing takes effort, but such rhythms were vital according to the data. Taking a "stress break," as one participant put it, provided the opportunity to think clearly and critically about the problem, allowing them to develop better solutions. Another participant said that pausing is "a moment not to fix; student leaders are a bunch of fixers." In addition to better decision-making, student leaders shared some of the benefits of pausing, including remembering why they wanted to be a leader and what they loved about the role in the first place. It is also worth noting that categories such as exercise and prayer, discussed below, possess a pause-like quality. These and other stress coping strategies can be combined with pausing for maximized benefit. Pausing, taking five minutes, or simply granting permission to take a moment to think clearly, can be done in many different ways. I concur with Hecht & Oehme (2021) and recommend student leaders must be encouraged to pause and apply stress management strategies that work best for them.

Organization and prioritization - "Google Calendar is my best friend. It calms me." The study shows that staying organized and prioritizing responsibilities helped student leaders navigate more effectively during times of stress. The data confirmed that using tools like Google Calendar helped participants stay organized and meet their student leadership responsibilities. Participants expressed a certain level of comfort being able to stay organized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants also remarked that not feeling prepared caused them additional stress. Such stress can be avoided with good organization and proper prioritization. Leadership

uncertainty during COVID-19 discussed earlier naturally led student leaders to want to stay organized and prioritize their schedules well. Participants suggested that staying organized helped them "Feel less out of control," while prioritizing helped participants gain their bearings when faced with multiple challenges and ever-changing demands.

Early findings underscored student leaders' tendency to self-describe as perfectionists, overachievers, fixers, and doers. Student leaders also demonstrated a deficiency in saying no and could be accused of being overly optimistic. These generalizations are relevant to the discussion when participants expressed difficulty setting reasonable timeframes, leaving little buffer room in their schedules, as discussed earlier. Managing personal bandwidth was seen as a necessary leadership skill set, according to participants. One participant stated the ability to stay organized and prioritize well was a leadership responsibility and prerequisite. This participant seemed to logically question how a student can lead others when they cannot lead themselves. How can one disorganized person who cannot prioritize help another disorganized person who cannot prioritize? It is a reasonable question. Participants commented on the stress caused by fellow leadership team members who were not as organized as them. Willink & Babin (2017) concur that leaders must be counted upon during stressful times to stay organized and focused on the mission objective.

Finally, staying organized and exercising good prioritization had a psychological calming effect on more than one participant. These student leaders credited their Google Calendar with bringing calm to their lives. Controlling what they could help create a calming effect, peace, and a semblance of order when much of the 2020-2021 academic year was chaotic due to the impact of the pandemic.

Personal boundaries - "Don't let others control you." The majority of student leaders interviewed said having healthy boundaries with themselves and others helped address the impact of stress. The majority of the participants specifically mentioned "boundaries" by name when making simple yes and no commitments. I found boundaries revealed participants' priorities and underscored the controlling impact of "yes's" and "no's" in our lives as explained by Cloud & Townsend (2017). Boundary setting was a self-reported growth area for many of the participants. Personal boundaries generally took the form of commitment making around relationships, work, and academics. The inability to say "yes and no" will often led to participants feeling overwhelmed and overcommitted.

Interestingly, student leaders struggled with saying yes and no due to associated relational risk and fear of disappointing others. The fear of missing out, or FOMO, was a genuine concern for student leaders. Milyavskaya et al. (2018) stated that FOMO is a natural phenomenon in students experiencing fatigue and stress. Some participants countered this by establishing a decision-making rationale for agreeing to specific opportunities or requests. Staying organized with a calendar, routine, and regular disciplines helped participants know how and when to take on extra responsibilities. Those that are not as organized often struggled with their relationships and leadership commitments (Cloud & Townsend, 2017).

As proposed by Komives (2011), Komives & Sowcik (2020), and Kouzes & Posner (2018) my study also found that commitment making was a crucial part of self-leadership. Participants, in general, recognized this was a critical leadership growth area. Those participants who did maintain good boundaries reported more enjoyment in their roles. Other benefits included increased clarity and mutual respect among participant's team members. Faith-based institutions often subscribe to or simply adopt a servant leadership model (Komives et al. 2020;

Timms, 2018). A limited number of student leaders reported that they felt student leadership service was "taken advantage of" by their institutions and could have been better supported. Whether these feelings of inequity were based upon individual perception or not, the impact of obligation can lead to resentment (Brown, 2018). While data did not specifically identify resentment, I noted a perception of overdue improvement and need for better support of student leaders. Faith-based institutions' expectations of student leaders emerged as a meta-theme and will be discussed later in this chapter and further in Chapter 6.

Self-Care - "Care for the soul can be a lot of things." Self-care regularly appeared in participants' language to describe prioritizing personal health and wellness (Bono et al., 2020; Hecht & Oehme, 2021; Hermanson, 2021). Findings demonstrated participants had diverse views of what exactly constituted self-care, such as exercise, nutrition, being outdoors, time with friends, and keeping their room clean. The self-care theme closely related to research question two and provided helpful stress management techniques. Combining multiple findings such as a time to pause, prayer, community, and exercise helped participants cope with stress exponentially. Participants simply referred to these methods ubiquitously as self-care.

Making time for these practices is critical (Shaller, 2021). Shaller (2021) includes meditation, mindfulness, and other coping techniques as helpful ways students can de-stress and develop resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants who applied similar self-care techniques during the pandemic often had a more positive outlook. While the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed social interaction, closed gyms, and encouraged shelter in place, many participants started running again, playing a musical instrument that they previously did not have time for, and reached out to friends and family online. Self-care practices can be cultivated and

shared with others to enhance individual leaders and teams (Bono et al., 2020; Hecht & Oehme, 2021; Shaller, 2021).

Community - A support system inside and out. The majority of participants mentioned the power of friendship and community support systems they had in place on and off-campus California's first-ever Surgeon General, Nadin Burke Harris, stated, "Trusted relationships - these connected, nurturing, trusted relationships are the number one antidote to stress and adversity" during the COVID-19 pandemic (Morgan, 2021). Participants commented on the importance of having good friends and an encouraging community to support them as student leaders. Accountability, honesty, and encouragement were some of the positive attributes attributed to having a supportive community both inside and outside the university.

The pandemic required student leaders to be more intentional about building community and maintaining healthy relationships (Bono et al., 2020; Hermanson, 2021). With the advent of social distancing, students had to find new ways to remain social (Morgan, 2021; Hecht & Oehme, 2021; Son et al., 2020). Physical distancing was required to stop the spread of COVID-19, but undergraduate student leaders are hardwired for social interaction critical for their personal growth and development (Astin, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2014). Having key relationships acted as a support system of sorts providing participants with perspective, encouragement, and motivation to continue their studies and leadership responsibilities which was also supported throughout the literature (Bono et al. 2020).

Unfortunately, some student leaders reported, "feeling lost," a numbing or "basement experience" of being disconnected from relationships and the larger reality (Morgan, 2021; Perry, 2021). Student leaders reported disconnects between team members when meeting online. Concerns over work quality, individual and team development, and team chemistry all surfaced

in the data and were prevalent in other studies focused on distance learning (Castalano, 2021; Morgan 2020). Student leaders who were intentional with their relationships and motivated themselves and others to stay connected felt the positive stress coping impact of these efforts. The challenge, of course, was that feeling stressed, isolated, and unmotivated generally inhibits community engagement (Bono et al., 2020). Student leaders who were creative within the COVID-19 guidelines could find ways to "think outside the box" the pandemic had placed them in. These participants reported feelings of encouragement and connection.

I found that identity formation during stress was critical for undergraduate student leadership development and concurs with the findings of Kouzes & Posner (2018). Participants who reported having healthy relationships outside of their leadership role and away from their campuses viewed themselves with a greater sense of perspective and personal identity. Student leaders also said the shared benefit of being there to help friends and family, even when being there meant meeting via Zoom video conferencing was important to them. Community support helped student leaders take their eyes off themselves and their immediate stress (Bono et al., 2020).

Team - Openness and honesty. *S*tudent leaders found critical relationships forged with their teammates were vital for stress support. Team openness to discuss and share stress was welcomed and viewed as supportive by participants. Similar to the supportive supervisor findings communicated earlier, team impact on participants was never neutral. Student leaders either recognized the positive support received from their team or wished they had such support from their team. Unfortunately, some student leaders indicated that their leadership team was a source of stress for them. Either way, having a supportive team was a significant way for student

leaders to cope and manage stress (Komives, 2011; Komives & Sowcik, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

Openness and honesty build trust in teams (Brown, 2018; Willink & Babin, 2017; Lencioni, 2002). Groups that displayed humility and were vulnerable with one another during times of stress reported higher levels of trust and more significant stress coping (Brown, 2018; Lencioni, 2002). Participants indicated that they could mutually support each other during stressful times. However, teams responding to constant change without trust quickly became an added source of stress for participants. Groups that addressed the pandemic challenges with openness and honesty, vulnerability and humility, and commitment to each other provided leadership team members with a vital way to cope with stress (Bono et al., 2020; Brown, 2018; Sallee, 2021).

Establishing teams like this during COVID-19 proved difficult. Participants reported difficulties getting to know one another and establishing team rapport during virtual meetings. It was challenging to help, encourage, and support one another if team members felt largely unknown. One participant encouraged student leaders to stay humble, reminding themselves that "everyone is still learning and growing as leaders." Extending grace and the benefit of the doubt is also easier when student leaders are familiar, open, and honest with each other; something that was challenging for student leadership teams to do during the pandemic but was also supported in the literature (Bono, 2020; Brown, 2018; Morgan, 2021).

Ask for help - "Help; stress is kicking my butt!" One of the hardest things for some student leaders to do was ask for help when feeling overwhelmed by stress. Student leaders often focus on helping others by providing resources that they could also benefit from. Taking advantage of these resources was something multiple participants said they should do more of.

Asking for help was perceived by some participants as a leadership weakness and an area for growth. Yet, when leaders ask for help, it can be an opportunity for them to lead and model vital stress management techniques (Brown, 2018; Bono et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). Student leaders who previously experienced therapeutic counseling credited these services for their current ability to cope and manage their stress. I found that, whether it was past counseling or skills learned from previous leadership training, participants who recalled these tools were greatly helped in their stress coping (Morgan 2021; Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020).

Morgan (2021) cited a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study from February 2021 that found a 31% increase in the number of people reporting feeling anxious and depressed between 2019 and 2021. Such a significant increase underscores the importance of asking for help from support and care resources available (Bono et al., 2020; Hermanson, 2021; Son et al., 2021). Perry (2021) referenced a recent Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) study from the end of fall 2020. Academic leaders from 32 CCCU member institutions reported 66% seeing similar or decreased demand for students seeking mental health support while at the same time, 78% reported seeing students struggling (academically). While these figures seem paradoxical, options have never been more readily available now that mental health services are online (Morgan, 2021). Still, it may appear that students at faith-based universities were not taking advantage of them during the pandemic (Shaller, 2021). The findings from my study also indicated that student leaders struggled with asking for help even when resources were available.

Role of Faith

Jesus invited everyone in the biblical gospel account to "Come to me, all who labor and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (*English Standard*

Version Bible, 2001, Mathew 11:28-30). Christians over the centuries have found Christ's

invitation to be a source of comfort and encouragement during stressful times. Faith played a

significant role in how student leaders cope with stress. An unhealthy or manufactured and

obligatory faith caused student leaders at faith-based institutions to feel more pressure and

increased stress according to the study's findings. Only when faith was authentic, lived out, and

applied to their challenges and experiences did faith provide positive outcomes for participants,

including an enhanced awareness of God's presence, increased communication with God, a

supportive community of faith, and an invaluable perspective.

