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Building the Foundation for a Relevant and Acceptable Stress-Management Program to Millenial College Students: Use of Focus Groups to Determine How to Communicate with Students

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Building the Foundation for a Relevant and Acceptable Stress-Management Program to Millenial College Students: Use of Focus Groups to Determine How to Communicate with Students

Abstract
The college experience can involve many challenges that can contribute to stress and life adversity, and that can detract from the potential benefits of a successful college experience. In this study the qualitative research method of focus groups was used at three different universities to address college stress and how it could be managed. Seven focus groups were conducted to acquire data concerning the following issues: effective ways to communicate and connect with college students of the Millennial Generation (those born in 1982 and after); how current college students perceive stress and its effects on their lives; ways in which students deal with too much stress; how students associate the words/meaning of control, commitment, challenge, and courage (derived from resiliency literature) to each of their current ways of dealing with stress; and how interested might they be in a program that would help them manage stress better. The secondary goal of this project was to use the data obtained to make recommendations for a stress-management program that would likely be acceptable and utilized by Millennial Generation college students.

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BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR A RELEVANT AND ACCEPTABLE STRESS-MANAGEMENT PROGRAM TO MILLENNIAL COLLEGE STUDENTS: USE OF FOCUS GROUPS TO DETERMINE HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE STUDENTS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF

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OF

DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

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The college experience can involve many challenges that can contribute to stress and life adversity, and that can detract from the potential benefits of a successful college experience. In this study the qualitative research method of focus groups was used at three different universities to address college stress and how it could be managed. Seven focus groups were conducted to acquire data concerning the following issues: effective ways to communicate and connect with college students of the Millennial Generation (those born in 1982 and after); how current college students perceive stress and its effects on their lives; ways in which students deal with too much stress; how students associate the words/meaning of control, commitment, challenge, and courage (derived from resiliency literature) to each of their current ways of dealing with stress; and how interested might they be in a program that would help them manage stress better. The secondary goal of this project was to use the data obtained to make recommendations for a stress-management program that would likely be acceptable and utilized by Millennial Generation college students.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Students’ Stress and its Effects</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Millennial Generation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress-Management Programs</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency to Manage Stress</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Focus Groups for Qualitative Research</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Study</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>METHOD</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Procedure and Structure</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining and Noting Information</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Risks Experienced by Participants</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULTS</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress in This Study’s Focus Groups College Student Population</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with Millennials</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress-Management Programs – Perception on Efficacy and Feasibility</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying the Hardiness Constructs to Manage Stress</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summation of Results</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISCUSSION</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with Stress</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Stress</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Unique Results of Coping Methods from School C</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major SPIs – Significant Points of Interest</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Millennial Generation’s Need to Communicate</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress-Management Programs</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resiliency to Manage Stress</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of What was Discovered</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations and Alternative Explanations</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Direction for Further Research</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Recommendation</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Possible Programs Options</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Program Recommendations</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggested Points to be Conveyed in Stress Management Class or Program..</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. Coping Methods Used in Schools A, B, and C Combined………….............. 42
TABLE 2. Schools A, B, and C Compared on Coping Method Use…………................. 43
TABLE 3. Schools A, B, and C Compared on Perception of Coping Methods…………… 47
TABLE 4. Schools A, B, and C Compared on Applying the Concept of
Control to the Eight Main Coping Methods………………………….. 54
TABLE 5. Schools A, B, and C Compared on Applying the Concept of
Commitment to the Eight Main Coping Methods……………………… 55
TABLE 6. Schools A, B, and C Compared on Applying the Concept of
Challenge to the Eight Main Coping Methods………………………… 56
TABLE 7. Schools A, B, and C Compared on Applying the Concept of
Courage to the Eight Main Coping Methods………………………….. 58
Introduction

There are currently more students entering college than at any other time in history. At a time when the two challenges that worry these youth the most are grades and college admissions, admissions officers at the nation’s upper-ranking colleges are reporting a recent rise in the qualifications of incoming freshmen, with vast numbers of applicants being turned away who would have been admitted ten or fifteen years ago (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The transition into the college experience involves many other challenges that can contribute to stress and life adversity, which can detract from the potential benefits that a successful college experience can offer. Stress plays a significant role in the success of students in college, and can contribute to psychological problems such as depression and anxiety, even though it is perceived as a common aspect of the college experience (Kadison & DiGeronimo, 2004).

The same major sources of stress, doing poorly on exams or worrying about exams, getting poor grades or worrying about poor grades, and not having enough money, have changed little during the past 20 years, during the time of the Generation X and the current Millennial Generation (Staats, Cosmar, & Kaffengerger, 2007). (The Millennial generation—also referred to as the Y generation—is defined as those born between 1982 and 2003. This generation was proceeded by Generation X, defined as those born between 1961 and 1981.) At the same time, the Millennials are experiencing college-related stress at levels not experienced in previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2007).
Stress-management programs have proven effective in research studies (DiRamio & Payne, 2007; Iglesias et al, 2005; Walker & Frazier, 1993). Information that could support increased effectiveness as well as students’ acceptance of such programs was the genesis of this dissertation project. Targeting the college population—especially for those just entering college—with a stress-management program that includes taking into consideration their generational language, concerns, experience, and development, is needed (Kadison & Digeronimo, 2004).

Review of the Literature

College Students’ Stress and its Effects

A recent survey of over 80,000 college students from 106 schools reported that stress was the top impediment to academic performance (American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment, 2008). In this survey 34 % of students surveyed perceived stress as the most significant impediment to academic performance and 16 % viewed depression and anxiety impeding academic performance. During the 12 months prior to the survey 36 % of students surveyed reported feeling so depressed that it was difficult to function; 53 % reported feeling that things were hopeless; 66 % reported feeling overwhelmed by all that they had to do; 66 % reported feeling very sad; and 65 % reported feeling exhausted (not from physical activity.) This ACHA-NCHA survey reported that from 2000 to 2005 there has been a 56 % increase in students reporting ever having been diagnosed with depression.

The transition from adolescence to adulthood, undergone by college students, involves many challenges and psychological stressors that can affect their mental and physical health (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). Starting college requires students to make
many adjustments, such as dealing with increased academic demands, changes in social support, increases in decision-making involving finances, management of time, and lifestyle (Walker & Frazier, 1993). The effects of debilitating stress, or distress, can affect college students’ academic performance, sleep, relationships, working memory, and the physiology of students, affecting such things as their breathing, heart rate, and salivary cortisol, a stress hormone (Iglesias, et al, 2005). College students’ stress is also affected by their personal perception; if students perceive situations as stressful, they are stressful. Irrational beliefs and thoughts may increase the level of stress experienced (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Current traditional college students, referred to as members of the Millennial Generation, are paying more for their education than ever before, with financial concerns adding to their stress (Howe & Strauss, 2007). One study showed a major cause of stress for college students as that of transportation, which the researcher stated may be due to the increasing price of gasoline—a fluctuating variable during the 21st century (Staats, Cosmar, & Kaffenberger, 2007). Research showed that in the United Kingdom the worst aspect of university life is having little money to spend and being in debt (UNITE, 2004). The necessity of having a college degree in the contemporary workplace is a strong stressor, and that stress is added to by financial struggles due to both decreased availability of financial aid and increased tuition costs (DiRamio & Payne, 2007).

One study investigated the interrelationship among academic stress, anxiety, time management, and leisure satisfaction among college undergraduates (Misra & McKean, 2000). The results demonstrated that the time management behaviors had a greater buffering effect on academic stress than did the leisure satisfaction activities. The results
showed that male students scored significantly lower than females on both trait and state anxiety, and experienced significantly higher satisfaction from leisure activities. The male students reduced their academic stress when they perceived themselves to be in control of their time, were able to set goals, and were organized. The results also demonstrated that female students managed their time more efficiently than males, but this did not lower academic stress as hypothesized. The females who were goal orientated had less frustration. The results did not support other research that associated hobbies and physical activities with reduced stress. A limitation of this study was that its correlational nature precludes making causal statements. For example, it may be that poor time management may cause academic stress, or that academic stress may cause poor time management.

Nonis, Hudson, Logan and Ford (1998) measured the perceived control over time on college students’ stress and stress-related outcomes. These researchers found low levels of stress and high levels of academic performance, problem-solving ability, and physical health were experienced by students who perceived high levels of perceived control over time. These results were significantly different than for the students who perceived low control over time. As with the previously mentioned study the correlational nature of this study precludes making causal statements.

Succumbing to stress leads to symptoms of anxiety and depression, as well as symptoms and frequency of illness (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). It has been demonstrated that stress-management programs that reduced academic stress would also prevent stress-influenced illness (Iglesias, et al, 2005). Kenney and Holahan (2008) examined the relationship between depressive symptoms in college students and cigarette
smoking, addressing the comorbidity between psychological and physical health. This study’s findings support the evidence that depressive symptoms are a risk factor for increased cigarette smoking in college students.

Academic achievement and buffered stress is influenced by student’s traits, such as having high levels of hope, optimism, perseverance and motivation, and by having social support (Iglesias, et al, 2005). The best protective factors to buffer stress are setting goals, learning problem-solving skills, learning coping skills (Verhaagen, 2005). Coping with stress can involve attempts to make changes in one’s environment (problem focus coping), or attempts to make changes to the meaning given to the event(s) by an individual (emotion focus coping) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

**Perception of stress.**

As mentioned previously, stress is also affected by one’s personal perception; if a student perceives his situation as stressful, it is stressful. It is the individuals’ perceptions that they do not have the necessary resources to cope with perceived situations from the past, present or future, or the individuals’ irrational beliefs and thoughts that increase the individuals’ experience of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This perceived stress is caused by fear, and the body’s reaction to the fear is the ‘fight or flight’ response. This behavioral response to the stress is an attempt to avoid the antecedent to that fear, whether real or imagined. How students think about events and how they think about themselves in relation to those events affects what they perceive as stressful (Verhaagen, 2005). Time constraints also cause stress, but it involves more than management of time itself, but the perception of control over time that is the source of student stress (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998).
The beliefs of students strongly affect their perceived stress. For example, Iglesias et al. (2005) found that the following beliefs were correlated with anxiety levels: “I must study all the time” (59% of the students answered YES); “I need the best grade rank to be the best professional” (15% of the students answered YES; “I have no time for fun or leisure” (50% of the students answered YES); and “I have no control of my life” (41% of the students answered YES). Anxiety level was correlated with these types of beliefs.

**Stress versus happiness.**

The presumption that the effect of stress would have an adverse effect on a students’ happiness must be questioned. Staats, Cosmar, and Kaffenberger (2007) found a significant correlation pattern between sources of school stress and on sources of school happiness. College happiness as well as college stress contributed to general happiness. This result supports the Yerkes-Dodson Law that states that arousal and the stress it causes or represents is productive up to a point in that it is motivating, but that beyond a point of the level of arousal the stress becomes counterproductive. This long established law states that stress is necessary, and the perception that stress is “bad,” or that all stress has a detrimental effect on performance, and thus satisfaction and happiness, is a misconception. Stress as a psychological concept did not exist in 1908, and the term “arousal” was used. Yerkes and Dodson (1908) developed an inverted U shaped curve that shows arousal to be increasingly helpful and necessary starting at the lower left of the curve, up to a point, (top of U curve), at which time it can start to become counterproductive to performance as it progresses down and to the right. Arousal is good, is needed to motivate people to action, but too much arousal becomes stressful and
is not beneficial to one’s productivity. The effect of what a student perceives as stressful, or distressing, may affect the shape of the curve and at what point the perceived stress becomes unhealthy and unhelpful. Millennial college students are known for their ability to multi-task, experiencing multiple influences of arousal at the same time (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The added arousal of the college experience may be contributing to increased perceptions of stress.

Staats, Cosmar, and Kaffenberger (2007) also found that students reported higher scores on both sources of stress and happiness scales in their 2004 study, as compared to a similar study 20 years earlier, which may be another indication of differences with Millennial college students from past generations. These researchers also stated that measures based on sources of perceived stress, or that of happiness, are not direct measures of stress or happiness (Staats, Cosmar, & Kaffenberger, 2007).

The Millennial Generation

The “Millennial Generation,” those born between 1982 and 2003, represent the present population of traditional-aged college students. This generation, the largest and most racially diverse generation in U.S. history, “express” specific characteristics that are different than the X generation and the previous generation of baby boomers (Verhaagen, 2005). There are seven characteristics, or personality traits, for which this generation is known: being “special,” sheltered, confident, conventional, team-orientated, achieving, and pressured (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The first trait that defines members of this generation is a sense of being “special,” seeming to reflect parental and educational messages regarding these individuals’ importance, and that they are vital to the nation and to their parents’ sense of purpose (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The second trait is being
“sheltered.” Their lives have been highly structured and organized by concerned authority figures, and they have been the focus of the most widespread youth-protection movement in American history (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Millennials seem more connected to their parents than have other generations; they also thrive on praise (McGlynn, 2008). The third trait that characterized members of this generation is “confident.” They experience high levels of trust and optimism. The forth trait is “conventional.” These youth are comfortable with their parents’ values (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The fifth trait is “team-oriented,” where the Millennials have developed tight peer bonds and strong team instincts. The sixth trait is “achieving.” With the political focus more on higher school standards, Millennials have become a generation focused on achievement—and are on track to becoming the best-educated adults in U.S. history (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The seventh trait is “pressured.” Millennials are pushed to study hard, to avoid personal risks, and to take full advantage of the collective opportunities adults are offering them (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

Millennials are said to have strong values—such as faith, family, tolerance, intelligence, and altruism (Verhaagen, 2005). These youth define success as: 1. personal satisfaction with what you are doing; 2. having close family relationships; 3. having a close group of friends; 4. having an active spiritual/religious life; and 5. making a contribution to society (Verhaagen, 2005). Being close to their families is very important to Millennials, and technology has become second nature to them (Verhaagen, 2005). This generation is the most socially connected of all the past generations; they appear to need social connection, and to like group activity (McGlynn, 2008). They are likely the most academic and achievement-orientated generation in U.S. history (Verhaagen, 2005).
Researchers will need to question whether this generation is more alike other generations than different. Dozen of focus groups and panels, which have probed and tested the preferences and behaviors of this generation, have discovered that they are different (Abram, 2007). Although specific characteristics and strengths of the Millennial Generation will be empirically studied and validated in future studies, certain facts are currently evident. In the last 10 years, teens evidence some significant differences than the previous generation. For example, rates of violent crime among teens has fallen by 70 percent, rates of teen pregnancy and abortion by 35 percent, rates of high school sexual activity by 15 percent, and rates of alcohol and tobacco consumption are hitting all-time lows (Howe & Strauss, 2007). A recent survey found that 82 percent of teens reporting “no problem” with any family member—versus just 48 percent who said that back in 1974, when parents and teens were far more likely to argue and oppose one another’s basic values (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

Whether or not there are significant differences between the Millennials and past generations, this generation likely experiences the lack of the ability and practice of reflection, a common problem with most populations of our society (Kolb, 1984). King and Kitchener (1994), who have done extensive study in the area of reflective judgment, think of reflective judgment as beginning with an awareness of uncertainty. They write that reflective judgment involves integrating and evaluating data, relating those data to theory and well-formed opinions, and to creating a solution to the problem that can be defended as plausible and reasonable. People in general would benefit by any type of program that involves increasing reflective judgment, while also increasing other life skills, such as setting goals and effective communication. These are all resiliency factors
that enable one to better cope with stress and to bounce back from adversity. These factors, or skills, reduce the stress that is counter to quality life experience. Along with their purposed positive attributes Millennials could benefit by building the skill of reflection (McGlynn, 2008). They would benefit by learning such strengths as determination, problem-solving, emotional smarts, and resilience (Verhaagen, 2005).

