

## Emerging Adults' Strategies and Methods for Overcoming Stressful Situations and Challenges

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**Abstract:** Forty-five young adults attending a large public university provided information on the most challenging or stressful situations they have experienced, and the strategies employed to overcome those situations. Using an inductive, qualitative, non-theory-based (even a-theoretical) approach with a very small sample, we replicated the findings of much larger hypothesis- and theory-driven quantitative studies. Strategies for overcoming stressful or challenging situations included: support from others, religious or faith-based strategies, personal-action strategies, and cognitive strategies. While results of the study were consistent with previous work on stressful, challenging situations and methods used in overcoming those situations, the study makes an excellent case for not discounting or minimizing the utility and power of inductive, qualitative research. Results, methodology, and implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** stress, adversity, coping strategies, emerging adults, grounded theory, inductive research

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### Introduction

The notion that stressors placed on both the mind and body could have serious consequences for physiological and psychological functioning dates back more than 150 years ago when French physiologist Claude Bernard began to first hypothesize that the body tried desperately to maintain stasis in the face of extreme angst through homeostatic mechanisms (Robinson, 2018). Other academics gradually expanded on Bernard's theory about the body fighting to maintain a delicate physiological balance to ensure survival by claiming the mind in many cases reacted as well to external threats. Ultimately, the psychological toll that environmental stressors placed on mental functioning became obvious when surviving soldiers from both World War I and World War II were suffering from what at first was thought to be physiological issues impacting their brain functioning (Sheppard, 1999). Eventually, these so-called "shell shocked" soldiers were understood to be suffering from psychological issues regarding their wartime experiences. These studies and experiences began to build the modern foundation of today's understanding of how stressor events may impact human beings. Although certainly more is understood today regarding the impact stressor events have than was known in Bernard's time there remains serious exploration that is needed to understand how specific individuals best cope with challenging and stressful events.

An in-depth search of today's academic literature on the topic of stressors and coping strategies yields relatively little published research that explicitly deals with general coping strategies based on non-specific stressor events. According to Eitle et al. (2004) a stressor event is one in which a negative life event or in some cases a more traumatic event serves as a major disruptive force in people's lives and produces adverse consequences. Most literature a researcher finds deals with the details of how to possibly cope with these issues related to a specific stressor event such as terminal illness, medical conditions, acts of terrorism, or violence. Given the fact that most of these researchable coping strategies are so associated with a very specific life-altering event it was determined for the purpose of this study to examine these issues using a grounded theory approach.

Grounded theory was first introduced as a concept for the harvesting and categorizing of qualitative data by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Utilizing this inductive research approach, researchers collect information on a topic and allow the results to "speak" about social processes being studied. Implementing grounded theory for inductive research normally entails examining data and grouping it into major themes or patterns that can be formed into plausible relationships of a proposed theory. The development of canons and procedures by Corbin and Strauss (1990) in grounded theory allows researchers to approach qualitative studies through a systematic methodology that is present in traditional quantitative studies. Ultimately, the use of grounded theory as a methodology may be used for theory

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construction in areas of study that have been neglected if it is done properly with the correct tools (Charmaz, 2015).

Implementing these established grounded theory processes and procedures, data were collected and examined with regard to how various people responded to stressor events in their own lives. Research participants were asked to examine stressful events in their lives and describe how they coped or handled these situations. Based on various evaluations of the response data themes and categories of coping mechanisms were determined. The four ways in which respondents generally managed their stressful events were through strategies that included support from others, religious or faith-based strategies, personal-action strategies, and cognitive strategies.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Support from Others/Personal-Action Strategies**

While stressor events can sometimes be very intimate episodes that may deal with sensitive personal or family issues, human beings often look to others to help mitigate these negative experiences. Yazedjian and colleagues (2008) discovered in a qualitative research study that college students desire meaningful relationships with their peers in order to be successful while in college, which requires an individual to seek out and pursue personal relationships. Another method to overcoming challenges that college students endure is to seek mental health services. Mental health and counseling services have shown to be effective in decreasing depressive symptoms that are prevalent among college students (Gawrysiak, Nicholas, Hopka, 2009) considering that a significant population of college students experience depression due to struggles in relationships with peers and significant others as well as physical health issues. Methods of personal action by Pariat and colleagues (2014) in a study of college students indicated that these methods may be positive or negative. Examples of these positive coping strategies include meditation and/or prayer, sleep, listening to music or watching television, talking to family members or friends, exercising or yoga, and/or participating in their hobbies and interests. Negative personal action strategies included social networking and using drugs and/or alcohol.