Equally important was what participants shared when asked to consider what their views

of stress might be if they were not a person of faith. Coping with stress sans faith revealed that

participants adopted a more fatalistic outlook, became self-reliant, prideful, disconnected, and

without grounding. Several participants mentioned their relationships would be distanced,

resulting in their feeling more closed off and less likely to ask for help. Others anticipated

turning to spirituality and self-care, increased exercise routines, and partaking in other healthy

stress management techniques. Some shared they would employ more unhealthy numbing habits

such as drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity to cope with stress minus their faith. While the literature

addresses the benefits of spirituality and the undergraduate experience (Astin et al., 2011;

Fosnacht & Broderick, 2020; Pfund & Miller-Perrin, 2019; Wang & Distelberg, 2019) and

undergraduate leader spirituality (Komives et al. 2020), there remains little research on the

crucial role faith plays in developing stress resilience of undergraduate student leaders. At the

time of this research study, available studies on the role Christian faith played in developing

stress resilience for undergraduate student leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic were not

found.

Turn to God - "God already walks with me." Student leaders felt God's presence during the heightened stress of the COVID-19 pandemic. Faith helped participants recall that God was present with them in their stress. Participants reported that God was in their midst, inviting and available for them to turn to when stress levels rose. Participants would often turn to God in times of desperation, exhaustion, and feeling overwhelmed. Data revealed specific moments where participants acknowledged God and his power and presence in their lives during times of stress. Student leaders expressed their faith through the sense of relief, comfort, and peace participants derived from a vital personal faith relationship when turning to God. As one participant paraphrased the biblical passage, 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001).

Proximity to a higher power when student leaders are overwhelmed by stress was significant to this study and the literature (Komives et al., 2020; Moss, 2021; Perry, 2021). Beyond simply having access to wisdom and strength, participants indicated that their personal relationship with God provided them the most peace and comfort during times of stress. The ability to "let down" or "give over" or "release the burden and weight of leadership" was regularly mentioned in response to the vital role faith played in influencing student leaders at faith-based institutions. Stress may have even provided an opportunity for this awareness.

Although not stated explicitly by participants, there was a confidence that emerged from brief moments of stress crisis that may not have been otherwise. The moment of "letting down, giving over, or releasing the burden" also indicated that participants made the conscious choice to do so. No one reported being forced to go to God. Again, obligatory faith led to a sense of guilt and increased stress among participants. However, the individual choice was significant, as was the reason student leaders made the choice. Data showed if participants felt obligated to or

were expected to turn to God as a result of being a "Good Christian leader at a faith-based institution," the impact was predominantly negative.

Communication with God - Prayer and scripture. Prayer and scripture reading regularly appeared throughout participant responses when coping with stress. These two mediums were associated with communicating with God; specifically, participants reported hearing from God through scripture and spoke with God through prayer. Scripture often provided participants with perspective and meaning during times of stress (Moss, 2021; Perry, 2021). At the same time, prayer practiced both privately and collectively connected participants relationally with God and others, making them feel less isolated. Many faith-based institutions created opportunities for students experiencing isolation and loneliness to communicate with God and each other through virtual prayer meetings on Zoom and provided online spiritual resources (Moss, 2021). Shared experiences of collective prayer with fellow student leaders were significant to student leaders. Every participant confirmed the value of prayer and scripture in fostering a genuine faith relationship with God during times of stress during follow-up interviews.

Communication continued the idea of relational intimacy with God as described in the previous finding; turn to God. Perspective can often be hard to establish and maintain during stressful seasons (Bono et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). Participants reported that prayer left them with a practical sense of perspective when facing anxiety and stress. Communicating with God recalibrated participant's outlook on their current circumstances. Time spent in prayer reminded student leaders of God's closeness. Praying with others also reminded them of the faith community around them that they could rely upon. Participants

shared about having a group of close friends to send "S.O.S." texts to ask for prayer. The faith community was an important finding discussed next.

Grounding in the scriptures tempered anxiety caused by stress for many participants. The example of Jesus and what he endured to be faithful to God and the example of the people of faith throughout the pages of scripture helped participants connect and relate their own experiences. The scriptures also provided encouragement, promises of God's faithfulness to them that seek him, and a track record of God's enduring love for them and the world. God's love and commitment were particularly encouraging, given the state of the pandemic world in which this study was conducted. Participants said that prayer and scripture helped them make sense of a stress-filled world (Moss, 2021).

As previously discussed, participants who felt obligated or forced in their faith experienced increased pressure and anxiety. While maintaining the discipline of prayer and scripture reading can be healthy and habit-forming, it began to lose its positive influence when faith became a checkbox. Participants felt guilty when sharing about neglecting prayer and scripture reading. Conversely, participants described keeping regular morning routines that included prayer and scripture as life-giving. The relationship between "get to" and "have to" demonstrated two perspectives that could help or hinder student leader stress levels at faith-based universities. A significant determinant in how student leaders felt stress occurred when communication with God through prayer and scripture moved from privilege to task.

Community of faith - "Christian community is a shared faith experience." The results of the study align with the findings of Bono et al. (2020), Morgan (2021), Lee et al. (2021), and Son et al. (2020) that actively maintaining a healthy community and relationships during stressful periods was vital for student mental health and wellness. Whether it was a

supervisor or vital relationships with teammates, friends, and family, the importance of

participating in a faith community came as no surprise for student leaders at faith-based

institutions. Having a community to connect with, knowing, and being known was very

important to participants. Faith provided a deeper level of shared understanding and experience

for student leaders to tap into and help address the concerns regarding the impact of stress on

their lives. Komives et al. (2020) identified a critical positive connection between leadership and

spirituality, including several essential group values such as collaboration, shared purpose, and

controversy with civility. McGonigal (2015) described altruism and deeper community

connection as unique and powerful benefits from stress experiences. As previously mentioned,

prayer, scripture reading, and turning to God were enhanced when practiced in community.

Scripture itself speaks to the importance of "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of

some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day (of the Lord) drawing

near" (*English Standard Version Bible, 2001*, Hebrews 10:25).

Faith communities on and off campus were essential to participants. Having a shared

spiritual understanding and philosophical outlook on the world provided student leaders and their

teams with a more profound sense of purpose and meaning (Astin et al., 2011; Komives et al.,

2020). Praying together during staff meetings, sending encouraging text messages with scripture

to one another, and supporting each other through stressful times were meaningful ways a

community of faith played an essential role in the lives of student leaders. Participants also

mentioned having a common faith gave them a basis to understand and appreciate a wide range

of perspectives. As noted by Komives et al. (2020), spirituality aided leaders in controversy with

civility. Faith communities provide diverse populations with divergent perspectives with a

common ground and are essential in the polarized world of 2020-2021. Participants shared that

belonging to a faith community also helped them ask for help when they needed it. Two international student leaders shared that they felt welcomed and included at their respective campuses because they were part of a larger faith community. One transfer student leader contrasted her experience from a larger out-of-state institution to a smaller faith-based community highlighting the community of faith was the number one difference.

Having a vital faith community off-campus was equally important. Student leaders needed to have places where they could feel included in meaningful ways outside their leadership roles. The value of having a church or Bible study group to regularly attend off-campus was something participants looked forward to. Some participants expressed the loss of participating in chapel on-campus and church services off-campus due to COVID-19. The perspective of not being able to attend such services made student leaders appreciate them all the more.

Perspective - "I am not the savior of this program." A faith-based perspective played a significant role in helping student leaders cope with stress. Turning to God through prayer and the scriptures and living out beliefs within the larger community of faith provided participants with a healthy, more accurate perspective of themselves amidst stress. The majority of participants felt that faith gave them a sense of purpose, gratitude, and hope, which were vital for developing stress resilience (Komives et al., 2020; Moss, 2021; Perry, 2021). A faith-based perspective went beyond simple encouragement. Multiple participants described a decidedly more sobering, truthful, gritty outlook because of how complex their stress challenges were during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings revealed that only a vital personal faith is capable of reframing challenges and strengthening personal resolve. In contrast, faith in name alone proved to be counterproductive and caused more stress for participants.

While stress is a shared experience, does personality type influence a person's perspective on stress? The question of personality did arise after interviewing a very logically minded student leader. Fitted perfectly for his role as the SGA Controller, Luke approached stress differently from the other participants, adopting a very logical approach to stress. When faced with uncertainty, it appeared Luke started with what he did know, planned multiple scenarios, and left room for what he called the "Seventh Option." The Seventh Option was how Luke incorporated a practical faith in God. According to Luke, he could develop options one through six himself, but God was his Seventh Option. Calculating for God was a unique perspective which demonstrated participants' faith in dynamic ways.

Perspective was the single most crucial role faith played in how student leaders cope with stress. Perspective was also one of the more difficult things to achieve when experiencing high degrees of stress (Bono et al., 2020; Moss, 2021). A person's faith in God could reframe their situation, circumstances, and outlook. It is important to note that participants placed faith *in* God rather than in themselves or in faith itself. Faith, in this case, had to be grounded in something or someone more significant than themselves. One of the more telling discoveries was that faith was often described as authentic, honest, and even gritty at times. Faith-based perspectives did not align with wishful thinking or pie in the sky faith stereotypes that are not necessarily grounded in reality. For faith to be practical, it had to be applied to stressful situations directly. To be meaningful, participants had to wrestle with preconceived notions of what faith should be for what it was.

A leader's broken eyeglasses were one of the more powerful metaphors used by participants. Only when the "rose-colored glasses" were broken by leadership experience did the student leader feel like they could understand and empathize with those hurting at their faith-

based university. This type of perspective probably cannot be taught. Instead, I strongly suggest that the more accurate leadership views happen when genuine faith intersects with the realities of stress and all it reveals.

Equally influential was that faith allowed participants to be more charitable, humble, and grateful when encountering stress. Stress drove faith participants to turn to God through prayer, scripture and draw near one another. This, in turn, opened them to engage vulnerability and authenticity, producing compassion and grace for themselves and others. Faith reminded participants that they were human, beautifully broken, and held in common grace with their peers (Perry, 2021). Surrendering to God was no longer a burden but relief and a meaningful way to engage those around them by exercising their leadership role. Faith described as such, allowed participants to realign priorities to "know what is really important" and endowed them with a sense of purpose and fortitude. In short, vital faith does have the power to strengthen the stress resilience of undergraduate student leaders.

Hindrance - Expectations of "a good Christian." The eyeglasses metaphor underscored how faith could create a false dichotomy for student leaders. A perfectionistic perspective of faith led participants to feel increased anxiety and stress. Faith-based universities like Fidem and Fidelium indeed have higher expectations of their students, translating to even higher expectations of their student leaders. However, experiences like the cracked eyeglasses provided student leaders with the opportunity to develop more "accurate" clarity about how their faith engaged with the stress around them.

A "good Christian" idea seemed to be a misnomer because it often led students to worry about being good enough to lead. Participants wrestled with faith when they felt the burden of being a perfect person was a prerequisite for being a good leader. The misconception appeared

to be something each leader was in the process of working out for themselves. COVID-19 and all the stress of the 2020-2021 academic year only pressurized these questions for student leaders. Questions asked during the initial interviews were recalled by participants who were still processing answers. Some even shared that they had discussed with fellow student leaders who affirmed that they too were grappling with what it meant to lead at a faith-based institution. Data findings suggest student leaders at faith-based institutions may carry an additional burden of performative pressure or perfectionism to their student leader counterparts at secular institutions.

Limitations

This study took place during the 2020-2021 academic year during the COVID-19 pandemic. Undergraduate student leaders from Christian faith-based institutions in California made up the 12 participants interviewed. The study's perceived limitation is the narrow focus on Christian faith, which did not address a broader spectrum of faith and spirituality. However, the findings and model discussed in this study can be further developed to investigate how other faiths, besides Christianity, influence leadership stress resilience. Grounded theory examined undergraduate student leaders actively participating in leadership development programs in a wide range of leadership roles. Other methodologies such as phenomenology, case study, and others may yield additional data beneficial to understanding how undergraduate student leaders develop stress resilience. While this study investigated diverse leadership experiences across various academic backgrounds and standings, future studies may focus specifically on first-year leaders versus returning leaders, international student leaders, or inquire by individual leadership position, class level, residential or commuter student, etc. Participants had previously served in

formal student leadership positions for a minimum of one semester (approximately four months) or more.