**Characteristics of the millennial generation.**

One of the characteristics attributed to the Millennial Generation is that of being pressured, of being under more stress than past generations (Howe & Strauss, 2007). There is no evidence that the Millennial Generation cope worse with stress than past generations, but there is evidence that they are feeling more stress than past generations (Verhaagen, 2005). This increased stress is likely caused by such factors as having more academic pressure, more students competing for the same number of college openings, more testing, and increased amounts of homework (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

Conflicting with this assertion that Millennials are under more stress were the results of the Pierceall and Keim (2007) study that showed that there was no statistically significant differences in stress between traditional students (Millennial generation), and non-traditional students (those born before the Millennial generation). These researchers had expected the non-traditional students to have higher levels of stress due to having multiple roles, such as being a parent and/or employee, in addition to their roles as a student. There were no significant differences between these groups on a measure of stress. This study did indicate that women perceived more stress than men. Other results indicated that students who were least confident in their educational goals were more stressed. Pierceall and Keim (2007) found that the most common way of coping with
stress was talking to family and friends (77%), followed by leisure activities (57%) and exercise (51%). Less healthy ways of dealing with stress was drinking alcohol (39%), smoking (37%), and using illegal drugs (15%). Only 5% reported talking to a professional to deal with their stress. One-third of the students in the study reported interest in stress reduction workshops and information. These students had higher stress scores, indicating that they perceived more stress in their lives, than those students who were not interested in stress reduction workshops and information.

Millennials are described as optimistic, assertive, positive, friendly, and cooperative team players who do well in group activities. Many of those in academia and health care predict them to be the next great generation (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). There are also those professionals who measure Millennials by traditional developmental milestones and perceive them to appear less mature than previous generations. They have been described as not liking to read or write, and employing the ability for multitasking that makes it difficult for them to focus on one activity (Pardue & Morgan, 2008).

**Needs of the millennial generation.**

In a study involving over 97,000 first year college students from across the United States 33 percent of the participants reported weak or irregular study habits, and 28 percent reported having problems with boredom and inattention while studying (Noel-Levitz, 2007). Over one half of the participants expressed a desire to improve study habits and an openness to academic support. This study reported that 95 percent of entering freshman expressed a strong intention and desire to complete their education, it is estimated that only half of those students will likely do so (Pardue & Morgan, 2008).
Creating an environment where students are zestful and curious about themselves as learners, and engaged in action to address identified weaknesses, is important for freshman-year success (Pardue & Morgan, 2008).

Millennials work best in an environment of active and engaging activities, such as group work, versus being taught by lecture in a teacher-centered approach (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). The Millennials expect their college experience to continue to be structured, as have their lives leading up to college (Verhaagen, 2005).

Millennials also benefit through experiential learning, where active questioning and hands-on activities are incorporated into the teaching. The dynamics and benefits of this type of interactive, experiential learning was defined and strongly supported by David Kolb (1984). Millennials can benefit by developing the capacity for critical reflection and quiet contemplation (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). Reflection is needed for the optimal learning cycle to occur (Kolb, 1984). Being able to listen to oneself, to focus on self-inspection that leads to increased self-awareness, and to be able to experience mindfulness are needed and important (McGlynn, 2008). Millennials also need to be able to address and evaluate their academic strengths and weaknesses, and to develop competency in the areas where they lack mastery (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). It is not good for a member of this generation to have an overly high option of himself, or an overly low option of himself; either extreme is unhealthy and out of balance (Verhaagen, 2005).

Another way in which Millennials could benefit would be by learning how to better accept difficult thoughts and feelings—and painful life experiences—versus avoiding these problematic occurrences. Experiential avoidance can produce
counterproductive consequences (Chawla & Ostafin, 2007; Hayes, 2005). The acceptance approach to dealing with life difficulty and managing stress is detailed in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), one of the third wave of behavioral psychotherapies (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2003). ACT is successfully used to treat such personal challenges as anxiety (Twohig, Masuda, Varra, & Hayes, 2005), depression (Zettle & Hayes, 2002), employment-related stress (Bond & Bunce, 2000), and physical pain (Dahl, Wilson, & Nilsson, 2004). Although developed as a psychotherapy, ACT is also used by some psychotherapists in their own lives, and by the lay public (Back & Moran, 2008; Hayes, 2005). Teaching acceptance and other concepts of ACT to Millennials could increase their sense of self-mastery and enable them to better manage stress.

The educational challenge of teaching Millennials, with their unique characteristics, is for academic faculty and others who will guide this generation, cultivating awareness of their own generational biases and learning styles (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). Generational diversity needs to be addressed in order to maximize student progress and retention. Those in academia need to question how they can help students to develop the skills of contemplation, critical reflection, and scholarly curiosity (Pardue & Morgan, 2008). Colleges should offer problem-solving training that emphasizes the use of cognitive components to deal with academic stress, especially for freshmen and sophomores (Misra & McKean, 2000).

**Stress-Management Programs**

Studies of college stress-management programs have been conducted with results demonstrating the efficacy of the programs. Walker and Frazier (1993) applied a
wellness-orientated stress management educational program in their study. These researchers measured the knowledge, attitude, behaviors, and stress levels of college students. Treatment and no-treatment groups were measured pretest, posttest, and with a 4-week delayed posttest. The participants in the treatment group significantly increased their knowledge of stress and coping, attitude of self-efficacy in coping, and self-reported frequency of coping behaviors (Walker & Frazier, 1993). The interventions applied involved the psychoeducation on stress—its causes and consequences—and the Hardiness construct. The Hardiness construct involves the three characteristics or attitudes of control, commitment, and challenge. To have control means a person believes taking action to influence outcomes is best, irrespective of the difficulty of those actions. Commitment is a tendency to be involved with people, things, and contexts rather than to be detached, isolated or alienated. Challenge means that one believes that stresses and changes are normal and provide a basis for learning from the experience, whether it is positive or negative (Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994). This stress-management program addressed aspects of wellness and health, including the roles of exercise, nutrition, and sleep. The program also addressed cognitive restructuring, building high self-esteem, and the “benefits of laughter and tears.” Discussed were stress evaluation (perception), time management, and problem-solving. Social dimensions of health including the importance of social ties, empathy, assertiveness, and conflict resolution were addressed. The Hardiness concept was a core aspect of this program (Bartone, 2008).

The Walker and Frazier (1993) study results supported the effectiveness of a stress management educational program for increasing knowledge of stress and ways to
cope with stress among college students. Results showed increased attitudes of self-efficacy; increased self-reported practice of time management, cognitive restructuring, and coping behaviors. These changes were maintained at followup. Significant differences were not noted in stress level, although stress levels did not increase during finals week, a fact attributed to the program.

DiRamio and Payne (2007) conducted a study to assess the relationship between campus programs, student self-efficacy, stress, and substance abuse. These researchers used Bandura’s concept of self-efficacy as a conceptual framework. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as the confidence one has in his or her ability to organize and execute a course of action required to attain a goal. He stated that if individuals feel that their lives are out of their own control, they are more likely to be a risk of increased anxiety and depression. DiRamio and Payne (2007) hypothesized that students who experienced the high stress of university life may react to their own feelings of helplessness or lack of control by succumbing to feelings of anxiety and depression. The researchers also hypothesized that students who participated in co-curricular activities feel more in control of their lives, leading to higher self-efficacy scores, and more favorable attitudes toward stress, alcohol consumption and drug abuse. Study results did not support this hypothesis, showing that students who participated in more activities scored lower in self-efficacy than those with low or no activity. Results showed that for some students, who preferred to ‘go it alone” and not participate in co-curricular activities, their self-efficacy scores were higher (DiRamio & Payne, 2007). It cannot be assumed that campus programs have a positive impact on the mental health of all students.
Iglesias and colleagues (2005) applied a several stage study, where they initially evaluated personal stress problems, values, and academic skills of second year undergraduate students. The second stage they designed a stress management pilot program (SMAPP) that included psychoeducational resources, coping skills, deep breathing and relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring and time management. Participants’ anxiety, anger, neuroticism, helplessness and salivary cortisol were assessed before and after treatment. A poligraphic device was used to measured heart rate, peripheral blood volume, peripheral temperature, electromyography, and skin conductance levels. Results from this study showed lower levels of stress, anxiety, anger, neuroticism, helplessness, and the physiological response of salivary cortisol, but no change in cardiac reactivity. The study authors stated that if stress reduction programs were available for students, and staff, both undergraduate and graduate students would experience less academic stress, which would prevent illnesses (Iglesias et. al, 2005).

Steinhardt and Dolbier (2008) demonstrated in their study of applying a resilience intervention program with college students that the experimental group had higher resilience scores, more effective coping strategies—such as problem-solving—higher scores on protective factors—such as positive effect—and lower scores on symptomatology (i.e., depressive symptoms, negative effect, perceived stress) than the control group of students. These researchers indicated that their resilience program is applicable as a stress-management and stress-prevention intervention for college students.

Dziegielewski, Roest-Marti, and Turnage (2004) used a classical pretest-posttest control group design to measure changes in participants’ responses after a 45-minute stress-management program to undergraduate social work students. Techniques on how
to better handle stressful situations were discussed in this short session. At posttest the experimental group showed significant changes compared to the control group, with reported levels of stress and apprehension significantly lowered. These findings suggested the importance of short-term assistance to help students cope with academic stress (Dziegielewski, Roest-Marti, & Turnage, 2004).

Using such approaches as CBT, REBT, and resilience models, Steinhardt and Dolbier’s (2008) study focused on thoughts that often create stress, on the perceptions of a situation. These researchers also addressed the potential of students to experience challenges and to go beyond being resilient and bouncing back to their previous level of well-being, to actually improve their level of well-being to a state called “thriving.” This ability to benefit from adversity versus just survive it is a concept aligned with Keyes theory of dual continuums of mental health, with one being defined by the ability to achieve the state of flourishing, versus just maintaining “normal health” (Keyes & Lopez, 2002; Keyes, 2005). Steinhardt and Dolbier (2008) found that problem-focused coping, used long term, is linked to resiliency and to flourishing.

Davies et al. (2000) used seven focus groups at a university campus to identify male college students’ perceived health needs that included coping with stress, barriers to seeking help, and recommendations to help men adopt healthier lifestyles. The researchers identified representative groups that would represent a cross-section of male students, including such groups as those of fraternity men, those who lived in residence halls, and members of the Lesbian/Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Alliance. The researchers developed discussion questions such as “What actions do you take to address your health needs?” and “What would motivate you to adopt a healthier lifestyle?”
Results showed that many of the men viewed using alcohol and drug use as their main health issue and concern, and saw alcohol as important in building social confidence, attracting women, and coping with stress and anger. The second most discussed concern had to do with physical appearance and personal fitness. Anger management was another main issue, and some focus group members felt that this was the most important issue that men face. Results showed that men considered creating and maintaining friendships and romantic relationships as critical issues for men’s emotional health. Participants reported that depression was a common phenomenon for men, affecting their academic performance and interpersonal relationships. Concerns about coping with stress were evident throughout the discussions.

Of the barriers to seeking health services by the men in the Davies et al. (2000) study the need to conceal vulnerability and be independent was viewed as the greatest barrier. Results showed that seeking counseling had an even greater social stigma than seeking medical services, and was a sign of weakness. The third most frequently mentioned barrier to seeking mental health services was the lack of time to seek healthcare. Reported strategies to cope with stress were in order of frequency: engaging in physical activity and sports; smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol; internalizing feelings-tied with venting feelings through cursing or violence; talking with friends and family members-tied with listening to music; writing in a journal; and towards the least frequent ways of coping was listed spending time alone and playing video games. More than half of the strategies appeared to involve ways to escape from feeling stress versus on how to deal with it effectively. Men reported that sharing problems with others was difficult, and that seeking help at a counseling center was seen as the last resort.
Davies et al. (2000) made suggestions for improving health services for men. A top idea was to provide free services. A second idea that was well received by the group members was to offer health classes and programs, presented so that men could talk about health issues in small groups. Another popular idea was that incentives for participating in interventions (e.g., academic credit) would be provided. The researchers stated:

The participants’ strategies for coping with stress are similar to those found in previous research that reported that men are more likely than women to rely on themselves, to withdraw socially, and to try to talk themselves out of feeling depressed.

Davies et al. (2000) felt that providing opportunities for men to talk in small-group settings would be a priority. They also felt that since the men were most concerned with health issues that affected their physical appearance and athletic skills that a way to connect would be to address lifestyle issues such as diet and nutrition, exercise, and smoking.

Although studies demonstrate that stress-management programs can be effective with college students, it should be questioned how many students experiencing stress would utilize such a program, or the college counseling services. Pierceall and Keim (2007) found that more than one-third of the student participants of their study wanted stress reduction workshops. These students had statistically significant higher scores on measure of stress in this study. But what can be surmised about the other two-thirds who did not express interest in a stress-management program? These students naturally experience stress, and may also benefit by such a program if they were motivated to
participate. For most of the participants in the Davis et al. (2000) study—seeking help at the counseling center and actively addressing their stress issues—was seen as a last resort. Pierceall and Keim (2007) found that only 5% of the participants reported talking to a professional to deal with their stress.

**Resiliency to Manage Stress**

**Applying the hardiness concepts of control, challenge, commitment, and courage to experience resiliency.**

Contemporary college students—as with all people—should benefit by building their resiliency, the ability to bounce back from adversity. An important aspect of resiliency is to develop or increase mental and emotional hardiness (Maddi, 2002). The hardiness construct—closely related to that of resiliency—involves the three characteristics or attitudes of control, commitment, and challenge (Maddi & Khoshaba, 1994). Among personality dispositions proposed in psychology, the two that appear the most similar to hardiness are ego strength (Barron, 1963), and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Numerous studies show the effectiveness of the hardiness construct. Bartone (1999) demonstrated that hardiness can be a protective factor against war-related stress in the army reserve forces mobilized for the Persian Gulf War. Bartone described the constructs of control, commitment, and challenge somewhat differently than Maddi and Khoshaba (1994). To Bartone (2008), control is the belief in one’s own ability to control or influence events; commitment in this context is defined as the tendency to see the world as interesting and meaningful; and challenge involves seeing change and new experiences as exciting opportunities to learn and develop.
The construct of courage was later added to the other characteristics of hardiness by Maddi (2006). Maddi has defined existential courage as a key to hardiness. According to existential psychology, consistently choosing the future leads to continued personal development and fulfillment. According to Maddi (2006), although there is the anxiety of not knowing what the future holds for us, by choosing the future rather than the past, one engages an ongoing decision-making process that expresses the quest for meaning. He wrote that psychological problems can be moderated by “hardy beliefs,” (those that apply the concepts of control, commitment, and challenge), which can provide the courage and motivation to engage in healthy social support, healthy coping practices, and health practices.