### **Religious, spiritual, and faith-based strategies**

Taking some personal, specific actions to cope with stressors and looking for comfort in others are not the only methods that people turn to in difficult times. Research has shown that a high number of people grieve as a way to make meaning of a stressful situation and cope as well (Neimeyer & Sands, 2011). When stressful times are upon an individual, the person looks to something that they may view as something that is beyond them. This can be in the form of religious, spiritual, or faith-based strategies. Therefore, it is not unusual for individuals to seek religion in times of distress. It is also not uncommon for individuals to self-report that their faith, belief, or religious community helped them overcome a stressful event. According to Graham as colleagues (2001), most Americans have a religious faith, and many people depend on their religious faith to cope with their problems. Explicit examples of this type of coping could be seen following the September 11 attacks when 90% of individuals responded to a survey claiming they used a religious coping strategy to deal with the event (Schuster et al., 2001). To be clear, religion and spirituality mean different things and may or may not be intertwined. According to Graham and colleagues (2001), religion is an assimilated set of beliefs and rituals where spirituality is gained through the experience of life.

Religious individuals who have gone through a stressful situation (i.e., loss of loved one) usually rely on their faith and community support, which provides a framework through their religious beliefs to help make sense of the loss or challenge (Park & Edmondson, 2011).

There are two types of religious coping: positive religious coping (PRC) and negative religious coping (NRC). PRC involves an outward appearance of spirituality, a solid relationship with a God, a conviction in the purpose of life, and a feeling of faith-based connectedness with other individuals (Pargament et al., 1998). Pargament and colleagues (1998) defined NRC as spiritual displeasure, punishment from God, or accrediting the experience to the work of the devil. It is possible for a person to be stressed and use both strategies in conjuncture to cope with a situation. Individuals who favor more PRC in stressful situations have more advantageous outcomes, such as improved mental well-being and spiritual growth (Paragament et al., 1998, Bryant-Davis & Wong 2013). A key to using these strategies in coping is to gain self-esteem, make sense of life, and empower the individual in their current situation (Spilka et al., 1985).

Communities that lack resources often rely more on faith-based coping strategies more than other groups (Bryant-Davis & Wong 2013), and studies in the U.S. have shown that clergymen are usually the first person contacted when an individual encounters mental health challenges (Wang et al., 2005).

Programs that teach coping strategies may want to include religious, spiritual, and faith-based strategies as part of their program because of how many people identify as being religious or spiritual, and the outcomes from these strategies are favorable (Graham et al., 2001). Graham et al. (2001) also noted that while secular

counseling occurs in places such as counseling centers or colleges, the spiritual aspect of a client should be addressed since religion plays an important role in the well-being of individuals. According to research conducted by Abu-Raiya and Pargament (2015), numerous empirical studies have revealed that PRC is positively correlated with constructive physical and mental health indicators, whereas NRC is consistently linked with undesirable physical and mental health indicators.

### **Cognitive strategies**

While various other types of coping may come more naturally and be more sophisticated for people in earlier stages of their lives there remains ample evidence that one of the more common coping mechanisms employed by people are numerous cognitive strategies. These brain-based strategies can be engaged for mundane episodes of daily life challenges to more serious stressful situations that occur intermittently. Cognitive coping is a widely adopted practice deployed by human beings of virtually every age or gender category although the frequency or successful intervention of this strategy can certainly be impacted by other variables such as environmental factors (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Cognitive coping strategies, like many other types of coping, can be utilized in both adaptive and maladaptive ways. Some of the more regularly used cognitive coping strategies are acceptance, positive reappraisal, self-blame, rumination, avoidance, denial, and catastrophizing.

Folkman & Lazarus' research in the study of various coping styles led them to surmise that individuals process and interpret stressors through a cognitive appraisal of whether an event or stressor poses a risk to the individual and whether or not he or she possesses the resources and capabilities to adequately deal with the event (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984). The research duo found that coping strategies usually could be divided into two distinct categories of emotional coping or problem-solving coping. While problem-solving strategies tend to be thought of as cognitive-based mechanisms, their dependence on multiple outside factors makes it difficult to generalize. Other cognitive coping mechanisms such as rumination also tend to be influenced by outside, environmental factors as well (Hamesch et al., 2014). A problem-solving strategy must evaluate the context in which the stressor event is taking place in addition to the individual's personal ability to overcome the stressor event. The ability to empirically test problem-solving strategies is difficult as there is no universal test that is free from participant bias and also because stressor events are subjective to the individual's perception of the event.

