

OPERATIONALIZING HUMILITY: A MODEL OF SITUATIONAL HUMILITY FOR
CHRISTIAN COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies

Department of Educational Leadership

Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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December 2017

Keywords: humility, grounded theory, college, Bronfenbrenner, character

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Ph.D. Educational Administration (Specialization in Higher Education Leadership)

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December 2017

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ABSTRACT

This research study explored how college student leaders operationalize humility in their actions and what leads individuals to act with situational humility. There is a rise in narcissistic tendencies in college students (Twenge, Konrath, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008a, 2008b) and a decline in overall character traits (Burns, 2012; Hunter, 2000; Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Opposite the vice of narcissism sits the virtue of humility (Emmons, 2000; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Using a grounded theory approach, the researcher looked to discover the process of humility development. Twenty six in depth interviews were conducted at three institutions. Each institution was a member of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities and each participant identified as having a Christian belief system. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were coded using grounded theory method of open, axial, and selective coding. Based on the data collected three main themes emerged. Faith and humility go hand in hand, sense of self impacts humbling experiences, and the effect of relationships on humility. Through this research, the model of situational humility emerged grounded in the data.

The model of situational humility describes what leads an individual to act with humility within a specific humbling experience. For these students, humbling experiences occurred when their sense of self (“I am an athlete,” “I get things done on time,” “I am a not racist”) did not line of up with their experience of the world (physical injury, failing to send necessary emails, making comments that were received as racial insensitive by a peer). Individuals then move to

the point of change where they must decide how whether they will reorient their sense of self or actions or if they will not reorient and act with pride. In this point of change individuals were positively impacted towards humility by their Christian belief system, empathy, being in relationship, and interacting with others who were different from them. The implications of this research for institutional leaders who desire to grow humility in students include valuing how humility is seen as a virtue, growing empathy in students, and providing opportunities for students to be in relationship with others, specifically those who are different from them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is much to be grateful for and many people to be grateful for. My time as a graduate student has taught me more than I anticipated and moved and changed me in ways that will be with me for the rest of my life. Below are a few of the many people to whom I owe gratitude. I recognize the privilege it has been to be able to study for an advanced graduate degree. I do not want to take this privilege or those who have helped me along the way for granted.

I am grateful to God who has given me the time, energy, and abilities for my studies. May I continue to hear the call you have for me in my life and to follow it.

I am grateful to my committee for their time, energy, and willingness to walk with a developing researcher. Thank you to Dr. Tim Hermann. Dr. Kandace Hinton, thank you for serving on my committee and for teaching me along the way. Dr. Mary Howard–Hamilton, thank you for the thoughts and encouragement along the way. My time in this program has changed me.

I am grateful for those who assisted in my research process. My campus gatekeepers who trusted me. To the participants who willingly shared of their lives and experiences with someone they have never met before. This research does not happen without you.

Steve and Justin, my Quality Inn Hotel buddies. Steve, we have known each other for a long time and have had a chance to do lots together that neither of us anticipated when you first

met me as an 18 year old. Thanks for the investment in my life and the ways in which you and Rach have walked with Mel and me over the years.

Justin, I spent more time with you over the five semesters of this program than just about anyone other than my wife. I am grateful for the chances we had to share in this experience together. Your friendship was one that I did not anticipate changing in the ways it did through this program and I am grateful for it.

I am grateful to my family. To the broader Domsten and Barrett clans who asked questions, let me seclude myself when necessary, and supported Mel and the kids along the way. Mom, thanks for the ways in which you demonstrated education as a priority throughout my childhood and for your support and encouragement in these past years.

Sam, Quettie, and Mya. There are many things that I hope you take from this experience your dad has had. I am praying that you will continue to grow to be people who interact with the world as lifelong learners rather than as experts. May you grow in great ways in these next months and years, putting others before yourself and loving others well. I love each of you and am looking forward to watching you grow.