Maddi (2006) has stated that positive psychology—optimism and subjective well-being—is not enough because it does not fully appreciate the inherently stressful nature of living well; it requires courage. According to Maddi, stressful circumstances are a part of life, and that they should be expected. In addition to these normal stressors are the adversities that are not predictable, such as a car accident or injury, or sudden major illness, or the loss of one’s job, or one’s mate. The courage to face stressful circumstances directly is needed, rather than avoiding or striking out against them. This requires the motivation to cope with them by doing the work of turning them from potential disasters into opportunities for growth. Maddi (2006) has described courage as “the strength to face stressful circumstances directly (rather than denying nor catastrophizing them) and be motivated to cope with them by doing the hard work of turning them from potential disasters into growth opportunities (rather than avoiding or striking out against them)” (p. 306).
Maddi (2002) has described hardiness as not only an attitude-based construct that helps one deal with stress and helps one discover life meaning, but also as a lifestyle, a way to live. In one study, hardiness, social support, and physical exercise were compared in their stress-management effectiveness (Kobasa, Maddi, Puccetti & Zola, 1986). Hardiness was shown to be twice as effective in decreasing risk of illnesses than were social support and exercise in the business managers who were above the sample median in stress. Managers who used all three of these buffers to stress achieved optimal results, and managers who used only two of the variables did better than those who used only one buffer.

**Hardiness is resiliency.**

It is possible that stress management is influenced by both the characteristics of hardiness and resiliency—both constructs being described as ways to deal with life difficulty. The concept of hardiness has been considered synonymous with the concept of resiliency by the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2003). The APA had conveyed the importance of addressing the topic of dealing with life adversity. Stemming from the September 11, 2001 tragedy, the APA recognized the need to convey ways of building resilience to the general public. The 9/11 tragedy underscored the importance and relevance of resilience to the present times. The APA has stated that resiliency applies to all kinds of trauma and normal life stress (Murray, 2003). The APA lists the following specific constructs, attitudes, and behaviors as being integral to developing and experiencing resiliency: hope, goals, strengths, growth and self-discovery, life meaning and sense of purpose, acceptance, spiritual practices, others and relationships, and optimism (Murray, 2003). The APA stated that
hardiness is a key to having resiliency, and for people to not only survive, but to also thrive. Hardiness can enhance performance, stamina, mood, and both physical and mental health (American Psychological Association, 2003).

**Using Focus Groups for Qualitative Research**

The focus group method is a qualitative research technique that emphasizes understanding and interpreting the bases of attitudes, opinions, or behaviors, and will serve as an effective method to acquire the data sought in this project. Most studies on stress have used a quantitative approach that typically requires a study participant to complete self-report inventories that claim to measure stress or stressors, but that are influenced by one’s subjective perception of stress (Robotham & Julian, 2006). Pierceall and Keim (2007) suggested that wellness education should include a stress reduction component, and that students in groups could brainstorm ideas for programs. The focus group qualitative process can enable this type of brainstorming, as well as to explore and define how stress is perceived and dealt with by Millennial generation college students, and how a program could most likely be effectively communicated and utilized by this cohort. Focus groups can provide data that cannot be achieved through the research methods of participant observation or individual interviews because until participants interact with others on a topic they may not be fully aware of their own implicit perspectives (Morgan, 1997).

The focus group interview conceptualization is “based on the therapeutic assumption that people who share a common problem will be more willing to talk amid the security of others with the same problem. People of like-kind gathering together are assumed to give strength and support to one another’s expression of self” (Lederman,
This process enables a freedom to discuss thoughts, feelings, and behaviors candidly; members of the group draw social strength from each other. The goal is to foster honesty rather than socially desirable responses, and where the dynamics of the group process can enable genuine information to surface rather than creating a “group think” phenomenon (Morgan, 1997).

According to Krueger (1994) group members are able to share more honestly with others they perceive to be like themselves than they might with those who they do not feel could understand them. This point reinforces the importance of the focus group facilitator to strongly demonstrate his or her intention and interest to understand this Millennial generation/age group, as well as to demonstrate an appreciation for their differences and strengths. Lederman (1990) stated that the group potentially provides a safe atmosphere and a synergy that can generate more than the sum of individual inputs.

**Effectively communicating and connecting with the millennial generation.**

The qualitative research technique of conducting multiple focus groups—a technique that emphasizes understanding and interpreting the bases of attitudes, opinions, or behaviors—will serve as an effective method to acquire the data sought in this project (Morgan, 1997). An example of this research technique is a study that used focus groups to formulate effective language for a media campaign to raise awareness of domestic violence on a college campus (Lederman & Stewart, 2003). The study emphasized the importance of designing messages that are appropriate for the potential audience, and used focus groups as a method to define the audience’s perceptions of potential messages. The goal was to assess the perceptions of the target audience addressing their specific vocabulary, perceptions, and values; to gather the students’ perceptions and beliefs in
their own language. The specific goal of these focus groups was to identify messages that would be effective in increasing students’ awareness of domestic violence and in motivating them to seek out and utilize domestic violence programs on campus. Trends and patterns of target audience perceptions were sought. A result of these groups was that the term “domestic violence” did not apply to college students. Focus group participants preferred the term “abusive relationship.” The participants continually demonstrated by their responses that they understood the issues and questions, but that they felt that there were ways to word statements that would be more in the ‘voice’ of students (Lederman & Stewart, 2003). Questioned by the group facilitators was how to make the statements—the language—the most meaningful for the student target audience. Lederman and Stewart (2003) demonstrated the value of using the qualitative, exploratory methods of the focus group process to understand the target audience and its language. Their study also supported the efficacy and potential of using focus groups to explore and define stress, its effects, and ways in which it is perceived, and how it can be effectively discussed with Millennial college students.

Many people studying the Millennial generation feel that our society needs to deal with the Millennials as their own, unique generation (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Verhaagen, 2005). Learning their ‘language’ and demonstrating a willingness to communicate and connect with them is critical. Presenting a stress-management program that is relevant and applicable to the concerns and stressors of this age group is an essential component to a useful program. The focus group method could be an effective way to find the optimal ways to communicate and connect with the Millennials. The language in which they are most accustomed and comfortable could be explored. Focus groups’ data could
be assessed to address the characteristics and psychological needs of the current generation of college students and how the stresses innate to this group impact their functioning ability and life satisfaction. This analysis could lead to processes and possible interventions for a stress-management program for Millennial college students that would be relevant and acceptable.

**Purpose of Study**

**The specific goals of this project.**

Based on the previous research findings, at least some Millennial college students could benefit by learning methods that could better enable them to cope with stress. An effective program specifically designed to teach them these methods can only be developed once student’s needs, perceptions, and methods of communication are better understood. For this benefit to be actualized it is necessary to find effective ways to communicate concepts of stress, coping and resiliency with this population (Iglesias, et. al, 2005). The primary goals of this project are to acquire data concerning the following issues:

1. What are ways in which students deal with too much stress?
2. How do current college students perceive stress and its effects on their lives? Do students ever perceive stress as being useful and productive?
3. How would they associate the words/meaning of control, commitment, challenge, and courage to each of their current ways of dealing with stress?
4. How interested would the participating students be in a program that would help them manage stress better? How much interest would they have in a program that
looks at control, commitment, challenge, and courage as it relates to dealing with stress?

5. What are effective ways to communicate and connect with Millennial Generation college students?

The secondary goal of this project is to use the data obtained to make recommendations for a stress-management program that would be relevant to the issues and concerns that cause stress in Millennial Generation college students; a program that would likely to be acceptable and utilized by this group of college students.
Method

Participants

A total of 31 students participated in the focus group study.

Utilizing the diversity of different academic institution’s characteristics and student population cultures.

Focus groups were conducted at three private universities: a private undergraduate liberal arts institution with graduate and professional programs, referred to in this report as School A; a Christ-centered institution of the humanities, sciences and professional studies, referred to as School B; and an undergraduate institution of the liberal arts and sciences dedicated to sustaining the highest of intellectual standards, referred to as School C. The three schools are located in the Northwestern USA.

Patterns and trends across each school’s focus groups were sought as well as characteristics specific to each institution’s academic culture, as well as characteristics demonstrated at each group conducted at each school. Idiosyncratic behaviors of the participants in each group were also observed and noted. The participants of this collection of groups were considered to be a representation of the more generalized population of college students as far as specific vocabulary, perceptions of stress, and coping with stress. Specific vocabulary and perceptions of societal norms of this Millennial generation age group sample were also identified and noted.


**Obtaining participants.**

Fliers detailing the groups were posted and handed out at Schools A and C. The research groups opportunity was mentioned in specific classes, internal communications, and institution newsletters at all three schools. Local newspaper ads were utilized to promote the groups at School C. Multiple options for participation were offered at all three schools. There were a total of 19 participants in the groups at School A; 6 participants in the groups at School B; and 6 participants in the groups at School C.

Each participant was at least 18 years of age, and attending school on a full-time basis. All participants volunteered for involvement. Students who were under 18 years of age or over the age of 26 were excluded. All participants were fluent in English. It was assumed that certain members of each group were likely to know each other, as would be expected with a small college population. Although this familiarity is counter to the often-recommended protocol of using homogeneous strangers as participants (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997) this is unavoidable and acceptable when dealing with a college population.

**Group Procedure and Structure**

The groups were semi-structured/directive, working from a Moderator’s Guide. The Moderator’s Guide included four elements:

1. An introduction that provided the purpose and ground rules. Every group member signed the informed consent before this introduction. (See introduction in Appendix B).
2. An icebreaker, such as asking everyone to give a brief self-description and tell something interesting about him or herself.
(3) The series of 8 core questions and related probe questions. (See Questions list in Appendix C) A 9th question was added, asking, “What was it like to engage what we’ve done here today? How has this process been for you?”

(4) A summary or closing section, thanking them again for their participation and again reminding them of the confidentiality.

The focus groups were conducted at each of the participating school campuses. Each group session was planned to last no longer than two hours, with refreshments being served during a 30-minute period before the start of the session. Pizza and soft drinks were the only tangible incentive.

A ‘funnel approach’ was applied where the list of questions began with questions that require minimal reflection, such as “When you think of the word ‘stress’ what comes to mind?” (Lederman, 1990). As questions progressed they became increasingly more engaging, such as, “Do you think that action/distraction ways of dealing with stress are more effective, or are reflective/mindful ways of dealing with stress are more effective?” and “How would you associate the words/meaning of control, commitment, challenge, and courage to each of the items on our list of ways in which stress is dealt?”

Throughout the sessions there was active interaction between the facilitator and participants with the facilitator asking probing questions where more detailed information could be “mined” from the group members’ answers that often demonstrated information further contributing to the significance and relevance to the data sought (Lederman, 1990). Discerned information identified as significant points of interest (SPIs) are listed in the discussion section of this paper.
The semi-structured/directive focus group method of interviewing enabled an open and interactive discussion, with all viewpoints, perspectives and opinions welcomed and respected. A role of the facilitator was to create an environment where the group members could work well together, feeling comfortable and at ease. The facilitator initially established ‘ground rules’ concerning group interaction, establishing a process where participants could voice options without interruption; with only one person speaking at a time; and no side conversations among neighbors. Before proceeding with a group session these ground rules were agreed upon by all members. The facilitator made sure that all group members had a chance to contribute to the discussion, with no individual member dominating the interaction.

The facilitator sought to establish rapport with each group by voicing a willingness to listen and learn from what each participant believed and communicated. During the introduction the facilitator gave an honest admission that being of the baby boomer generation he was ‘out of their loop’ of the world experience of the Millenial generation age group, but that he wanted to really hear what they had to say.

**Obtaining and Noting Information**

After question #2 was asked, “What aspects of the college experience are the major sources of stress?” the answers were listed on the extreme right side of the white board. After asking question #2 the facilitator asked, “I now want to ask you to apply where you are at on a 1 to 10 scale of stress, where 1 means absolutely no stress and 10 signifies maximum possible stress. The facilitator asked them to write their degree of stress on their personal white sheets that were to be placed in each individual’s personal envelope—lacking any type of identifying label—so that all answers and written notes
would be completely anonymous. When asked, the facilitator stated that stress degree was meant to be a ‘more in general’ degree versus right now during the “crunch,” although the facilitator did say that they could list both. Question #3 was designed to obtain the members perception of stress and its mental and emotional effects. After the facilitator asked question #4, “What do you do to deal with stress?” the facilitator wrote the more avoidance/distracting types of coping, such as exercise, dancing, or getting away to go camping, on the extreme left hand side of the board, and wrote the more engaging/mindful/reflective answers in the middle of the board.

Answers that could go on either side of the avoidance versus mindful lists were probed, and the answer was placed depending on the perception of the person giving the answer and the function that the coping method served. An example would be sleeping; whether it is taking a planned nap to rejuvenate or sleeping in order to escape stress. Some identical answers served opposing functions, and were categorized by the consensus of the group, or listed as serving both functions.

Before asking question #5 the facilitator drew a line between the distracting/avoiding response list and mindful/engaging response list and put the associated heading of ‘avoidance /distracting,’ and ‘engaging/mindful/reflective’ at the top of related list to categorize that group of coping methods. Then he asked the members question #5, “Do you think that avoidance/distraction ways of dealing with stress are more effective, or are active/reflective/mindful ways of dealing with stress more effective?”

Before asking question #6 the facilitator asked, “Now I want to address each method on the coping methods list and see how many of you see each method as a very
important way of coping with stress, versus a method of moderate importance, or a method you perceive as having no importance or merit in dealing with stress.

For question #6 the facilitator asked how each member would associate the words/meaning of the concepts of control, commitment, challenge, and courage to each of the methods on the list of ways in which they deal with stress. These 4 constructs stem from the seminal work of Maddi (2002, 2006) and his work on resiliency and hardiness, and the work of Bandura (1994) and his seminal work on self-efficacy and control. Four columns to the right of each stress-coping method on the data record were designated for each of the constructs, with the number of members who responded with a “yes” listed in each method-categorical box. If a member felt ambiguity concerning that particular question then a number representing his or her opinion was placed to the right of the “yes” numbers noted.

The facilitator asked each group member for feedback on each construct as it relates to each coping method, starting with ‘control,’ asking, “Which of these coping methods would help establish a sense of control over a situation?” Then the facilitator asked about the next construct, “Which requires a commitment?” Then, “Which would constitute a challenge, to apply, and to put yourself beyond where you’ve been?” Before posing the question concerning courage, the facilitator asked, “How do you define the concept of courage?” He then asked, “Which of these (methods on each list) requires courage?”

The facilitator then asked the final questions in this sequence: “OK, we’re now going to go through this list and state either “I do it now”, (mentioning having pets as the
exception, since pets are not allowed in campus housing); “I have done it in the past and may again;” or “I am unlikely to do it.”