Due to COVID-19, student leadership programs changed significantly, with student leaders serving in hybrid and remote learning contexts. These drastic changes directly impacted the student leadership experience and should be taken into account. I recommend conducting a similar study post-pandemic. All interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. For most participants, this had been the first time that they had processed the stress experienced as a student leader during the pandemic. Participant feedback was often raw and unfiltered. Only 50% of student leaders could participate in a second follow-up interview due to scheduling conflicts. Although this study focused on undergraduate students in traditional four-year private, Christian faith-based universities, findings may apply to other undergraduate student leaders serving at a variety of diverse institutions.

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a period of unprecedented stress for undergraduate student leaders. The pandemic provided a boiling point revealing how stress impacted student leaders. The purpose of this study was to explain why and how student leaders experience stress, the influence, and impact of the stress, how student leaders cope with stress, and the role faith plays when stress is encountered. Student leaders experienced stress when leading peers, navigating the duality of being both student and leader, performance doubt, feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed, dealing with the challenge of COVID, Zoom and online fatigue, and interpersonal team stress. The impact of this stress on student leaders included a positive degree of motivation and a negative tendency toward perfectionism, general uncertainty, burnout and breakdown, discouragement leading to apathy, irritability, and experiences of

personal loss. Student leaders coped with stress through their supervisor, taking a pause,

organization and prioritization, healthy personal boundaries, self-care methods, good

community, a healthy open team dynamic, and asking for help. Faith played an influential role

in how student leaders cope with stress. Their Christian faith led participants to turn to God,

communicate to God through prayer and scripture, and increase perspective. However,

participants viewed a superficial or obligatory type of faith as an additional source of negative

stress.

Chapter 5 discussed these findings in detail, identifying important implications and

conclusions from the data. However, 28 themes can point in many different directions. Out of

the findings emerged three meta-themes: undergraduate student leadership expectations at faith-

based universities, processing undergraduate student leadership stress, and the faith factor. The

compounding nature of stress and the important role faith plays will lead to a generalizable

leadership stress resilience model to help understand and address undergraduate student leader

stress in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: LEADERSHIP STRESS RESILIENCE MODEL AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed areas of stress for student leaders that could no longer be ignored. The pandemic compounded stress for student leaders and revealed areas where stress already existed. Many of the stress points inherent in being an undergraduate student leader started to converge and compound during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic certainly made life and leadership more complicated, it was not the original cause of stress. Instead, the pandemic revealed where stress already resided in the lives of student leaders. It is essential for student leaders, educators, and supervisors to note why and how student leaders experience and cope with stress and gain valuable insights into the crucial role faith plays in the life of student leaders at faith-based institutions. As Winston Churchill was reported to have said, "It is important to never waste a good crisis" (Nair, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to examine stress in the lives of student leaders up close and personal. This study will help students and educators alike understand how student leaders might develop vital stress resilience.

Chapter 6 builds upon the findings discussed in Chapter 5, presenting three data emergent meta-themes from each of the four research questions. These three themes serve as a springboard for introducing the leadership stress resilience model intended to be generalizable beyond this study's participants. The leadership stress resilience (LSR) model can help identify the origins and impact of stress in the lives of student leaders. A discussion of three core meta-themes emerged from the data follows next before leading to the introduction and application of the stress resilience model.

Three Meta-Themes

Undergraduate student leaders at faith-based universities during the 2020-2021 academic year experienced and coped with stress different from ever before. As detailed in Chapter 5, this research identified 28 core themes that accounted for the high-stress levels faced by student leaders at faith-based universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of these findings emerged three important meta-themes (a) expectations of undergraduate student leaders at faith-based universities, (b) processing undergraduate student leadership stress, and (c) the faith factor, or how faith influences student leadership stress. The three meta-themes are introduced here and will help unpack the emergent leadership stress resilience model. While current literature (Komives et al., 2020) makes the critical connection between spirituality and leadership, my study adds the influential role stress plays in leadership formation. These findings also extend the understanding of the Christian faith in developing undergraduate student leaders. The meta-themes make up much of the inquiry recommendations and springboard further research for developing undergraduate student leaders in stress resilience.

Undergraduate Student Leadership Expectations at Faith-Based Universities

Student leaders described their new pandemic roles in precarious terms, "like walking a tightrope," in the words of one participant. Studies showed that stress due to COVID-19 escalated physical and mental health concerns for college students across the nation (Bono et al., 2020; Kecojevic, 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Moriarty et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). A unique burden fell on all college campus communities to adjust how they fulfilled their responsibilities in light of many new health and safety protocols (Castalano, 2021; Morgan, 2020). My findings concur with Mangan (2020) that student leaders were expected to enforce COVID-19 protocols

as well. Student leaders experienced increased expectations placed upon them by their institutions during the pandemic.

In addition to carrying out their role as peer leaders and community builders, student leaders had to enforce new COVID-19 health and safety protocols on their campuses. These findings showed such expectations directly conflicted with how participants viewed their roles as community builders. In addition, student leaders had to go above and beyond to keep the institutions they attended operational. This burden added to the stress of successfully navigating new distanced learning realities and doing whatever they could to create a socially distanced community. To their credit, participants understood these new expectations but found them stressful and questioned how reasonable it was for their institutions to ask this of them. I wondered who was taking care of student leaders with institutions asking so much of them.

The findings from this study showed that student leadership role expectations were a source of stress even before COVID-19. The pandemic added additional stress and pressure to developing student leaders who often felt insecure and overwhelmed, prone to perfectionism, and openly spoke of burnout and breakdown. The added pandemic pressure exposed preexistent cracks, like steam bursting from a broken pipe. My findings showed both student leaders and the institution were to blame for student leaders feeling overwhelmed. One participant said that ultimately, the students themselves are responsible for their own choices, how many academic units they take, how much they work, and where they lead. However, the participant said universities could be more supportive to help create sustainable options and opportunities for student leaders.

Student affairs and student success work are incredibly demanding and made even more during the COVID-19 pandemic (Russell O'Grady & Treadwell, 2019; Sallee; 2021). The

already challenging roles of student leaders became overwhelming during the pandemic (Mangan, 2020). When professional staff members feel stretched, student leaders likely feel the stretch, too. Three participants shared that they thought their supervisors were too busy to meet with them or did not invest enough in them. Student leaders must have the right mix of challenge and support, but as one participant said, he received little feedback his supervisor, which caused him even more stress. He wanted to lead well but was never completely clear what his supervisor's expectations were or if they were reasonable. So, he felt left alone to set his own expectations, which, in his case, were perfectionistic and unobtainable, he admitted.

Processing Undergraduate Student Leadership Stress

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a period of universal upheaval and significant stress for college students (Bono et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020). Multiple studies have examined the pandemic's impact on college student's mental health, with calls to increase student care and support (Kecojevic, 2020; Moriarty et al., 2021). An important finding from my study was the need for students to process their leadership stress experiences with trusted individuals beyond their peers. My findings concur with Moss (2021) and Perry (2021) that processing stress experiences played a vital role in stress coping and was critically needed by student leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nowhere was this more felt than in the discussion about personal loss.

Student leaders who felt that they could not express grief over personal loss during the pandemic was concerning. Toward the end of the initial interviews, the majority of student leaders commented that they had not previously considered how stress was impacting their lives and leadership. Other participants shared that they had not previously considered the impact their faith played on their experiences of stress in depth. Mary shared that she had never had the

opportunity to discuss stress as a student leader, despite being a very active second-year RA. "I never really broke down the causes of stress before. I just thought 'my job is stressful' but never saw all the different reasons why it was stressful," Mark realized. "I hadn't thought about how I actually cope with stress. No one asked, and I never really considered the stress; I normalized it and just kept going with it. How you cope wasn't really in my mind when I thought of self-care," John added. All 12 participants thanked me for the opportunity to discuss their experiences, and many expressed their hope that other student leaders will benefit from my research findings.

My study found that processing undergraduate student leadership stress can lead to healthier student leaders; leaders who are informed of stress, its causes, and able to cope with stress are resilient and better able to lead their peers and institutions. Leadership health promotes organizational health (Brown, 2018; Brown, 2020; Lencioni, 2002). Understanding how student leaders process stress during their undergraduate experiences is critically important for developing stress resilience. Yet, data gathered revealed that most participants had never discussed their leadership stress experiences outside of their peers and teammates. There are much more educators can do to help student leaders process stress and develop resilient student leaders.

The Faith Factor

Spirituality and faith play a significant and positive role in student leadership development (Komives et al., 2020). Understanding the critical role faith played in the lives of developing student leaders encountering COVID-19 pandemic stress was insightful and helped answer my fourth research question regarding the impact of faith. Faith presented a critical variable in student leadership stress that could have an important impact on stress resilience. The

role of faith in the lives of these student leaders under stress cannot be underestimated. However, faith is notoriously hard to quantify or measure as a variable. Faith appeared to be much greater than an add-on phenomenon but a notable influence for those student leaders interviewed in this inquiry. Participants reported that the encouragement, strength, and perspective faith afforded them during intense stress made all the difference to them as student leaders. Faith sparked many interesting findings for student leaders in this study and is therefore essential to learn how student leaders can tap into this transformative factor of faith. Educators and supervisors can develop resilience in their students to understand better the critical role faith plays in coping with stress. A vital faith opposed to obligatory faith made the difference between whether faith played a positive or negative role in how student leaders cope with stress.

Leadership Stress Resilience Model

Student leaders often described stress in terms of all that they "had on their plates." One participant shared that her supervisor walked their leadership team through an exercise where they drew the different things, they had going on in their lives on a paper plate and then shared with the group. This comment stuck with me because the colloquialism of having a lot on your plate is synonymous with stress and because it helped leaders understand and process why they were stressed. Understanding how and why leaders are stressed is half the battle, a model to help address their stress was required. Participants agreed that student leaders do not often take a moment to pause and consider everything going on around them. It could be due to an underlying fear that if student leaders did take stock, they might feel even more overwhelmed. Nevertheless, the idea of developing a plate with layers, intersections, and convergences may be able to help student leaders understand stress enough to be able to do something about it (see Figure 3).

Leadership Stress Resilience Model Layers

   The leadership stress resilience (LSR) model begins with a series of ring layers

representing a general undergraduate student experience (see Figure 3).

External Stress

Co-Curriclar

Academic
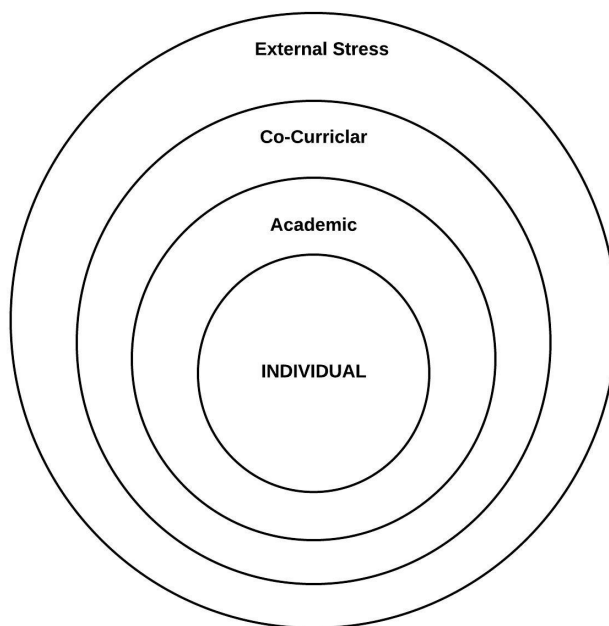
INDIVIDUAL

Figure 3. Leadership Stress Resilience (LSR) model.

