

UNDERSTANDING HOW TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS EXPERIENCE AND MANAGE STRESS:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

Stress is experienced by most individuals and throughout many different stages of life. Although stress can have positive and negative effects on individuals, the negative effects are more commonly studied with the intent of finding the best stress management techniques. Past research has shown that negative effects of stress on undergraduate students can have a significant impact in their college experience and success. However, the majority of this past research is conducted using survey methods and therefore lacks an in depth understanding of how individual students are experiencing and managing their stress throughout college. My research aims to fill in this gap with in-depth, first person accounts from students concerning their biggest stressors, stress management techniques, and knowledge of programs and resources offered through Texas State University. My research methods include interviews and a focus group with both male and female undergraduate students ages 18-23. Findings from this study will provide additional information to Texas State University administration about the stress that their students are experiencing and the extent to which campus resources are effective in helping students manage stress.

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is something that is experienced by almost everyone during various stages of their life. The American Institute of Stress (AIS) generally defines it as, the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change (2017). Some people may be able to use the stress they experience as motivation to get through a challenging period of time. However, others may feel as though they cannot function well mentally or physically when under a great amount of stress. One difficult aspect of understanding stress is that, although some patterns can be found, individuals experience the effects of stress and manage it in many different ways. Some individuals, for example, may find relief from their stress by doing specific activities or hobbies, or even by drinking or smoking cigarettes. Therefore, stress can be a difficult subject to study in regards to finding the best stress management techniques for a diverse group of individuals.

Stress is a particular issue among young adults who are transitioning from high school into college. This phase of life can introduce many challenging lifestyle changes that may be difficult for some traditional undergraduate students to interpret and manage. Here, the term traditional undergraduate student refers to students who started college directly after graduating from high school and are between the ages of 18-23 years old.

Psychologist Jeffery Arnett coined the phrase 'emerging adulthood' to describe individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 (Arnett 2012). Arnett explains that, over time, the experiences individuals have during these specific ages of their life have changed dramatically. These changes include peoples' ideas about adulthood, ages at which individuals get married and have children, and the level of education that they obtain

(Arnett 2012). Therefore, not only are the actual experiences changing, but the way that individuals perceive this life phase is changing as well.

Arnett explains that today many individuals in this emerging adulthood phase have not yet gotten married, do not have children, or have a stable career (Arnett 2012). Role immersion, or the role demands, change greatly between emerging and young adulthood. In other words, the relationships that individuals have and the jobs that they do, are all usually temporary during the emerging adult phase (Arnett 2012). Young adulthood, according to Arnett, better refers to ages 30-45 years old (Arnett 2012). In this case, he believes that "young adulthood" implies that an individual has already completely entered into the adulthood phase of life. However, he feels that this is not really true of individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. The characteristics mentioned above are a few of many that Arnett uses to explain the importance of emerging adulthood. For most students, the emerging adulthood phase consists of moving to college and experiencing an unfamiliar environment with new responsibilities. This environment can develop many new stressors in students' lives they most likely have never experienced before and don't necessarily know how to handle at first. These new stressors can include things such as moving away from home, gaining more independence, making new friends, romantic relationships, college classes, and ultimately taking on a lot of new responsibilities like managing finances.

Students across the country are reporting high levels of stress. The American College Health Association (ACHA) conducts the National College Health Assessment (NCHA), a survey sent out to undergraduate students every fall and spring. This survey provides data on how college students feel throughout the school year in relation to a

number of topics, including academics, careers, finances, sleep quality, anxiety, dieting, exercise, stress, and many more (ACHA 2017). The NCHA report released in the fall of 2016 had a total of 27,787 students that participated across the U.S. These results revealed that 43.6% of undergraduate students reported their stress levels at more than average during the last 12 months.

Students were also asked (yes or no) if a variety of topics were "traumatic or very difficult to handle" (ACHA 2017) within the last 12 months. The following are some of those topics that students were asked about and the percentage of students that reported "yes" as their answer: academics (50.1%), career issues (25.1%), family problems (29.8%), intimate relationships (31.1%) and other types of relationships (28.7%), sleep difficulties (31.2%) and finances (34.6%). Students also reported the following in regards to how they felt in the last two weeks before the survey: 58.0% reported feeling overwhelmed by everything they had to do, 55.7% felt exhausted (not from physical activity), and 29.8% felt overwhelming anxiety (ACHA 2017).

The results from the NCHA survey show that a large number of students are experiencing some sort of stress and are feeling overwhelmed throughout the school year. The topics that students responded to in this survey, such as academics, careers, finances, and relationships are the types of life changes taking place during the emerging adulthood phase Arnett refers to. He also argues that there are so many new and rich research questions to ask individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 because of the changes that have taken place in just the last half-century (Arnett 2012). Some of these changes include social norms such as when students are expected to attend college, get married, or start working. Arnett explains that research questions today should focus on attitudes and

experiences towards topics such as employment, relationships, and the fact that this age range has now become a time of exploration, rather than commitment, for many individuals (Arnett 2012). Adding this type of qualitative data to research such as the NCHA survey will allow researchers to better understand the stress that students today are experiencing during this emerging adulthood phase.

The research discussed in this paper focuses on the types of questions that Arnett considers, such as how students are experiencing and managing stress as well as the extent of their knowledge and use of resources available to them. All of the students interviewed in this study were asked to discuss their experiences transitioning into a college lifestyle, including their employment, relationships (romantic and non-romantic), family situations, academics, and finances. Although some students were hesitant to discuss certain topics, the majority of students provided substantial information regarding the difficulties of these lifestyle changes. Participants discussed how their transition into college affected them emotionally, socially, and academically. Along with gathering information regarding students' experiences with stress, I also asked questions regarding their stress management techniques and how they felt about university resources and programs to help with stress management. All of this information will be used to help Texas State University administration better understand their undergraduate student population and continue to help students succeed during what many individuals consider a stressful phase of their life.

The Effects of Stress

The American Institute of Stress (AIS) states that there is not necessarily one agreed upon definition of stress (2017). The most common definitions, however, describe

stress as a “physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension” or “a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize” (AIS 2017). People can experience stress on many different levels, including physiologically, emotionally, and socially. From a physiological perspective, stress on the human body creates a reaction from the sympathetic nervous system (Thiel 2011). Many people refer to this system as the “fight-or-flight” response of the body meant to protect itself from any type of threat. In many cases, stress is perceived as a threat and therefore can cause specific symptoms within the body. Once the sympathetic nervous system reacts, releasing the hormones epinephrine and norepinephrine, the common symptoms to follow are increased heart rate, blood pressure and respiration and the dilation of blood vessels increasing blood flow to the areas of the body that need the most energy (Thiel 2011). In other words, individuals may feel that their heart is pounding harder, they may start to feel warm and sweaty, and they may also feel short of breath.

When experiencing stress, individuals may feel physical, mental or both types of symptoms. The most common physical symptoms of stress reported by individuals include fatigue, headache, upset stomach, muscle tension, change in appetite, teeth grinding, change in sex drive, and feeling dizzy (AIS 2014). Some common psychological symptoms include irritability or anger, feeling nervous, lack of energy, and feeling as though you could cry (AIS 2014). Individuals may feel all or many of these symptoms during times of stress or they may experience only a few.

At any point in someone’s life, there may be enough change to cause an increase in stress. The transition into college can be especially stressful for certain individuals.

Because this age range (18-23 years) has become a time of exploration (Arnett 2012), college students are faced with many lifestyle changes that increase their stress levels more than they are used to. These changes include things such as a change in environment, living in a campus dorm room (a one-room living space), having a roommate who was most likely a stranger at first, and being away from home. Many of these changes influence what have been described as lifestyle diseases; these usually include things such as depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, and obesity, which are all enhanced as individuals stress levels rise (Boehm and Kennedy-Phillips 2016).

During college students are trying out different roles of adulthood, which according to Arnett, opens up new doors for research regarding things such as instability and identity struggles (Arnett 2012). This paper adds to these areas of research with in-depth, first hand experiences of traditional undergraduate students at Texas State University. Gathering first person accounts from students regarding their experiences with stress today will allow universities to better understand how to continue to help their future students manage these changing stressors.

Past Research

Stress is a topic that has been heavily researched for many years. The majority of research that can be found on stress among undergraduates was conducted using survey methods. Surveys, or quantitative research, can be beneficial for gathering a large sample size and presenting data that is representative of the population in question. A large sample size allows researchers to have a better understanding of topics such as, what the main stressors are for a particular population or what the most common stress management techniques may be. However, these data fail to capture an individual's

experience of stress from his or her own perspective. Adding a qualitative perspective to the research that has already been done on stress will create a much more in-depth, personal understanding of how undergraduate students are experiencing stress.

One limitation of survey-based studies is that the results are based on self-reported answers from the students (Smith and Renk 2007). Although students are self-reporting during an interview as well, a researcher can gather in-depth information and pick up on physical and verbal cues from students' responses. Surveys can also create a bias where students may try to create a favorable image of them based on the variables in the study (Smith and Renk 2007). The opportunity to ask follow-up questions face-to-face can provide information beyond single answered survey questions and creates less biased information. Even surveys that allow students to write a brief response do not allow for follow up questions or further discussions about what helped or deterred students concerning stress management (King, Singh, Bernard, Merianos, and Vidourek 2012). Follow up questions also allow researchers to gather information that may not have otherwise been discovered based solely on set survey questions. This produces the chance for a wider range of issues to be discovered. All of this can be beneficial when creating new programs or resources for students to better meet their needs for stress management. Therefore, using qualitative data in combination with quantitative data can provide researchers with a more accurate understanding of how an individual truly experiences stress within many different aspects of their lives.

Studies of stress vary greatly in terms of looking at different age groups, specific stressors, or stress management techniques. A study by Guo et al. (2011), for example, examined students' stress levels specifically in connection to the economic downturn in

2010 and 2011. This study revealed a significant difference only between student's grade level (Freshman, Sophomore, etc.) and their perceived economic stress (Guo et al. 2011). The authors also showed that students had an increasing stress level related to future employment opportunities, for example after graduating from college, in comparison with current employment opportunities, such as jobs that were available while they were in school.

In another study conducted in 2009, researchers sent out demographic surveys and two psychological scales for students to complete: one about life satisfaction and the second about college stress (Weinstein and Laverghetta 2009). The authors of this study reported that students' life satisfaction was inversely related to their stress and that females were more apt to report their stress than males (Weinstein and Laverghett 2009). Weinstein and Laverghetta stated that these were both key factors for university faculty and staff to understand about their students.

Other studies have considered various in regards to college students and stress: association of stress, general health, and alcohol use in relationship to sleep quality of college students (Valerio, Kim and Sexton 2015); the effects that life stress has on college student athletes (Lu, Hsu, Chan, cheen, and Kao 2012); how perceived life stress affects international students in the United States and their psychological symptoms (Duan, Ho, Siu, Li, and Zhang 2015); the behavioral health and adjustment to college of service members and veterans (Schonfeld, Braue, Stire, Gum, Cross, and Brown 2015); and how different lifestyles and health risks, such as drinking or smoking, have an effect on college students (Laska, Pasch, Lust, Story, and Ehlinger 2009).

Some of the studies mentioned above focus on the negative impacts that stress has on physical function. Valerio et al. (2015), for example, found that an increased level of stress, low general health, and frequent alcohol and cigarette use were independent predictors of sleep problems in college students (Valerio et al. 2015). The authors in this study discussed how higher levels of stress in college students, along with poor health and the increase of activities, such as drinking and smoking, (which can be responses to high stress levels) can lead to even further health problems such as trouble sleeping.