Environmental and contextual factors certainly are not the only potential influences on coping and certainly not for cognitive coping specifically. Other types of coping strategies can be honed and developed due to environmental circumstances such as family and systematic supports, but cognitive coping can essentially evolve as the person does as well. The Hamarat et al. (2001) study sought to try to reconcile some causal relationship between cognitive abilities, age and an individual's ability to overcome a stressor event. The authors hypothesized that as people age, their cognitive ability is increased. They proposed that as people age they acquire knowledge, experiences, and networks of social systems that in turn help overcome stressor events. As an adolescent's cognitive abilities increase so to do the coping mechanisms that are available to them because of this expansion of executive brain functioning skills (Compas, 2006). The development of the brain allows for more complicated thought processing such as evaluating hypothetical scenarios and various other types of abstract thinking skills. This growth allows a person to assess potential stressor events or challenges and engage in more sophisticated cognitive coping scenarios that may not have been available to them in previous years more carefully (Holt et al., 2005). These more advanced cognitive coping strategies can either be used to help deal with challenges or in some cases may leave the person more vulnerable to the development of cognitive emotional regulation issues that may be more associated with harmful, depressive symptoms such as self-blame, rumination or catastrophizing (Garnesfski & Kraaij, 2006).

While each person will face a multitude of challenges and stressors throughout the course of their lives older adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to swift environmental factors related to academic and educational settings. Postsecondary students may be especially vulnerable to new stressors brought about by a sudden move away from their existing social support networks to a strange, new environment where academic pressure and competition are the norms (Towbes & Cohen, 1996; Gadzella et al., 2004). These new challenges or stressors these adolescents may face makes the successful implementation of coping strategies as essential for success in some regards as their textbooks. Recent studies have shown that adaptive coping mechanisms may be predictors of academic success for these students in these new environments (Alarcon et al., 2013). The necessity of exploring this topic is even more crucial because previous research has demonstrated that adolescents do not use cognitive coping strategies as much as or as positively as adults do when it comes to certain strategies such as positive reappraisal (Garnefski et al., 2002).

### Methods and Procedures

The goal of the present study was to determine, using qualitative means, common approaches for overcoming or dealing with challenging and/or stressful situations. Consistent with grounded theory, rather than directly testing predetermined ideas, pre-existing conceptualizations, or even theory- or research-derived hypotheses, this study was based on an inductive approach where the data were allowed to “speak” and provide insights into the processes at work.

Using the grounded theory approach, researchers immerse themselves in and interact with the data. The ideal is to avoid preconceptions and to be open to what the data reveal. Eliminating preconceptions entirely is likely impossible, but researchers can be more sensitive to what the data are “saying” through at least two strategies. The first strategy involves researchers openly acknowledging project-related biases and then striving to “check” those biases through the process of reflexivity (Marks, 2015). For example, if a researcher is predisposed to view the research topic of “marriage” positively because she has been in a happy marriage for 20 years, then she can intentionally include questions regarding costs, challenges, and negatives regarding marriage in the project and instrument to help counter her bias. Related data should be carefully considered and reported. A second strategy to avoid undue influence of preconceptions involves building a diverse research team with differing preconceptions regarding the research topic. When this strategy is successfully implemented, team members help to check and balance both the biases and blind spots of others, thereby promoting a more rigorous and valid approach to research (Marks, 2015).

In grounded theory, themes (and ultimately, conclusions) emerge from the data. In contrast, researchers who study phenomena through the lens of predetermined ideas (whether theory-based or derived from existing research literature) run the risk of seeing things consistent with their predetermined ideas while minimizing, overlooking, or ignoring things inconsistent with those predetermined ideas. As a result, much traditional research tends to be confirmatory in nature (i.e., it has the effect of confirming what the researchers already believed or expected to find).

### Sample

The sample consisted of 45 students (34 undergraduate; 11 graduate) attending a large public university in the southern United States. By gender, the sample was primarily female (93%), and in terms of ethnicity, the sample was largely non-Hispanic white (73%), with African Americans (22%) making up most of the remainder of the sample. The overall mean age was 26.64 years, a figure pulled upward by the inclusion of graduate students in the study.