Each group discussion was audio taped for later transcription and analysis. Two recording devices were used to provide a backup tape, ensuring that full transcripts could be transcribed. To protect group privacy and identity a code number was assigned to each participant that was aligned with the demographical data. The facilitator was the only person to hear the tapes, and erased them after the data was obtained.

**Possible Risks Experienced by Participants**

There was little risk involved in this research other than the possibility of some discomfort that may come from thinking about problems or things that are stressful. Participation in each question discussion was completely voluntary.

**Dealing with information on potentially illegal activities.**

At the beginning of each session, when the ground rules were being explained, including confidentiality and limits of confidentiality, the facilitator stated that he was mandated to report when he hears of child abuse or neglect, or if someone is a danger to themselves or others. At the same time, the facilitator also stated that it was not his responsibility to monitor or police underage drinking.

Each group member was given 6 sheets of blank paper, writing utensils, and an 8 ½ by 11 inch envelope lacking any type of identification. During the introduction when confidentiality and limits of confidentiality were conveyed, the facilitator suggested that although honesty and openness was suggested and promoted, that participants might not want certain coping behaviors to be verbally shared with the group. Each group member was encouraged to write down all coping behaviors on their sheets, and then pull from
their list to share a specific coping behavior during discussion. At the end of the session the sheets were put into the envelopes and sealed, with all coping behaviors available for analysis, but without any means to identify a participant with specific data.
Results

In this section I will describe the qualitative research findings obtained from the seven focus groups conducted at the three colleges, Schools A, B, and C. Results from these groups demonstrated that there were eight main coping management categories that represented the participants’ most commonly used coping methods. These categories were: (1) connecting with other people; (2) making lists; (3) reflection; (4) taking a break; (5) taking action; (6) self-care; (7) getting away; and (8) music. I will present results detailing participants’ self-report of their current level of stress on a 1 to 10 scale; their reported causes of stress; the ways in which they manage stress; their perception of stress-management methods; their perception on the efficacy and feasibility of stress-management programs, and how they applied the concepts of commitment, control, challenge, and courage to the listed stress management methods.

Stress in This Study’s Focus Groups College Student Population

Participants’ current level of stress on a 1 to 10 scale

Each focus group member was encouraged to write down all coping behaviors on their sheets, and then pull from their list to share a specific coping behavior during discussion. During each focus group session each participant was asked to personally write where he or she is at on a 1 to 10 scale of stress—with 1 meaning absolutely no stress and 10 signifying maximum possible stress—on their blank paper sheets, writing a number that is “more in general” for each person, versus at the time of the focus group when the participants were in finals.
When all 31 participants’ ratings on the 1 to 10 scale were combined, the average rating was 6.48 (SD = 2.01). The three participating schools demonstrated only slight and not meaningful variation of scores: School A (n = 19, M = 6.52, SD = 2.11); School B (n = 6, M = 6.08, SD = 2.22): School C (n = 6, M = 6.75, SD = 1.69).

All schools—A, B, and C—had groups that demonstrated variability in how much stress the participants perceived themselves to be experiencing as related to the overall groups’ mean of 6.48. Means for Groups 1 through 3 of School A were 6.15 (SD = 1.84), 6.7 (SD = 3.15), and 7.25 (SD = 1.5), respectively. Means for Groups 1 and 2 of School B were 6.16 (SD = 3.17), and 6.0 (SD = 1.5), respectively. Means for Groups 1 and 2 of School C were 7.5 (SD = 2.29), and 6.0 (SD = 0.5), respectively. Five of the seven combined groups of Schools A, B, and C, had participants with numbers that were outliers to the mean, with three groups having individual scores of 2.5 or lower, and three groups having individual scores of 9 or larger. Schools A and B groups demonstrated more variability with a SD of 2.17 than the School C groups, which demonstrated less variability with a SD of 1.69.

All group participants were given the instructions that he or she could write coping methods not meant to be shared with the group on the blank white sheets that would go into unidentified envelopes. The participants of School A utilized this option. One participant (stress level 2 on the 1 to 10 stress scale) who reported meditating wrote, “The best way for me to deal with stress is to take a step back and realize the smallness of the situation.” One participant (stress level 4.5) wrote, “lots of sex and drinking.” One participant (stress level 6.5) wrote, “lots of sex, some fighting.” One participant (stress level 7) wrote, “ask for help,” and “blame something.” One participant (stress level 6)
wrote, “meditating and breathing.” One participant (stress level 6) wrote, “sex,” and “try to get an adrenalin rush.” One participant (stress level 8) wrote, “do something that I feel I shouldn’t,” and “sleep and eat a lot.” One participant (stress level 9) wrote, “masturbate,” and “sleep.” In the School B groups the only statement written on the anonymous blank white sheets was by one participant (stress level 6), “major stress is caused by looking at ourselves how we think others view us.” There were no statements written on the anonymous blank white sheets at School C.

**Causes of stress**

The three participating schools demonstrated similar antecedents for experiencing stress: personal, interpersonal, familial pressure, academic, and financial.

**Personal.**

All participants gave examples of personal causes of stress. Examples mentioned were: procrastination, and the guilt resulting from procrastination; demands on time and feeling overwhelmed; balancing school, job and friends; balancing school and extracurricular activities; hangovers; “questioning what am I doing with my life;” not enough sleep; prioritizing duties; being motivated to apply time-management skills; “the stress to keep healthy, and feeling the needed to exercise, and not eat all that junk food that makes you feel so good;” losing a loved one, (e.g. “my grandmother;”); first time living on one’s own; and realizing a lack of emotional support, “finding yourself in a crisis, and not having people there to talk to about it.”

**Interpersonal.**

Another category of stressors that the majority of participants experienced and brought up involved interpersonal experiences. Examples mentioned were: dealing with
different groups; feeling isolated, like you don’t belong; being away from friends and family at home; making time for current friends; extracurricular clubs. One participant remarked that students must party to be social, and being social the only way to meet people. Other examples were: relying on someone who doesn’t come through; relationships; balancing responsibilities and people you want to spend time socially with; having to find and create a new support system; adjusting to living in such a large community; lack of own space; and roommates.

_Familial pressure._

A number of participants mentioned familial pressure as a significant source of stress. Examples brought up were: being reminded by parents of how much money they are spending; parent’s financial difficulties; family problem stressors, such as one participant’s sister being in jail and needing to be picked up; and parental expectations and pressure on which academic mayor the student should choose.

_Academic._

All participants brought up academic stressors. Examples mentioned were: keeping grades up; competition to get into graduate schools; understanding complex professors; school bureaucracy; class schedules and getting needed classes; staying healthy so as to not miss classes; pressure to join extracurricular clubs so that it can be put on resume; giving speeches; projects, especially group projects where a member may not do his or her part; forgotten deadlines springing up and being unprepared; grades to get scholarships, and to keep getting financial aid. An academic stressor often mentioned was not having professors telling the students where they were at, grade wise, or where
they stood. Other common stressors were homework; finals; deadlines; exams; papers; and deciding on a major.

**Financial.**

Most of the participants mentioned financial stressors. A major example often brought up was being on financial aid, where the process itself can be stressful (e.g. not knowing which bank to contact, paperwork, and slowness of the process). The worry of paying the financial aid loans back was often mentioned. Other financial stressors were: finding a job; having a job; affording everyday things; bills; and not being able to afford joining friends when they go out. Concern about the current difficult situation of the economy was often mentioned. This concern was exasperated by the worry that parents may lose their jobs—or that this worry had already been actualized. Further adding to the academic stressor was the guilt felt by some participants stemming from the cost to their parents of their child being in college.

**Type of stressors characteristic to a particular school**

Stressors more common to a specific school were also mentioned. School A’s participants mentioned competition to get into graduate schools, dealing with different groups (not belonging), time management, and pressure to join extracurricular activities so that it can be put on resume.

School B’s participants mentioned giving speeches, group projects, especially when one member does not show up, unpredictability and the unknown. These students stated that they had grown up being told that the sky is the limit, but that they had to work for it. One participant stated, “Added to our stress is that we have been brought up in a time where we are taught that we could be the best; should be the best, and we should
earn the most money, and we can succeed. Education is freely available and is expected of us. This puts pressure on us.” Another student stated, “And I think we want a lot of things too….we’ve been taught that we can have a nice home, and a nice car, and we’re also growing up in this time of seeing the American dream not happen—this recession and stuff. We feel we’ve paid all this money and have done everything ‘right,’ and now what? We’re stuck here with debt; is it even working? Is it even worth it?” Another participant stated, “Part of that is driven by ‘I want, therefore I can get it.’ Your wants stack up so high that first you must support your wants, so basically there is stress there long-term anyways, but you have to increase your stress to increase money—to earn enough to keep up with your wants.” Another often mentioned stressor mention by participants in the school B groups was that they did not have enough time to practice their faith, to read the Bible and to pray.

School C’s participants mentioned the amount of work and the amounts of reading required as a common problem at this high performance school. One student stated, “There’s just not enough time.” Another student mentioned her desire to see her grandparents who are very elderly, and the reality that she had too much work to do. Several participants brought up parental expectations and pressure on which academic mayor the student should choose. One participant stated, “Dad puts a lot of pressure on me; he wants me to be a math and science person.” Other stressors mentioned were the perception that one is failing to function properly; not having time for a romantic relationship; and “finding people who will have time to socialize with you.” One’s involvement with others appeared to be a major issue with School C.
Ways participants dealt with stress

*The 8 commonly used coping methods.*

Eight main coping methods became evident by applying a criterion that at least 50% of the students reported that they either currently utilized a specific coping method, or that they had used it in the past and would do so again in the future.

**Table 1 – Coping methods used in Schools A, B, and C combined**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with other people</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making lists</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a break</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking action</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting away</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the eight main coping methods only two practices—connecting with other people and taking a break—were used by all of the participants of the groups. This is not to imply that some groups abstained from a particular method, such as taking action or getting away. A group may have engaged other practices, similar to those mentioned, as a way to accomplish the same result (e.g. students engaging in grounding activities such
as walking in the woods, resulting in the same escaping of one’s environment and its related demands and stressors, as students can achieve by getting away and removing themselves from their environment.

**Comparing the schools on the use of the 8 coping methods.**

Participants were asked to identify each of the eight main methods as either a coping strategy that they currently use, have used in the past and will do so again in the future, or are unlikely to use. In the table below are the results of participants who reported stress management methods as currently being utilized, or have been used in the past and will be used again in the future.

**Table 2 - Schools A, B, and C compared on coping method use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Method</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with other people</td>
<td>19 100</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>6 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making lists</td>
<td>7 37</td>
<td>5 83</td>
<td>6 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>9 47</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>6 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a break</td>
<td>19 100</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>6 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking action</td>
<td>14 74</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>16 84</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>6 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting away</td>
<td>15 79</td>
<td>5 84</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>19 100</td>
<td>6 83</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only one of the three School A groups mentioned making lists as a coping method. One of the School A groups did not mention reflection activities as a coping method. One of the School A groups did not mention taking action as a coping method. One of the two School C groups did not mention taking action as a coping method. One of the two School C groups did not mention getting away as a coping method. One of the two School C groups did not mention music as a coping method. As facilitator, I did not mention these methods, and they may be experienced but simply may not have come to mind of those groups’ participants.

The School A participants’ examples for connecting with other people were: pointless arguing, venting, having sex, and calling home to talk with parents and siblings. Examples given for reflecting were: talking to self, engaging spirituality, journaling, meditating, walking, doing intentional breathing, listening to muscle relax CDs, and taking hot baths. Examples for taking a break were: pleasure reading, playing video games, eating, and surfing the web. Examples for taking action were: being proactive, being optimistic, and studying. Examples for self-care were: playing/watching sports, cleaning, taking baths, taking naps, and exercising. Examples for getting away were: exploring, trying something new, getting off campus, doing something unusual, backpacking, taking long drives, going to the beach, skiing, and going to Safeway. Examples for music were: singing out loud; listening and playing; and making music.

The School B participants’ examples for connecting with other people were: talking and connecting with others, sharing problems, venting, and “processing through communication.” Examples for making lists were: planning; prioritizing goals, checking things off of lists, and organizing. Examples for reflection were, journaling and praying.
Examples for taking breaks were: pleasure reading, watching a movie or TV, and seeking comedy on the web. Examples for self-care were: exercising, cleaning, walking and jogging, taking naps, and boxing. Examples for getting away were: walking in the park, getting away for the weekend, and taking a drive.

The School C participants’ examples for connecting with other people were: talking and connecting with friends, experiencing relationships, seeing a therapist, sharing problems, being heard, calling family, and receiving emotional support. Examples for making lists were: check things off lists, and organizing. Examples for reflection were: experiencing the peace in nature, being in the moment, being vs. doing, meditating, going for walks, bike riding, hiking, camping, doing intentional breathing, and cooking. Examples for taking a break were: talking with friends, eating, reading for pleasure, watching TV, doing grounding tasks that increase self-efficacy, doing dishes/cleaning, and choosing between abstract vs. concrete tasks. Examples for taking action were: accomplishing things, and solving problems. Examples for self-care were: exercising, taking naps, doing self-grooming, cleaning, bathing, getting enough sleep, eating regularly and healthily, and consuming marijuana and beer. Examples for getting away were: driving, camping, and walking.

**Miscellaneous ways that participants dealt with stress**

**School A**

Participants of the School A focus groups \((N = 19)\) identified other stress management methods that were not prevalent enough to be added to the list of main 8 methods. The methods that the participants in Group 1 \((n = 10)\) currently use, have used in the past and will do so again in the future, were dancing \((n = 6, 31.57 \%)\), surfing \((n =\)
2, 10.52 %), window shopping (n = 7, 36.84 %), spending money (n = 4, 21.05 %), and “taking it out on mate,” “venting,” (n = 6, 31.57 %). Group 2 (n = 5) added being logical (e.g. focus on acting rationally) (n = 5, 26.31 %), and physical interaction (e.g. massage, hugs) (n = 5, 26.31 %). Both Groups 2 and 3 mentioned destroying something (e.g. tearing up paper, punching a pillow, destroying stress ball) (n = 7, 36.84 %). Group 3 also described getting high and eating junk food as a way to deal with stress (n = 4, 21.05 %).

School B

Participants of the School B focus groups (N = 6) also identified other stress management methods that were not prevalent enough to be added to the list of main 8 methods. The methods that the participants in Group 1 (n = 3) currently use, have used in the past and will do so again in the future, were rewarding self (n = 3, 50.00 %), and drinking a glass of wine (n = 2, 33.33 %). Group 2 (n = 3) added eating chocolate (n = 2, 33.33 %), and avoidance sleeping (n = 1, 16.66 %).