In another study, Laska et al. (2009) analyzed male and female undergraduates. For this study, both males and females were separated into four groups based on their lifestyle quality and the riskiness of their behaviors. Each group was compared with variables such as physical activity, weight control, cigarette usage, alcohol consumption, consumption of fruits and vegetables, inadequate sleep and poor stress management (Laska et al. 2009). The results showed patterning and links between a large number of these behaviors, such as consuming large amounts of alcohol, excessive smoking, or not eating healthily, and the quality of the student's lifestyle. Based on these results, the authors recommend that college campuses should offer more gender-focused programs to help these individual groups of students better manage specific stressors (Laska et al. 2009).

Yet another study showed comparable results with students most often stating that academics, familial relationships, finances, daily hassles, and social relationships were the top stressors (Brougham, Zail, Mendoza and Miller 2009). This same study found more specific stressors within these five categories to include things such as papers or assignments, getting bad grades, choosing a major, parents getting a divorce, illness of a

family member, getting into an argument with family, paying bills or having financial problems, being stuck in traffic or not being able to find a parking spot, breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend, and dealing with roommates or rude people (Brougham et al. 2009). These stressors can be found across much of the research that has already been done on stress and stress management among undergraduate students.

College students have also reported a variety of negative stress symptoms, both psychological and physical, in prior studies. Some of these psychological symptoms include irritability/anger, depressed mood, anxiousness/nervousness, hopelessness, concentration difficulties and social isolation (Peer, Hillman, and Hoet 2015). Other physical symptoms reported include increased heart rate, tremors, appetite changes, gastrointestinal complaints, and sleeping problems (Peer et al. 2015). Additionally, negative cognition as a result of stress can cause students to have a decreased function of their immune, endocrine and cardiovascular systems (Doom and Haeffel 2014). Doom and Haeffel also explained that negative cognition from stress can lead to negative health behaviors such as changes in diet, exercise, and cigarette smoking (Doom and Haeffel 2014).

Other studies have looked at one specific symptom, or set of symptoms, in relationship to a specific stressor among college students. Researchers have also combined symptoms of stress and how it relates to stress management techniques or coping. For example, research has been done on the relationship between students' self-esteem, stress, and physical activity (Hubbs, Doyle, E.I., Bowden, and Doyle, R.D. 2012), students' mental health in relation to the quality of their workplace relationships (Vaughn, Drake, and Haydock 2016), and trouble sleeping and specific symptoms of

depression (Brooks, Girgenti, and Mills 2009). These types of studies discovered aspects of stress among college students such as a negative correlation between stress and self-esteem for a total sample of students and among men and women separately (Hubbs et al. 2012). College students' symptoms have also been studied in relation to major events that happened, or are happening, in their lifetime such as their symptoms and emotional reaction to September 11, 2001 (Lindsey, Fugere, and Chan 2007).

Lastly, there are also a variety of stress management techniques that college students' use in attempt to relieve their stress. Some of these include, physical activity (Baghurst and Kelley 2014), thinking proactively, anticipating the stressors before they occur, contacting people in their social support network (Peer et al. 2007), negative dietary behaviors, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, or behaving in other risky ways for example, risky sexual behavior and driving drunk (Laska et al 2009). Other stress management techniques among college students include listening to music, running or exercising, talking or calling someone to vent, taking deep breaths, stretching, praying, imagining something pleasant, meditating, and counting to ten (King et al. 2012).

The given examples have been published in journals among a variety of disciplines including psychology, education, and health journals. As these many examples demonstrate, stress is experienced in diverse ways and not everyone manages it in the same way. The major gap in stress research among college students is the lack of qualitative data. The majority of information researchers have is based on survey methods and students' self scored answers from given scales regarding general stress levels or life satisfaction. This gap is significant when trying to understand students' experience of stress in terms of classes, finances, family relationships, or their social life.

The other gap in a lot of the research cited is the lack of male participants in studies. Having a much greater number of female students than male students in a study can greatly skew the knowledge gained from that data in terms of how a sample of students experiences stress. This can also make it difficult to find a reason for certain gender differences that appear in research concerning stressors or stress management techniques. The research that is presented in this paper attempts to add to these gaps by providing in-depth qualitative data and drawing from a balanced sample of both males and females.

Theory

There are many anthropologists who have studied topics using narrative analysis. The idea of narrative analysis is that the stories people tell can provide a medium through which researchers can learn and understand other individuals' experiences that the researcher has not lived through (Mattingly and Garro 2000). As Mattingly and Garro explain, using narrative analysis as a theoretical approach to research allows researchers to obtain a broader context for trying to determine what was happening at that particular time or place (Mattingly and Garro 2000).

Many areas of cultural anthropology involve gathering information, or stories, from individuals regarding their experiences and details about their culture. As anthropologists began using narrative as a theoretical viewpoint they drew from many different disciplines including linguistics, history, and psychology, to examine narrative as a communicative act (Mattingly and Garro 2000). In other words, they were using narrative to examine the relationship between how individuals told their stories and the content, or cultural knowledge within them (Mattingly and Garro 2000).

Catherine Riessmann, a sociology professor who became known for her writings on narrative analysis, explained that during an interview individuals attempt to convince the listener that certain events happened at a point in time and that it affected him or her in a specific way (Riessmann 1990). She argues that it is important to observe the "how" of the telling and not just the "what" (Riessmann 1990). In other words, how is the individual telling the story and how are they describing themselves, and others, within it? This idea ties into that of Erving Goffman's when he explains that the storytellers can be viewed as "animators" (Ochs and Capps 2001). By this he means that the storytellers will use communicative resources such as talk, print, visual representative, gesture, body orientation, movement and facial expression to explain what their position was during an event and how they felt at that moment (Ochs and Capps 2001).

For my research, it was important for me to use narrative as a theoretical lens because my goal was to understand not just what stressed students out, but how they specifically experienced stress and what it felt like from their perspective. My goal was to uncover in-depth description of their feelings and emotions during particularly stressful situations. Along with this, I wanted to try to understand how each individual's experience with stress might fit in with the culture of Texas State University. In other words, I wanted to see if there were patterns in how students experience and manage their stress in order to help the university administration better understand how students are interacting with their campus specifically and know if changes need to be made in the future.

Narrative has been described as "a fundamental human way to give meanings to experience" (Mattingly and Garro 2000). Although anthropologists are accustomed to

gathering stories from individuals and analyzing them (Mattingly and Garro 2000), the important aspect of narrative analysis is to understand the event within the framework of an individual's identity. Based on scholarly research, Bucholtz and Hall define identity as "the social positioning of self and other" (2005). In their article "Identity and Interaction: a sociocultural linguistic approach" they focus on fundamental aspects of studying identity with the goal of creating a model that incorporates both current research at the time and possible new directions (Bucholtz and Hall 2005).

Bucholtz and Hall discuss five important principles of studying identity. These are emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness. Emergence is based on the idea that identity is located within the mind of an individual (2005). However, Bucholtz and Hall argue that identity emerges not necessarily from within the mind, but from the specific conditions of linguistic interactions and therefore, is a social, cultural phenomenon (2005). Positionality refers to an individual's identity and how it is shaped as they move between moments. Bucholtz and Hall believe identity in this sense includes macro-level demographic categories, local or cultural positions, and also temporary roles and stances an individual may occupy (2005). Indexicality refers to the links between the linguistic form of identities and the social meanings. It is important to understand that these ideological structures of identity are rooted in cultural beliefs and values (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). The relationality principle emphasizes that identities are never independent but always have a social meaning in relation to other identities around them (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). The fifth and final principle that Bucholtz and Hall discuss is that of partialness. By this they mean that any formation of a given identity is only a small portion of a much larger picture. Therefore, Bucholtz and Hall believe that it is

something that continuously shifts through different contexts and as different interactions occur (2005).

Using narrative as a theoretical approach allows researchers to decode and reframe the past in order to make sense of the present and provide a direction for the future (Mattingly and Garro 2000). During my analysis it was important to observe individuals' identity throughout each interview and keep in mind Bucholtz and Hall's idea that identity emerges from interactions and is therefore a social and cultural phenomenon (2005). This aspect specifically draws on the importance of my research to not only add knowledge about stress to the field of cultural and medical anthropology, but also to Texas State University and their understanding of how students are interacting with their campus.

The last theoretical viewpoint that I used for my research is idioms of distress. Mark and Mimi Nichter have both been known to draw on the concept idioms of distress in their research. Mark Nichter describes this theory as a "socially and culturally resonant means of experiencing and expressing distress in local worlds" (Nichter 2010). In other words, idioms of distress can be seen as actions people take or words and phrases that signal the fact that they are in distress. An excellent example of this is Mimi Nichter's book "Fat Talk". In this book, Mimi Nichter discussed her research on body image and how young girls talked about weight and dieting. She explained that one girl would use the phrase "I'm so fat" to let her friends know that she was feeling stressed or out of control (Nichter 2000). In this example, the phrase "I'm so fat" was an idiom of distress. In other cases girls used the phrase right before eating something unhealthy in the cafeteria line (Nichter 2000). Mimi also gives a nonverbal example in her book "Lighting

Up". In this book she describes smoking on college campuses and the idea that some students would use smoking to indicate that they were feeling stressed out (Nichter 2015). She determined this as an idiom of distress signaling a variety of feelings including the implication that the individual wanted to be alone, that they wanted comfort from others, or that some individuals were upset with their significant other (Nichter 2015).

Idioms of distress are used as signals to others that an individual is feeling anger, powerlessness, or anxiety (Nichter 2010). Mark Nichter also states that they can be culturally or interpersonally effective ways of expressing distress to others and may also be ways to cope (2010). In other words, identifying idioms of distress can help researchers better understand how a specific group of individuals experience certain aspects of life. It can also provide more detailed information about a particular culture or subculture.

My goal with this research was to help Texas State University begin to understand students better in terms of their experiences with stress and stress management. To do this, I provide more in-depth information directly from students themselves. My research does not solve the issue of fully understanding the many ways that students experience stress or what may be the best way to help with stress management. However, my findings offer additional insight into the students' lives that can inform the university about students' stressors specifically associated with Texas State and raise additional questions for further study.

Methods

My research focuses on undergraduate students at Texas State University. I conducted this research throughout the summer and fall of 2017. The main research questions that I studied were the following. What are the major stressors that students experience throughout college? What strategies do they use to cope? Are students aware of the programs and resources that are offered on campus; if so, how often do they use them and are they beneficial?

To recruit students for my study I posted flyers around campus, and I also did classroom announcements with the permission of the professor. I placed 30 flyers in buildings and areas of campus where there would be a larger flow of students during the summer, and I conducted approximately 26 classroom announcements. All of the students that contacted me reported hearing about my study in a classroom announcement.

I recruited both male and female traditional undergraduates. In this case, I refer to traditional students as those who came to college directly after graduating from high school and were between the ages of 18 and 23 years old. I chose this group of students so that I could focus on individuals who have experienced similar aspects of the college transition so far. Graduate students, for example, may have very different stressors than undergraduate students. During my classroom announcements I recruited for both one-on-one interviews and focus groups. From these I recruited 10 females and 10 males for individual interviews. I was also able to recruit 5 individuals for a focus group. This focus group was made up of 3 males and 2 females. For the one-on-one interviews I developed an open-ended interview questionnaire consisting of 16 questions. Many of

these questions were also used during the focus group along with some more detailed questions based on the information I gathered from individual interviews.

All of the questions that I asked during the one-on-one interviews were based on my three main research questions. I focused on topics such as students' transition into college, what stresses them out, how they feel mentally and physically when they are feeling stressed out, what their main ways of relieving stress were, and whether or not they had ever participated in any of the programs and resources offered on campus to help with stress management. For the focus group questions further explored some of the themes that emerged during the one-on-one interviews. For example, I informed the focus group of themes that I found regarding differences between stressors for males and females. After providing them with this information, I asked for their thoughts and interpretation as to why I may be seeing these specific gendered patterns.