Generic descriptors for each level include (a) individual, (b) academic responsibilities, (c) co-

curricular involvements, and (d) any additional external sources of stress. The generalizable

model can shift for this inquiry to include undergraduate student leadership during the time of

the COVID-19 pandemic. Research findings presented in Chapter 5 outlined a similar sequence,

starting with the undergraduate, undergraduate student leaders, and undergraduate student

leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data findings informed the structure of the model

layers (a) the individual, (b) undergraduate, (c) undergraduate student leader, (d) the COVID-19

pandemic (see Figure 4).
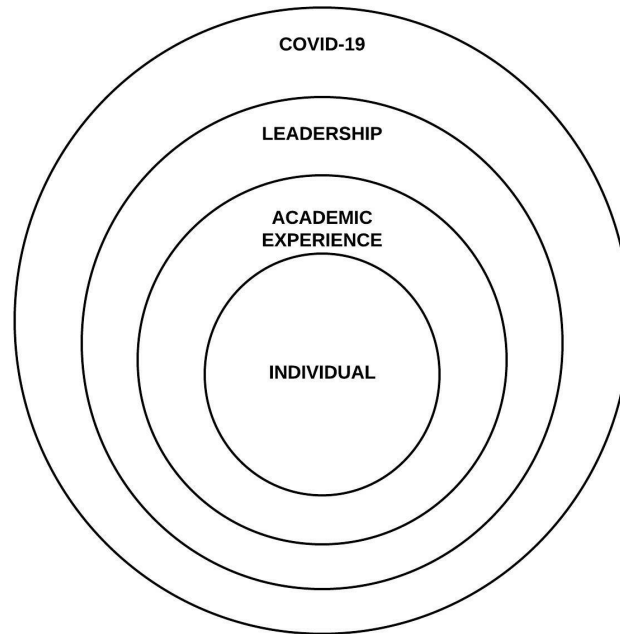
Figure 4. Adapted Leadership Stress Resilience (LSR) Model.

The LSR model lays out a successive view of the phenomenon taking place with the first ring, layer, or level representing the individual, the academic experience, the leader, and the external reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. All three terms, ring, layer, or level can be used interchangeably to represent each dimension of the model. Each layer can be viewed separately to understand its makeup or collectively to see how the layers stack together, compounding the stress experienced by the individual. The combined effect of each successive layer or ring presents a dynamic way to view leadership stress. The model provides a unique opportunity to understand better why and how student leaders experience stress, the impact of stress, coping, and the powerful role faith plays in developing leaders.

The LSR model begins with the primary individual. The individual remains central and fixed while the other layers may change due to the individual's life circumstances. For example, the individual will not always be an undergraduate, their leadership roles will change over time,

and eventually, the COVID-19 pandemic will end. How individuals experience, cope, and understand stress is vast and wide. The field of psychology provides a rich understanding of how stress impacts everyone on the individual level. For my study, the individual will serve as the starting point for building and understanding the LSR model.

The undergraduate experience is both stressful and rewarding, a unique time of personal growth and development in an individual's life (Astin, 1993). The LSR model combines the individual layer with the undergraduate student layer to represent the transition to collegiate life. Becoming a college student is a critical life step that comes with a host of academic, relational, and spiritual connections and relationships. Lifelong choices are made, challenges are overcome, and lessons are learned within this layer or ring of the model.

A select few individual undergraduates will choose to become student leaders during their college experience. Student leadership will be the first time many students will experience what it is like to lead others (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). Additional responsibilities associated with leadership are encountered within the leadership layer. The findings from this study showed students are inevitably introduced to leadership stress at this stage.

Viewing the first three layers of the LSR model, the individual, undergraduate, and leadership, provides possibilities to see the plate metaphor evolve from a static plate to a dynamic LSR model with three integrated layer dimensions. The powerful interplay between the age and developmental stage of the individual embarking on the undergraduate experience who decides to become a student leader is significant (Komives & Sowcik, 2020). Participants experienced both excitement and stress while learning how to succeed at a student level and a leadership level. Major life decisions, relationships, and other discovery experiences make up this beautiful, sometimes tumultuous, season of life (Acharya et al., 2018).

Figure 5 shows what a single source of stress might look like and how it covers multiple layers. The origin of the stress could originate in any one of the three layers covered. For example, study findings indicated leading peers was a source of stress may have its epicenter where the layer of undergraduate student meets the layer of leadership but it radiated outwards impacting the undergraduate and individual layers as well.
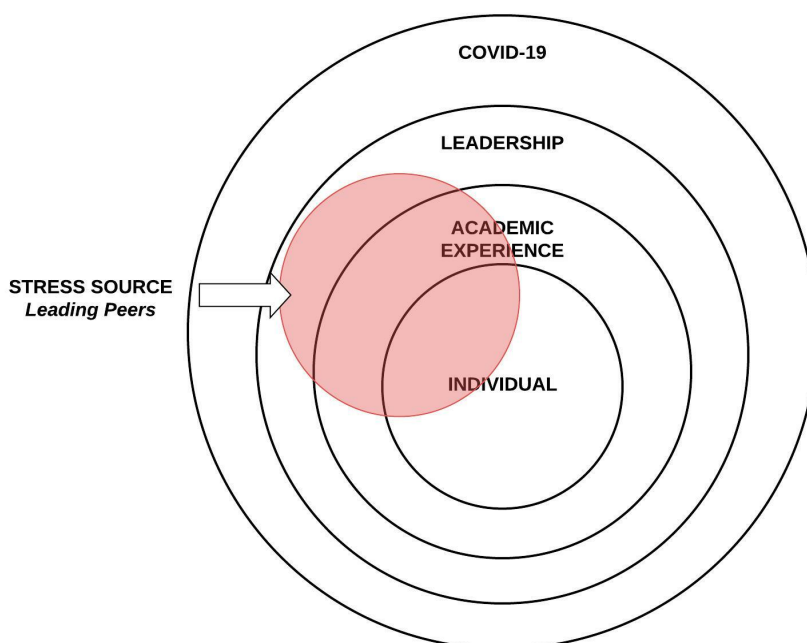
Figure 5. Single Source of Stress Interacting with Leadership Stress Resilience Model.

The model can continue to accommodate two or more of the causes of stress participants experienced in this study. Figure 6 includes an undergraduate student leader who might be experiencing stress of (a) both student and leader (pink), (b) leading peers (red), (c) Zoom video conferencing fatigue (yellow), and (d) feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed (blue). Again, the stress focus of the circle originates on a single layer but radiates out impacting multiple layers but notice the size of the circle can indicate the magnitude of the stress. In this example,

the blue circle is larger indicating stress caused by feeling overcommitted and overwhelmed was greater than the other three; Zoom video conference was less so. The colored stressors in this example overlap in a Venn diagram like manner to show stress convergence.
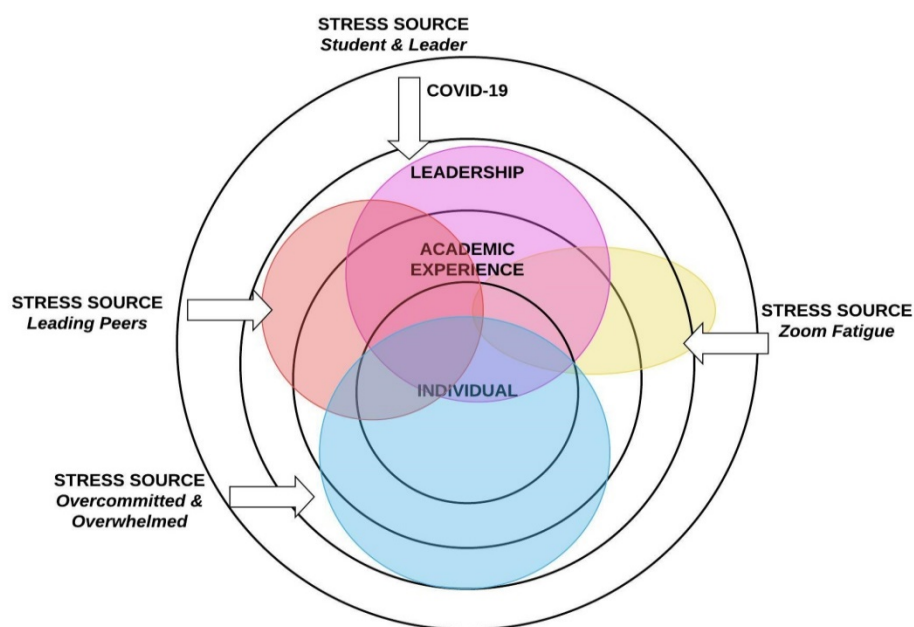
Figure 6. Multiple Sources of Stress Interacting with Leadership Stress Resilience Model.

The fourth ring or layer accounts for unexpected life-impacting circumstances. In this case, the fourth layer represents the COVID-19 pandemic. Each successive ring layer comes around and influences the ring before it. The word pressure was used synonymously with stress by participants; pressure also corresponds accurately in the LSR model. COVID-19 added extra pressure to all aspects of daily living, not just for student leaders but for everyone else the student leaders interacted as well. COVID-19 did not simply add or multiply stress; the pandemic compounded stress.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5, the original intent of the inquiry was to study existing student leader stress. The findings from this study concur with the literature reviewed earlier that revealed that student leaders displayed low-stress resilience before the pandemic. However, this study now becomes a snapshot in time, providing a fascinating backdrop for an entirely new perspective on developing undergraduate student leader stress resilience.

Using the LSR Model

The participants shared that they ultimately resorted to a "just suck it up attitude" when it came to stress and said they could do better but often did not know how. Others felt like stress was "kicking their butt!" As one senior student leader candidly shared, "Honestly, if you were to ask me right now how I cope with stress, I don't think I would have a very good answer for you." This study showed that multiple participants desired to develop their ability to manage stress while acknowledging that they frequently overextended themselves. Beginning with the individual and working out through the successive layers represented by each ring in the LSR model can help student leaders visualize everything on their plates to pinpoint what, where, and how stress may be impacting their lives and leadership. The LSR model can also work starting from any ring and moving in toward the individual. The individual is central to orientating the LSR model because the individual must be ultimately responsible for responding to the stress in their lives. This presupposition is paramount. Think of the LSR model as a stress positioning system. It can only tell someone where they are in the midst of their stress, which can be extremely helpful, but it cannot do anything about the stress; that remains up to the individual. My study findings suggest that student leaders want to improve their stress management skills and balance their commitments better. Student leaders want to know how to cope with stress better, and my LSR model can help using stress positioning mapping and forecasting techniques.

Stress mapping. The LSR model can help students to create a stress map of everything

that is "on their plate." Rather than "sucking it up" and carrying on, student leaders can start

with themselves as individuals. The model invites individuals to take stock of their individual

needs or "bare necessities," as one participant called them. The LSR model can help student

leaders order their needs according to each layer of their lives and current experience. For

example, listing personal responsibilities and relationships on the individual level, academic

responsibilities on the undergraduate level, leadership responsibilities on the leadership level,

and any additional COVID-19 requirements on the fourth level. Participants can then order their

responsibilities, time commitments, and other individual priorities by writing or drawing out

these needs on each level. The fourth COVID-19 level impacts the student leaders'

responsibilities on all other levels. Mapping out these impacts can help student leaders see and

understand how the pandemic may be affecting them personally, their academic studies, and

leadership role and responsibilities. The LSR model serves as a resource tool or platform to ask

essential questions about responsibilities, expectations, and energy levels of student leaders.

Similarly, the undergraduate layer of the model considers all academic requirements and

the leadership level, all roles, and responsibilities associated with leading. Seeing everything on

the plate in multiple dimensions can help students gain a sense of scope. Coordinating and

scheduling significant personal dates, essential assignments, and leadership requirements on a

calendar and task list will help meet one of the identified coping themes of organization and

prioritization. The LSR model is a simple way for student leaders to see how each layer can

influence and integrate with one another. It also reveals convergence points that can signal

potential compounding stress. When two or more significant events converge or run close

together, student leaders may experience increased stress levels. When student leaders ignore or

fail to address these convergences, the likely result is that they experience the negative consequences of stress. This study found that adding more to the plate or running a full plate for any prolonged period can lead to burnout and breakdown for student leaders.