Finally, Mel, my partner, my support, my encouragement, my friend. The past four years has held a lot. I don't know if either of us really knew what we were signing up for. Without you, without your support, without your kindness, I am not at this point. Time after time you chose to put me before you, giving me the time and space to get done the work I needed to. I am grateful for a partner like you. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Narcissistic tendencies are at historic levels in today's college students (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008a, 2008b). The antithesis of these narcissistic tendencies is the character virtue of humility (Emmons, 2000; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Through a qualitative, grounded theory study, this research project focused on how college students participating in leadership programs operationalize humility in their lives and the process through which they developed these behaviors. A variety of factors limit current research on humility including the lack of an empirically valid and reliable instrument for measuring humility (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Slote, 1983; Tangney, 2000). Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental ecology model as a framework, this study identified a model for what leads an individual to act with humility within a humbling experience. As college students develop humility through the meaning they make of their college experiences this experience may lead to individuals with a more accurate view of self and greater openness to the views and opinions of others.

Statement of Problem

The state of individual character in America is in a dangerous place (Hunter, 2000). The failings of individuals have led to pain, death, and victimization (Burns, 2012; Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Researchers have shown that narcissistic tendencies are on the rise (Twenge et al., 2008a, 2008b). The self-focus of today's college students has led to the title of the selfie generation

(Blow, 2014). It has also led to a generation that believes it is entitled, with employers complaining, “Young employees expected too much too soon and had very high expectations for salary and promotions” (Twenge, 2006, p. 70). During college this entitlement looks like grade grabbing, an expectation that a high grade is deserved regardless of the work that is done. In addition to entitlement, Twenge (2006) pointed to more severe results of narcissism like the shooting at Columbine High School. Recorded video from the two high school shooters contained numerous statements that align with questions on the narcissistic personality disorder test. Studies have found that “narcissists lash out aggressively when they are insulted or rejected” (Twenge, 2006, p. 71).

Opposite the vice of narcissism sits the character virtue humility (Emmons, 2000; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Scholars have characterized humility as an accurate assessment of self, acknowledging both strengths and weaknesses (Carr, 1991; Emmons, 2000; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Owens, Johnson & Mitchell, 2013; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Richards, 1992; Tangney, 2000). Tangney (2000) added five additional characteristics:

- An ability to acknowledge mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge and limitations
- An openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping of one’s abilities and accomplishments in perspective
- Relatively low self-focus
- An appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world. (p. 73–74)

Humility is not lowliness or meekness (Bobb, 2013; Comte–Sponville, 2001; Peterson &

Seligman, 2004; Richards, 1992; Tangney, 2000). While many times associated with various eastern and western religions, humility is not always a religious construct (Comte–Sponville, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000).

As college leaders look to educate the whole person, character needs to become a part of what higher education institutions look to develop (Colby, Erhlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Dalton, 1999; Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Identifying the process of humility development could be an important step in developing college programs aimed at promoting character growth. More specifically, as campuses become increasingly multicultural the need for students to be open to others continues to be paramount (Dalton, 1999). The virtue of humility contains actions and attitudes that reflect an openness to others and an ability to be taught (Owens, 2009; Tangney, 2000). The development of character is an important output of America’s post–secondary educational system (Hersch & Schneider, 2005).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to discover the process of humility development for college student leaders. This study contributes to research in character development, specifically humility development. With the noted rise of narcissism in college students and humility identified as an antithesis of narcissistic tendencies, intentionally developing the humility of the selfie generation is a worthwhile goal. There is a renewed call for the intentional development of character in college students (Colby et al., 2003; Dalton, 1999; Liddell & Cooper, 2012) and identifying how one virtue is developed is one way to move character development forward.