Each student also filled out a one-page demographic survey. This allowed me to have a better understanding of the sample of students I recruited in comparison to the general population of students at Texas State University. This survey included questions regarding their age, ethnicity, level in school (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), employment status, financial help from family or financial aid, and relationship status. All students involved in in this study signed a consent form with information about campus services including the counseling center. This was to assure that if the interview became stressful for any individual, he or she was aware of a location on campus where they could receive help.

I recorded the audio for all of the interviews and the focus group, then transcribed and coded them to look for emergent themes. I chose to transcribe my interviews so that I

would be able to more closely examine the data. Along with this, I wanted to be sure that I fully understood what each individual was saying and did not unintentionally take anything out of context. Coding each interview allowed me to more easily locate specific topics during my analysis and helped to reveal patterns and themes throughout all of my data. To do this, I carefully read through each transcribed interview and looked for answers concerning my main research questions. As I began to find themes I was able to decide on a list of codes that I could use throughout all of my interviews. In terms of themes, I looked for patterns among what students described as common stressors, symptoms of stress and ways that they relieved their stress (including whether or not they participated in university programs and resources). However, I also looked for possible emerging themes among how individual students perceived themselves and others around them during times of elevated stress levels.

Throughout my analysis of the 20 interviews that I conducted, there were very clear themes that emerged regarding the largest stressors for students here at Texas State University. The sample of students that I recruited was fairly diverse, though it was not enough to be able to make comparisons across ethnicities. However, having a balanced sample of 10 males and 10 females, I was able to look at the emerging patterns of stressors in terms of gender differences. These gender differences are discussed where they emerge within each findings section.

Description of Sample

Texas State University had a total of 38,694 students as of fall 2017. Of those, 34,206 students are undergraduates (TXST University Marketing 2017) and almost 7,000 of those students live on campus. About 58% of the student population is female and 42%

is male. In terms of ethnicity, 47% of the student population is white, 36% is Hispanic, 11% is African American and 5% is other. In total, over half of the Texas State student population are racial or ethnic minorities (52%) (TXST 2017).

I individually interviewed a total of 20 undergraduate students at Texas State University (10 females and 10 males). All of the participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 years old. Of all 20 students, one was 18, four were 19, four were 20, six were 21, one was 22, and four were 23. There was one freshman, two sophomores, seven juniors, and 10 seniors. As a note, I asked them what year they were based on credit. Therefore, some of the students were only 20 years old, but were at a junior status. I was also able to recruit a diverse sample in terms of students' ethnicity. About 55% of the students in my sample were white, 5% were Black or African American, 25% were Hispanic or Latino/a, 10% were Asian/Chinese, and 5% were other. The majority of students that I interviewed lived in an apartment complex off campus. Only two students were living on campus in the dorms.

II. AS A COLLEGE STUDENT WHAT STRESSES YOU OUT?

During the individual interviews I asked students open-endedly what stressed them out as a college student. From the 20 students that I interviewed, there were a total of 25 different stressors that were reported. The top three stressors among this sample of students were time management, finances, and schoolwork (specifically tests, homework, and group projects). These three stressors were each mentioned a total of 8 times making them the most common stressors to come up during the interviews. The next most common stressors included maintaining grades or overall GPA, trying to meet high self-expectations, social life (including both romantic relationships and friendships), school deadlines, family troubles, having more responsibilities, having a job, struggling with classes, and the pressure of deciding on a future career. All of these listed stressors were mentioned at least three times among all of the interviews conducted. Other stressors that were outliers, or only mentioned by one or two students, included social anxiety, trusting other people, pressure from family members, being independent, having a medical condition (specifically in this study ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome), being involved in extracurricular activities, being a people pleaser, trying to take advantage of all the opportunities available on campus, being involved in a sport, rushing for a fraternity, the bus system or the commute to campus, and being a woman on campus (specifically the fear of doing things alone or at night).

Time Management

Any time that a student reported feeling stressed about managing their time between different aspects of their lives I labeled this as time management. For example, some students reported that they struggled with managing time between school and their

job or school and spending time with their friends. When asked what stressed him out as a college student Sean, a 20 year old senior replied "the juggling aspect of it...you have all of your friends asking if you want to hang out, or go out and party...and then also having to tell them no, that you need to stay in and study or do something specific...that's pretty stressful". Students who felt that this was stressful often stated that it was hard to tell their friends "no" as in Sean's case, or they found it difficult knowing that their friends were out doing fun things and they had to stay in and study.

Other students felt that it was difficult to manage their time between school and their job. When I asked Sarah, a 22-year-old junior, what the most stressful thing regarding time management was she replied, "maybe working so much or having to focus on work instead of school at times. Like, for example, today instead of being able to go to Alkek (the campus library) and study, I have to go to work". Other students felt this way too regarding the amount of time that they spent at work versus finding time to study. Erica, a 19-year-old sophomore, explained what her normal schedule was like during the week when I asked her what her biggest stressor was:

Definitely my job...it's a little hectic at times. Mostly putting towards that is time management. Like, now I go to class 8 until noon and then I have to do my work between noon and 5 because I have to go to sleep because I work nights. Like, from 10pm to 3am...and then you have to drag yourself out of bed and yeah...but I mean, that's probably the most stressful right now.

Out of all 20 students that I spoke with, 15 of them were employed full-time, part-time, or seasonally during the school year. Like Erica, many of the students do not always feel that they are getting enough time to study and do homework around their work schedule. In many cases, this can also take away from the amount of sleep they get each night or time spent doing other leisurely activities that they enjoy.

Another aspect of time management that students mentioned was struggling to simply keep up with everything they had to do throughout each week. Tyler, who is a 21-year-old senior and athlete, explained how he feels when he has multiple things going on at once:

It's usually, I have a mindset like, I have to study for this test, but I need to go to sleep early cause I have to wake up early in the morning and run in the morning. But, if I sleep in, in the morning, it's like, oh now I gotta do my run at night. I also need to be studying for the test too. But it's just, I get kind of discombobulated I guess. And it's just like, I need to do all these things. But, if I slip up on one it's just, it goes downhill from there.

It was clear to me that many students felt very overwhelmed in terms of feeling as though they do not have enough time to accomplish everything they need, and want, to do throughout the day or week.

Finances

Aspects of struggling with finances were brought up during 8 out of the 20 interviews I conducted. These different aspects included budgeting without the help of a parent, having to work a lot of hours to make enough money, and even being able to afford enough meals until their next paycheck or financial aid disbursement. It was clear that no matter what aspect of finances was a struggle, each student that mentioned it as a stressor felt that it was one of the biggest stressors since they started college.

When I asked Sean, who was mentioned earlier, if there was anything else that really stressed him out he explained, "it was a maturity thing". When I asked him to explain what he meant by this he told me:

Well, I mean...there's a lot more financial freedom that you have to deal with in college so, I guess doing the "adulthood"...having to pay your taxes, getting your water bill on time, not spending your money on pot or alcohol so you can actually pay for food and pay

for nice food that's healthy that's gonna fuel you better than just junk food, which is easy.

As Sean demonstrates here, it is a dramatic change in lifestyle when students move out of their parents' home and are on their own for the first time. This transition suddenly changed Sean's idea of his own identity from being at home to having to take on more aspects of an adult role. Although it may be nice to have that freedom, his discussion of maturity shows his realization of now seeing himself as an adult on his own. In many cases, students like Sean may not have had any experience with managing their money on their own so they may experience much more of a shock when having to suddenly focus on money along with school. This ultimately affects other aspects of students' life, like staying healthy, in terms of what types of food they buy and how much they eat as Sean mentioned.

Nicole, a 19-year-old freshman, told me a lot about her financial situation and the trouble with her tuition. In Nicole's case, her father pays for her tuition. However, other factors, including family troubles such as divorce, affected her financial help from him, which in turn caused her stress level to rise throughout the semester. For example, she explained to me her current financial situation as she was trying to prepare for the spring semester:

The other thing that happens is, I am now kind of in a financial bind. My college is kind of being paid for by my dad. He actually didn't take out enough loans though and refuses to get on the phone so I can talk about filing for financial aid for next year...so that's extremely stressful, to know that my future for being able to pay for college is uncertain and the fact that my spring semester isn't even paid for and that thanks to [my dad] I have holds on my account so I can't register for classes for the spring semester.

In comparison to Sean's description of his financial problems caused by being on his own, Nicole explains her situation as being very dependent on her family still. Although she has more freedom than when she lived at home, not having money provided for her by her family holds her back from buying things throughout the semester. She told me more later on in the interview about her struggle with making her money last each month just for food. Nicole identifies herself as still being very dependent on her family, which is causing a lot of her stress.

Other students may have very little or no financial help from parents. This can have an even bigger impact on how students handle school and the amount of stress they endure throughout the year. For example, Elizabeth, a 20-year-old junior, told me about her stressful financial situation since she transferred to Texas State University and no longer had help from her parents:

Because my parents don't cover anything so it's like I have to pay for my student fees and then I had to go to the clinic the other day and I owe like, another sum of money for that. And then, I didn't think it was going to be that much but it was; it was a crazy amount. And then having to pay my rent obviously and the stuff that my FAFSA didn't cover, it's all due in November...and then groceries you know.

Although 17 out of 20 students said that they received financial support from their parents or guardians, only 3 students specified that their parents paid for all of their expenses. For those students who don't receive financial help with everything, this leaves many costs up to the student themselves, including anything extra they may want to do for fun like going out with their friends or spending money on hobbies.

Schoolwork: Tests, Homework, and Projects

The third stressor that was most common was a combination of preparing for and taking tests, keeping up with homework, and completing assignments, such as group projects. I included all of these three categories under schoolwork since they all indicated stress caused by work that was assigned in classes. These topics were also sometimes brought up in terms of time management. However, I only included them under schoolwork when the student specifically mentioned aspects of the work that stressed them out and did not discuss it in terms of managing their time. When it came to homework, many of the students stated that it was simply stressful with the number of assignments that were given and making sure that they were keeping up with them. This is something that did not necessarily cause extremely high levels of stress in students but did seem to cause a continuous low level of stress throughout the semester.

Tests and finals, although occurring less often than homework, caused a much higher level of stress among students. Tim, who is 19 years old, told me right away that finals, group projects, and presentations stressed him out. When I asked him why finals were such a huge stressor for him, he explained:

The fact that it encompasses the entire semester. So, it's like sixteen weeks worth of material that I have to make sure I know. And some of it is the stuff that has been previously covered earlier in the semester. It's still scary to go back to because I don't remember how much I understand or if I forgot anything. And then there's also new content which, if I'm still struggling to understand that then it's also difficult to be able to go back and review what is supposed to be already established.

Other students who experienced stress due to tests, homework or projects did so because of the influence it had on their overall grade in the course. Zach, 20 years old, explained

how stressful the exams in his department were because of when they occurred and how much they influence his overall grade:

The way that the department has it set up here is every exam happens...pretty much within that one week. And it's a significant portion of your grade because they know that cheating on homework and projects and things is totally possible...so they need something that is quantifiable and in a controlled environment, which is the tests. So for example...[in one of my classes] each of those tests was worth a massive portion of the overall grade. And the final was worth 35%. So, if you failed the final, you failed the course. That's a pretty stressful test.

Throughout my interview with Zach, it was very clear to me that he was a student who worked extremely hard throughout the school year. He was very motivated by his major in engineering and spoke with a lot of excitement about his hobbies, which usually included building things. Zach seemed to put a large emphasis on how important his test grades were to him, not just to feel good about his work, but how his grades contributed to his future career path. Although having all of the tests in one week was very stressful, the amount of weight that each grade had on Zach's class grade and his future, played a large part in affecting his stress level as well.

In regards to working on group projects Jacob, who is 21 years old, told me that "when you're depending on other people to kind of hold up their end and you can kind of see that they may not be putting as much effort as they should be, that's pretty stressful if you are the person who is putting in effort". Tim, quoted just earlier, also told me that group projects were a stressor. When I asked him to explain to me why they were such a huge stressor he explained that "[he hates] being in front of a group of people and having to talk. And when it's an entire classroom it makes it even worse". The stress students felt from group projects was usually caused by either having to work with other students or

having to present in front of a large crowd. These were not necessarily long lasting stressors, but they did cause a period of much higher stress than normal for the students who mentioned group projects as a stressor.