Using the LSR model for stress mapping is a helpful way to expand the paper plate metaphor. Topographic maps display land elevation levels using contour lines to indicate the grade or incline of mountains, canyons, and other geography and hydrography. Contour lines close together signal steeper terrain while contour lines spread apart may indicate a valley or lowland (USGS, 2021). Similarly, the layers or rings of the LSR model can describe an important area of the map, while each stress experienced on the layer represents a contour line. The more lines grouped together may inform student leaders of steeper, potentially more stressful terrain. When participants describe a lack of boundaries and blurred expectations, the lines on the map may be so close together that they resemble a cliff of stress. Every additional expectation placed upon student leaders by their institutions could represent the following contour line steepening the grade of stress.

Allowing participants to work with this model is an important area for further study. By applying the LSR model with student leaders, the model can be further refined in an iterative process that is key to grounded theory development.

Stress forecasting. Another way to look at the LSR model is through a similar metaphor of forecasting. Meteorologists use a weather mapping system to measure atmospheric pressure with isobars. Isobars are lines similar to contour lines that join together places of equal atmospheric pressure.

> Isobars are lines/areas of equal pressure represented on a weather map. When isobars become very tightly grouped together, it indicates a "tight pressure gradient" (steep-slope). The tightly packed isobars are due to the difference in air pressure between High and Low-pressure systems. This "slope" or gradient indicates faster winds as air from the

upper atmosphere mixes down to the surface of the earth. Conversely, when isobars are very loosely grouped together, the winds are typically calm (WFMZ-News, 2021).

Similar to isobars, lines representing student leader involvements on the LSR model indicating where stress pressure is tightening. When lines become grouped together, there can also be a "tight stress pressure gradient." Being able to draw circular lines on a model may help student leaders forecast stress in their lives (see Figure 6).

The COVID-19 pandemic created a perfect storm of sorts when viewing student leadership stress through the LSR model. One significant stressor, such as a pandemic, pressurized the entire stress experienced by student leaders. However, it was not just the student leaders who experienced the challenges of COVID-19. The pandemic was universally disrupting and impacted student leaders, supervisors, roommates, professors, and the entire institution. COVID-19 affected the county, state, and country where students, family, and friends lived. International student leaders worried about the health and financial stability of their families overseas. Before the pandemic, student leaders experienced stress minus the universal strain COVID-19 placed on their leadership expectations, academics, supervisory support, personal finances, and the like. While COVID-19 presents an extreme example, impacting everyone, everyone experiences external factors that cause stress, for example, personal health or economic pressure. The LSR model is useful for embracing the unique aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but during times of non-pandemic, the fourth ring still exists for other reasons. The LSR model developed based on findings that emerged during the pandemic and successfully captured the impact of the unique stress experience but the utility model explains general stress experienced at any time.

The LSR model was not designed to eliminate stress, but it can help account for where stress originates from and explain how it might affect the overall stress levels of student leaders.

Everyone, of course, has different capacities for managing stress, just like everyone has a different-sized LSR model or plate to fill. Fortunately, research shows that an individual's ability to handle stress successfully can grow (McGonigal, 2015; Sapolsky, 2004; Willink & Babin, 2017), but we all have limits. The LSR model can help student leaders with positioning their stressors, learning their stress limits, and how to adjust and become more resilient leaders. The following section will include brief recommendations from the 28 core themes that emerged from the data using the LSR model.

Why and How Undergraduate Student Leaders Experience Stress

Leading peers. The LSR model begins with the individual and will work through the subsequent two ring layers, undergraduate student and leader. Crossing each ring layer is the equivalent of crossing a significant stress threshold. Each layer introduces a new dynamic or experience that the student leader must orient themselves around. The orientation process may include how they view themselves as a student leader with their peers who may or may not also be a student leader. The findings of my study showed a certain level of disorientation, particularly for new student leaders, when stepping into the leadership role when it came to redefining these relationships. The LSR model accounts for this and can help students process their experiences to help establish healthy expectations in their relationships.

Both student and leader. Identity formation is critical during the college years (Astin, 1993; Baxter Magolda, 2014). Participants in this study had to be at least second-year students in either their first or second year of leadership for this reason. Astin (1993) discusses the formative importance of the first year of college, which is also considered when the individual becomes an undergraduate student. This single step is significant and loaded with its own stress experiences. Moving to the third leadership ring layer was where study findings indicated

additional stress. No longer were students merely students responsible for their academic and personal-social lives; they were now student leaders responsible for themselves and others. Adopting a new leadership role proved to be a challenge because it was new and the first time many participants had officially led. In addition, they struggled with other contributing factors such as perfectionism and lack of boundaries that follow next.

Performance doubt. The findings from this study revealed that participants openly questioned whether perfectionism was possible to achieve or even reasonable to expect. The LSR model, functioning as a stress positioning system, identifies the ring layers influencing how a student leader might perceive themselves as a leader. Suppose a student leader measures themselves across the ring layers with an idealized or perfect version of themselves, their standing as an undergraduate student, and performance as a leader. In that case, they will undoubtedly feel disappointed if they do not measure up.

Furthermore, participants equated leadership success with leadership performance based on event attendance. However, event attendance was specifically curtailed by the fourth layer of COVID-19 due to social distancing mandates. Student leaders appeared to not give themselves permission to recalibrate expectations for event attendance due to COVID-19. Student leaders continued to doubt their leadership without accounting for the pandemic, even though they recognized the limitations due to social distancing, they still felt pressure to perform to a higher standard than they were able to achieve. The LSR model shows the external stress had an internal impact on student leaders, which left them doubting themselves. However, even with the absence of a pandemic, leaders can commit to continuous stress resilience, which begins with a clear understanding of themselves, their strengths, and recognized areas for improvement. The

LSR model can help support continued leadership growth and stress resilience for student leaders with these vital insights.

Overcommitted and overwhelmed. Student leaders in this study struggled with saying yes and no, often finding themselves overcommitted and overwhelmed because they often felt they could not say no to myriad requests. The LSR model rapidly fills up with contour and isobar lines with each commitment a student leader makes. The closer those bars, the steeper the gradient, and intense the stress experience will be.

Challenge of COVID-19. The LSR model takes COVID-19 into account in the fourth ring layer. As mentioned, the universal impact of the pandemic was pervasive throughout the remaining ring layers. My study findings showed the COVID-19 effect in two main ways (a) constant change and (b) inherent contradictions. Participants described COVID-19 as "a series of slow letdowns." This was true; as the fourth layer in the model, COVID-19 was canceling important things in the other three ring layers. The influence of COVID-19 also required adjusting significant role responsibilities in the leadership ring layer, which appeared to contradict the community experience student leaders were trying to build in the undergraduate ring layer.

Online Zoom fatigue. Barriers erected by COVID-19 required new modes of learning and communication. Zoom video conferencing, used by all participants, provided a "convenient but very unmotivating" means of functioning for undergraduate students and added more stress contour/isobar lines to the LSR model on the individual, undergraduate, and leadership levels.

Team stress (interpersonal). Miscommunication and increased workload characterized stress felt by some participants. These two factors are often blamed for stress in the workplace, but unfortunately, with COVID-19 and distance learning and communication, teams on level

three of the LSR model (leadership) began to feel the stress of being misunderstood and working harder than participants felt should have been required due to physical separation. Utilizing the LSR model with groups to explain these stress pain points may help identify and address common frustrations and build team unity.

The Influence and Impact of Stress

Good/bad stress. One of the more surprising study findings was the idea of "good stress" and "bad stress." The LSR model uses contour and isobar lines to represent stress used to help identify which lines were motivational versus overwhelming lines. The findings indicated that a certain amount of stress could motivate student leaders to perform well, similar to an athlete before the big game but too much stress and student leaders became overwhelmed. It was not clear if stress moved beyond the question of leadership stress, ring layer three, but the LSR model could help identify good and bad stress on other levels as well. Further research on the ways the LSR model might help locate and clarify both types of stress for student leaders is needed

Perfectionism. Described by one participant as "performative pressure," perfectionism is a cyclical kind of stress that proved to be both a *cause* of stress and an *impact* of stress. In other words, participants reported that the pressure to perform perfectly was a source of stress, and when participants felt stressed, they would often become more perfectionistic. The LSR model could plot this type of stress to see how the cyclical relationship increased the size of the contour or isobar line indicating overall pressure or influence. I recommend that educators and supervisors work with student leaders to identify and implement coping strategies to help keep stress from snowballing.

Uncertainty. Using the LSR model, it is possible to see just how many stress lines emanated from the COVID-19 ring layer causing the other ring layers a high degree of uncertainty. The uncertainty caused student leaders to second guess their decisions, teammate intentions, and even question their leadership efficacy.

Burnout and breakdown. Burnout and breakdown may signify a very "tight pressure gradient" or "steep slope," stress contour/isobar lines packed so tight in fact, student leaders disengage completely before coming apart. In effect, student leaders may experience such accumulation of stress or a single significant stressor that they avoid the level of the model where the stress occurred entirely. Student leaders described this behavior as ghosting, an extreme act of disconnecting or stress avoidance. While seemingly extreme, findings showed that this behavior is present and presents a significant concern for developing student leaders. I recommend helping student leaders recognize that while any of the model layers may be avoided or ghosted for a while, those levels do not cease to exist. When student leaders return, the stress pressure remains. Insights on the LSR model can help educators and supervisors address this reality with student leaders who may struggle with burnout and breakdown.

Discouragement apathy. Many participants felt overwhelmed by the stress they experienced during the 2020-2021 academic year. Unfortunately, prolonged stress left many student leaders feeling "drained" and lacking motivation. Feelings of discouragement and being undervalued followed next for participants. The progressive nature of this stress effect could be mapped using the LSR model to help students reevaluate their needs as individuals, students, and leaders. I recommend intervening with support and care resources for leaders who were on the front lines for prolonged periods or began appearing discouraged or apathetic toward their role.

My study showed that every student leader wanted to lead well, but prolonged stress over time could lead to discouragement.

Irritability. The stress response of irritability is symptomatic of how much stress could be registering on the LSR model. Using the model to map stress reveals the inherent energy stress contains. Stress viewed as an energy source could lead to irritability or anger that may be out of character for a student leader at a faith-based institution. When stress is considered this way, it is also easier to understand how stress can be draining; in the same way, being around a lot of energy, think small children, or a day at an amusement park, can be exhausting. Behaviors such as irritability or discouragement and apathy shared previously are outward signs of stress. I recommend when these signs begin to appear, to look back at the LSR model to locate the root cause of stress.

Unhealthy lifestyle. Findings from my study showed that student leaders also developed unhealthy lifestyle habits concerning sleep and nutrition due to stress. Participants stated that such patterns were unusual for them and were identified as being associated with stress. Therefore, behavioral stress responses like lifestyle and mood changes can act as good reminders for student leaders to take stock of their stress using the LSR model.

Personal loss. Hesitancy to acknowledge the personal loss, regardless of how big or small it is perceived, is concerning. Findings from my study indicated that student leaders suppressed feelings of loss because they felt it would be inappropriate. While the LSR model is not intended to be a counseling tool, it could be used to help students gain a greater understanding and appreciation of just how much they have gone through. In this way, the model presents a more accurate picture of reality and may help students feel the permission to give themselves the grace to grieve. A recurring theme throughout my study was that student

leaders generally did not stop to process their stress or loss. Processing stress is a meta-theme I

unpack below using the LSR model.

Coping With Stress

Thus far, the LSR model has been used primarily for its capabilities in mapping and

forecasting stress. However, the LSR model information will now be used to help student

leaders cope with stress and develop resilience.

Supervisor. Findings from my study suggest one of the most significant influences for

student leader stress coping comes from their immediate supervisor. Supervisors like those who

helped their student leader draw on a paper plate can now help students map and forecast their

stress using the LSR model. I recommend supervisors first use the LSR model to map their own

stress to see how it may be helpful. Then, from personal experience, supervisors can lead their

student leadership team by completing the LSR model and using it in debriefing groups or

individual discussions. Supervisors can address major stress points shown by the convergence

between the ring layers or stress lines. Supervisors may also use the model to help with goal

setting, strength development, and accountability, all of which student leaders indicated they

found helpful, according to my study. More recommendations for supervisors will follow in the

meta-theme discussion section.