Several recent studies have looked at humility empirically examining measurement (Davis et al., 2010; Peters, Rowatt, & Johnson, 2011; Rowatt et al., 2006) and humility’s impacts on organizations (Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2014; Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013), but these

studies do not focus specifically on the process of development. Tangney (2000) calls research on humility a humbling endeavor. The lack of quality instrument to measure humility and the inaccuracy of a self-report measure due to the nature of humility make it difficult to investigate (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Tangney, 2000). While some authors like Collins (2001a) have put forth hypotheses on what causes humility to develop, a lack of empirical data to investigate the specifics of development is clear.

Research Questions

The following research questions were of primary interest:

1. Based on Tangney's (2000) six-part definition of humility, what are the actions that college student leaders identify as humble?
2. What is the process through which college student leaders develop humility?
3. How do colleges and college experiences provide opportunities for the humility development process to occur?

Theoretical Framework

Because the process of development was a significant focus of the research questions, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of developmental ecology served as the primary framework. Bronfenbrenner built on Lewin (1936) and Piaget to develop his theory of developmental ecology. He focused on developmental processes rather than developmental outcomes. Lewin (1936) created his famous equation of behavior = *function*(person \times environment). Bronfenbrenner (1979) changed this equation to read development = *function*(person \times environment). Additionally, Astin's (1984) work on student involvement as a catalyst for development can help to explain the impact of student leadership on growth.

Methodology

In order to investigate the stated research questions, I used a grounded theory approach. The purpose of a grounded theory research study is to “move beyond description and to generate theory” (Creswell, 2013, p. 63). In this study, I looked to discover the process of humility development and to create a theory of this process grounded in data.

While the primary method of inquiry was a grounded theory approach, the research also looked into the phenomenon of humility. Phenomenology seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Research examined the lived experiences of those who have operationalized humility with the primary method of data collection being the interview.

Participants

Participants in this study were 26 undergraduate students who currently held leadership positions at institutions that are members of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. Heterogeneity of participants is an important aspect of data collection. Diversity of participants includes racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, religious, socio economic, and college involvement among other possible options.

Assumptions

I held certain assumptions in the research process. One primary assumption was that participants remained honest. I assured participants of their confidentiality and anonymity and participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

Delimitations

Participants in this study were limited to students participating in an on campus leadership position who are currently enrolled at an institution that is a member of the Council of

Christian Colleges and Universities. Purposeful sampling was beneficial in recruiting participants.

Significance of Study

As institutional leaders look to develop students who have more than academic or content knowledge the significance of a study on character development emerges. Developing the whole student is an important output of the higher education system (Liddell & Cooper, 2012). With the noted rise in narcissism (Twenge et al., 2008a, 2008b), developing students with an accurate sense of self will start to turn the focus away from self and towards others. Second, as institutions look to become more open and inclusive to all types of people, “openness to new ideas” and an “appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world” is vital to inclusivity (Tangney, 2000, p. 73–74). This full definition of humility is a worthwhile developmental goal. By identifying the process of humility development for college student leaders, institutions may be able to intentionally grow the virtue of humility in students.

Personal Statement

Doing research on humility has been deep and impactful in my own life and work. Reading, thinking, and talking with others about humility has put a spotlight on this virtue in my own life. My interest in humility began during my own work with college students. During one particular day as a student affairs professional, I spoke with two college seniors who also happened to be roommates. One of these men told me about all of the things that he knew, all of the ways the institution had failed him, and all that he was going to do as he left that place. His roommate and friend stood in stark contrast. He talked about all of the things he had learned, acknowledged the institution’s imperfections, and said that he was looking forward to continuing

to learn after he left college. This research project was born out of these conversations. What led to this difference? These men were friends, classmates, and roommates, so how did each of them get to these different ways of carrying themselves?

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the study and have been defined in the following manner:

Character: “habits of mind, heart, and conduct that help students know and do what is ethical” (Dalton, 1999, p. 47).