School C

Participants of the School C focus groups (N = 6) also identified other stress management methods that were not prevalent enough to be added to the list of main 8 methods. The methods that the participants in Group 1 (n = 3) currently use, have used in the past and will do so again in the future, were physical contact (e.g. massage, hugs) (n = 3, 50.00 %), helping others (e.g. volunteering) (n = 3, 50.00 %), and using alcohol and drugs (n = 3, 50 %). Both Groups 1 and 2 mentioned creative expression (e.g. making music, art, writing) (n = 6, 100 %).
Perception of stress

Participants were asked to identify each of the eight main methods as either a very important way of coping with stress, a method of moderate importance, or a method each member perceives as having no importance or merit in dealing with stress. In the table below are the results of participants who perceived stress management methods as having importance, (i.e. identified as having from moderate to high importance).

Table 3 - Schools A, B, and C compared on perception of coping methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Method</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connecting with other people</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making lists</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a break</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking action</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting away</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group participants from all three schools conveyed the belief that one could condition him or herself to stress. The general consensus among the participants was that escape is okay, as long as it is not self-destructive.
The participants from groups at all three schools stated that they perceived stress as expected, normal, and something in which one must engage and cope. They also stated that they realized that stress that is not adequately coped with could have a detrimental effect on their lives: personally, academically, and physically. The participants all perceived that stress did serve the purpose of motivating them to action. The participants stated that they realized that stress could be counterproductive to their goals and well being, and that stress needed to be addressed in order to engage an ongoing academic program at their schools. The group participants of School B and C also demonstrated that they are aware of those who appear to compete in who has the most stress—a form of status—where the ability to endure extreme stress is perceived as an aspect of what is required to be a successful student.

Participants from the groups at School A shared their thoughts on how they perceived stress. One participant stated, “You can take a lot of stress from one thing, and that can push you. If you have the same amount of stress from a lot of things then you get overwhelmed.” Another participant added, “Sometimes a way stress is a motivator is that sometimes we care, but sometimes we could do more for a situation…so the stress caused by that realization forces you into action. And makes you work harder; it forces you into action.” Another School A participant added, “What happens to me, like I’ll go on this cycle, like, if there is not enough stress I don’t get whipped on; because there is not enough stress I don’t care about it, right? I don’t care about it if there isn’t enough stress. And then I fall behind a little bit, and get stressed, and start caring, but then it gets too stressed, and then I stop caring again.” One participant stated that he did not use the word ‘stress,’ because for him the word ‘stress’ made him feel increased stress.
Participants from the groups at School B shared their thoughts on how they perceived stress. One participant stated that she perceived stress as a motivator, and that sometimes she found herself actually liking the fact that she had known stress during the day. She added that if she had a huge list of tasks she had to do, and was accomplishing things on the list and then marking them off, she would feel an extreme sense of accomplishment. She stated that in this way she perceived stress as her friend. One participant stated, “Sometimes I feel stressed, but I won’t know what I’m stressed about, so I have to kind of sit down and say, ‘OK, What is going on? Why am I feeling stressed?’ And that will help me. I almost like sometimes that is something that God uses that to be like, ‘Hey, you need to fix this a little bit.’” Other participants also remarked that when they experienced stress about something they realized that it held some importance. All School B participants agreed that having had to deal with significant stress in the past helps one to deal with it in the future.

Participants from the groups at School C shared their thoughts on how they perceived stress. They also demonstrated that they are aware of those in the School C stress culture, where the ability to endure extreme stress is perceived as an aspect of what is required at this school known for its rigorous academic standards, and an identifier of a successful and excelling student. An aspect of this mindset is that if one is not “partying” (implying use of substances) then he or she should be working hard on their studies. As one participant stated, “If sober, you should be working.”

The School C participants conveyed that people could condition themselves to stress; that one can become aware of signs when it is dominating and becoming counterproductive, and can compensate, and know when to escape. The general
consensus among the participants was that escape is OK, as long as it is not self-destructive. Again, this realization may be characteristic of these particular students, and may be demonstrating a self-awareness and acceptance that is not characteristic of School C students in general, or Millennial generation college students from other universities.

**Communicating with Millennials**

As the group facilitator, I experienced an initial hesitancy to use my normal language and slang terms—using words such as “cool”—in that I did not want to appear as if I was trying to put myself in their Millennial generation culture. I realized that it was pivotal for me to be authentic. This concern was assuaged as I heard the focus group participants use the word “cool” numerous times, conveying the probability that this word has retained its connotation since the 1950’s. The participants also demonstrated that they gave the same definition and meaning to the concepts/words of “control, commitment, challenge, and courage” as I also perceived through dictionary definition and personal use. The participants appeared that they were able to apply these four concepts to the methods of coping with stress.

Another expectation that I had before experiencing the focus groups was not met. In a personal conversation I had with Andrea R.—age 18—on September 6, 2008, she stated that if stressed or unhappy she would refer to the state as “pissed.” Although she stated that she uses the word “stress,” she stated that she would never say she was depressed, which to her means that she needs medications and counseling. She stated that she would admit to “feeling down.” During the focus groups at the three schools the general consensus was that it was perfectly valid and appropriate for someone to say, “I am depressed.”
Stress-Management Programs – Perception on Efficacy and Feasibility

As the group facilitator, I asked the participants how much interest there would be in some type of stress-management program at their school. The general consensus was that such programs would not be successful, that they would be just another thing a student must do, and thus just another stressor. “It would just be another class you had to take.” I did receive thoughts on having such programs, suggestions on the frequency and length of possible programs, and how they might best be marketed to the students to achieve optimal participation.

Interest that participants had in the programs.

Participants suggested that such a program may need to be required if student participation was to be achieved. One participant stated, “We would do it because it is required. But then it would be annoying to us, probably, because you’re being like forced to relax.” Another member added that she was not sure that if voluntary that people would do it.

Suggestions included that the program be for one credit, and maybe part of the freshman class. A participant stated that their school offered yoga for one credit, and that they could also offer stress management for one credit. Some students did see the potential for efficacy and participation of such a program. One participant remarked that when the program first started it would probably not receive much interest, but that if people went and it helped them, it could take off. Another participant added, “It really depends on how effective it is, because there are a lot of things like that that students go
into coming out saying, ‘I learned nothing in there; it hasn’t helped me.’” Some students demonstrated a keen interest. One participant stated, “For me I would be really interested, but then, programs can be really not helpful. It would just be another thing you have to do.” Another student suggested the merit of something like a wilderness first aid course, where students would get a pamphlet they could take with them, as part of their first aid kit. She stated, “It would be kind of neat to have something with different sessions for….like social interaction, with different ideas and options of things one can do, or ways to handle certain life situations. Different ways to deal with stress.” One participant stated, “A lot of people get really busy and don’t want to take the extra credit; and if it’s not worth a credit, it’s an optional thing, then people look at it as not worth anything, so why take it.”

**Thoughts regarding program length.**

Participants suggested different lengths and frequency of a program, such as three to six weeks, one or two terms, or a three-hour class for one month. Suggestions varied from a two-hour class similar to the focus group, to one class a week for a term, or an all-day seminar. One participant stated, “For me, I might go if it was a one-time thing, maybe for an evening during the week.” One participant referred to the length of such a program by suggesting having it on a Wednesday night, but not very often, and definitely not on Friday. Another participant referred to length by stating, “For me, if it was a one week, or something, I’d be a lot more likely to dismiss it, as like, ‘Oh yea, there going to tell me how to eat well, and stuff I already know.’” All members of one focus group stated that even attendance at a 2-hour seminar for beginning students—a one-time seminar—would depend on how good it was.
Thoughts on how to market these programs.

Marketing suggestions were limited, but one participant suggested promoting a program by word of mouth might be very effective. A participant added, “If it was trendy, or something, then people would do it. Like with an Ipod; everyone has one, so you have to do it.” Another participant stated, “Yea, if different groups and people who have large networks of friends are recommending it, then you are more likely to have a larger turnout. But it might make some students angry because on this campus we already have so many things that the college requires us to go to. One group member from School C stated, “Enduring high stress here can be cool; maybe going to it (a stress-management program) could also be cool.”

Applying the Hardiness Constructs to Manage Stress

As the group facilitator, I asked the participants how each would apply the concepts of control, commitment, challenge, and courage to the stress management methods brought up.

Applying the concept of control.

As group facilitator I asked, “Which of these coping methods would help establish a sense of control over a situation?”
### Table 4 - Schools A, B, and C compared on applying the concept of control to the eight main coping methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Method</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Connecting with other people</td>
<td>5 26</td>
<td>5 83</td>
<td>5 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making lists</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>4 67</td>
<td>6 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reflection</td>
<td>8 42</td>
<td>3 50</td>
<td>4 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Taking a break</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>1 17</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Taking action</td>
<td>4 21</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-care</td>
<td>4 21</td>
<td>3 50</td>
<td>5 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Getting away</td>
<td>7 37</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>1 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Music.</td>
<td>4 21</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>0 00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Group 1 of School A did not list any method as helping to establish a sense of control over a situation.

Some similarities were demonstrated between the three schools, with a partial agreement on the relevance of control evidenced with the coping methods of connecting with other people, reflection, taking action, and self-care. A significant difference was found between the schools on the relevance of control concerning the coping methods of making lists, taking a break, getting away, and engaging music.
Applying the concept of commitment.

As group facilitator I asked, “Which of these coping methods would require a commitment?”

Table 5 - Schools A, B, and C compared on applying the concept of commitment to the eight main coping methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Method</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Connecting with other people</td>
<td>14 74</td>
<td>3 50</td>
<td>6 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making lists</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>5 83</td>
<td>4 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reflection</td>
<td>18 95</td>
<td>3 50</td>
<td>0 00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Taking a break</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>2 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Taking action</td>
<td>14 74</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-care</td>
<td>18 95</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>5 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Getting away</td>
<td>8 42</td>
<td>3 50</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Music.</td>
<td>7 37</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>0 00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some similarities were demonstrated between the three schools, with a partial agreement on the relevance of commitment evidenced with the coping methods of connecting with other people, taking action, self-care, and getting away. The schools evidenced a significant difference on the relevance of commitment concerning the coping methods of making lists, reflection, taking a break, and engaging music.
Applying the concept of challenge.

As group facilitator I asked, “Which of these coping methods would constitute a challenge, to apply, and to put yourself beyond where you’ve been?”

Table 6 - Schools A, B, and C compared on applying the concept of challenge to the eight main coping methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Method</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schools A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Connecting with other people</td>
<td>6 32</td>
<td>3 50</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making lists</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>0 00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reflection</td>
<td>4 21</td>
<td>3 50</td>
<td>2 33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Taking a break</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Taking action</td>
<td>14 74</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-care</td>
<td>18 95</td>
<td>6 100</td>
<td>5 83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Getting away</td>
<td>9 47</td>
<td>1 17</td>
<td>3 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Music.</td>
<td>10 53</td>
<td>0 00</td>
<td>0 00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some similarities were demonstrated between the three schools, with a partial agreement on the relevance of challenge evidenced with the coping methods of connecting with other people, making lists, reflection, taking action, self-care, and getting away. The schools evidenced a significant difference on the relevance of challenge concerning the coping methods of taking a break, and engaging music.
Exploring the Millennial Generations’ Definition of Courage

As group facilitator I asked, “How do you define the concept of courage?” Of the four constructs I inquired on the definition of this particular concept due to the media’s portraying of courage as doing such acts as rushing into a burning building, or our Euro-American culture’s perception of courage being demonstrated through aggressive behaviors. The participants of all three schools gave a similar definition on the meaning of courage.

The main consensus of a definition by these participants was that courage required doing an action even though one feels fear or resistance related to the action. One participant stated, “Being really scared and doing what’s right anyway,” while another group member added, “When it’s hard to do and you can push through and do it anyways.” Some students perceived courage as being strong, and taking action in the face of uncertainty. Participants defined courage as integrity and being strong; being willing to take a challenge; being uncertain about the consequences concerning a situation, but taking action anyway; and to be willing to deal with a situation in which you are aren’t sure about the results, but you know you need to do it.

Some students applied specific actions as related to courage. One participant stated, “It takes courage to be open with people; to let your guards down. Because you put on a social mask with people, sometimes, unless you are close friends and they really know you. Like being different around people you are not really used to, and being uncertain whether you will be liked and accepted, and engaging anyway.”

Some students perceived courage as doing an action even though other people might disapprove. One participant stated, “The willingness to do something irregardless
of how other people might think of it, as long as you think it is the right thing to do.”
Another group member added, “I feel like fear is an aspect of, ‘Oh my gosh, this is what people are going to think,’ and you’re afraid of that.’ Basically, it’s doing what you feel is the right thing to do, even if there are negative emotions involved with that.” Another participant added, “Trust in yourself and trust in your decision, no matter what you have to do.” Another participant stated, “Putting yourself aside, and thinking of others before yourself.”

Applying the concept of courage.

As group facilitator I asked, “Which of these coping methods would require courage?”

Table 7 - Schools A, B, and C compared on applying the concept of courage to the eight main coping methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Coping Method</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
<th>n - %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools A</td>
<td>A 32</td>
<td>B 50</td>
<td>C 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Connecting with other people</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making lists</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reflection</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Taking a break</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Taking action</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Getting away</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Music.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Group 1 of School B did not list any method as requiring courage.

Some similarities were demonstrated between the three schools, with a partial agreement on the relevance of courage evidenced with the coping methods of connecting with other people, making lists, reflection, taking action, and self-care. The schools evidenced a significant difference on the relevance of courage concerning the coping methods of taking a break, getting away, and engaging music.

Applying Control, Commitment, Challenge, and Courage in a Stress-Management Program

As the group facilitator, I asked the participants how much interest did they think there would be in a program that looks at control, commitment, challenge, and courage as it relates to dealing with stress? The general consensus among the three schools was that applying these four constructs would be beneficial to the students.

Most participants appeared enthusiastic about the application of these concepts. Participants stated that they perceived the relevance of applying these concepts. One participant stated, “To me they don’t sound relevant at first, but I think they are.” Another participant added, “Stuff that takes commitment or courage, or is a challenge, is difficult to do—but if you do them you may feel much better. It’s good to look at what it takes.”

Some students questioned the efficacy of this application, questioning what students would get out of it. One participant stated, “If you put that (meaning the four words) in the title I don’t think anyone would show.” Another group member added, “If you call it something like, ‘Chill-lax,’ then people might go for it.” Another participant shared an interesting perspective, “Yea, I think if they were explained, they might be.”
But to just say it would sound like hard-core training, and doesn’t sound relaxing. But if you did the lists, stating some of the high points of it, and then at the end say, ‘You guys have worked on commitment with this and this, and challenge with this and this, and courage with this and this,’ and then they would go, ‘Oh yea, I did it.’”

One participant stated, “Some of the emotions of stress and some of the actual stressors that I can associate with stress I was able to think about, as we were bouncing ideas off the walls. So it was very insightful for me to see some of the issues put on the board and to be able to connect some of the dots.” Another group member added, “I would say that ‘challenge’, definitely, yes, because you can find what is hardest for students and then address that.”

One participant seemed to summarize the general consensus of the participants. “Looking at these concepts definitely has benefit; it’s like life skills, really. Because what we are talking about, we talked about stress from the context of college, but really, stress kind of drives your life. And it’s always been that way. Before we had our nice, industrialized modern society, it was like, the stress of waking up, and going and hunting, or figuring what you were going to eat, that’s the driving force that gets us through life. And those four C’s (courage, challenge, commitment, and control) that you talked about, are all like ways of getting through it and making the most of it. Or ways of thinking about it that can help you get through it and make the most of it. Those are actually attributes of life itself.”