Pause. Completing the LSR model will show student leaders both the need and where

they might be able to take a break. Constructing the LSR model and processing it individually

may act as a prayer and meditation resource during times of pause, which will be discussed in the

faith section of this chapter. The LSR model may also help student leaders identify which ring

layer or stressor may benefit the most from taking a pause. Study findings showed that taking a

break helped student leaders focus, evaluate the situation, and make better decisions. In light of this, the LSR model is the perfect tool to help with this vital process.

Organization and prioritization. At its core, the LSR model is a tool to help student leaders organize and prioritize the stress in their lives. The model may serve as a companion to student calendar schedules and task lists, informing them of convergence points and assisting them in not being overcommitted or overwhelmed. For example, student leaders can avoid planning for a big event, on the leadership level, during midterms, on the academic level.

Personal boundaries. Similarly, the LSR model may assist students in establishing good personal and professional boundaries. The findings suggest that student leaders who were able to keep good boundaries often had a rationale for doing so. The LSR can help student leaders gauge their stress levels and compile helpful information which they can later use to make better-informed decisions concerning their time and energy.

Self-Care. Each coping theme that emerged from my study may mediate or counteract the adverse effects of stress. The LSR model stress positioning capabilities may register the impact of coping techniques. Using the multiple ring levels, student leaders may see a ratio of stress to self-care practices in their lives. All stress and no self-care will register on the LSR model and inform the student leader that they need to prioritize more self-care practices.

Community. Community was defined by the data as a vital support system on and off-campus for student leaders. Student leaders reported mutually beneficial relationships among their teammates, friends, and family. Community was an umbrella term for a network of trusted relationships that student leaders could connect with for support. The LSR model may help student leaders know when to connect and what to share or ask for in these crucial relationships during stressful times. Participants did not always understand why they were stressed or what

exactly was causing the stress but greatly appreciated the opportunity to discuss their stress with people that cared for them.

Team. The LSR model may also serve as a tool to help foster team understanding and build trust and unity among teammates. My findings suggest that teams could be both a cause and solution for stress. The findings reveal that teams who work together well are open and honest with each other. Student leaders who understand their stress levels and cope can share and connect better with their fellow student leaders. Using the LSR model as a team-building exercise or a regular way to check-in and understand one another may be beneficial.

Ask for help. Asking for help was difficult for student leaders, according to my study findings, due partly to not knowing precisely what was stressful or how to address the stress. Participants also shared that they were perfectionists and often too busy or considered leaders above asking for help. However, findings also showed the student leaders recognized asking for help as a top growth area for their leadership. The purpose of the LSR model is to map and forecast stress for student leaders to help them ask for help when they genuinely need it.

The vital role faith plays in stress resilience is one of the three meta-themes that emerged from the data and will be discussed in the next section.

Meta-Theme Insights and Recommendations Using the LSR Model

Undergraduate Student Leadership Expectations at Faith-Based Universities

The findings suggest a need to re-examine the role expectations of student leaders. Student leaders self-identified as "overachievers and perfectionists," who prefer "fixing and doing" and subsequently found themselves "overcommitted and overwhelmed." Responsibility ultimately lies with the adult student for taking on too much, but student life professionals also play key roles in hiring, training, and supporting the very student leaders who reported these

findings. Student life professionals can use the LSR to gain awareness of stress when addressing the role and responsibilities of student leadership at faith-based institutions is an excellent place to start.

Utilizing the LSR model can help university leaders identify and address student leadership stress. Examining and making necessary adjustments to student leadership expectations and job descriptions can help ensure leadership is sustainable. Participants reported that it was not uncommon for student leaders to take more than a full academic course load and be allowed to work multiple jobs in addition to their leadership position. This suggests the need for supervisors to continually review student course loads and co-curricular commitments to ensure that student leaders can thrive in their leadership roles. Reviewing current policies concerning student leadership expectations and keeping student leaders accountable can help students from being overcommitted and overwhelmed, two key findings from this study. The LSR model may aid in the student leadership hiring process, team building, and the ongoing development of student leaders. The LSR model considers the evolving nature of student leadership and should be employed semi-regularly to remain current. Data revealed student leaders began to feel "drained" as the year went on. The LSR model can act as a diagnostic tool to gauge student stress levels and create urgency for coping and stress management techniques.

It is generally understood that leaders rise and meet the unexpected, but what is reasonable to expect of student leaders during an unprecedented pandemic? Participants were aware of federal and local COVID-19 guidelines. For the most part, they understood that their institutions were doing everything they could to keep students safe while providing the best learning experience they could. What was not always clear was how stress would impact them as student leaders.

The LSR model reveals the long-term compounding effect of significant stress in the lives of student leaders. Early recognition of the impact of considerable stress can help institutions create more sustainable expectations for their student leaders. Even if greater than average expectations arise, the participants indicated a willingness to meet those expectations and a desire for the expectations to be clearly communicated with them. As they work to support the development of student leaders, supervisors can begin to look at the LSR model in relation to each leader to see how they can process the stressful experiences with students to mitigate the consequences of stress.

The LSR model helps to identify and manage stress tension. Institutional leaders, educators, and supervisors will need training, practice, and support in utilizing the LSR model to its full potential. Establishing and updating policy and practice recommendations can be informed by using the LSR model as a diagnostic tool for all of the student leadership, not just the individual student leader. For example, COVID-19 added more rules, making student leaders enforcers, which was not expected or welcomed according to individual student leaders. COVID-19 emergency response changes and pivoting guidelines had to be heard with two sets of ears by student leaders; that is, student leaders had to think about how updates would impact them individually, as an undergraduate student, and as a student leader. The LSR model shows that when a change was made to the campus due to COVID-19 guidelines, on level four, student leaders had to translate what the impact would mean for them on leadership level three, and as a student I on level two of the model. One student leader described the experience as "balancing on a tightrope."

Some student leaders went as far as to say that in a culture of consuming Christian service it was doubly important to set good boundaries with student leaders' time and leadership

expectations. When asked how stress may differ for one serving as a leader at a non-faith-based

university, Mark shared,

> I think there's a large factor of when my leadership role rides on the line between a job and a kind of servant leadership. I don't get paid minimum wage in my leadership role and I could be doing other jobs that make a lot more money. I do work on the weekends because it's a lot nicer to get that paycheck. I would say the challenge is feeling like you can't set healthy boundaries, because what you're doing [student leadership] is this service for others and I don't think that's wrong, but I think it's wrong to think that you can't set healthy boundaries for yourself.

Mark also suggested universities consider policies to support student leaders better. He pointed

to student-athletes' academic accommodations as a policy example to consider for student

leaders recognizing the valuable work they do for the university. "I think the university is going

to have to realize that if they want to keep student leaders, they're going to have to make

changes, and they're going to have to start supporting them," Mark shared. Institutional leaders

can carefully consider the type of pressure student leaders might experience given their multiple

responsibilities and the commitment to Christian service. Because student leaders acknowledged

the challenges of saying no to requests, it is incumbent upon supervisors and other institutional

leaders to help student leaders sort out the expectations and to create opportunities for students to

decline requests for additional service.

Processing Undergraduate Student Leadership Stress

Perspectives gained from the pandemic can help students cope with future stress if the

experiences are processed in healthy ways. The findings from this study align with Hecht and

Oehme (2021) who concluded that unprocessed stress might lead to a more negative outlook and

trigger anxiety, depending on the stress experienced. Processing stress promoted stress coping

for the participants. The LSR model can help student leaders map and forecast their stress in

many different and meaningful ways. Simply the act of completing the LSR model can be used

as an interpersonal leadership processing exercise. The LSR model can reveal where a student is

experiencing stress and can be explored further with their supervisor, teammates, mentor, or

close friends and family. The LSR model provides a way for student leaders to table their stress

and view it objectively. Stress is often challenging to articulate, according to my findings. Still,

the LSR model provides a meaningful way to observe and communicate the causes of stress and

how student leaders manage or cope with stress.

The findings also align with the recent Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

(CCCU, 2021) "Thriving Quotient" survey administered during fall 2020 to more than 4,800

students from faith-based universities across the U.S. and Canada. The survey included

questions related to what students worried about amid the COVID-19 pandemic. According to

the results of the survey, students reported that during the pandemic they worried about doing

well in college 34%, always or most of the time; 24%, a little more than or about half the time;

20%, sometimes, with only 22%, rarely or never. In addition, students said they worried about

friendships and social connections; 29%, always or most of the time; 28 % a little more than or

about half the time; 22%, sometimes; and only 21%, rarely never, also supported my study's

findings. These statistics are sobering and offer insight into some of the personal issues that

concerned students during the pandemic. The LSR model can help caring educators and

professional staff map and forecast these and other stresses that create anxiety for students.

The LSR model may help develop healthier student leaders by aiding their stress

processing. Organizational health largely depends upon the health of its leaders, making

leadership health and stress resilience of utmost importance (Brown, 2018; Brown, 2020;

Komives et al., 2020; Lencioni, 2002). The LSR model can help develop healthy leaders who

also have a healthier sense of success. My findings support Komives et al. (2020), Kouzes and

Posner (2018), and much of the student leadership research available that maturing leaders must move beyond simply equating success by attendance numbers. Furthermore, healthy leaders will develop stress resilience, becoming good at coping with stress (McGonigal, 2018). These leaders will grow and multiply other healthy leaders who can map and forecast their stress using helpful resources like the LSR model.

Faith Factor – Role of Faith

Thus far, the LSR model has shown it can help student leaders map and forecast stress that emerged from the core themes of this study. The model can identify stress points across multiple dimensions called ring layers, representing the individual, undergraduate student, leader and significance of the COVID-19 pandemic. But can the LSR model accurately account for the role faith plays in coping with stress? The answer is yes and no. The answer hinges on a proper understanding of faith, as revealed in my study findings. Student leaders reported that faith was only meaningful in aiding in stress coping when it was authentic. My findings showed that student leaders who bravely applied their faith to the challenges facing them as student leaders experienced such things as God's presence, the ability to communicate with God, the benefit of a faith community, and the life-giving perspective that brings.

This is not to say that faith derails the LSR model; faith can be applied in conjunction with the model. Faith moved beyond the ability of the layer or contour/isobar lines represented by the LSR model. Thus, making faith difficult to measure, even qualitatively. However, I could discern from the data that the type of faith impacted the amount of stress student leaders experienced. A faith that was authentic, gritty, and grounded in reality met student leaders' stress at every level of the model in a dynamic way. The LSR model can account for the levels

of stress and magnitude of stress, but only faith provided student leaders with a unique and life-giving perspective of that stress according to study findings.

This study's findings in relation to a student's faith concur with more extensive leadership studies "demonstrating a consistent and significant positive connection between spirituality and leadership" (Komives et al., 2020 p. 135). Furthermore, as Astin (2004, p. 5) observed,

> There are two important aspects of spirituality – values and a sense of connectedness – that drive leadership for transformation. And while many have argued that leadership is doing, and spirituality is being, it is in connecting what we do with who we are that helps us see how leadership interfaces with spirituality.

Faith, in this sense, is inseparable from leadership, meaning leaders lead out of what they believe (Komives et al., 2020). Student leaders at Christian faith-based universities interviewed for my study believed in Jesus Christ and sought to emulate his leadership, not simply because of his method but also because they believed, by faith, that they knew him personally. Faith data from my study all points to relational significance, God's proximity, participants' ability to communicate with God through prayer and scripture, shared belief among a faith community, and the perspective gained by these findings are highly relational. The LSR model struggles to account for relationships with the divine, but it can help student leaders process their stress and stress the faith relationship they have with the divine.

One possible way of using the LSR model is to track a single factor across the various ring layers. First, faith factored on the individual level accounts for the personal, relational faith of student leaders. Second, understanding the multiple ideas, expectations, and standards regarding faith-based higher education plays out on the undergraduate level. Discussing the interplay between genuine personal faith on the individual level and the institutional concept of faith embodied at the undergraduate level helps to understand some of the ways student leaders

wrestled with reconciling perceived differences. Third, faith on the leadership level presents a more comprehensive intriguing look into the difference between good leadership and Christian faith leadership. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a unique, revealing stress quality that demonstrated the integrity of student leadership faith.