### Procedure and Measure

As a course requirement, students enrolled in a split-level (i.e., undergraduate/graduate) course on risk and resilience provided qualitative data in the form of written responses to the following open-ended questions:

1. Describe a challenging or stressful situation in your own personal life that you've worked through or overcome.
2. How did you get through that situation? How were you able to overcome it?

The use of open-ended questions provided participants with a considerable degree of latitude to respond in their own words while avoiding the introduction of excessive researcher bias into participant responses.

Permission to use the data was obtained from the first author's university Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

The process of open coding was utilized in the present study to identify the challenging and/or stressful situations participants reported, as well as the strategies they reported for overcoming those challenging/stressful situations. With open coding, researchers seek to group similar information (or responses) into concepts. Then, concepts or codes are analyzed and grouped into categories based on similarity. For instance, “honesty,” “kindness,” and “generosity” might be grouped into a category labeled “values,” “virtues,” or “character traits.” Another simple illustration would entail grouping “happy,” “sad,” and “anxious” into a category called “emotions.” In open coding, the concepts emerge from the data and are later grouped into categories.

Coding and refining concepts and categories is a recursive process and typically requires multiple iterations until saturation (or theoretical saturation) is achieved. This is basically the point at which no new categories can be identified.

In this study, participant responses were analyzed, grouped together based on similarity, and assigned initial labels. Then, codes were analyzed again, with similar codes being aggregated together into themes or categories and assigned more refined labels. Saturation was achieved for both participants' reported challenges

and strategies for overcoming those challenges after three rounds of coding and refinement by three researchers (two Ph.D.-level university faculty and a Ph.D. student) working independently. Information is presented about the challenges reported by participants, followed by discussion of the strategies they employed for overcoming those challenges. Actual statements from participants are included for illustrative purposes.

### Challenges

The most commonly reported challenging or stressful situations had to do with academic issues (22.2% of participants), personal illness or illness of a loved one (20% of participants), and family issues (20% of participants). Most of the remaining challenging or stressful situations mentioned by participants fell into the following categories: role strain, loss/grief, mental health issues (e.g., depression, anxiety), and relocation. Four participant responses were so idiosyncratic that they did not fit into any of the previously mentioned categories.

An example of a challenging and stressful academic situation was provided by a student who wrote, "From a young age, I have always had a really hard time understanding math. It was a challenge in elementary school, and it got even harder through junior high and high school. I always had teachers who helped me. That was not the same when I got to college. Between freshman and sophomore year, I had dropped college algebra several times, and I started to get behind in my major at the time. I had to have all my basic courses out of the way before I could get accepted into my program. I was starting to get very stressed worrying about how I was going to pass this class."

While many of the other academic issues (e.g., trying to decide upon a major or where to go to college, making bad grades) reported by participants might strike readers as less grave or serious, they nonetheless constituted real sources of concern and stress for the individuals who experienced them.

Challenging family situations typically involved parental divorce, abuse, and dysfunction in general. One participant who experienced parental divorce wrote, "Looking back on my life up until now, I will have to say that a very challenging and stressful situation that I went through was when my parents got divorced. I was only 12 at the time, and the news threw me for a huge curve ball [sic]. This was a very challenging time in my life because I was already going through so many changes in school, and I felt completely alone."

The negative impact of parental divorce on children was echoed further by another student's statement: "I grew up with a very dysfunctional family. When I was seven, my parents divorced. This situation was extremely tough for me growing up."

An especially vivid illustration of a challenging family situation (characterized by multiple forms of abuse, as well as excessive and unreasonable responsibilities for a child) was provided by a young woman who wrote, "When I was seven, my father decided it was time for me to grow up and be an adult. He decided that I should wash clothes, cook, clean, look after my little sisters, and take care of our pets. I rarely saw my friends. I think at this point I just remembered going to school and coming home and getting homework completed and starting on my chores. By the time we were living with our grandparents, there were eight people living in the house. And I had to make sure that everyone's laundry was done, and the house was clean every day before I went outside. Now the part I disliked the most was that my father was mentally, verbally, and physically (kicked, slapped, and pushed) abusive. I have to add this in because this is what was the most challenging part. My mother and I were scared because he never got in trouble for it. He's a police officer and that's his mentality. He does not think he did wrong."

An example of an abusive relationship experienced by one participant in adulthood is seen in the following student comments: "One challenging situation I had to face was leaving an abusive relationship. The relationship was filled with a lot of mental, physical, and financial abuse."