**Summation of Results**

The results of the seven focus groups demonstrate a myriad of ways in which the participants evidenced their similarity as related to what they find stressful, as well as
how they deal with their stress. Relationships appeared to be the main way in which stress was managed. At the same time, the individuality of the students was evident, with participants applying many stress-management methods, from surfing to meditating.

All the students experienced stress, as would be expected. The range of degree of the students’ perception of their stress was wide. Specific ways in which stress was perceived and managed differed depending on the particular school, with some schools’ participants appearing to manage stress from more of an internal locus of control, versus external locus of control. Significance variance was demonstrated in how some participants accepted and dealt with their perceived stress as compared to how other students avoided their perceived stress.

I experienced the communication with these students as open and genuine, although the topic of drinking alcohol, using drugs, or having sex by the participants was barely mentioned. The general consensus among all the participants was that stress-management groups may be helpful, but willing attendance would be a challenge. The general consensus about applying the constructs of control, challenge, commitment, and courage to a stress-management program was that this application would be interesting and beneficial for the students.
Discussion

The results demonstrate that stress among college students does have a significant impact on the majority of college students, and that students’ perception of stress has a significant impact. The causes of stress and the ways in which stress was dealt were similar—for the most part—among the three schools. The majority of the participants of the three schools applied the most of the eight main coping methods. This similarity among the three schools also applies to the perception of coping methods listed, such as connecting with others, taking a break, and self care. These results likely signify that people of this age group who are engaged in college use similar methods of coping with the stressors common to the college experience. The results also support the contention that stress does influence the experience of Millennial age college students, and that the potential of a stress-management program to mitigate the impact of stress is a topic worthy of investigation and needs to be explored.

Dealing with Stress

Concerning the ways in which participants dealt with stress, all of the participants in the seven groups demonstrated an individual approach regarding methods used, describing a wide range of stress coping methods. Although there were similar stress management methods mentioned in the groups at all three schools, at the same time there were specific ways in which some schools and not others addressed stress. For example, School A participants appeared to use more avoidance types of methods, and applied
destructive behaviors or expressions of negative effect. These processes were not mentioned by participants at the other schools.

Another example is that making lists, organization, and reflection were major coping methods at Schools B and C, whereas participants at School A utilized these methods far less. School A mentioned the use of video games as a common coping method, where participants at Schools B and C stated that playing video games was seldom used as a method. At School B participants demonstrated significant application of faith and religious practices, which were lacking from the other schools. School C participants utilized such methods as grounding and flow activities, creative expression, helping others, and physical contact (hugs), all of which were not mentioned by the School A and B participants. These results suggest that a college likely attracts and accepts people based on characteristics and the specific intentions or values of students as well as on qualifications.

Another difference between the participants at the three schools were the remarks written on the ‘blank white sheets.’ School A participants utilized this method of listing coping methods to note and not share—such as drinking and having sex—while participants at Schools B and C chose not to use this method of noting coping methods. I question why this is the case, and surmise that participants at School A applied the instructions more literally, and felt more comfortable using this method of conveying information while retaining anonymity, than those from the other schools. In addition, the way in which I introduced how these sheets could be used may have resonated more with the participants of School A than the other schools, offering a means of engaging in the groups that better served the needs of School A participants to retain anonymity.
Perception of Stress

The participants’ stress appeared to be substantially influenced by their perception of stress, as demonstrated in the 1 to 10 level of stress self-report. The focus group members’ perception of stress appears to be based on individual experience. At the same time, the impact of stress appeared to be ubiquitous to this population. Most groups of School A and School B had a participant who wrote a low number, demonstrating that not all students who volunteered to participate were perceiving that they were under significant stress. I found this to be an interesting finding, especially since all participants were experiencing the demands of end of term finals during the time of the focus groups. The students who perceived their stress as minimal may have experienced far worse stress in the past, affecting their perception of their current college-related stress. The individual temperament and coping ability of students could also affect their perception.

The general consensus among the participants was that escapism is okay, as long as it is not self-destructive. In addition, the participants all perceived that stress did serve the purpose of motivating them to action. Again, these perceptions may be characteristic of these particular students, and may be demonstrating a self-awareness and acceptance that is not characteristic of other students at the three schools in general, or Millennial generation college students from other universities.

Another way that perception was observed was that in some cases the methods of coping mentioned by the participants appeared to align with the level of perceived importance attributed to each method, demonstrating a correlation between action and perception. For example, in Group 1 of School A, the coping method—reflection—was
described by all participants of being of no importance, and all participants reported that they did not do it and were unlikely to engage a reflective process. On the other hand, members of Group 1 of School A stated that they all used music as a coping method, and everyone perceived it as important. In the groups of School B all the participants stated that they used connection with other people as a coping method, and all perceived this method as important. The participants of the groups of School C demonstrated a similar correlation involving other people. The latter participants also demonstrated a similar correlation in taking breaks and self-care as coping methods.

The presumption that the effect of stress would have an adverse effect on students’ happiness must be questioned. As demonstrated in the Staats, Cosmar, and Kaffenger (2007) study, there is a significant correlation pattern between sources of school stress and sources of school happiness. This study indicated that college happiness as well as college stress contributed to general happiness. These results may be a factor in the stress culture mentioned by the School C participants—where one needs the perceived high stress to be able to receive self-acceptance or satisfaction.

Additional insight into the School C’s participants’ perception of stress comes from the Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908) that states that arousal and the stress it causes or represents is productive up to a point in that it motivates us, but that beyond a certain point of arousal the stress becomes counterproductive. This concept states that some stress is necessary, and helps explain the necessity of college stress to motivate and “arouse” students to action. It also gives light to School C participants’ description of students in their school who embrace a stress culture. The stress-embracing sub-group culture mentioned by School C participants may be able to affect where the top of the
inverted U curve becomes detrimental through their perception that stress is necessary and the more the better. At the same time, School C participants stated that they were aware that too much stress may also lead to illness, and/or the need to escape through substance use, or to dropping out of school. The very high academic standards by which School C is known may require stress to motivate people to action, and students may pride themselves in their ability to endure high stress and still produce in an environment with such a high standards identity.

**The Unique Results of Coping Methods from School C**

There were significant differences between the School C groups and those from Schools A and B. Both groups of School C were fully aware of the stress culture at their school—those students who embraced enduring high stress as a part of their identity—but stated that they were not a part of this group. Both groups appeared to have ways—or coping styles—that appeared to complement their individual personalities and that contributed to each group dynamic, and which enabled each of the members to maintain a sense of balance and psychological flexibility in their lives. Research shows that whether one’s locus of control is internal or external strongly influences how stress is perceived, and thus dealt with (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984.) Group 1’s way appeared to involve engaging and being more involved with their environments. Group 2’s way appeared to involve grounding and achieving total detachment from their highly involved/engaged mental state and interactive style. Both groups appeared to be able to give themselves permission to not get homework done, to take a break from mental engagement, when such a break seemed needed and beneficial. Different styles of coping—whether through intentionally taking a break or mindfully grounding oneself—tend to work better in
different circumstances, with cognitive flexibility (and the awareness that both lists serve a purpose) being necessary (Sapolsky, 2004).

As the facilitator of the groups, I observed that Group 1 of School C had participants who were more outgoing and engaging as they comfortably interacted with their external locus of control to affect their internal locus of control, the latter still appearing as a strong and healthy influence. One example of the interaction and influence with their external locus of control was their tendency to volunteer, to intentionally work with others in order to have a positive effect on their lives. This method/activity was only mentioned in Group 1, in which all participants either currently do it or see merit in it. The members of this group appeared to benefit by making a difference in the world. As stated by Sapolsky (2004), “Often, one of the strongest stress-reducing qualities of social support is the act of giving social support, to be needed” (p. 406). “In a world of stressful lack of control, an amazing source of control we all have is the ability to make the world a better place, one act at a time.” (p. 407).

The participants of Group 2 of School C were more reflective and analytical, relying more on an internal locus of control to maintain balance when dealing with stress. At the same time, they—individually and adhering to their group dynamic—appeared to take walks and to engage and connect with nature to achieve a sense of peace, versus utilizing walks for exercise, and engaging nature as a positive and beneficial interaction affecting their external locus of control. Nature appeared to have a grounding effect to the members of this group.

I also observed that grounding tasks had a significant importance in coping with stress for the participants of Group 2. I perceived Group 2 as being more analytical, more
introverted with their internal locus of control being the dominating factor. One participant spoke of the increased self-efficacy he experienced by being able to do something he perceived as “grounding” by choice, intentionally, as he received immediate satisfaction or gratification. The participants of this group appeared to have a mental process that was more abstract and existential, which may explain how grounding tasks were beneficial. Members of both groups mentioned banal tasks such as washing dishes as being mindful and grounding—an immediate and solid thing one can do. Members of Group 2 appeared to benefit from “flow” activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), enabling a complete detachment of mind and engagement in the moment, and appeared to be very effective ways for this group to cope with stress.

**Major SPIs – Significant Points of Interest**

Significant points of interest (SPI) that applied to all schools were that all participants agreed that being able to have the option of using both sides of the lists written on the white board—avoidance/escape versus mindful/reflection—is the optimal way to deal with stress and keep a sense of balance. Another SPI was that humor and laughter appeared to play a significant part in the success of the focus groups. A high percentage of participants believed that college stress prepared them for stress in life. In addition, giving oneself permission to take a break and do something perceived as being of no value, such as watching a ‘House’ rerun was a major stress management tool used by the group participants.

Significant points of interest that applied to School A were that different participants in Group 3 used the term “man-up”. I mentioned that “man-up” seemed like a sexist term. I asked the females of this group if they saw it as sexist. They said that our
cultural vocabulary tends to be sexist. “We use ‘he’ pronouns to everything. We are kind of born into it.” All of the participants of Group 3 stated that sex takes courage. One participant stated that sex is something he did want to do, but was afraid to fail at it. Another participant stated that it takes courage to get high and to get away with it; to not get caught.”

Significant points of interest that applied to School B were that the use of video games was not mentioned and listed as a way to deal with stress, even as a part of the avoidance/escape list. Another SPI was that while the second of the School B focus groups attributed the application of courage to prayer and reflection, connection with others, and taking action, the first School B focus group did not attribute the construct of courage to any of their stress-managing methods.

Significant points of interest that applied to School C were that the problem of procrastination was not on the stressor list; that there was an apparent general awareness among participants that the stress at this school can cause one to get ill; and that half of the focus group members stated that they have “barometers” that signal to them when they are being adversely affected by stress, and then take needed action. One participant stated that she uses the personal sign of stress build-up by her awareness of becoming increasingly emotional. Another SPI was that all participants brought up lack of time as a major stressor, but there was no implication that better time management would help. The participants conveyed that just knowing time management did not mean that one would utilize it. All participants agreed that organization was key. Another SPI was all the participants of Group 1 agreed that hugs are good; that physical contact is needed.
All agreed that one must ask for a backrub. One participant remarked how important backrubs were, but that they were hard to obtain.

**The Millennial Generation’s Need to Communicate**

A question posed in this dissertation was, “What are effective ways to communicate and connect with today’s college students?” As the group facilitator, I expressed a genuine willingness to listen to and to learn from the participants, and I applied a strong intention to give them that consideration and respect during the focus groups. Being treated in this manner by an older ‘boomer generation’ adult may have been somewhat of a novel experience for most of the participants, since most people—including parents and educators—overestimate their listening ability. Most people from all generations think of themselves as better listeners than they actually are (Nichols, 1995). By actively listening, applying reflective listening, showing respect for all ideas and comments, asking questions and seeking ideas and opinions, versus dictating information, or talking ‘to’ the students, likely had a positive impact. I perceived the communication and connection experienced in the seven focus groups as excellent, as evidenced by the content and quality of data obtained.

It is probable that this age cohort of students is able to communicate and relate with all generations, in that they interact with their parents and teachers who are of the Baby Boomer or X generations, and as they also communicate with those in their own age group (J. Thomas, personal communication, May 2008). In other words, they are able to live in both worlds. This theory may be a generalization for other students at each of the three schools, and all people of the Millennial generation—to varying degrees—depending on such variables as intellect, maturity, and upbringing. At the same time, the
participants who volunteered for these focus groups may be demonstrating a self-awareness and acceptance that is not characteristic of all the students at the three schools, or college students from other universities, or those of the Millennial generation in general.

**Stress-Management Programs**

Regarding the research question, “How interested would the participating students be in a program that would help them manage stress better?” the receptivity of such a stress-management program would likely be questionable at the three schools participating in this study. It appears that according to the focus group participants’ perception of how well a stress management program would be received by other students at their respective schools that a required program on stress would only serve to increase the stress of the students. The general consensus was that such a required program would just be another thing to do, or if not required would not be attended. At the same time, this study’s seven focus groups—which can be defined as a stress-management process—demonstrated the merit and potential efficacy of such a program.

**Resiliency to Manage Stress**

**Applying concepts of control, commitment, challenge, and courage**

The participants’ understanding and application of the concepts of control, commitment, and challenge became evident during the focus groups. These constructs were applied to the different methods of dealing with stress listed, and a variance among participants, groups, and schools was demonstrated. The understanding of what the meaning of the words “control, commitment, challenge, and courage” appeared to be a universal definition aligned with the mores of contemporary Euro-American society,
rather than aligned with any specific generation. This writer expected the definition of
courage to have the most diverse perspectives and definitions, given that different people
have different meanings for such words as truth, integrity, courage, and spirit (May,
1953). The perception of courage in contemporary society is often described as rushing
into a burning building, or not backing down from a fight. The focus group participants
gave their perceptions of courage that aligned well with Maddi (2006), with the main
consensus being that courage is doing something that needs to be done, even though
doing so requires facing the fear associated with the action.

Another question posed was, “How much interest would they have in a program
that looks at control, commitment, challenge, and courage as it relates to dealing with
stress? Participants of School A both expressed statements supporting the relevancy of
such programs, and also questioned what people would get out of it. Participants of
School B expressed statements expressing how interesting it was to list the stress data on
the board, and to look at it, questioning things not previously thought about having to do
with dealing with stress. Participants of School C expressed interest in such programs,
stating that it would be beneficial in the sense that one could look at the way that certain
things might be challenging, and/or courageous, or one of the other concepts, and then
look at the relationship between them and trying to figure out, that some things are easy
to do, but one also may not feel that he or she is getting a lot of benefit from them, where
other things are harder, but are more rewarding. The participants expressed the merit in
looking at the connections between them when making choices. It appeared that the
participants in School C perceived these concepts as having benefits similar to the life
skills that one needs in order to have a successful life. One participant described these concepts as attributes of life itself.

**Summary of What Was Discovered**

**Stress vs. happiness**

Study results indicated that college happiness as well as college stress contributed to general happiness. Participants reported perceiving stress as normal, and necessary. At the same time, participants at School B stated how they had been brought up to work hard and then to expect a successful and abundant life, that “the sky is the limit.” These students had started experiencing the contradiction to this creed, largely due to the current job market and economic difficulties of our society, and were expressing their confusion and frustration.