My findings suggest a purposeful relationship exists between faith and leadership. One way of modeling the influence of faith was by the differences participants made concerning genuine faith and obligatory faith. Student leaders expressed that a genuine personal faith reduced stress while obligatory faith, felt required to be a "good Christian" was perceived as an additional source of stress in this study. Participants experienced two different effects of stress. Figure 7 demonstrates the stress isobar lines in a cutaway view of both types.
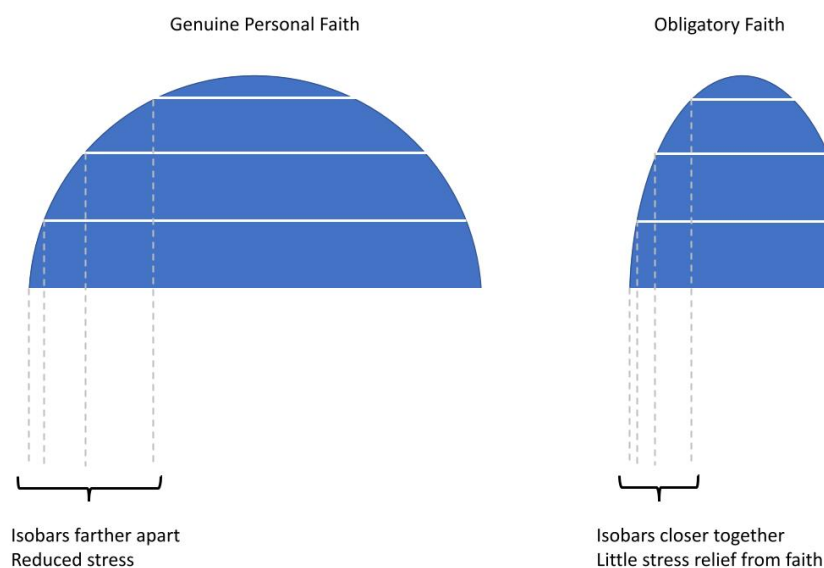
Figure 7. Genuine Personal Faith Versus Obligatory Faith Comparison.

Further Utilizing the LSR Model

The LSR model is a valuable tool to help students, educators, and supervisors view stress on multiple levels. The SPS capabilities of the model may identify stress caused in one ring level and present on a completely different ring level. My findings concur with Friedman (2017) that stress often behaves by triangulation and transference from one area of life and presents in another. For example, student leaders may not even be aware that academic stress on the undergraduate level may show team stress on the leadership level. COVID-19 caused an unprecedented amount of stress, but not all stress can be attributed to the pandemic. To truly understand the stress, it has to be located on the correct ring layer or level. Caring supervisors can use the LSR model to view student leadership performance holistically, developing them as individuals, students, and leaders.

Educators and supervisors may consider using the LSR model as a case study lens. The LSR model could be used to freeze a moment in time, a stressful situation, for example, for student leaders to examine, reflect, and learn from later. Experiential learning discussed in Chapter 1 highlights the numerous opportunities for the LSR model to provide additional reflective insights for direct student leadership experiences with stress. In Chapter 1, I shared that developing future leaders is a commonly stated outcome of higher education. Yet, educators find it challenging to maximize instructional and experiential opportunities for student learning and engagement to meet the challenging demands students face now and in the future (White & Guthrie, 2016). The LSR model can help maximize student leader instruction and experiential learning opportunities by allowing students to map and forecast past experiences to help further develop stress resilience.

Resilience also appeared as an important section in my Chapter 1. According to the American Psychological Association (2020), resilience is "adaptation in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or stress: family/relationship problems, health problems or workplace/money issues." A necessary trait for overall student success in college, career, and life in general, persistence coupled with an optimistic attitude, led researchers to investigate to see if resilience is an inherent trait or something that can be taught and developed, which indeed it can (Schriner, 2010). The LSR model can help identify the causes and implications of stress while helping student leaders grow in positive stress coping strategies. Developing these vital coping skills will help students become resilient leaders in their lives and careers beyond their current student leadership roles.

The LSR model also aids in critical thinking, which was linked to helping student leaders cope with stress and anxiety (Powley & Taylor, 2014). Using the LSR model as a diagnostic tool will provide vital information for student leaders to help them make better-informed decisions. Critical thinking with accurate stress insights offered by the LSR model also concurs with Baxter Magolda (2014). Critical thinking can help student leaders' transformation through knowledge acquisition that will empower them to take action and manage their internal stress and external crisis successfully (Baxter Magolda, 2014).

The power student leaders gain by managing their stress will help them develop into transformational leaders. Komives et al. (2011) refer to a model of integrating student developmental stages and expanding the leadership development practice to address such student leadership needs as critical thinking and resiliency development, similar to Bass's theory of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). Timms (2018) further developed Bass' model, defining transformational leadership that embodies producing change and developing lives

through authenticity, inspiration, empathy, and innovation. Although scholarship exists describing transformational leadership, none offers a praxis model to include intensive formative leadership stress experiences like the LSR model. Many current models focus on skill-building and short-term interventions rather than fostering leadership capacity by developing critical thinking competencies and growing leadership identity over more prolonged and more intense stressful experiences (Komives et al., 2005). The LSR model can provide multiple snapshots forming a student stress time-lapse of transformational leadership moments.

LSR Model Recommendations

Educators and supervisors can leverage the LSR model to develop student leader stress resilience across critical thinking, experiential education, and transformational leadership frameworks. The LSR model allows educators and student development professionals the opportunity to inform existing developmental theory to help first-year and maturing student leaders process leadership stress through the practical means of stress mapping and forecasting. Additional ring layers can be added or subtracted to accommodate different developmental life stages. Marriage and family, significant life events, and the like are all layers that can be added and removed. Career counselors, employers, and coaches can help students add employment, sports involvement layers to the model to identify stress and promote coping skills. The LSR model can help those working with student leaders view their stress experiences holistically while providing the depth of layers to drill down and source significant stress causes.

The LSR model emerged in support of the core findings from my study and will need to be tested to ensure accuracy. Further calibration is recommended. The LSR model is genuinely in the initial infancy stages of development and will undergo an iterative process as new research aids in maturing the model. In true grounded theory fashion, I concur with Charmaz (20014) that

the model must be able to evolve to represent the overall framework of undergraduate student leadership stress. That said, the LSR model certainly presents broader uses for leaders in general, educators, counselors, pastors, coaches, parents, and anyone interested in better understanding how stress influences our leadership. The LSR model provides value to anyone who wishes to map and forecast stress or is interested in better understanding the convergence and compounding effects of stress.

Outcomes from this study can assist in designing programs and integrative models that engage students and provide new conceptual frameworks for developing student leadership competencies and career readiness. The LSR model may also be presented differently to understand the stress relationships between the ring layers better. One alternative would be to use a grid with the ring layers represented on one axis and variables, such as the 28 themes from the study, for example, on the other axis. Grids help capture a lot of data but are not as dynamic as the visual model, in my opinion. It is more important to me that participants complete their own LSR model rather than fill in cells on a grid.

I mentioned earlier that the LSR model concept sprang from an idea one of my research participants, pseudonym Deborah, shared with me when discussing a team exercise using a paper plate. Seeing the origin and development of the LSR model from the data makes me wish I could follow up with Deborah and other student leader participants. There is now so much more to discuss using the LSR model that these student leaders helped me create. Deborah's account appears in Chapter 4, but I include her story here to conclude the discussion of my findings.

> We did an excellent little exercise in our last leadership team meeting, where we had a little paper plate and drew on it all the things that are on our plate at the moment. We were sharing, and we all were like, "Wow, we have a lot!" Because not only do we want to be a good RA, but we want to be a good student, and some of us have other jobs. We want to be a good, you know, daughter or child or friend and all these things, there's so much on the plate. So I think definitely balancing it all is a big part of leadership stress.

Summary

The LSR model emerged directly from my student leadership stress findings. Undergraduate student leadership stress at faith-based universities during the COVID-19 pandemic was a big concept that grounded theory helped to present in a relatively simple model. The beauty of the model is that it is simple but can help student leaders better understand what is causing them stress, how stress impacts their lives, what coping mechanisms work best for them, and the vital role faith plays in stress management. The LSR model is simple but can represent a lot. Researchers Brené Brown and Jim Collins (2020) recently shared a brief outline of grounded theory. They suggest that grounded theory research begins with a question, addressed by a research method, followed by data and the experience of chaos before insight takes place. Brown and Collins (2020) state that emerging validation of the insight leads to a conceptual vessel that has to be constructed, wrapped and ultimately fits into the overall data framework. This summary outline of the grounded theory process fits my emergent LSR model accurately. From chaos to a concept, the LSR model emerged by constantly comparing the data until a core emerged. The LSR model fits the overall data framework of the unique challenge of student leadership stress. The LSR model may be used by educators, student life professionals to develop healthier leaders, leading to healthier campus communities. Ultimately, healthy student leaders today will lead to healthier, stress-resilient leaders so desperately needed to lead the post-pandemic world of tomorrow. If my research and subsequent LSR model casts one additional ray of light for the next generation of leaders to navigate stress challenges, I will be pleased. I conclude with the words of the late British statistician, George Box, "All models are wrong, but some are useful." It is my sincere hope that my model will be found useful.

CHAPTER 7: PERSONAL LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

"He toka tū moana. As durable as a rock pounded by the surf."
- Māori Whakataukī proverb

Introduction

Where would we be without stress? I have spent most of my professional life developing leadership stress resilience; but only just recognized it researching the topic. The narrative arc of every good story sees the protagonist develop through the crisis (Campbell, 2004). Our heroes and leaders encounter moments of stress while the audience eagerly awaits the outcome on the edge of their seats. Often it seems impossible for the hero to make it. The odds against are stacked high, but persistence leads the champion to victory. In the great stories, a summit is reached, a battle won, and a leader grown. My personal leadership journey follows a similar storyline, unique to me but familiar to our shared experience with stress.

During my admission interview for the doctoral program, Dr. Rod Githens graciously answered my question. Given the gravity of embarking upon a doctoral program, I asked him what the leading causes were for students *not* completing the program. In my mind, the question was the academic equivalent of preparing to summit Mount Everest. Dr. Githens qualified that while much was outside the student's control, I should avoid moving, changing jobs, or making any additions or subtractions to my immediate family during the doctoral experience. Since beginning the program, I somehow managed to ignore such sage advice and welcomed a child, moved, and changed jobs. He was right, of course. These significant life changes were largely outside my control and greatly challenged my ability to persist in the program. Life was stressful. However, I would not change the stress of our daughter's adoption and subsequent

move, nor would I change the unforeseen transition to full-time faculty from my previous role as Dean of Students.

Leader and Model Development

Amidst the everyday chaos, I have grown to appreciate that the truest things in life are often simple and beautiful; what I would have given for a paper plate to capture the beautiful chaos that was my life. The impetus for the leadership stress resilience (LSR) model originated with 12 student leaders who also found themselves navigating full plates. My research aimed to develop a generalizable model to help student leaders like these develop stress resilience. Stress can be disorienting. Based on my professional experience working with student leaders, I recognized student leaders needed a stress positioning system to help them make sense of the chaos. My recognition led to this study. The findings from the study led me to conclude that mapping and forecasting stress supported what student leaders were telling me and resonated with my own experience. In many ways, we were all in this "stress thing" together.

Being an undergraduate student leader (RA) and student development professional for over 10 years provided me with firsthand experience with the student leader stress experience. The challenges and expectations facing current student leaders are exponentially greater than when I was an RA. My problem of practice originated from a desire to help prevent our brightest leaders from burning out prematurely. However, no one could prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic. A pandemic has a way of revealing and redefining stress. One of the most incredible benefits of successfully navigating stress is perspective. Interestingly, perspective is often what student leaders lack and has the most to gain through student leadership programs. Enter now a study on undergraduate student leadership stress during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When I share the topic of my dissertation with others the response usually involves a smile and a supportive comment related to the timeliness of this study. I feel the urge to explain that developing leadership stress resilience was a need long before COVID-19. The pandemic simply created a perfect storm in which to conduct the research. Student development theorists describe crisis moments, transitional experiences involving dissonance that are common to young adults and that are part of a typical developmental process. This process may fit neat psychological models, but a student's lived experience is seldom linear and often stressful. My understanding of undergraduate student leadership development informed the framework for the emerging LSR model. But like the student leaders themselves, the model is growing and evolving with each stress iteration.