Twenty percent of participants cited personal illness or illness of a loved one as the challenging or stressful situation they had to overcome. Statements illustrating the challenge and stress of a loved one's illness included:

"Last fall, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. I really struggled coping with this fact. Number one because cancer can be rather intimidating, and number two, because I was here at school and not at home."

"When I was in middle school, my mom was diagnosed with cancer, and it was one of the scariest times in my life. Not only did I not know how to handle the news, seeing my dad and older brother cry about the diagnosis really threw me for a loop. It was a stressful time of not really knowing what would come next, coming home to different people taking care of the person who was supposed to be taking care of me, and trying to go about normal life activities. This is when anxiety really began for me."

"A challenging and stressful situation in my life was when my mom found out she had breast cancer. I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and we found out she had it a week before my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was so scared and so upset because when you find out a parent has cancer you think the worst."

Examples of the difficulties associated with personally experiencing a major medical condition included:

“The toughest thing I’ve ever had to work through is being diagnosed with thyroid cancer. My son was only 8 months old, my husband was gone for work, and I was told I had to have surgery. Surgery and radiation were definitely trying, both physically and emotionally.”

“In fourth grade, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor and was told I must undergo surgery. Being so young and vulnerable, it was a difficult circumstance for me to grasp.”

### **Strategies for Overcoming Challenges**

Four general themes or strategies for overcoming challenges and stressful situations were identified: (1) Support from Others; (2) Faith; (3) Personal Action Strategies; and (4) Cognitive Strategies. Each of these strategies is discussed in greater detail below.

#### **Strategy 1: Support from Others**

Seeking and receiving support from others (e.g., family, friends) was the most reported strategy for overcoming challenging or stressful situations, with slightly over 42% of participants reporting this strategy.

One young woman who underwent surgery for a brain tumor commented, “I think I was able to overcome this experience with the mass amount of support I received from my church community, immediate and extended family, and the hospital staff.”

Another student who reported challenges associated with growing up in a single-parent home wrote: “One of the ways I got through the situation was with the support for me and my mother from other family members.”

Two participants whose mothers survived cancer also illustrated the important role played by social support in their comments:

“We got through my mom’s cancer with patience and support from family and friends.”

“I am blessed with sweet friends and family who diligently prayed for my mother’s healing and my peace of mind as well as encouraged and comforted me when I was upset.”

A final example of the value of social support in navigating and overcoming challenging, stressful situations came from a graduate student who relocated, started a new job, found out she was pregnant and whose military husband was deployed overseas all within a two-week period: “I made friends and allowed them to help me when they could. When the people of my town found out, they helped me. The church I attend arranged Saturday care for me at my home so that I could grocery shop and do errands with the three little ones at home.” She added, “They also arranged for people to cut my grass. My son’s soccer coach had a volunteer list for college kids to play with my younger children so that I could attend their big brother’s games and actually watch them.”

#### **Strategy 2: Faith**

Approximately 22% of participants reported that their religious faith and/or religious practices (e.g., prayer, devotionals, and church attendance) enabled them to overcome challenging or stressful situations. Representative comments are provided below.

A participant who experienced parental divorce and challenges associated with growing up poor after being turned over to the custody of her retired grandmother indicated: “I believe my strong faith has helped me get through my difficult times in life.”

Another participant whose father experienced a life-threatening illness wrote, “The only way I was truly able to overcome my situation was through God’s help. Without Him, I would have been a bigger stressful mess than I already was.”

A student struggling to figure out where to attend college stated: “I truly believe that I wouldn’t have made it through all of that uncertainty without my faith that God would make my way clear.”

Finally, a student who experienced severe academic issues that affected her physical and psychological well-being remarked, “[I] prayed and came to my senses.” Later she added, “God did not put me through something that He could not pull me through.”

#### **Strategy 3: Personal Action Strategies**

Another 22% of participants reported taking concrete measures (i.e., actually doing something) to deal with their challenging or stressful situations.

A participant whose family was facing financial difficulties due to the husband’s employment situation wrote, “I had to learn to do grocery shopping on a very limited budget. I learned to love hand-me-down clothing. I learned to shop second-hand stores. I learned to really be thankful for what we had and creatively entertain our family with stay-cations and creative theme nights for fun.”

A young woman dealing with excessive stress over just having too much to do dealt with it in the following way: "I have learned ways to cope such as making myself organized and having checklists. I live by checklists and organization in both my professional and personal life."