The School C participants identified a sub-group of their student population referred to as a “stress culture,” where one needs the perceived high stress to be able to receive self-acceptance or satisfaction. In the case of this school stress endurance and extended efforts are considered as elements of status and identity. It appeared that at School A, stress was to be avoided in order to experience optimal happiness.

**The need for reflection**

The need for increased reflection—its ability and practice—in our society has long been acknowledged (Kolb, 1984). Being aware of this need for reflective activities and learning to build the skill of reflection could benefit highly stressed college students (McGlynn, 2008). The perception and application of reflection appeared to be diverse among the different schools. The participants of School A had the least alignment with reflection as a coping method, less than School B and C.
All of the members of both Groups 1 and 2 of School B equated reflection to spiritual practice and praying, and utilized resources that enabled living aligned with spiritual beliefs, which includes time for prayer and reflection. This life value and its related actions appear to enable students to deal with significant college stress and to still maintain an element of life balance and to function effectively. At the same time, it was expressed that, aligned with living a Christian lifestyle, is the self-imposed demand to add prayer into the significant demands of college life. The added stress of spiritual practices, i.e., prayer, was stated more often than was the positive effect, leading this author to presume that this is due to the spiritual lifestyle already being integrated into ones life, accepted as a part of living “the good life,” as described by Plato (Johnson, 1999).

All of the members of both Group 1 and 2 of School C utilized resources that enabled reflection and mindfulness, which may be a similarity that enables both groups to deal with significant stress and to still maintain an element of life balance and to function effectively. Group members appeared to intentionally do activities that were grounding and enabled them to engage in reflection. In Group 1 a participant stated that people could be mindful about anything they did, that exercise, cooking, or helping others can be meditative.

**Control of time**

Time constraints also cause stress, but more than management of time itself, the perception of control over time is the source of student stress (Nonis, Hudson, Logan & Ford, 1998). Procrastination was mentioned as a significant stressor. It appeared that the participants of the School A groups were somewhat less committed to their academic
goals than the other schools, as evidenced by more avoidance forms of stress
management, and less of an expression on the importance of getting an education.
Participants from School A stated that school, job and friends were all a priority, and
balancing them was very stressful. It appeared that using time to escape the stress of
college was a higher priority at School A than the other two schools.

Participants from School B conveyed that just learning time-management is not
the solution, because procrastination would get in the way. Group members expressed
the need to be motivated to apply time-management skills, and stated that this should be
taught at home, similar to a social skill. Since participants expressed time-management
as a social skill that warranted being taught, it may be a skill that could be effectively
taught in school.

Participants from School C conveyed their problem controlling their time, and
that procrastination was an issue. These participants appeared to be more aware that they
were making excuses when they procrastinated, and that there would be consequences. It
appeared that they were also aware of why they were at school and were committed to
taking advantage of the opportunity. I surmise that students’ time management could be
improved by increasing their awareness of and commitment to their academic
opportunity.

What appeared as key to the students of both School C groups’ sense of control of
their time was the ability to give themselves permission to take a break and do something
of no value, such as watching a ‘House’ rerun. Giving himself or herself permission—
realizing and accepting that it’s necessary and OK to use their time this way—to take a
break, to take time for themselves, was seen as a major stress reliever. Sometimes taking
a break entailed intentionally escaping from the awareness and involvement in their current reality—or their perception of it. Taking this type of break likely enabled students to recommit to being aware and involved in their academic quest.

**Financial Aid and money issues**

Money issues and the worry about parents’ money woes, possible loss of job, and the current economy are currently a significant stressor for some students. There were varying degrees of concern related to money and financial issues among the members of the groups, specifically incurring financial aid debt. They expressed a sense of decreased hope for the future due to the current difficulties with our society’s economy.

At all schools at least one participant stated that being reminded by parents of how much money they were spending was very stressful. Participants spoke of the parental pressure to get employment, and among these members financial issues were a major source of stress whether parents were helping the student or having to face that considerable money would have to be paid back due to financial aid. Fear of failure in school and the need to keep grades up were also aligned with financial aid and money worries. Participants at School B questioned more than the other schools whether it was worth it to acquire school dept when there were now no guarantees that they would succeed. It appears that these students were promised more as far as what they could obtain in life, and due to current economic woes they were now facing the uncertainty of their futures. Participants from all three schools expressed similar concerns due to the current recession.
Need for social connection

A common theme at the three schools was the human need for social connection. Participants at School A spoke of the need to balance time for friends. At School B participants remarked on the stress due to being away from home for the first time, and not having convenient family right there. They also mentioned the lack of a social system, and the need to have people with whom to connect and to discuss issues. Participants at School C expressed the highest need for social connection. This may be due to the very high academic demands at this school and the resulting lack of time for social activity, and it may also be due to the level of social skills acquired by these students in high school, where there were few students to equal their intellectual acumen. Professionals who have studied the Millennial generation state that this generation is the most socially connected of all the past generations; they appear to need social connection, and to like group activity (McGlynn, 2008). The results from the seven focus groups appear to support this implication.

Using counseling services

Participants from all of the school groups addressed the school’s counseling services, although the concept of going to a therapist appeared to be more apparent than actual overt behaviors. One-third of the students in the study reported interest in stress reduction workshops and information, and those that did perceived more stress in their lives, than those students who were not interested in stress reduction workshops and information.

The participants at the three schools all remarked on how difficult it was to ask for help. They also referred to the stigma of counseling centers and people who ask for
help. One participant stated that the latter are seen as weaker. Participants stated how it was important to have one’s own resources and tools to use, but that it’s very important to let other people help you. Participants spoke of being aware of students who were going to a counselor, or were planning on doing so. Other participants stated that they had utilized counseling services in the past, and had been significantly helped. Some members remarked that they preferred to go to a friend for help. The general consensus of the focus group participants was that few students went to the school counseling facility when feeling stressed or anxious. In fact, the authors of one study found that only 5% of students reported talking to a professional to deal with their stress (Pierceall & Keim, 2007).

Volunteering

One of the strongest stress-reducing qualities of social support is the act of giving social support (Sapolsky, 2004). This premise appears to support the act of volunteering. Of the seven focus groups conducted at three different academic institutions of higher learning, it was Group 1 of School C in which volunteering was a major theme and way of managing stress as it also enhanced lives. It appeared that the lives of the students were enhanced as well as those people who were at the receiving end of time and efforts.

Martin E. P. Seligman (2002) wrote of how altruistic behavior, another way of defining volunteering to help others or help with aspects of our environment, is related to the “hedonic treadmill.” According to Seligman, a barrier to positive emotions and to raising one’s level of happiness is the “hedonic treadmill,” which causes one to adapt to good things by taking them for granted. As people accumulate more material possessions and accomplishments, their expectations rise. Americans today have more cars, color
TVs, computers, and brand-name clothes than they did several decades ago, but Americans are no happier now (Buss, 2000).

One School C participant explained her rationale for using time to volunteer to work with children by explaining that it was only once a week for an hour, that it was a good break to have, and that it was very enjoyable to interact with the children. It appeared that participants at School C were more aware of behavioral options, and that volunteering was a viable option for not only reducing stress but also enhancing life. It appeared that volunteering enables these students to feel increased empathy and compassion.

**Drug and alcohol use**

Robert Sapolsky (2004) wrote about the desire to use substances from a physiological perspective when he stated that the desire to use substances to deal with stress is likely enhanced by stress because stress impairs the functioning of the frontal cortex, which normally has that sensible, restraining role of gratification postponement and decision making. Sapolsky explains how this process can lead to continued use of substances although the use results in hangovers and other consequences counterproductive to academic goals.

The only reference to drug and alcohol use in the School A groups were a notation made by one participant on the ‘blank sheets’ used to convey information and keep complete anonymity. The participant wrote of experiencing considerable sexual activity and drinking alcohol. A School B participant stated that she sometimes would have a glass of wine and smoke a cigarette, and that there was an underground of drinking at her school. Participants added that you’re not going to hear people talking
about drinking in public, and it appeared that drinking at this institution was far less prominent than at other colleges. Participants from School C stated that students would either be studying or “partying.” Although all of the School C group participants saw the need for little “vacations” now and then from their need to engage their responsibilities, substance use was not mentioned as a major way that the focus group members dealt with stress. Several participants stated that they did not use substances, or feel the pressure to use, although they were aware of others using substances. These individuals referred to themselves as being part of a different subculture at their school. Other participants remarked that it takes a commitment to plan to drink alcohol responsibly so that it does not become counterproductive to academic goals.

Coping with stress by intentionally giving up control by intentionally taking some form of break, whether it is an avoiding or mindful form of break, can increase one’s sense of control that one perceives having (Sapolsky, 2004). Substance use can be a way to intentionally give up control because for many people once they are under the influence of a substance, they are unable to give effective or optimal effort studying or engaged in academic endeavors. The perceived sense of control versus how much control one actually has is key (Sapolsky, 2004).

Taking action

Sapolsky (2004) gives insight into this finding concerning taking action by describing how with stress management: 80 percent of the stress reduction is accomplished with the first 20 percent of effort. He recommends that one take the time to practice stress management daily. He suggests that one find the outlet for his or her frustration and to do it regularly. He also suggests that we learn how to be patient with
our friends, that “most of us spend a lifetime learning how to be truly good friends and spouses” (p. 416). A common theme at the three schools was the benefit of taking action in order to manage stress. Some participants felt satisfaction and relief from stress by writing out duty lists and then checking off what was accomplished.

Most of the references to taking action by the groups of School A were statements of action taken, without the reference to the concept of taking action. One participant did state that she dealt with stress by taking action and being proactive. Participants from Schools B and C often referred to taking action to reduce or manage stress. Some of these references were academic related, while other examples listed were not related to academic tasks, such as cleaning or cooking. Listing items and them checking them off was mentioned as a major behavior that helped reduce and manage stress. It appears that the sense of accomplishment and/or organization from using lists were seen as effective tools.

**Limitations and Alternative Explanations**

One limitation of this study is that only a total of 31 students out of a population of several thousand students participated in the focus groups. That being said, these interviews seemed to yield enough data to achieve saturation of our core themes, providing numerous questions to research in the future.

I question why these particular students chose to participate. A possibility may be that these students are constantly seeking and finding life balance at the same time as experiencing significant stress, a supposition taken from analysis of the results. Although the group participants were aware of the different sub-groups at their school, such as the
stress culture at School C, the group participants appeared to belong to a population with a more balanced approach to dealing with stress.

Another limitation of the study was the time of the school year and academic term that the focus groups were conducted. The students at the three schools were approached at the end of the term when finals are taken and papers are due. Students who may have been interested in participating in one of the focus groups may have had to forgo the opportunity because of the necessity of academic demands being the top priority. During this time of the semester it is expected that most students are significantly affected by stress.

The general perception that society has of stress, and particularly the students of School C, who have to endure high academic demands and levels of stress as a norm, can be the genesis of resistance to voluntarily participating in a study involving stress. Human life involves stress, and it is likely highly natural to avoid whatever is perceived as contributing to one’s stress. Students may be so overwhelmed and dominated by the stress in their lives that to intentionally engage discussion on stress could seem unbearable.

**A Direction for Further Research**

Interesting research would be a study on whether volunteering—giving to others—increases the empathy and compassion in one, or if it was that individuals’ innate empathy and compassion that enabled volunteering to be an effective way to manage stress. A likely finding would be that this is an example of recursion, or that both are correct.
Conclusions

Outlets for stress are needed in order for the stress to not become detrimental (Sapolsky, 2004). Besides outlets a student needs to find ways to achieve a sense of balance when dealing with the significant demands and stressors incurred by being a college student. Developing an effective stress-management perspective and lifestyle requires an increased level of self-awareness, as well as the awareness of the importance of the relationships in our lives. The awareness that stress is innate to all aspects of the human life experience is key. One can develop ways to deal with stress, to survive the worst aspects of life, while still leading a rich and flourishing life in the process.

What became apparent while doing the seven focus groups at the three schools was the commonality of the stress experience, as well as the individuality of how the participants managed their stress. Finding one’s own style of coping, of being the most functional and productive under the stressful circumstances of the college experience, appears to be essential. It appears from the results of the focus groups that in order to optimally adapt to stress one needs to discover, apply, and practice stress management methods that work best for them as individuals. Participants described their need for social connection, so this was a common factor with all participants. At the same time, each student’s individual characteristics, preferences, habits and personal strengths appear to affect the ways in which he or she manages stress while being a student at the three schools.
Recommendations

The secondary goal of this project is to use the data obtained to make recommendations for a stress-management program that would be relevant to the issues and concerns that cause stress in Millennial Generation college students. Recommending options for a program that would likely to be acceptable and utilized by this group of college students is key. The efficacy of this type of program has been established. The Walker and Frazier (1993) study results supported the effectiveness of a stress management educational program for increasing knowledge of stress and ways to cope with stress among college students. Results showed increased attitudes of self-efficacy, increased self-reported practice of time management, cognitive restructuring, and coping behaviors. These changes were maintained at follow-up. Significant differences were not noted in stress level, although stress levels did not increase during finals week, a fact attributed to the program. Although studies show the efficacy of stress management programs, the realistic application of this type of program conducted in such a way where the college students of the three schools involved in this project’s focus groups would engage and benefit, versus resist, must be questioned as to whether or not it is realistic and achievable. Results from the seven focus groups conducted for this study support that old saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him (or her) drink.” On the other hand, this project’s results also left open the possibility that there may be a
way or ways in which some type of stress management program could be designed and applied where it would be effective and beneficial.

**Main Recommendation**

The main recommendation for a stress-management program or process that would be relevant to the issues and concerns that cause stress in college students—specifically applicable to college students of this age cohort—would be a program that is conducted very similar to the process applied during the seven focus groups at Schools A, B, and C.

**A program labeled as ‘personal stress and optimal management’ groups.**

The ideal length of time of this type of group would likely be 2 hours, with the maximum of 6 students in each group as also ideal. These groups would be interactive and experiential, with a facilitator posing the question of what causes the students stress, listing their answers on a white board. The other aspects of the focus groups conducted for this study, such as asking what the different ways are that students deal with their stress might be asked with the responses listed on the white board. The separation of answers into the avoidance/distraction versus reflective/mindful groups on the white board could enable students to differentiate between the two ways of coping, and to accept that utilization of methods from both groups is the optimal way to manage stress.

A specific Moderator’s Guide could be developed that contained the main questions as well as probe questions, as was applied in the seven focus groups. The facilitator, who could be a teacher, graduate student, or student ending his or her four years of undergraduate study, would ask questions versus give information. According to some researchers who have studied this age group of college students, Millennial age
college students work best in an environment of active and engaging activities, such as group work, versus being taught by lecture in a teacher-centered approach (Pardue and Morgan, 2008).

It could be very beneficial to students to just be listened to and respected for their thoughts and life experience—without judgment or receiving advice. Exploring the constructs of control, commitment, challenge and courage, as these concepts apply to stress and the methods in which the students manage stress, is highly recommended, as this process would enable students to explore and define their stress management methods, as occurred in this study’s focus groups.