Other Major Stressors

Although time management, finances, and schoolwork were the top three themes that emerged from my interviews, there were a few other stressors that followed closely. Out of the 20 interviews, 7 students specifically stated that maintaining their GPA and grades was a major stressor. Close behind this were students having high self-expectations for themselves to do well, which was mentioned by 6 participants and also social life, which was mentioned by 5. Although these three reported stressors did not appear as often as the top three, they are important to mention because they appeared in at least 25% of the interviews.

For some students, it was clear that their stress emerged from a combination of social life, maintaining grades, and having high self-expectations. For example Shelby, a 19-year-old sophomore who was taking summer classes at the time, told me that grades really stressed her out. When I asked her what the most stressful thing about grades was, she replied, "getting the 4.0". She told me:

Right now, thankfully, I have it...but, you know, it's scary. Like right now I'm worried about getting a 4.0 in this [class] because I took two classes this summer session...and I've never taken a summer class before...so that's a little worrisome. I have a test tomorrow so, it's just...I'm a perfectionist so it's not so much, you know, I know everything's gonna be okay if I don't have a 4.0 anymore or if I get a B, but it's the making sure that I'm trying my best and doing my best...I don't want to half-ass anything, you know what I mean?...I gotta make sure that I'm giving it my all. So, that's the part that kind of stresses me out the most...that's something that I put on myself.

More often than not, when a student spoke to me about stress caused by trying to maintain their GPA or get good grades, it ended with them telling me about the high expectations they hold for themselves. Only two out of the six individuals who talked about maintaining their grades stated that the stress resulted from their parents pushing them to do well. Overall, there was a total of 6 individuals that discussed the high expectations they set for themselves in terms of academics or other aspects of college. Norah, a 21-year-old senior, explained her biggest stressor as a college student and where it stemmed from:

I think I put a lot of pressure on myself. So, it's very like, self inflicted pressure to succeed. I think it has to stem from like, being in high school my only form of validation that I was successful or doing something right was academics. That's the only thing that I got that from. And so, I think I have honestly just, kind of stuck to that as a form of, I don't know, self-validation.

Finally, five students described social life as a stressor. For these students, this referred to having to tell friends "no" when they wanted to go do other things besides study, difficulties in their friendships or romantic relationships, and taking on problems that their friends are going through. Shelby, who was mentioned earlier, also told me about her stress regarding her friend group. She said:

I really have to evaluate who I want in my life and who I don't want. You know, I had some stress, where I was like, okay I have to let these people go who don't really understand...I'm here, you know, to not only be successful but, you know, to hopefully make a positive impact in people's lives, which is a huge thing of mine. And so, I really had to re-evaluate some friendships. Like, especially this past semester cause I was pretty busy and some people just don't understand. So, that was a little stressful.

As this example illustrates, learning to be independent for the first time, figuring out what career to pursue, and trying to do well can all be more difficult to handle when students

feel as though they have friends who are not supportive or understanding. Shelby's comment shows one aspect of how a student's social life can cause stress during the school year. Another aspect of this is seen in Emily's case. Emily is a 20-year-old junior and she told me that her friends and roommates can cause her a lot of stress. When I asked her why this was, she replied:

I guess a lot of different things. Like, I have a friend now, it's actually my closest friend, she just, I feel like she likes to put her problems on me all the time. And I'm the type of person that will take that on. So, that's kind of a big stressor for me.

Both Emily and Shelby's experience with their friends reflects difficulties regarding their interactions with their friend groups. Shelby felt as though her friends were not being supportive enough or understanding of her schedule and her goals as a student here at Texas State. In Emily's case, it seems as though she is the supportive one when her closest friend is going through tough times. However, taking on someone else's stress, as Emily discussed, is starting to have an effect on her own stress levels.

During the course of the interview I also asked students how they felt about specifically about social media. None of the students had previously mentioned social media during their interviews. However, when asked directly, 12 of the 20 students told me that social media could definitely be a stressor at times. The remaining students said that they usually used social media as a stress reliever or they did not really use it all.

Of the 12 students that felt social media could sometimes be a stressor, 9 of them explained that it was the content that caused them to become stressed. Some examples of this include students becoming frustrated by what others are posting, feeling a lower self-esteem based on what others are saying or doing, taking on the stress others are experiencing such as family members, dwelling on things that other people have said,

seeing mean posts, becoming jealous of what other people were doing (traveling, being out at the bar, etc.), and feeling that there were high social expectations regarding how your life should be in college. The other two students who felt that social media could be an added stressor explained that it was not the content that bothered them, but it was simply something that distracted them from their work.

More of the female students that were interviewed reacted to what people were posting about how they should act or feel about themselves, ultimately ending in jealousy or a lower self-esteem. Bethany, for example, explained to me that social media could definitely be a stressor for her throughout the school year.

But, for social media and stress, it is a huge stressor because, not only do I see people out having fun and of course like, I'm happy for you, but then I'm like, why wasn't I invited or, you know what I mean? And so then, or then I'm like, oh, well I don't have money to go to Europe, you know. When everyone else is studying abroad...Because then it makes me think that, you know, I'm not as cool cause I'm not going and doing all these fun things, you know. And so...it's definitely a downer on my self-esteem. Which causes stress.

In this quote, Bethany's stress first stemmed from not being invited out to do the things that her friends were. However, as she continued to talk about social media she began to show that she began to feel down about things like how much money she had or her appearance simply because she was not able to go on these trips or study abroad. Just being able to see pictures or comments from other students on social media would cause stress in Bethany's life.

Elizabeth explained to me why exactly she thought both the media in general and social media sites were such a large stressor for her in college.

I think a lot of it how we're supposed to like, live our college years and whenever we're not able to I feel like that is stressful. Because you want to be able to make them as big as you possibly can and as fun as possible. But like, whenever you're not having that, like you have a picture perfect way of how college should be and whenever it's not it's like oh, it should be this way, it's a notion of how you want it to be but it's not because of how media perceives it...you want to be like that...I feel like Snapchat is a big stressor. You can always see when people open it...and whenever you check your memories you see everyone is out doing something or doing something productive and you're at home studying and you're like, oh I want to go out with them. And then definitely Instagram as well because everything looks so perfect. I have a lot of people who travel or studying abroad right now and it's kind of like oh, I'm working and then doing school and trying to make rent and they get to do all this crazy fun stuff and it's like, I don't.

For Elizabeth, the way that life was portrayed in the media and on social media sites was a huge influence regarding how she felt about herself or expectations of what her college years were supposed to be like. She explained that things looked "perfect" on social media. This ultimately influenced the way that she felt in regards to the things that she was not able to do but her friends were. Seeing other students traveling or doing all of these things outside of schoolwork seemed to cause a lot of stress and self-doubt.

Overall, it can be difficult for universities to help students with stress caused by social media. With the numerous social media sites that are out there and the ability for anyone to post anything, this may be something that is hard to reduce, especially as technology continues to advance. However, I still think that it is important to understand what it is about the social media sites that are the root of students' stress. Understanding where their stress comes from may help to incorporate some sort of media literacy program to help them learn to think about what people post in different ways, or techniques to reduce the stress caused by social media in general. This could ultimately

raise awareness to the issue by informing students about how social media can become a stressor.

Gender Differences

Although each student was asked openly, what stressed him or her out, time management was reported as a stressor by 8 out of 20 students interviewed. Of those, 4 of them were female and 4 of them were male. There appeared to be no gender differences regarding how students' experienced time management. This was the same outcome in regards to finances. There were both 4 males and 4 females that discussed their struggle with money. However, the third most common stressor, schoolwork, differed greatly. Of the 8 students that reported this as a stressor, 7 were male. A gender difference also emerged in regards to social life as a stressor. There were a total of 5 students that reported aspects of their social life as stressors. However, 4 out of 5 of these students were female.

These gender differences do not necessarily mean that male and female students experience stress from completely different things. However, this data reveals that male and female students are experiencing stress in different ways in terms of what they consider their biggest stressors. Although there were similarities between the stressors mentioned by male and female participants, schoolwork was more often mentioned by males, whereas females more often mentioned aspects of social life.

Of the 12 students that said social media could sometimes cause stress, 7 of these were female and 5 were male. Therefore, I do not feel that there were any drastic gender differences regarding whether or not females or males experience stress from social

media in general. However, of the 9 individuals who said that it was the content that stressed them out, 6 of these were female students and only 3 of them were male.

Overall, it can be difficult for universities to help students with stress caused by social media. With the numerous social media sites that are out there and the ability for anyone to post anything, this may be something that is hard to reduce, especially as technology continues to advance. However, it is important to understand what it is about the social media sites that are the root of students' stress. Understanding where their stress comes from may help to incorporate some sort of media literacy program to help them learn to think about what people post in different ways, or techniques to reduce the stress caused by social media in general. This could ultimately raise awareness to the issue by informing students about how social media can become a stressor.

Focus Group Results: Stress

The focus group that I conducted had a total of 5 students and it was conducted during the first month of the fall semester. There were two females and three males. When I started the focus group I asked each student to write down on sticky notes everything that came to mind when I said the word 'stress'. This resulted in five main categories that the students arranged, and titled, themselves out of their combined sticky notes. The five categories included "education", "adulating", "family", "emotions or feelings", and "binge eating". Education included words and phrases such as time management, school, homework, exams, procrastination, and the library stairs on campus. In regards to the last stressor mentioned, a few of the students experienced stress from the amount of stairs on campus they had to climb throughout the day, specifically the ones leading up to the library. Adulating meaning things associated with growing up or

being an adult, was the title given to things such as job, insurance of any kind, and money. The students felt that things such as parents and relationships went together under the title "family" and lastly, the title "emotions and feelings" included things like sad, mad, no sleep, tired, and depressed.

Having the students write down and arrange their thoughts about stress helped to start a more comfortable discussion regarding how they experienced stress. After this I asked the five students to tell me what they considered to be their biggest stressors as college students. In response to this I received a total of 9 stressors that these five students felt affected them the most. These 9 stressors included tests, the feeling of everything having to be done at once, deadlines, group projects, balance, transitioning, parking on campus, time management, the food offered on campus and how busy the dining halls would get. Although there were a few differences in the stressors reported by the students in the focus group versus the individual interviews, there is some overlap concerning what all of the students in this research considered stressors as a college student.

III. HOW DO YOU EXPERIENCE STRESS?

Along with learning about the different types of stressors that students experienced, I wanted to understand how stress affected them both physically and psychologically. In order to do this I asked each student how they experienced stress within their body. I further broke this down by asking specifically how their body felt physically and what their mind felt like during stressful situations.

Asking these questions resulted in a total of 32 different physical symptoms and 24 different psychological symptoms from all 20 interviews. Most students mentioned two or three different symptoms that they experienced during stressful situations throughout the school year. The most common physical symptom, mentioned 6 times, was muscle tension throughout the body. Some of the other symptoms mentioned by multiple students were shaking or fidgeting, headaches, stomach aches, increased heart rate, sweating, fatigue, nausea, feeling anxious, pressure, stuttering, neck and shoulder pain, and stress hives. These students described their muscle tension in different locations of their body, including their neck and shoulders to their back. Asking students how the stress felt in their body or in their mind usually resulted in a short list of different symptoms that they experienced. For example, Erica tried to explain what her body felt like when she became very stressed at work.

I don't know how to explain it. Like, if one thing's not working correctly then a lot of other things fail. So, when my muscles tense up I don't type as fast or I'm worried about other things so it's also a lot of mental. Like, man I really need to get this correct and when you mess up it's just a-whole-nother chain so, it starts from the tense muscles, to the increase heart rate and sometimes sweating and you know, it's just, it goes from one to ten so fast.