Virtue: A “disposition or a pattern in someone’s character or personality that leads them to act morally. It refers to traits of character that we find admirable” (Van Hooft, 2006, p. 1)

Student involvement: the amount of physical and psychological time college students invest in their educational experience including both in and out of classroom experiences (Astin, 1984).

Humility:

- Accurate assessment of self
- An ability to acknowledge mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge and limitations
- An openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping of one’s abilities and accomplishments in perspective
- Relatively low self-focus
- An appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world. (Tangney, 200, p. 73–74)

Outline of Dissertation

This chapter introduced the condition of character within America and the narcissistic

tendencies that are present in college students. Additionally this chapter introduces the need for further research in humility. It also gives a brief overview of the research methodology. Guiding this study is the research question seeking to understand the process of humility development. The second chapter provides a review of the relevant literature on character, humility, college student development, and pertinent theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 explains the methodology used to identify the process of humility development. Chapter 4 presents participant biographical information organized by how participants defined humility. Chapter 5 contains the data collected through interviews with college student leaders and the emergent themes from this data. The discussion of results is in Chapter 6. The final chapter presents the implications of this study, recommendations for future research, limitations, a personal statement, and research summary.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine current literature relevant to the research questions. The first section reviews literature regarding the failings of character and morality. Second, the virtue of humility is explored, its definitions, and current research on the topic is reviewed. Third, is an examination of whole person education with a focus on student development theory. The final section of chapter two examines the relevant theoretical frameworks as a basis for understanding character development.

Terminology

The following literature review will use several key terms. Commonly used, but rarely defined, ethics, virtues, morality, and character are part of common discourse. If one was to talk to a friend about ethics, virtues, morality, or character in conversation, the individual listening would most likely understand the usage, but defining and differentiating among terms is a more difficult task.

Dalton (1999) referred to character as the “habits of mind, heart, and conduct that help students know and do what is ethical” (p. 47). Character or moral character is the “normal patterns of thought and action” connected to moral choices (Kupperman, 1999, p. 202). Kupperman (1999) also referred to character as the “aspects of what a person is that are closely related to good (or bad) ethical choices” (p. 202). Hunter (2000) referred to character as “the embodiment of ideals of a moral order” (p. 16) or more clearly stated character is internalizing

the motives for right moral action. Kuh (1998) defined character as “the internal compass that enables one to live with integrity in a complex world” (p.18). Character is an internal concept, but one’s actions display his or her character (Wiley, 1998).

Virtues are excellences, the meaning of the Greek word translated by the Romans as *virtus* (Comte–Sponville, 2001; Van Hooft, 2006). While one could have good character or bad character, bad virtue is an oxymoron as these are referred to as vices. Virtues are the traits of character that individuals find admirable (Dent, 1984; Swanton, 2003; Van Hooft, 2006). Different societies, cultures, or religions may distinguish what is virtuous differently (Van Hooft, 2006).

Whereas scholars define character as habits of mind, heart, and conduct, ethics are actions rooted in systems of right and wrong (Liddell & Cooper, 2012; Wiley, 1998). Many educational institutions may have courses on ethics. Most career fields have an industry wide standard of ethics. These industry standards may cause what is ethical for one individual to differ from another (Liddell & Cooper, 2012). For example, the ethical obligations of counselors differ from that of student affairs professionals (Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Ethics involves choices rather than a habit of the mind, heart, or conduct.

Each of the above mentioned terms has a unique definition, but is interconnected. This connection lies within the concept of morality. One’s character can lead him to make morally right or wrong choices. Possessing virtues like courage, honesty, or humility helps to make up one’s character. Thus, virtues help to guide our morality. This study will refer to humility as both a virtue and a part of character. Exline and Geyer’s (2004) study, reviewed later in Chapter 2, showed that college students viewed humility in a positive way as a virtue and mentioned virtues are part of one’s character. Humility also follows Dalton’s (1999) definition of character

as a “habit of mind, heart, and conduct” (p. 47). It is not always a conscious decision, but is a habit, a learned action. The literature review shares additional connections between humility and virtue later in chapter two.