The LSR model serves as a starting point to develop transformational leaders. Student leaders who can locate and forecast their stress, who understand the convergence of life and leadership layers are better equipped to use coping strategies outlined in this study. How do I know it will work? I do not, but I look forward to finding out. I anticipate using it in my work with students, studying the model in different ways, and refining it as new findings emerge. At this time, my educated guess is that student leaders will have to embrace and make the LSR model their own. The plate represents their life. Each student is ultimately responsible for their stress, no matter how it found its way onto the proverbial plate. The LSR model provides developing student leaders with handholds, transforming a static plate with dynamic layers and lines that move and correspond to the lived experience of leadership stress.

Faith and Stress

God appears to work upstream. Less than six years ago, my family and I concluded a beautiful and stressful season of our lives as missionaries and pastors in New Zealand. During

that time, we embraced the Māori phrase, *Kia Kaha*, an affirmation used in New Zealand, meaning "stay strong." Never were we standing stronger than when we recognized God's work upstream in our lives. Fast forward, and the faith-based university where I now teach includes in its mission statement "to educate transformational leaders for the glory of God" (William Jessup University, 2021). Little did I know that my own transformational leadership journey would consist of a dissertation study on developing student leader stress resilience? Neither could I foresee this inquiry producing a model that now springboards an exciting line of academic inquiry as a faculty member. Nor did I fully appreciate all the leadership stress experienced during my life could become a catalyst for developing transformational leaders for the glory of God.

The Māori, like many Polynesians, were ancient navigators, or way-finders, who used both sea and sky to locate and pull islands out of the ocean long before Global Positioning Systems (GPS). For perspective, a flight from San Francisco to Auckland is 13 hours over nothing but the open Pacific Ocean with a few scattered islands. Student leaders are the next generation of way-finders traveling long distances tasked with leading a world tossed by the stress of multiple pandemics. A leader's ability to map and forecast stress critical to their resiliency is perhaps more important now than ever.

The curious thing about the relationship between faith and stress is that God allows it. Without getting into the deep theological waters of God's will, I believe God permits stress in all our lives. Findings from this study agree that *not* all stress outcomes are good. However, engaging an authentic faith during stress has a reshaping, perspective-building effect. In other words, God can bring purpose to our stress. The immense stress of completing a doctorate degree combined with our family's adoption journey, job changes, and a pandemic revealed

things about me that I would have never known otherwise. Similarly, many have discovered

something new about themselves and the world around them during the pandemic. Incorporating

faith with stress can bring a unique awareness of God's presence in our circumstances. Such

awareness can lead to knowing God himself. Knowing self and knowing God is perhaps the

highest purpose of stress.

I conclude with a favorite passage from Philippians 4 in the Bible. Paul was no stranger

to stress or to knowing God. He writes from his Roman prison cell to encourage a church

saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be

known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by

prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the

peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Philippians 4:4-7).

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

My study seeks to better understand student leaders' experience at faith-based universities to cope and manage today's inherent leadership stress. I was a student leader (resident advisor) for three years and have been working in student affairs for almost 15 years. I have served as the dean of students and leadership faculty at William Jessup University in Northern California with oversight of our student leadership development program. Like you, I desire to help student leaders succeed and thrive.

My study aims to develop a generalizable stress resilience model for student leaders at faith-based institutions using grounded theory methodology. Central research questions include:

1. Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress at this time

2. The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions

3. The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress.

4. The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress

After a brief information questionnaire, I will invite students to a one-hour recorded interview via Zoom. A second shorter interview may be required to clarify salient points for the purpose of the study. All student and institutional information will be kept confidential and only used for the study purposes previously described. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the doctoral dissertation requirements and has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of the Pacific. Please see a copy of the informed consent form below.

As a token of appreciation, all student leaders will receive a $25 coffee card for their participation.

Introduction to Recruitment Letter (Email)

I want to invite you as a student leader to participate in a very important study to help with undergraduate student leadership stress. This study is being conducted to better understand the experience of student leaders at faith-based universities and help them better cope and

manage the inherent stress of leadership. The aim is to see every student succeed and thrive as leaders. I was a student leader (resident advisor) for three years myself and have been in student development for almost 15 years. I have served as a dean of students and professor of leadership at a Christian faith-based university in Northern California with oversight of our student leadership development program. I would be honored to hear your leadership story. I believe you can help fellow student leaders by taking part in this study. The goal is to develop a generalizable stress resilience model for student leaders at faith-based institutions. The study interview will take approximately one hour via Zoom and will be recorded for data collection purposes. To facilitate the best communication, participants are required to have their video on. A second short follow up interview may be necessary to clarify certain salient points for the purpose of the study. All information will be kept confidential and be used only for the purpose of the study as previously described. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the doctoral dissertation requirements and has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of the Pacific. In addition, this study has also been approved in cooperation with the IRB of the participants' home institution. As a token of appreciation, all participants will receive a $25 coffee card for their participation.

Recruitment Strategy

I have a number of professional networks with faith-based institutions in Southern California who are interested in their student leaders participating in this study. Upon obtaining IRB approval, I will reach out to these networks to send the introduction above to their student leaders with any accompanying information they wish to include as the participating home institution. A link to the Google Form below with the demographic and leadership background questionnaire will be included. A second link to complete the informed consent will also be

included in the initial email and in the Google Form. I will then select the twelve participants

from those who have completed the form and begin scheduling Zoom video conferencing

interviews for January, 2021.

Demographics and Leadership Background Information Questionnaire

1. Name of College/University

2. Full Name

3. Age

4. Gender (male, female, other)

5. Ethnicity (Native American or Alaska Native…; Asian…; Black or African American…; Hispanic or Latino…; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. …; White)

6. First-Generation college student? Y/N

7. Transfer student? Y/N / If yes, was your previous institution faith-based? Y/N

8. Personal Christian faith Y/N

9. Academic Year: (First year, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)

10. Total number of years of student leadership experience (1, 2, 3 or more)

11. Current leadership position(s): name and main function

12. Other involvements beyond academics and student leadership (e.g. work, sports, performing arts, clubs, organizations, church, community service, etc.)

13. Best days and times to meet (approximately one hour, on Zoom).

Interview Questions

1. Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress

    a. What is the best thing about being a student leader? What are some of the more challenging aspects?

b. Can you tell me about a time when you experienced stress as a student leader?

    i. If so, what was it like?

    ii. If you recall, what were you thinking then?

    iii. What contributed to your stress?

c. What do you feel are the leading causes of stress for you and other student leaders at this time?

2. The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions

a. How do you feel stress impacts student leaders?

b. Can you describe the events that led up to a time stress impacted you as a student leader?

    i. Who or what influenced your thoughts/actions?

    ii. How did they/it influence you?

c. Do you feel the amount of stress would differ if you were a leader at a non-faith-based institution?

    i. If so, how?

    ii. If not, why?

3. The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress

a. What do you think are the most important ways to manage stress?

    i. How did you discover (or create) them?

    b. How has your experience as a student leader affected how you handle stress?

        i.   Is this an area you feel like you can grow in?

        ii.   If so, how?

        iii.   If not, why?

4. The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress

    a. Do you feel that your faith influences the way you view and manage stress?

        i.   If so, how?

        ii.   If not, why?

    b. Has faith helped or hindered the way you view and manage stressful situations?

        i.   How has faith helped or hindered you?

    c. If you were not a person of faith, how might you view and manage stress differently, if at all?

Wrap-up

1. Is there something that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

2. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand student leadership stress better?

You may be invited to take part in a follow-up interview to further explore certain aspects of student leadership stress. I appreciated the opportunity to meet you and thank you for your time. If you think of anything else you would like to share with me related to our conversation today, please feel free to reach me at d_heitman@u.pacific.edu.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

STRESS RESILIENCE DEVELOPMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT LEADERS:
A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

Lead Researcher: David Heitman
Dissertation Advisor: Delores McNair, Ed.D.

You are being invited to participate in a research study, and your participation is entirely voluntary.

Description of Research

The research study seeks to understand how and why undergraduate student leaders at faith-based institutions experience and cope with stress. Data collection will primarily be through one-on-one interviews and a review of existing performance evaluations and reflective written work as part of ongoing leadership training.

Description of Identifiable Information

Surveys and existing documents that have identifiable private information will not be shared beyond the purposes of this research study. All participant identification will be anonymized.

Duration of Storage, Maintenance, Use

Storage of digital information will be on institutional Google Drive and destroyed within two years of the study's completion date. Data collection may be used for research purposes only.

Foreseeable Risks

While there are no foreseeable risks, participants will be asked to voluntarily share about past stress and stressful experiences which may result in increased anxiety.

Benefits

Benefits may come as a result of the reflective nature of this research study for students to share about their past leadership experiences. As a token of appreciation, all participants will receive a $25 coffee card for their participation.

Whether Research Details to be Provided

Participants will not be informed of the details of any specific research studies that might be conducted using the subject's identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens, including the purposes of the research, and that they might have chosen not to consent to some of those specific research studies.

Confidentiality

We will take reasonable steps to keep confidential any information that is obtained in connection with this research study and that can be identified with you.

Measures to protect your confidentiality are: we will not include your name in any reports, records will be kept in secured locations, the number of researchers or persons with access to the records will be limited to the extent reasonable, records will be [reasonably] de-identified, no/limited material will correlate the consent form to the research data.

Upon conclusion of the research study, the data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked or otherwise secured location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the research is completed. A password-protected storage option for all digital files and interview transcripts or any other data pertaining to our study will be used such as Google suite. I alone, as I, will have access to the data. Data may be kept for further research or will otherwise be destroyed within three years. Digital signatures will be obtained for consent using Docusign encrypted software.

Participation

Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

University Contact Information

I am the lead researcher in this study and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education. This research study is part of my thesis for my doctorate in Education.

If you have any questions about your rights and about the storage and use of your identifiable private information at any time, please contact me at (530) 391-5035 or by email at d_heitman@u.pacific.edu, or Dr. McNair at dmcnair@pacific.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project or wish to speak with an independent contact, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of the Pacific at (209) 946-3903 or by email at IRB@pacific.edu

Notification of Research Results

Participants will not have the research study findings disclosed to them.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that your participation is completely voluntary, that

you understand that you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Research Study Participant (Print Name): _____

Participant's Legally Authorized Representative (Print Name): _____

Description of Representative's Authority: _____

Researcher Who Obtained Consent (Print Name): _____

APPENDIX C: STRESS RESILIENCE FOCUSED CODING OUTLINE

Why and how undergraduate student leaders experience stress

What is the best thing about being a student leader? What are some of the more challenging aspects?

Can you tell me about a time when you experienced stress as a student leader?

What do you feel are the leading causes of stress for you and other student leaders at this time?

The influence of stress on student leaders at faith-based institutions

How do you feel stress impacts student leaders?

Can you describe the events that led up to a time when stress impacted you as a student leader?

Do you feel the amount of stress would differ if you were a leader at a non-faith-based institution?

The various processes and strategies student leaders employ to resolve their main concerns regarding the impact and consequences of stress

What do you think are the most important ways to manage stress? How did you discover (or create) them?

How has your experience as a student leader affected how you handle stress? Is this an area you feel like you can grow in?

The role faith plays, if any, in how student leaders cope with stress

Do you feel that your faith influences the way you view and manage stress?

Has faith helped or hindered the way you view and manage stressful situations?

If you were not a person of faith, how might you view and manage stress differently, if at all?

Wrap-up

Is there something that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?

Is there anything else you think I should know to understand student leadership stress better?

Unanticipated and Exciting