Another student dealing with excessive role strain associated with working two jobs while attending college wrote, "I had to slow it down. I resolved my issue by losing one job and limiting the days I have to work to the weekends."

A participant who reported registering for and dropping college algebra multiple times and being distraught as to how and whether she would ever pass the course (which was a degree requirement) indicated: "I was able to find a tutor who was really able to explain the class in a way I could understand, and I was able to pass the class with an A."

#### **Strategy 4: Cognitive Strategies**

A little over 14% of participants reported employing various cognitive sorts of strategies to overcome their challenging or stressful situations. Examples of this would include thinking about a problem in a different way (i.e., cognitive reframing) or intentionally adopting an optimistic outlook or trying to look on the bright side of things. Two examples of participants using cognitive strategies to overcome challenging and/or stressful situations include:

"I completely overcame the stress by reminding myself that the education I am getting is worth being away for a while." – written by a student who faced the challenge of moving far away from her family to attend college

"I got through the situation with determination and motivation. I learned how to have confidence in myself." --from a student who experienced academic difficulties.

### **Discussion**

The modern world has a variety of daily life challenges and stressors that are constantly changing and having different coping strategies to address these issues is vital. College students have unique challenges presented to them by sometimes rapidly changing academic and social situations. To effectively navigate these stressors these students need a plethora of refined coping strategies. The challenges that were most consistently identified in this study were academic (i.e., struggling in math), personal illness, illness of a loved one (i.e., cancer of a parent), or family situational challenges (i.e., divorce). Within this study there were four strategies that were identified as being used by college students to cope with their current or past life stressor. Some of these strategies overlap such as faith-based strategies and support from others. The support from others may have very well come from connections with a religious group. The results were dynamic and somewhat evenly dispersed. The survey also showed that all college students used some type of strategy to overcome issues that were present in their life even if it did not fit into a category. By using inductive research, the researchers did not hamper the respondents' answers and manipulate them to fit into a previously identified category.

Individuals have the option of employing either a problem-solving approach or an emotional response to resolve a stressor event as a coping mechanism. Most individuals will evaluate their approach based on their emotions and assessment of the stressor event. For example, individuals that lack resources and power may be unable to manage stressful events well and thus depend on whatever coping opportunities are available to them (Boss, 2002). In contrast, individuals with strong community and family bonds are able to implement cognitive strategies that will help them recover from the experience and not be immobilized by it (Boss, 2002).

An interesting finding from the research is that there is a fine line between too much and too little when it comes to a coping strategy. In young adults, the relationship between coping and emotions can have extremist perspectives as the individual will determine the level of attribution a stressor event receives based on their experience and their view of how the stressor event will affect them personally. By externalizing or internalizing the stressor event, the individual will then seek to connect with others to find support, or they will isolate themselves. As an individual can employ more than one strategy to overcome a stressor event, it becomes difficult to determine whether a single strategy is more effective than other strategies. This is important especially for those individuals who rely on faith and religious beliefs into their cognitive and emotional response to a stressor event. For individuals that implement religious or faith-based coping mechanisms in reliance on a deity they gain a sense of empowerment within the situation from such a strategy (Gall et al., 2005). This relationship is important as the individual may alter their strategy to re-establish equilibrium depending on how their beliefs influence their decision-making process. Their emotional response is then not only influencing their approach, but their faith and spirituality can also guide the individual to pursue a specific cognitive strategy to resolve their situation. These results showed that some college students routinely intermixed strategies making it difficult to narrow down the effectiveness of any one specific coping mechanism.

### Limitation/Future Research

Allowing the respondents to self-report could be considered a limitation because this allows for their personal reporting bias to be present and perhaps their lack of understanding of some of these concepts. Much like the limitations with cognitive strategies, faith-based strategies are subjective to the projection of personal abilities for overcoming stressor events. Another issue that is hard to account for is all participants viewing the same events as life stressors. Socioeconomic status of the participants was not taken into account by researchers on this project and that could certainly play a role in both coping strategies available to respondents as well as their personal level of experience in dealing with numerous stressful situations in the past.

Future research could include a longitudinal study where the respondents are tracked over time and see how their coping and understanding of stressful events impact their handling of future stressors moving forward. This would allow the researchers to see changes over time and make a more informed decisions on the specific strategies employed in various situations and compare the results of their implementations on respondents independently.

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