For Erica it seemed like there was a quick build up to feeling one symptom and then the next. She felt like once she started feeling one symptom she knew the rest of her body would feel off, or not normal, as long as she was stressed. Another student, Seth also felt the muscle tension whenever he became stressed out.

I mean anxiety. Clenched teeth. That's my new thing is, I've noticed that a lot. You know, just feeling anger. It's a lot, I don't know, let's see what else...Just tense, you know, my whole body, my muscles are just sore the next morning just from being all tense...I don't know how you describe it other than just, it's all pent up, you know.

Here, Seth talked about how his body felt after the stress decreased as well. Although, he would feel tense during a stressful situation, he may not have noticed how drastic it was until he woke up the next morning and his whole body was sore. In Seth's case, his stress had a longer lasting affect on his body than just during a stressful moment.

The most common psychological symptom, also mentioned 6 times, was the feeling of too much going on in your mind. Other psychological symptoms mentioned by at least two people include having a hard time focusing, confusion, trouble sleeping, and a feeling of wanting to just run away from the situation completely. Although many of these students knew that their mind felt busy or that they felt confused, it was a little more challenging for some of them to describe how they felt psychologically during stressful moments.

When I asked Sarah how stress felt in her body, she gave me a list of symptoms that were common to her. She laughed a little and told me, "I just start feeling very tense and just, agitated. It's hard for me to focus and I start getting very quiet and I'm usually not the quietest person in the room." While Sarah did mention a few physical symptoms like stomach aches, migraines and even stress hives, I asked her if she could explain to

me more what it felt like in her mind, drawing the conversation back to her comment about feeling agitated. She said, "I can't get anything done in that moment, or that I have to run away. Even if it's from nothing, it feels that way, like I have to run away, which is a very odd feeling." As Sarah explained to me what it was like when this her stress levels rose it was very clear to me that scratching her wrists or tugging at her sleeves had become an idiom of distress for her. When she started doing this, it registered in her own mind that she was stressed out more than normal. However, when becoming agitated and losing focus, it was difficult for her to think of ways to relieve her stress, resulting in a feeling of wanting to run away.

Nicole, whose main stressor throughout the interview was her finances and disagreements with her family, told me that her anxiety could get very intense at times. When I asked her how her stress felt in her mind she responded using an interesting comparison. She explained,

"Running thoughts. I have described it before as you have a clogged sink but you turn the faucet on full blast. You know? You don't have the capacity to even deal with the thoughts that might already be there, you're already blocked up and then you start all of a sudden gushing everything in and then it starts pouring out. And when it's pouring out that's really when the stress starts to manifest and you start feeling ill. Cause there's a capacity you can take but if you can't drain it, you'll flood."

Nicole's description of how her stress manifested encompasses how many of the students seemed to feel as their stress started to elevate over a period of time. It is important to realize that students like Nicole are experiencing high stress levels that can result in negative physical and psychological symptoms. Although some of these symptoms are normal or may not reach a level of concern, it is important to note that once many

students reach high levels of stress they may not have a plan for how to relieve that stress to bring their body back to a level of feeling secure.

Unlike my results regarding student's most common causes of stress, there were no gender differences among the responses for how student's felt physically and psychologically during stressful situations. Although some symptoms were talked about much more often than others, male and female students seem to generally experience stress in a similar way when it comes to the affects on their bodies and minds.

IV. WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELIEVE YOUR STRESS?

The second important aspect of this research was to understand how students manage their stress throughout the school year. To do this, I asked each student what he or she did in different situations when they started feeling stressed out. Similar as to when I asked each student about their stressors, this question usually generated a list of different strategies that each individual used when they felt stressed. The two most common stress management techniques that emerged included exercising and talking or spending time with friends or family. Out of the 20 interviews, 13 individuals mentioned some type of exercise as a stress management technique that they either currently used or had used since they started college at Texas State University. Of those 13 students, 8 of them were male and 5 of them were female. Talking or spending time with friends and family was mentioned by 7 of the students. Only 2 of those 7 students were male. The remaining 5 were female. These were the two stress management techniques that were mentioned the most, although there were several others that were brought up as well.

Exercise

Exercises mentioned by students included running, resistance training, walking, and yoga. Of these, the most common were running or walking. Many of the students that used exercise as a stress reliever stated that this was usually one of the best ways to help bring their stress levels down. In some cases students felt that it was something that would keep their mind off of whatever was stressing them out. Others explained that exercising made them feel relaxed or exhausted so that they did not have the energy to stress about anything. For example, when I asked Timothy how he relieved his stress his first response was the following:

Well, I go running. That helps. I'll run a few miles. I mean, it keeps the body healthy and all that and whatnot. But, running really helps reduce the tension in my muscles I feel at times. So, after running I'll feel tired but I'll still feel really relaxed and my head is clear and all that stuff...it's something I really try to hammer into my schedule so that once I am stressed, the first thing that comes to my mind is, I'll just go running. Instead of binge eating or chain smoking.

Timothy explains that although exercising makes his body feel tired physically, being active clears his mind of whatever it was that stressed him out. I think it is also important to note here that Timothy not only went running when he felt stressed because it relieved stress well but also to try and create it a healthy habit. Another student, Erica, explained how running helps her in a similar way.

After a good workout and after a great shower, it's like nothing was ever stressed. Like, everything's gone, you're focused only on the run, or whatever you're doing...it's more of, kind of just helps me focus on another situation. Like, man I'm dying on this run...so like, all the stress that I'd given to the pen or to the stress ball goes out like, you can literally feel it lift off like it's much easier and lighter.

Earlier in the interview, Erica explained to me that her coworkers began to notice that she would click her pen more often when she was feeling stressed. Without realizing it at the time, Erica's pen clicking became an idiom of distress that her coworkers picked up on quickly. In response to this, her coworkers provided her with a stress ball to use while she was at work. In the above quote, Erika explains that although the stress ball can help at the time of her stress, running was the most effective way of relieving that stress in the long run.

The majority of students who mentioned exercise as a stress reliever also voiced that they usually preferred to go alone. Besides the few students who mentioned participating in yoga classes, many students explained that they would go to the gym by

themselves more often than not, or find trails to run around campus. Frank, a 23-year-old senior explained to me why he preferred doing his resistance training alone.

I just go to the gym and sometimes I go with my roommate. If I'm very stressed out then I like to go alone, just to get some time alone and listen to music and not really talk to anybody but just kind of work on my own work out. Just get some alone time and think about things and relieve some stress that way.

When I asked Frank if he worked out on campus he told me that he found a gym off campus. He told me that he prefers this than working out on campus because it "it gives [him] a chance to see other people than the students [he sees] every day. So, it gives [him] a better get-away scene." Other students also talked about running on campus or on trails throughout the city. Many found this more relaxing.

A few other students felt that exercises like walking or yoga are effective ways of relieving their stress. One student, Bethany, told me that she started participating in hot yoga classes about 3 months before her interview with me. She had driven by the studio many times and finally decided to look into classes. Bethany explained to me that, although it is just a temporary fix to stress, the hot yoga classes really helps her relax.

I started doing hot yoga in April. So, that's been really fun and, you know, we're technology driven so a whole hour and half of stretching and working out in one-hundred-degree weather plus humidity, phone-less, you know. So, that's very mind clearing...it's an hour and a half that I'm not on the grind of homework, you know?...Sweating out all the toxins and stuff. And it's my form of working out so I'm like, okay, I've accomplished a little bit of my goal.

For Bethany, hot yoga acted to relieve her stress in two different ways. The first was clearing her mind of the stressor, and the second was to help her feel a little bit more accomplished throughout her day. This can be a really important positive mindset to have when dealing with different levels of stress day to day. Another male student, Sean, said

that he also turns to yoga for stress relief. However, he has been using this technique to manage his stress for some time now and explained the positive effects he feels from practicing yoga.

I guess I've kind of always been interested in it. My mom's pretty religious and so I've kind of been interested in the deep breathing aspect of it. And also, the stretching to relieve soreness after exercising so, kind of always been a thing that I've kind of been into.

Many of these students who found exercise to be a good way to relieve their stress explained it as a way to distance themselves from the norm in their lives. By getting away from the normal routine of classes, students are able to place themselves in an environment that is distant from the source of the stress and it gives them a respite from their stress when they don't have to think about it.

Talking with Friends and Family

The second most common stress reliever among the 20 students that I interviewed was talking or spending time with friends and family members. A total of 7 students revealed to me that when they felt very stressed out they sometimes called someone close to them on the phone, or they would spend time with friends. In each of these situations, students felt that this helped them talk through their stressor or take their mind off of it. In terms of hanging out with friends, students talked about spending time indoors watching movies, or things like going out to eat or drink. Although these 7 students spent time doing a variety of activities, they all felt that talking or spending time with people that were close to them helped to relieve their stress.

When I asked Shelby what she did to help relieve her stress she responded right away that she just talked about it. Although there were other stress management techniques that she used, this was the first that she mentioned.

I just talk. I remember I was taking my license test, my driver's license test, and I was extremely stressed...and I had the best person ever because she just talked to me the whole time I was taking my license exam. And I passed! So, it's just talking. Just having a conversation with someone. Whether it's about what's stressing me out, that helps a lot.

For Shelby, it didn't matter who she talked to, it was just the act of talking that allowed her to feel less stressed. For other individuals they specified spending time specifically with friends. An example of this is Zach. He told me about a variety of different activities and methods that he used to help relieve his stress. However, he told me that spending time with friends is usually his first choice.

Mostly though I just hang out with my friends...I would say hanging out with my friends is pretty good because it takes my mind off of work, it gives me other things to focus on. Less practical I suppose, more social, but I enjoy their company. There's lots of intellectual discussions, I'm still active, we're going out and doing things. So, that's a pretty good one.

Another student, Elizabeth, also felt that spending time with her friends was one of the main ways that she tried to relieve her stress. However, she specified that she and her friends usually went out somewhere to drink in order to relieve stress.

Whenever I'm super stressed out, I won't do the things that I need to do and I'll just go and call a friend and like, hang out with them. And then we'll probably drink. And then we'll just get, if they're having a bad day too, you just get twice as drunk as you need to get. And we'll smoke cigarettes a lot. And we'll just end up inviting people over and just doing something really big just cause we're all super stressed out and need a stress reliever. Like, a night to just have fun and just deal with it tomorrow.

Elizabeth focused on the activities that she and her friends did when they were all feeling stressed out as a group. She continued to explain to me that by spending time with friends it gave her some time off so she could just have fun and not have to think about anything else.

The other students who mentioned spending time with someone as a stress management technique also mentioned going out with friends and drinking, just getting together with friends and smoking cigarettes, and others simply just spent time together watching movies or things like that. The few students who also mentioned talking on the phone with friends or family usually referred to calling a parent, sibling, grandparent, or their significant other. In some cases they would combine a phone call with things like going for a walk or a drive. However, it was the act of talking with someone close to them about the stressor or even something completely different that allowed the student to feel more relaxed.

There were several other techniques discussed by students as well. However, the rest were only mentioned by two or three students throughout all 20 interviews and did not present any particular pattern. These different stress management techniques include listening to music, playing video games, reading, watching Netflix, stress eating, taking a nap, or just putting everything else aside and tackling the stressor head on.

Gender Differences

Of the 13 students who talked about using some form of exercise as a stress reliever, 8 of them were male and 5 of them were female. Although there were a slightly higher number of males, there did not appear to be any drastic gender differences. Of the 7 students who mentioned talking or spending time with someone, 5 of them were female

and only 2 were male. This could mean that females tend to like to talk about their stress with someone more often than males. However, the difference is not very large and a larger sample size would be needed to determine if this is a trend.

Although exercising and spending time with friends and family are two very different ways of relieving stress, these students used both techniques in order to separate themselves from a stressful environment. It was important to them to participate in something that was able to take their mind off of whatever was causing them stress at the time.