These short in duration groups would likely be the most effective after students new to college complete their first term. Data could be sought and recorded as research on the benefit of this type of process, or the groups could be conducted strictly for the benefit of the students.

Even though the School A, B, and C focus groups were conducted to gather specific data, the participants stated that they benefited in how they could better maintain healthy stress management practices, or apply new ones. Their insights concerning the stress which affects them, how they dealt with their stress, and other possible ways to deal with stress in the future, were increased. In addition, their awareness was heightened regarding how stress and its effective or ineffective management affects other aspects of their lives. Participants stated that being able to sit down and talk about the issues discussed in the focus groups had been beneficial. Members remarked on how they were helped by not only talking about stress, but also about such issues as relationships, and creativity. Most of the focus group members voiced appreciation for
being able to talk at a personal level, and agreed that this type of group process created a bonding effect, “because you share very personal things with the whole group.” The ability to share personal information with other students is likely strongly influenced by the emphasis on confidentiality and the facilitator’s commitment to protect their privacy.

Other Possible Programs Options

45-minute stress-management program.

The Dziegielewski, Roest-Marti, and Turnage (2004) study used a classical pretest-posttest control group design to measure changes in participants’ responses after a 45-minute stress-management program to undergraduate social work students. Techniques on how to better handle stressful situations were discussed in this short session. At posttest the experimental group showed significant changes compared to the control group, with reported levels of stress and apprehension significantly lowered. These findings suggested the importance of short-term assistance to help students cope with academic stress.

This type of short duration stress management program could be given to students just entering college, or once a year for all students serving as a ‘refresher’ course.

Develop and present a life mastery program versus stress management focused program.

Instead of creating and presenting a stress management class/program, a ‘life mastery’ program might be better received by busy students who already have significant demands on them. The goal of a life mastery program would be to live well, to flourish, versus to just survive the riggers and stress of the college experience. Students could
benefit by learning or further developing, or enhancing such strengths as determination, problem-solving, emotional smarts, and resilience (Verhaagen, 2005).

Participants could focus on, define, and detail personal values, increase self-awareness involving personal strengths and weaknesses, increase their ability to change or defuse from counterproductive thoughts and beliefs, and learn how to better accept difficult thoughts and painful life experiences. This would be coupled with investigating and applying the 4 C’s of the Hardiness construct. Other aspects of a ‘mastery’ program would be a focus on and development of the ability and practice of setting goals and life plans, committing to actions that support what is really important to each individual, and to learn how to just be present—to live in the moment, where choices can best be made without the encumbrances of past regrets or worries about the future.

A characteristic attributed to the Millennial generation is the desire for information that they can use to make a difference in the world, and this cohort seems to do well when engaging in experiential learning (McGlynn, 2008). A ‘mastery’ program that has a learner-centered dynamic, thus student-centered and process-driven, would likely be advantageous.

Considerable literature and research support the possibility of a life mastery program being beneficial for college students. Using such approaches as CBT, REBT, and resilience models, Steinhardt and Dolbier’s (2008) study focused on thoughts that often create stress, on the perceptions of a situation. These researchers also addressed the potential of students to experience challenges and to go beyond being resilient and bouncing back to their previous level of well-being, to actually improve their level of well-being to a state called “thriving.” This ability to benefit from adversity versus just
survive it is a concept aligned with Keyes’ theory of duel continuums of mental health, with one being defined by the ability to achieve the state of flourishing, versus just maintaining “normal health” (Keyes & Lopez, 2002; Keyes, 2005). Steinhardt and Dolbier (2008) found that problem-focused coping, used long term, is linked to resiliency and to flourishing.

Members of the Millennial generation could benefit through experiential learning where active questioning and hands-on activities are incorporated into the teaching. The dynamics and benefits of this type of interactive, experiential learning was defined and strongly supported by David Kolb (1984). Millennials could benefit by developing the capacity for critical reflection and quiet contemplation (Pardue and Morgan, 2008). Reflection is needed for the optimal learning cycle to occur (Kolb, 1984). Being able to listen to oneself, to focus on self-inspection that leads to increased self-awareness, and to be able to experience mindfulness are needed and important (McGlynn, 2008). Millennials also need to be able to address and evaluate their academic strengths and weaknesses, and to develop competency in the areas where they lack mastery (Pardue and Morgan, 2008).

Non-Program Recommendations

Have a social orientation for incoming students similar to the program offered by University of Puget Sound.

The University of Puget Sound has three parts to their orientation week: Prelude, Passages, and Perspectives. Through their unique orientation the administration and facility present a program with the intention to challenge, to build connection, and to develop a sense of comfort for their incoming students. Prelude is the students’
introduction to the academic community. Passages marks their entrance to new friendships and experiences that will help them set a path into the university community. Each student can choose one of three different Passages experiences. Option 1 is three days and two nights at a base camp on Hood Canal having a wide choice of activities, such as hikes or half-day sea kayak trips; Option 2 is three days and two nights backpacking in the Olympic Mountains, with different degrees of difficulty to match the ability level of each student; Option 3 is two days and one night experiencing an overnight adventure: Canoeing on the Hood Canal. Perspectives is designed to acquaint them with their new home and the people that they will be living with each day.

This writer is aware of the potential that many incoming college students may feel that they are too sophisticated, contemporary, or bright, to have to engage such ‘sitting around the campfire’ activities. Those might be the students who benefit most from this type of novel activity that will help form relationships and social connections that extend throughout their time in college.

**Conduct “cool” social activities.**

In all of the focus groups participants often mentioned the lack of school-sponsored events that were “cool,” versus stuffy and too conventional and structured, and thus boring. Although there are substance use connotations to raves, such activities such as ‘clean’ raves may lower stress through the engagement of an experience that may or may not be novel, even though put on and supported by the school and not produced as ‘underground’ and illegal events. The type of high-beat music, lights, and other effects associated to a rave may not align with the tastes and preferences of a particular student, but engaging something different may prove beneficial.
Reframe going to a school therapist.

Only 5% of college students in one study reported talking to a professional to deal with their stress (Pierceall & Keim, 2007). The results of the focus groups for this paper demonstrated that while each of the focus groups had overlapping areas of major coping styles, as well as distinctly different coping methods attributed to each group, the majority of participants of the groups seemed amenable to utilizing the services of the schools’ drop-in counseling. This writer makes this supposition based on what the participants said about how students in general perceived going to a therapist, and how each as an individual perceived engaging this action. They often described the apparent lack of awareness of availably, and the connection and support that meeting with a therapist could provide.

An idea from one of the seven focus groups was that during whatever type of new student orientation conducted—such as a meeting with the dean welcoming the new students—to have the head of school counseling and some of the counselors (maybe the ones better able to form an immediate rapport) to introduce themselves and to tell about the drop-in center counseling and some of the basics of counseling. For example, these representatives of the counseling center would demonstrate aspects of their humanness and the potential for there to be trust experienced, as they also describe the benefits of having someone to really listen to you when you are feeling really stressed or troubled. These mental health professionals would reframe therapy as a supportive process of connection, and an act demonstrating strength, versus a resource used only by those with mental problems—including neurotic characteristics that are perceived as a form of weakness by many people. These spokespeople could present facts, research, and
statistics, on how connecting with others, communicating, social interaction, being able to vent, and sharing thoughts and feelings promotes resiliency and the ability to thrive in a difficult, stressful environment. This reframing of the utilization and broad spectrum of functions of therapy could help normalize using the school counseling resources as being healthy and smart.

**Develop and present a ‘stress survival’ sheet.**

This sheet would give basic points based on the normalcy of high stress experienced during one’s college experience, and that this stress can be dealt with successfully. This sheet could state basic points of stress management, such as eating healthy and intentionally taking planned breaks. The sheets could also state the concept that even during difficult life experiences people can still flourish (Keyes & Lopez, 2002; Keyes, 2005) by developing resiliency and the ability to perceive their stress as manageable and within their control, even if part of that control is getting assistance. This sheet could help normalize asking for and receiving assistance through the school counseling center.

**Increase opportunities and availability of volunteering, and how this could be tied into work study programs and academic goals.**

The act of offering assistance to others was considered a stress-management tool by researchers (Sapolsky, 2004), and was supported by the results of this study.

**Suggested Points to be Conveyed in Stress Management Class or Program**

**Changing perception of control over stress.**

To intentionally give up control by intentionally taking some form of break, avoidant or mindful, can increase the sense of control that one perceives having
(Sapolsky, 2004). Make dealing with, accepting, or dominating stress as something ‘cool,’ strong, and smart.

A new perception on ‘connections.’

The book, *The Power of Resilience* (Brooks & Goldstein, 2004), presents a novel perspective on the potential to increase connections in one’s life, and how these connections help to develop and maintain resiliency. The authors wrote how there are many ways in which one can form a connection, such as through communicating with others, which is commonly known. Other forms of connection are brought up, such as with a pet, or nature, or cooking, or even with an inanimate object such as a car, or boat. There are many aspects of our lives that we take for granted, even though they benefit our existence. Learning to recognize and appreciate these “connections” can help one manage stress and live more richly.

Financial Aid and money issues.

There were varying degrees of concern related to money and financial issues among the members of the groups. Participants expressed a sense of decreased hope for the future due to the current difficulties with our society’s economy. A way to reframe these issues is to promote the fact that education is an investment, using statistics to make this point. In other words, getting an education is a good investment.

Help students brainstorm ways to save money to address money issues and the worry about parents’ money woes, possible loss of job, and the current economy. This process of working together as a family to contend with unexpected and often crippling financial demands has been efficaciously used to help families dealing with a family member fighting cancer (Ryder, 1993).
**Living with roommates.**

Living with other students—roommates—is a reality for some college students, and was brought up as a stressor by some groups. During orientation, college students new to dorm life could be given a simple sheet of suggestions on ‘getting along with your roommate.’ Basic points on consideration, communication, assertiveness and boundaries could be mentioned.

**Awareness of the need for balance, and to learn to discover and adhere to one’s personal coping style.**

The goal of this type of awareness is that while a student is seeking the best education possible, he or she can learn how to go beyond just surviving stress, and to living a personal stress management program that enables the optimal chance of enjoying the academic process. This awareness is aligned with students discovering their personal learning and coping style, and then building on their strengths as they honor their personal needs. Promote the fact that one developing his or her own coping style is ‘cool’ and ‘smart.’ Part of this self-awareness is the realization of when and how to best take a needed break—and then giving oneself permission to take breaks needed to maintain balance.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Demographics for School A

1. Age
   18 = 5
   19 = 7
   20 = 6
   21 = 1

2. Gender
   10 male
   9 female

3. Religion
   Christian = 6  Catholic = 4  Atheist = 2  N/A = 5
   Agnostic = 1   Non-denomination = 1

4. Ethnicity
   Caucasian = 14  Asian = 3  Palavan = 1  Mixed = 1
   Hawaiian /Filipino = 1

Demographics for School B

1. Age
   18 = 1
   19 = 2
   20 = 1
   21 = 2

2. Gender
   2 male
   4 female
3. Religion  
Christian = 6

4. Ethnicity 
Caucasian = 6

Demographics – School C

1. Age 18 = 1
   19 = 1
   20 = 2
   21 = 2

2. Gender
   1 male
   5 female

Note: Religion and ethnicity were not included in School C’s demographic questionnaire due to the school’s small population and academic exclusivity and the study’s criterion of maintaining optimal confidentiality.
“Hi, welcome,

Thank you for attending. I hope that this will be interesting and fun. I’m a doctoral student in psychology, and I want to find out the best way to talk about stress and dealing with it and ways that you cope. First, can we all agree to keep what is discussed here among us confidential; we keep it in this room. There are a couple of formalities that I need to bring up. Because I’m doing these groups as a study in clinical psychology there are ethical and legal guidelines that I must follow. Everything shared, stated here, I keep confidential, except for several types of circumstances I must report. If someone discloses an incident of child abuse or neglect, or expresses an intention to harm himself or herself or someone else, I am mandated to report this. We are going to discuss stress and how we deal with it, and although I hope that everyone can be open and honest there may be some things you may not what to say out load in this group; ways that you personally cope. I will leave that up to you. What I suggest is that you write down all the ways you cope with stress on the paper in front of you, and then pull ideas from that list as we have our discussion. At the end of the session put the papers in the envelope in front of you and seal it. You can leave your name off the papers, and thus there will be no association between what you have written and your identity. Your name is not on the envelope, only a letter of the alphabet. Again, we want to keep everything said in this session completely confidential. No one’s name will be connected with any comment that I end up putting in my report telling of what was learned from the groups. We want to establish some other ground rules: only one person speaks at a time, let people voice
options without interruption; all opinions given respect without objection or criticism; and no side conversations among neighbors. Is everyone Ok with these ground rules?

Last, let me state that I am from the ‘baby boomer’ generation, and that I must admit that I know little about your generation, often called the Millennial Generation. I want to understand your thoughts and feelings; I really want to hear what you have to say. Now, are there any questions before we start?”
APPENDIX C

Questions Asked

1. When you think of the word “stress”, what comes to mind? How much stress can a person handle?

2. What aspects of the college experience are the major sources of stress? What states/emotions can stress cause?

3. Some people find that they are more productive when under some stress, for example a deadline or having to meet high expectations.

4. How do you deal with stress?

5. Do you think that action/distraction ways of dealing with stress are more effective, or are reflective/mindful ways of dealing with stress more effective?

6. How would you rate the importance of each stress coping method?

7. How would you associate the words/meaning of control, commitment, challenge, and courage to each of the items on our list of ways stress is dealt with? How do you define the concept of courage? Which of these demand courage?

8. How interested do you think students would be in a program that would help them manage stress better? And would you envision as the optimal length of such a program: 6 weeks, 1 term, a summer class, or 3 week jam term? How much interest do you think there would be in a program that looks at control, commitment, challenge, and courage as it relates to dealing with stress?

9. How has this process today been for you?
## APPENDIX D

### School A Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Import.</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Commit.</th>
<th>Chall.</th>
<th>Courage</th>
<th>Do it</th>
<th>Have/will</th>
<th>Unlike</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Other people - friends</td>
<td>15/3/1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Making lists</td>
<td>6/0/4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Reflection - meditating</td>
<td>6/1/12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Taking a break - pleasure reading - video games - eating</td>
<td>17/2/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Taking action</td>
<td>7/6/6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Get away - Explore - try something new</td>
<td>11/5/3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Music - listen - play</td>
<td>16/3/0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

### Misc.

**Methods**

A. Dancing | 1/3/6 | 8 | 5 | 1 | 4
B. Surfing | 1/1/8 | 10 | 1 | 1 | 8
C. Window shopping | 0/6/4 | 4 | 3 | 2
D. Spending | 1/4/5 | 11 | 1 | 3 | 5
E. Take it out on mate – venting | 2/5/3 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 4

Misc.
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<th><strong>Methods</strong></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>A. Dancing</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Being logical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on acting rationally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Physical interaction. – massage – hugs</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Destroy something – tearing up paper</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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