A Call to Character

The moral and character failings of 21st century society are scattered across newspaper headlines. Illicit stories serve as fodder within scholarly articles to demonstrate the decline of moral and ethical thinking as well as the decline of individual character and virtue. In looking to build a case for character education in youth, Burns (2012) named several public events that demonstrated a decline in both virtue and virtuous behavior. He mentioned a cheating scandal at Harvard, riots in London, and a mass shooting at a Colorado theatre as demonstrations of the current state of character in today’s youth. While Burns desired to eliminate the risks of these behaviors, elimination of risks does not guarantee the presence of positive character and he advocated that character development in youth must be present as a “protective mechanism” (p. 2) against risk. One cannot simply remove poor behavior, the teaching of positive character traits must be present as well.

Liddell and Cooper (2012) similarly raised concerns about the state of character in today’s society. They noted the Penn State Jerry Sandusky scandal in which child sexual abuse took place by a university employee over the course of many years. Concerned staff members notified several university officials, but took no action. They also recognized the presence of hazing rituals often associated with Greek organizations as a concern and demonstration of current character. For Liddell and Cooper, these incidents “call into question the moral credibility of higher education leaders” (p. 7).

Cano and Sams (2003) performed research concerned with the ethical abilities of current college students. “Today’s college students have grown up in a society where the line between right and wrong has been blurred and where unethical behavior of high-profile individuals is expected” (Cano & Sams, 2003, p 2). The authors noted the importance of ethical behavior by citing several financial scandals of the early 2000s where individuals chose to put their own financial gain above their ethical responsibilities. They also acknowledged that despite the inclusion of ethics in conversations on campus, cheating and academic dishonesty continue to be a problem.

In his book, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, famed Harvard University president Derek Bok (2006) wrote about higher education’s failures with a particular chapter focused on building character. He contrasted the paradox of relaxed moral codes on college campuses with courses not previously offered on practical and professional ethics. The significant number of high school students who admit to cheating and the continued academic fraud present in higher education highlights the importance of these courses (Bok, 2006). Bok (2006) encouraged institutional leaders to continue to use academic courses as well as practical opportunities to strengthen student’s moral will. Additionally he encouraged leaders to “foster ethical behavior by helping students develop greater concern for the needs of others. Empathy supplies the most powerful motive for acting ethically” (Bok, 2006, p. 166). Students must not only know what moral choices to make, but they must be motivated to make them as well.

Hunter (2000) wrote “The problems of today can be attributed to a weakening moral commitments so central to character” (p. 6). Hunter’s feelings were so strong he titled his book *The Death of Character*. Hunter believed that one can directly attribute the character of individuals within today’s society to the changing perspective of character within society. In the

early decades of the 20th century there was a shift from industrial production to mass consumption (Hunter, 2000). With this shift came the possibility that “more emphasis could be placed upon accumulation, leisure, and the cultivation of personal preference” (Hunter, 2000, p. 7). Rather than being a society of character we have become a society of personality focused on “expression, fulfillment, and gratification” (Hunter, 2000, p. 7). Despite these societal shifts, Hunter still asserted the importance of character, writing, “Character matters, we believe, because without it trust, justice, freedom, community, and stability are probably impossible” (p. 10).

In their 2011 book *Lost in Transition*, Christian Smith et al. synthesized the results of a national survey of emerging adults, defined as 18–23 year in this research. One of the highlighted findings from the 230 in depth interviews that were conducted was that many emerging adults are morally adrift. While not every emerging adult fits this description, Smith et al. (2011) saw several trends. Researchers found emerging adults to be both morally relativistic and morally individualistic. Additionally, emerging adults were unable to articulate what makes something moral, basing choices off of what made them happy or off of their instincts. The 18–23 year olds interviewed also had the tendency to make moral compromises. As for the root of this moral mindset, Smith et al. believed that this is learned behavior based on avoidance of moral issues. The authors called for schools to not side step controversial issues, but to promote the position that “*it is good to learn how to think clearly and coherently about important issues, including moral issues*” (Smith et al., 2011, p. 63).