Focus Group Results: Stress Management

Just as I asked students to write down what came to mind when I said the word 'stress', I also asked them to do the same thing when I said the phrase 'stress management'. When they were done writing their thoughts on sticky notes I asked them to put all of the words and phrases into groups and title them. This time the students created categories including "sleep", "escape", "social life", "scheduling", and "stress relief/health". Breaking these categories down, "sleep" included words such as "relax" or "sleeping". "Escape" consisted of things like "Netflix", "habits", and "finding a happy place". "Social life" included things like "friends", "going out" and "talking to someone". The students put words like "anxiety", "calendar", "planners", "planning", and "to-do list" under the category "scheduling". The last category was "stress relief/health" and included things like "working out" and "exercise".

There was also some obvious overlap in topics that the students in the focus group brought up and the individual interviews. The five students in the focus group stated that their main stress management techniques included relaxing by using things such as a

facemask, running, taking a nap, watching Netflix or Hulu, rewarding themselves with TV or other hobbies, and listening to music. A lot of these topics were also mentioned in the individual interviews concerning what students felt helped them to relieve their stress. However, minor contradictions emerged in the individual interviews including students saying social life was a stressor. The students in the focus group considered social life as a way to relieve stress. Even though there were varying responses from the students in the focus group, they did seem to experience a lot of the same stress management techniques as the students individually interviewed.

V. KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF CAMPUS RESOURCES

Individual Interview Results

After getting a better understanding of how undergraduate students at Texas State University experienced stress overall, I wanted to learn more about their knowledge of the programs and resources offered to them on campus. Through the Texas State Counseling center, there are many online resources available to students that offer help with stress management. These resources include lists of common physical and psychological symptoms of stress to watch out for, tips for managing stress (including physical, behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and help-seeking), and a stress relief technology program called EmWave which helps students try to better balance their emotions, mind, and body (TXST website). Besides these specific stress management resources, there are many other resources offered on campus, such as activities throughout the semester and the recreation center where there is a large variety of gym equipment available for students who want to work out or play sports. During the interview I asked open ended-questions to allow for unanticipated resources that students' may have used to help with their stress management.

Towards the end of each interview, and focus group, I asked the students about their knowledge and use of the campus programs and resources. Overall, six of the 20 students interviewed had no knowledge of any resource available to them on campus for stress management. Another 10 of the 20 students stated that they knew there were some resources available to help with stress but never looked into them or used any of them. Only four out of the 20 students that were interviewed said that they had used some sort of help from the university to help manage their stress. All four of these students had

used the counseling services offered on campus but only one of them had heard of Emwave or any of the other online resources offered by Texas State University.

Of the six students who reported having no knowledge of campus resources, four were male and two were female. As I spoke with them about campus resources, 4 out of the 6 students explained that the only resource that they knew of was when the university brought puppies to the library during finals week. Otherwise, these six students did not know that university offered other types of resources for helping with stress and stress management. Many of these six students replied that they never saw advertisements for any type of stress management resource. I asked each student if they had seen more advertisement for these types of programs, would it be something they would like to participate in. This generated a variety of responses from the students.

When I asked Frank, a senior, if he would be interested in using more resources on campus to help with stress management he replied that he probably would not. Compared to the other students who replied that they had no knowledge of the resources, Frank explained in a little bit more detail why he wasn't interested in seeking help.

I've actually never heard of any of those. But, I usually keep my stress level pretty maintained, where I'm sure those might be helpful and it would definitely be something to look into but, for now I feel like I have it under control. So, it's definitely not something I've participated in thus far...honestly it probably wouldn't be something I would attend. Like I said, just talking about everything going on makes things more stressful. I'd rather just keep it to myself and just get it done. But I feel that advertising would encourage it more just because there are a few of those that I've never even heard of. So, I feel like advertisement would improve the opportunity of attending one of those.

For Frank, he felt that he was able to manage his stress on his own. However, he did admit that talking about stress with someone would make the situation more stressful for him.

Elizabeth, a transfer student and a junior, said that she wasn't sure if she would use any of the resources offered if she had known about them. When I asked her why she explained, "I feel like I don't want to have to go see a counselor and stuff. I feel like it would just add to the list of stuff I have to do anyways." For Elizabeth, it was the time it took to participate along with worrying about how to get to campus without a vehicle that deterred her from looking into any of the programs or resources available to her.

The majority of the students who had no knowledge of the resources offered on campus did not express any sort of interest in finding out more about them or wanting to participate. For those few students who did go into more detail, it was clear that they either felt that they already had control of their stress management, or that they could not justify spending time doing anything besides the work they had for their classes.

The 4 students who had experience using resources or programs for stress management offered by Texas State University were female. The main resource used among these 4 students was the counseling center. They had all at some point attended scheduled appointments or group counseling with a counselor. However, only 1 of these 4 students was still attending these appointments at the time of her interview. The other 3 students were no longer using the counseling services.

Nicole was the only student that I interviewed that was still using a resource offered by the university to help her manage her stress. She explained to me that she was attending bi-weekly counseling appointments and that these were "an opportunity for

[her] to unload and then to get some feedback on things [she] could be doing better".

Nicole told me that she was very open to feedback about how she was handling the stressful aspects of her life. However, she continued to explain to me further the aspect of the health services on campus that she did not like.

And I've gone to the Student Health Center and they make you fill out this form like, hey fill this out so we can get ideas about your anxiety and depression levels and then they called me back like, hey we're severely concerned, please come back in for a consultation. I had a consultation and they want to have another appointment with me but I can't afford this and my dad would flip out if he knew. So, I'm not going to be able to pursue that because, unfortunately, while there are great resources for people who are not, you know, just people who do not have the best finances, there's not exactly much that the campus provides for students with kind of problematic relationship with, you know, abusive parents who will withhold your ability to get medical care and stuff out of spite. So, there's not much I can do about that.

Nicole spoke a lot about her personal situation with her family and how this impacted her experience with stress on campus. She expressed interest in other types of support groups on campus but felt that she just did not have the time to participate with everything else she needed to get done for classes. Nicole's case may be more extreme than other students. However, by talking with her one-on-one it is very clear that she feel very limited in her ability to get the help that she feels she needs. Although she is still taking advantage of some resources offered on campus, she does not necessarily feel that there is enough help for her specific needs. When I asked Nicole if she still felt that the bi-weekly counseling was helping she replied, "Definitely helping in a positive way. Not much progress is being made. Very minimal. But progress is progress. Sometimes it's just nice to have someone whose job it is to just listen to you. Because I do feel guilty about unloading stress onto others." Feeling guilty about unloading stress onto other

individuals, such as friends, adds another layer of difficulty for students, like Nicole, who are searching for a way to relieve their stress.

The other 3 female students that had previously participated in the counseling services offered on campus were no longer using them at the time of the interview. When I asked them about their experience using this resource and why they were no longer using it I received a variety of answers. Bethany, a 21-year-old senior, told me that she had participated in a grief counseling group on campus while she was coping with her grandfather becoming ill and eventually passing away. She was the only student who had heard of any of the other stress management services, such as one called How to DEAL, a presentation program to help students deal with different situations throughout life. When I asked Bethany about her experience with these resources she explained,

The how to deal with life, I feel that I'm very independent and I can do things myself, you know? And so, I felt like, with all my social science background and stuff, I thought that I had already known what to do...They (the university) gave us a flyer that was like, take a break and it had little pictures and a cute description of what to do, you know. Like, fly a kite, read a book, go to yoga, or you know, stuff like that?...And so, I already felt that like, that was just common sense to me.

Bethany did inform me that the group counseling sessions that she attended had helped her think of things from a new perspective that ultimately benefited her grieving process. However, the above quote illustrates how she felt about the general use of the other campus stress management resources.

Another student, Lindsey, also told me that she had gone to the counseling center before, but only once. I asked her if she thought it helped her and she responded, "Yeah! It was a really good experience, I think. It was just one of those thing where I didn't go back to my other appointment just because I don't like confronting what I'm feeling, I

guess. It's exhausting." This stood out to me as a very important aspect of my interview with Lindsey, and with a few other students as well. Although she felt that she had a good experience talking with a counselor, her uneasiness about confronting her own feelings kept her from ever going back for more help. This presents an important aspect of how undergraduate students are handling stress that needs to be considered when designing programs and resources meant for stress management.

Norah, a 21-year-old senior, was the fourth student that had experience using a campus resource to help with her stress management. She told me that she had also been attending the bi-weekly counseling services. However, when I asked her if that helped her she explained, "I love the counselor that I got to see, she was great herself. But just how the resources were offered, it was helpful, but it wasn't enough. It was enough help for what I needed then". I asked Norah for an example of what she meant by "it was not enough help for what she needed". She said,

I wasn't seeing a therapist as frequently as I need. Like, two weeks is a long time for someone who's like, trying to rewire their brain and process things that have happened to them. And they can't even get to some people even twice a week you know?

All three of the female students who were no longer using the campus resources for stress management felt that it had helped them in the past. However, each student had a different reason for not attending anymore. This can make it more difficult when trying to make these services helpful for students experiencing a number of different stressors. However, it is this type of information that is so important to consider when trying to encourage students to get help with their stress.

The remaining 10 students, 6 males and 4 females, all had some knowledge pertaining to the different resources that Texas State University provides for help with

stress and stress management. However, not one of these students ever used the resources available to them and many expressed no interest. The most common reason for not wanting to participate was wanting to handle stress alone and not ask for help. This was mentioned by 7 of these 10 students. However, they all presented this answer from a slightly different perspective. Following are some examples of why these students did not feel the need to reach out for help.

Zach and Seth both talked about the different between being on campus and being at home. For these two students, campus was a place where they were able to work on studying and assignments, but beyond that they did not want to stay on campus if it wasn't needed or planned. Zach, who spoke a lot about working better under pressure, explained that his stress management takes place when he gets home. He stated:

I've probably seen some presentations or something that were given in the engineering department about stress. But that was not really a choice. That was because it was given in a class. If it's got anything to do with campus I'm here because I'm working. Any of my stress management and pretty much all of my stress management is done at home. I'm going to relax as far away from anything with the Texas State logo as possible.

It was easy to see that Zach is very adamant about not participating in anything that is offered through the university to help with stress. The only thing associated with campus for him is schoolwork and studying. He even continued to tell me why he has always felt this way saying, "Pretty much everything I've done has been by myself. I don't really get involved in organizations, especially if they've got stress in the title or something." Zach told me that everyone experiences stress in their own way and has their own way of coping with that. Therefore, he claimed that the idea of a single program out there to help students with stress did not make sense. He felt that dealing with stress is an individual

process and is up to each student on their own. Seth did not necessarily feel as strongly as Zach did about campus resources and programs. However, he did express that once he was done with school he did not want to be on campus anymore and just wanted to go home.

The 5 other students who talked about not wanting to ask for help consisted of 4 males and one female student. Each of them indicated they would rather handle stress on their own and did not want ask for help. For example, Brian said, "I've always kind of been the person that, I don't really seek help when I should probably ask for it. But that's also just because I feel like, with the way I've been brought up, life is never really that bad. You can get through things." He told me that because of this he has always felt as though he was an independent person and never found a need to participate in any programs or resources for stress management.

The other 4 students did not have a lot to say but responded similarly. Jared explained, "I like to do stuff on my own. I like to be independent." Sean responded similarly by stating, "I feel like I kind of have a handle on my own stress and I kind of have figured out how I operate myself." However, Paul brought up a more personal point of view when I asked him what his reason was for not using any type of campus resource. He stated, "I don't know. I guess it's some ego thing. It's like, I don't need to admit I need help with anything." When I asked Sarah why she did not participate she explained that she used to say it was because she did not have enough time. However, she said, "now that I'm talking about it I think it was just because I didn't want to put myself in that situation of just like, having to discuss it with people that I didn't really know." These last two quotes bring up an important aspect of why many of these students may not want to

ask for help. The other responses regarding doing things alone or wanting to be independent can result from transitioning through the emerging adult phase of life. As students are transitioning from parents homes to being on their own, it may be more difficult to admit needing help or even knowing who to turn to. This is another extremely important aspect of students' experience with stress to consider when trying to implement programs and other types of resources on campus.