As members of society have experienced the realization and impact of these moral failings, they have begun asking questions about who is responsible to develop the character of individuals. Althof and Berkowitz (2006) wrote that moral and character education are not new

fields of study, with classic thinkers like Aristotle and Confucius addressing these ideas. While Althof and Berkowitz acknowledged that individuals will disagree about who is responsible for moral and character education, they write there is no question the “society needs moral members” (p. 496).

In order to understand how college and university experiences were impacting student moral and character development Kuh (1998) undertook an analysis of current quantitative data and correlated it with institutional type. Kuh’s research shows that faculty members show a declining percentage who “believe it is very important or essential to help students develop their values or enhance their self–understanding” (p. 18). Despite this declining focus by faculty members, “most colleges and universities endorse the importance of personal development” (Kuh, 1998). Through examining the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) Kuh was able to find that institutional type impacts the ways in which student character develops. When compared with general liberal arts institutions, larger public universities, and schools on the Tempelton character honor roll, Kuh found the greatest character growth took place at liberal arts institutions that were part of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. He also found that institutional environment and activities students engaged in were of a greater impact on character development than student personal characteristics (parents’ education, personal aspirations). Kuh offered several suggestions based on his findings including emphasizing character in the institutional mission, recruiting faculty committed to student personal development, and cultivating a character building culture on campus.

Other authors have echoed this call for moral and character development in higher education (Colby et al., 2003; Dalton, 1999; Liddell & Cooper, 2012). In their article “Fostering Personal and Social Responsibility on College and University Campuses,” Hersh and Schneider

(2005) focused on the role of the university to develop character. From its colonial foundations, higher education has had association with the cultivation of virtues (Hersh & Schneider, 2005). The reality of societal issues and campus concerns such as alcohol, violence, and a rise in mental health issues has given a new sense of urgency to the task of whole person education (Hersh and Schneider, 2005). While some members of the academy may feel like character education is none of their business, Hersh and Schneider (2005) wrote that education inherently impacts character development whether educators chose to focus on this concept or not. “We know we can teach students organic chemistry; we know we can teach them Keynesian economics and the history of the Italian Renaissance. But if that is all we do, then we have failed them” (Hersh & Schneider, 2005, p. 10). The researchers went on to write that in a society where “93% of high school students plan to attend college” (p. 13) higher education must be a part of character education in the future. The call for moral, virtue, and character development aligns well with the field of college student development and the idea that college is a time for change and growth in areas beyond cognitive knowledge.

Narcissism

One specific area where scholars have noted a change in character and virtue of college students is the rise of narcissism and self-focus. The authors of *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living In The Age Of Entitlement*, and several articles surrounding this same topic, Twenge and Campbell (2008) have brought themselves to the forefront of scholarly research on narcissism in today’s college students. Twenge et al.’s (2008a) research looked at how scores on the Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI) have changed generationally. Twenge et al. (2008a) found that compared to 1979, 30% more college students who took the NPI in 2006 scored above the mean average score for narcissism. Other scholars have questioned Twenge et al.’s (2008a)

research, asking whether there really is an “epidemic” and questioning the connection between gender, ethnicity, and narcissism measurements (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2008), but Twenge et al. (2008b) have stood by their research. Twenge (2006) also noted millennial self-focus in her book *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—And More Miserable Than Ever Before*.