The other 3 students that had some knowledge of the resources available but chose not to use them attributed their choice to factors such as, not being able to fit it into their busy schedule and not feeling like it was needed but knew they were there if things got worse. For one student, she only saw advertisement for stress management during finals, which was not one of her major stressors. From all of this data it is clear that there are a lot of students that either know nothing about the programs and resources offered through Texas State University for stress management, or that have knowledge but purposely choose not to use them. These are areas that may need more research in the future to determine what could help the university reach more students with their advertisements and what could make more students feel comfortable reaching out for help.

Focus Group Results

When I asked the students in my focus group if they used any type of resource on campus to help with stress management they only mentioned using the Student Recreation Center and the Student Support Services where they took part in tutoring sessions over the summer. The two students who told me that they had used the tutoring resources both felt that it had helped them a lot while they were trying to manage their

summer classes. The majority of the students agreed that using the recreation center was helpful because they liked to use running or other types of exercise to help them relieve stress.

Towards the end of the focus group, I informed the participants that my analysis of the individual interviews that I conducted showed that many students were not aware of the programs and resources offered on campus and several did not show any interest in participating in anything. I asked the focus group participants what they thought about this. Their responses included comments such as, it is "weird to go up to random people saying oh I'm stressed will you help me"; it was "out of [their] way" during their day to day schedules; "people who have stress think that it won't last long"; or many students believe that they "can do this (handle stress) by themselves". Many of these comments made by the students in my focus group are very similar to the results from my individual interviews with students. Even when discussing the topic of stress management with each other, the students seemed to feel that it was uncomfortable to reach out and ask for help from any type of resource on campus.

VI. STRESS NARRATIVES

During each interview, I asked every student if they could tell me of a time recently when they felt stressed out and what that experience was like for them. The goal with this was to elicit a story, or narrative, from each student. Thinking back to Mattingly and Garro, they stated that the narrative theory is "a fundamental human way to give meanings to experience" (2000). During each student's story I asked them questions about different aspects of their stressful experience, such as "what stresses you out", "how do you experience stress physically and psychologically", and "how do you deal with and relieve your stress". Although I had already gathered information from each student regarding these general aspects of their experience with stress and stress management, obtaining a story of a specific stressful time allowed me to see how each student communicated their full experience of stress, from what they identified as their major stressors, to how they experienced it and ultimately managed it. For example, I looked for things such as differences and similarities between their story and the aspects of their experiences that they discussed earlier in the interview. Along with this, I looked for moments during their story when they interacted with others and what those interactions said about how they identified themselves in terms of the stressor and relieving that stress in the end. As I discussed earlier, Bucholtz and Hall (2005) provided five main categories of studying identity: emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness. Keeping these in mind I was able to analyze the narrative provided by each student and look for themes in regards to how they formed their identity in their mind and if that identity changed from earlier in the interview. The following are

examples of these stories, or narratives, provided by the one-on-one interviews I conducted.

From the 20 interviews that I conducted I received a wide variety of narratives, or stories, regarding a recent stressful experience. Each student talked about an experience involving either his or her finances, schoolwork or tests, issues with family members, work, or their social life. These were the only five categories that were discussed by the students. Schoolwork and exams were the most common focus of these. This was mentioned by 12 of the 20 students interviewed. The next most common topic was finances, which was mentioned by five different students. Family was mentioned four times, work three times, and social life only twice. A different student mentioned the last three topics each time.

The reason that all of these topics were mentioned more often (26 times) than the total number of interviews is a result of some students mentioning multiple stressors throughout their story. For example, Lindsey explained that one recent experience that stuck out in her mind was not being able to afford a textbook which led to her running out of time to complete a school assignment. Although her stress had started with not having enough money, she ultimately experienced stress from trying to complete her homework on time as well. Another student, Seth, told me that the original stressor in his story was his family's finances. He and his wife were denied health insurance and were struggling with other finances in regards to their young daughter. However, when he got home the stress started increasing because of disagreements with his wife. Seth felt like they were getting nowhere and ultimately felt an increase of stress because they were not getting

along at the moment. Including these two examples, 6 of the 20 students interviewed told a recent story that had more than one stressor.

As mentioned before, school was the most common topic for the students' narratives. Among the 12 stories that included school as a stressor, students talked about being worried about an exam, feeling overwhelmed from the amount of work they had to complete, papers that they had to write, or even certain assignments such as giving a speech in class. One student, Bethany, told me that the week before her interview with me had been "very overwhelming". She explained to me that she "always [seemed] to be one assignment behind" in one of her classes and on top of that she had two tests and a paper due in the same week. As Bethany continued her story of what that week was like for her she explained that when she realized how much she had to do throughout the week the first thing she did was turn on a show on Netflix. She followed this up by stating, "and then of course after the episode's done I'm scrambling even faster to start" getting her schoolwork done. For Bethany, she felt so overwhelmed by the amount of work she had to get done and the feeling of being behind in a class that her first reaction was to avoid her work by watching TV.

Another student, Emily, told me the story about how stressed she became when she found out that she had to give a speech in one of her classes. She told me that from the moment she read the assignment on the syllabus at the beginning of the semester she felt stressed about it and that stress only continued to build as it got closer to the date of her speech. Emily told me "public speaking is actually one of my biggest fears ever...it always has been. So that was extremely stressful". She continued to explain to me how she coped with it saying, "as it got closer, I think I just started putting it off and...I didn't

want to stress myself out and so I wasn't thinking about it and I was doing other things to distract myself." Just like in the previous example with Bethany, Emily's first reaction after feeling extreme stress was to distract herself from the situation with other things and not think about it. However, she told me that she "put it off until the night before and that's when [she] was stressing about it." Both of these examples show that both Emily and Bethany's reaction to their stress was to procrastinate and not do the work that needed to be done until the last minute. Ultimately, this caused even more stress for the both of them.

Other narratives regarding schoolwork included topics like getting a bad grade on an exam. Tyler used an example from just a few days before his interview took place. He said, "I got my calculus exam back and I didn't do very well on it. And after going through it I was like, I made the dumbest mistakes you could ever make and it was just, I guess it was under the stress of taking the test, made me do poorly." For Tyler, his stress started immediately after he saw his test score. He said he began to feel pressure in his head and began looking at his other grades to help relieve stress. However, this only increased his stress level in the end.

Finances were one of the biggest stressors in 5 of the student's narratives. A couple of these students talked about the stress of having enough money to pay rent or bills on time. Elizabeth, for example, chose to tell me about the day before her interview when she realized that she was extremely low on money and her rent was due soon. She told me that she was in class when she was thinking about her finances and she said "I just looked up and I was like oh my gosh, and my heart started beating really fast and I thought I was going to throw up. Cause when I get really stressed out I get panic attacks."

For Elizabeth, her extreme stress started in the middle of class. When I asked her what she did after she started feeling sick she explained, "I had to not think about it. I went on my phone, I don't know if you've ever played those games on imessage...well it's like these games and I started one with my brother...or I texted my mom too and my dad...just trying to get my mind off of it." Other students talked about moments where they had an unexpected cost that made a particular week or month extremely stressful. For example, Brian told me that he had found a dog while out on a hike one day. Before he was able to find a home for the dog, it had destroyed things around his apartment requiring him to not only fix up the apartment, including repainting, but also pay for the repairs. The other big stressor in Brian's story is that he had to wait for his financial aid to come through, which put him in a tough position after having to unexpectedly pay for repairs to his apartment. He explained, "Looking forward it's dealing with financial aid. Knowing that it's not gonna come until September 6th when I literally need it August 24th." Whether it was payments for school or personal expenses such as rent, all 5 of these students talked about moments where they felt like they did not have enough money to get through the next week or month without going broke.

The last three topics were only mentioned a few times. These included issues with family, work, or social life. The 4 students who brought up family talked about one specific encounter or argument with a family member that caused their stress levels to rise in that moment. The three students who told me a story about a time at work all had very different reasons as to why it was stressful for them. Erica, for example, had an unfortunate situation at work with an individual who had called in for help. When the call was dropped and she did not have a call back number she immediately felt her stress

levels raise and knew there was nothing she could do. Erica told me, "that's one of the nights that I stayed up...so many things just went through my mind and it was just hard to focus on anything." Although it was nothing Erica did wrong, she felt partially responsible and could not stop thinking about how things could have been handled differently. The other two students, Jared and Kate, had yet other experiences at work that they chose to tell me about in their narratives. Jared's example was a time when some of his shifts had been cut. He explained that he had seen the new schedule posted at work and "[felt] like [he] wasn't being given a good shot at getting more hours and that was pretty stressful." In Kate's situation, she had returned to work after taking an exam and found herself in a heated argument with her boss and another employee. When she returned to work after her exam, she was disappointed that no work had been done while she was gone. That's when things started to get stressful as she explained to me, "they just think that I'm gonna do everything...I started going on and on and I was like I can't do this anymore...I can't. I'm so sorry but I can't...This lady over here, she's just been watching Netflix. I was like, I need you to put her to work." For Kate, she felt that all of the work was being put on her shoulders and with having to balance work and school, it was just becoming too overwhelming.

The last topic was social life and was only mentioned by two students, although their stories were drastically different. Shelby told me about a time where she had been exhausted from a busy week of school and tried to make plans to watch a movie with her boyfriend one night. However, her roommate and other friends began to disrupt her relaxing night by inviting people over. After being so overwhelmed by the week leading up to this point, she felt an immediate increased level of stress from her friends and their

plans. The other student, Paul, had a drastically different experience with his friends. He described to me a recent time when he had hung out with a group of friends that had influenced him to take part in doing drugs. He told me that after that time with friends he slept in the next day and "definitely didn't" talk with anybody about what had happened. He told me that "[he'll] never talk about that type of stuff" with other people because he knew it was a poor way to handle his stress.

All of these narratives show a variety of situations where students recently felt a higher-than-average level of stress. Also, almost all of the students said that they felt the same physical and psychological symptoms in these moments that they had told me about earlier in their interview. However, after hearing all of these different stories from each of the 20 students interviewed, one theme seemed to stand out to me the most. Although some students used one of their previously mentioned stress management techniques, more than half of the students explained to me that they wanted to simply remove themselves from the stressful situation or just be alone. A total of 13 students expressed this in their narrative. This can be seen in a couple of the examples that were given earlier. However, several other students either told me specifically that they wanted to be alone or as they explained how they tried relieving their stress it was quite clear that they were trying to remove themselves from the situation. Throughout each narrative, students tended to view themselves as protagonists who were generally vulnerable and dealing with situations completely out of their control. These patterns that emerged allowed me to use the narratives from each student to better understand how these students created their identity around their stress. The following are some examples from the students' narratives.

Seth, mentioned earlier, continued to tell me about the stressful situation with his wife when he came home one day. He explained to me what that feeling was like and how he eventually was able to manage his rising stress levels.

It's just, you know, very, very stressful, and so I use my techniques and it's decent, but then I come home and my wife's stressed out and then it's just, I can't calm down because it's just stress, in a stressful situation...and there's really nothing you can do about it and it's annoying...I tried to put on a front like, you know, be happy, umm, you know I was, oh I guess what it was is I came home and we just got a piece of mail saying that we didn't get our insurance, we got denied. So, very, very stressful. Umm, and then let's see what I did, I think I suggested my wife and my daughter go swimming just to relax and go have fun...I think I learned this technique from my father, who's a business manager, and it goes back to the, you know, trying to get them away. Umm, not just from me, I mean, just from the situation. I think that's a really good technique...and eventually we went in separate rooms or something and just, you know, everyone calmed down. But, I think separation, alone time or, you know, just your mind away from the stress.

For Seth, he only started to feel better once he was removed completely from the situation. Even before he, his wife, and their daughter went into separate rooms he was suggesting things for his family to go do without him so that he would not be in that stressful situation anymore or around the people that he was in disagreement with.

Another really clear example of this idea of wanting to remove oneself from the stressful situation is Lindsey. She was also brought up earlier as an example of a student whose narrative consisted of a combination of school and financial stress. Lindsey could not afford a textbook, which was limiting her time to finish an assignment for that class. She continued to tell me about her experience from the moment she felt her stress rising through finding out that her boyfriend had put money in her account to help her purchase the book.

It's been that point of the summer where I'm just waiting for my financial aid day to come in so I can pay for my summer classes. So, it's like, I've got like ten dollars in my bank account and umm, it was a couple weeks ago where I was just stressed to the point of just crying when I was with my boyfriend. And I didn't have money to pay for this textbook that I needed for class. And I had an assignment due for the textbook and I was just, pretty much shut down. I mean, I remember I just started getting my things and I wanted to go home cause I just wanted to just kind of, just be on the road, be back at my apartment where I just like, freak out by myself. And umm, it was just one of those things where stress, that stress of not being able to get the textbook made me just want to kind of run away from the situation and completely, even though the situation was [not in San Marcos], I just wanted to be by myself. But, when I was getting my things together, my boyfriend actually came in and he told me that he transferred money to my bank account, which was two hundred dollars, so I could buy my books for class, which stressed me out even more because I was like, how am I gonna pay him back? Which, of course, he told me not to but, I think that was just one of the most recent situations where I was just really stressed out trying to figure out how I'm gonna get this book.

When I asked Lindsey about how she was feeling physically and psychologically in that moment she explained that she experienced "obsessive thinking that kind of just made [her] shut down completely and [she] just wanted to leave." She admitted to me that she knew in reality even if she left the situation immediately she still would not have the money to pay for her textbook. It was difficult for Lindsey to know exactly how to handle that feeling of wanting to run away or just remove herself from the physical place that she initially started feeling her stress level rise.

Other students did not necessarily talk about wanting to get away openly like the examples of Seth and Lindsey's narrative. However, it was clear in their story that they removed themselves from the situation by doing something else alone. For example,

Jared was telling me about how he felt when he realized his hours were cut drastically at work.

It was pretty stressful. I was pretty upset because of the fact I wanted more hours and I feel like I wasn't being given a good shot at getting more hours and that was pretty stressful. I mean, my body started shaking a bit and my mind was just out of place. One thing I did after I got off work, I took a drive down to New Braunfels and drove around listening to country music, since I like country music...[the stress] started to go down a bit because I was listening to music I love but also I was looking at some beautiful parts of New Braunfels that I hadn't seen before cause New Braunfels is beautiful since it's very foresty like and it's surrounded by hill country. So, it's just beautiful to drive out there.

Jared did not saying anything specific about wanting to be alone or get away from the situation. However, as he explained to me how he tried to relieve his stress that is exactly what he did. After becoming so stressed about the new schedule at work he got in his car and drove away from the situation. By getting away from the physical location of where his stress started, and doing so alone, he was finally able to feel his stress level begin to decrease.

Thinking back to Bucholtz and Hall, they stated that one aspect of identity is to understand that the ideological structures of one's identity are often rooted in cultural beliefs and values (2005). This principle of identity (indexicality) by Bucholtz and Hall stands out to me the most when looking at how students tried to remove themselves from the stressful situations in their narratives. It may be important to combine this finding with why many of the students felt that they did not want to use any programs or resources on campus to help with their stress management. Referring back to when I asked students about their knowledge of resources on campus, many students talked about not wanting to share their stress with someone, especially a stranger, or admit that

they needed help dealing with stress. The idea that more than half of these students ended up dealing with their stress on their own during their narratives leads me to the conclusion that this is linked to not wanting to admit that they are stressed or reach out for help. By handling the situation on their own, students may feel that this portrays a stronger, more independent identity versus someone who needs to depend on someone, or something else, to help lower their stress levels. It may be that, the act of reaching out for help makes one feel as though they are not succeeding as well as they should be on their own.

This idea of wanting to handle stress alone could be associated with the cultural stigma surrounding any type of mental illness and the idea of receiving any type of help. Stigma surrounding anything involves the "*signals* leading to cognitive *stereotypes* that lead to employing *discriminatory practices*" (Corrigan 2005). Although none of the students I interviewed talked about having any serious mental illnesses, a few of them did mention that they had either taken part in counseling or were at one time taking something for depression or anxiety. However, a couple of these same students did not show any interest, at the time of their interview with me, in getting help or reaching out to anyone, even a friend or family member to talk about their stress. This is an important aspect to consider when providing students with resources on campus to help with stress management. Even if the resources are not associated with the counseling center, if it is associated with stress and stress management at all, that may turn students away from participating. This stigma of stress and mental health issues may not just surround serious depression or anxiety, but it could also surround the terminology associated with general stress and stress management. In the end, this may have an affect on why many of the

students interviewed in this study removed themselves from the stressful situation at hand and tried to relieve their stress on their own.

VII. DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The time that I spent talking with undergraduate students at Texas State University provided a lot of rich data regarding their total experience of stress. Overall, most of the students reported stress stemming from school-related areas of their lives including schoolwork, exams, and time management. The other major stressor that was found among the students I interviewed was finances, including both paying for tuition, other school costs, and personal expenses like rent, bills, and food. Although there are quite a few areas of students' personal lives that do add to their stress as well, most of it comes from the new aspects of their life since they began college.

Although the majority of the students that I interviewed talked about their stress coming from school, this does not mean that Texas State University is causing more stress for their students than other universities. Some stress from school is expected, especially during a student's initial transition into college at such a young age. However, students at Texas State University are not receiving the full effects of the programs and resources that the university has carefully designed to positively influence students' college experience. To be clear, this does not mean that the university is doing anything wrong or not doing enough for the students. From the information that I gathered from the students in this research, the main reason that they are not using more of the resources available to them is because of a feeling of wanting to handle stressful situations on their own. For some students, this may be the best way to relieve their stress. However, many students are still struggling handling stress on their own and for some reason, do not feel comfortable reaching out and asking for help.

In general, the transition into emerging adulthood and college for the majority of the students that I spoke with was relatively normal according to what many people expect to experience. Students talked about the excitement of becoming more independent, having more freedom to do what they wanted when they wanted to, and even the more stressful aspects like taking on more responsibilities than they previously had when they were living at home. However, with the majority of the students that I interviewed being upperclassmen, this shows that some students are continuing to struggle with these transitional stressors not just when they enter college as a freshman, but throughout the duration of their college career.

Texas State University offers a few programs that are related directly to stress. However, the university also offers many different types of resources, not directly related to stress relief, which could ultimately help students relieve stress by participating. An example of this would be the recreation center located on campus or other clubs and organizations that are available to all students. The university does not lack in the amount of resources that they offer for their students. However, 50% of the students that I interviewed have some knowledge of the resources available to them but do not show an interest in becoming involved.

Many students seemed to not want to acknowledge that they were feeling stressed, felt that they could handle it on their own, or simply felt uncomfortable talking with someone they did not know. Although this research does not provide clear solutions to this concern, there are a couple areas where the university could refine its approach to help students feel more comfortable.

The first suggestion is to try and adjust the names of some of the programs on campus specifically meant to help with stress management. Some students stated that they try and avoid any program with the word stress, or other associated words, in the title because it causes them to feel more stressed thinking about it. Other students who feel like they may have a handle on their own stress may not be very likely to try a program that specifically talks about helping with stress management. This may link back to the stigma that is associated with stress and mental health. Some of the students who do not want to admit that they are feeling stressed because of how they feel or appear to others are probably not likely to use a program that has stress or other similar words in the title.

The second suggestion that developed from my research is to try and find a way to make talking with someone about stress a more comfortable situation. Some students felt that talking with someone at the counseling center was not something that they felt comfortable doing. Although there are some mentoring programs offered through the university, none of the students that I spoke with brought them up. One way to gain more student participation may be to host more off-campus events that could involve some type of mentoring. The analysis of students' narratives showed that many of the students interviewed ended up trying to remove themselves from the stressful situation at hand. With the majority of stress coming from school related topics it may help increase participation in resources if students did not have to meet on campus. A new environment may benefit in relieving some of the stress that they feel on while they are on campus for class.

The research that I presented here gathered a wide variety of data involving what causes stress among undergraduate students, how they are experiencing that stress, and how they are trying to manage their stress levels throughout the school year. However, there are limitations as well. The first limitation was my sample size. Although I did recruit my goal of 20 participants and one focus group, this is a very small sample from a university with 34,206 undergraduate students. Because qualitative data is essentially not representative, drawing a conclusion for this larger population is not possible. Along with this, my sample was not able to provide any information regarding possible differences in handling stress among diverse demographic groups such as ethnicity.

The second limitation of my research was that I was only able to recruit students over the summer months and the first few weeks of the fall semester. There are not as many students that take summer class as there are enrolled during the normal school semesters. Therefore, students that are more highly motivated to take summer classes or that have other personal situations that led them to stay in San Marcos may have dominated my sample. If I were to have conducted the majority of interviews during the fall semester, this may have influenced the data due to possible differences, such as number of classes a student takes or more students living on campus. More research would need to be done in order to determine if this would have an influence on students' stress and stress management.

After analyzing my findings and noting the limitations of my research, it is clear that there is a lot more research that should still be done regarding how undergraduate students experience stress. For Texas State University specifically, it may be beneficial to research a wide variety of resources offered on campus and gather students' thoughts

about what might encourage even more students to participate. It may be very valuable to also conduct more research specifically regarding types of off-campus events or resources that could help students feel as though it is more of an escape from the stressful campus lifestyle. It is important to continue to gather more qualitative data regarding how students are handling their stress over time in order to adjust for changes as well. I strongly suggest that other universities continue to add qualitative data to the quantitative research that has been done regarding students' stressors and stress management technique. Every individual experiences stress differently and it is important to continue updating our knowledge across college campuses so that each university can continue to uniquely help their students have a successful college career.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

1. Can you tell me about your transition into college?
2. How did you make friends here?
3. What, if any, university/community organizations/activities are you involved in?
4. Who are the people you turn to for support?
5. What are some emotions or feelings that you have been experiencing more often since beginning college?
6. As a college student what stresses you out?
7. What is your biggest stressor during the school year?
8. How often do you feel stressed?
9. How do you know that you're feeling stressed?
 - What does it feel like in your body?
 - What happens in your mind?
 - Are there things that you do that let you know that you're stressed?
10. When you know you're stressed out, how do you tell someone, like a friend, that you are stressed?
11. How do you relieve your stress?
 - How does this work for you?
12. How does social media play into stress for you, if at all?
13. Can you tell me about a time when you were stressed recently and what that experience was like for you?
14. Have you ever participated in any of the stress management programs and services offered through the counseling center or any of the support-empowerment programs through the Office of Student Diversity and Inclusion on campus?
 - For example, *How to DEAL: Develop Effective Approaches for Life or EmWave?*
15. Are there any other programs that you have participated in to help relieve your stress?
16. Did you find any particular program or service to be more beneficial than others?

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTION GUIDE

1. What words or phrases come into your mind when I say the word stress?
2. What words or phrases come into your mind when I say stress management?
3. As college students, what are some things that stress you out?
4. Are there certain things that you do or say to indicate to your friends that you are feeling stressed out?
5. How do you know when your friend is feeling stressed out?
6. Does social media play into your stress?
7. How do you and your friends talk about stress?
8. Can you tell me about a time when you told a friend you were stressed out recently, or vice versa, and what that experience was like for both of you?
9. Have any of you participated in any program, resource, or activity on (or off) campus to help relieve stress? Either individually or with friends?
10. Is there any resource that you have used that seemed to work better than others?

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