Twenge (2006) referred to millennials, individuals born after 1981, as generation me because “this generation has never known a world that put duty before self” (p. 1). High self-focus is one of several traits that Twenge attributed to generation me. Rooted in efforts to increase self-esteem in young people, a healthy sense of self has grown to narcissistic levels. Twenge referred to a curriculum of self-esteem that takes place in both homes and schools. Twenge cited research on teenagers from the 1950s to the 1980s that notes a rise from 12% to 80% of 12–14 years olds who answered positively to the question “I am important” (p. 69). Calling narcissism the darker side of self-esteem, Twenge (2006) wrote “Many school programs designed to raise self-esteem probably raise narcissism instead” (p. 70).

While Twenge et al. (2008a, 2008b) saw a rise in narcissistic tendencies more recently, Emmons (1984) was noting a similar rise in the early 1980s. The purpose of Emmon’s study was “to provide additional construct validity to the NPI (Narcissism Personality Index)” (p. 292). Emmons noted that the society of the late 1970s is known as the “me generation” (p. 292). Emmons performed three studies on college students in order to test the validity of the NPI. In the first test, the 54 question NPI demonstrated that it had four “moderately intercorrelated factors” (p. 294). In the second study, researchers gave participants the NPI and one of several other personality tests. This test revealed that there were correlations between the NPI and each of these four personality tests. The third study looked at peer perceptions of narcissistic

behaviors. There was once again a correlation between the NPI scores and peer ratings demonstrating the validity of the NPI. Narcissism in college students is not a new topic and is receiving continued interest.

Narcissism is not the focus of this study, but a proper definition could help clarify the connection with humility. It is important to distinguish that while “narcissistic personality disorder is a clinical condition, narcissism also appears more generally as a personality trait normally distributed in the general population” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 467). Narcissism often contains an overly inflated view of self, seeing oneself as better than others (R.P. Brown & Zeigler–Hill, 2004; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Morris Brotheridge, & Urbanski., 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Buffardi and Campbell (2008) specifically saw narcissism having a connection to an inflated sense of power, intelligence, and physical attractiveness. Scholars have also named a few potential positive aspects of narcissism including positive first impressions and being seen as confident, but long term these perceptions tend to wear thin (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The narcissistic focus on self sits in contrast to both common and scholarly definitions of humility.

Humility

Definition of Humility

The words humble and humility are commonly used, yet their definitions vary and are many times not clear (Kellenberger, 2010). Researchers have found that college students associate positively with humility, but their definitions of this trait vary greatly (Exline & Geyer, 2004). The root of the word humility comes from the word “humus” or earth, meaning of the earth (Comte–Sponville, 2001; Kupfer, 2003). One commonly held conception is that humility is having low self–esteem, being lowly, or even hunching over (Murray & Chadwick, 2000).

This can at times lead to reluctance when viewing humility as a positive trait (Casey, 2001; Richards, 1992). For many, the idea of lowliness is where their minds go when they think of being humble or of a humble person, however researchers use a different definition.

The commonly held scholarly conception of humility is an “accurate self–assessment” (Carr, 1991; Emmons, 2000; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Owens et al., 2013; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Richards, 1992; Tangney, 2000). With this concept, an individual is not thinking less of himself or down playing his abilities, but is acknowledging both their strengths and weaknesses. Comte–Sponville (2001) called this “loving the truth” (p. 141).

For a rich definition of humility, there are a few additional key characteristics as proposed by Tangney (2000), which include

- An ability to acknowledge mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge and limitations
- An openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping of one’s abilities and accomplishments in perspective
- Relatively low self–focus
- An appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world. (p. 73–74)

Tangney’s (2000) six part description provides a full and in depth definition of the multifaceted nature of humility.

Tangney (2000) defined two separate types of humility, situational and dispositional. Situational humility connects to how individuals act in particular circumstances. Most people possess humility in some situations they find themselves in. However, situational humility addresses the question what causes someone to act humble in one situation and not in another

(Tangney, 2000). Dispositional humility is the “component of one’s personality, a relatively enduring disposition which a person brings to different kinds of situations” (Tangney, 2000, p. 76). Both types of humility are relevant in this research study.

Scholars also find it important to note what humility is not. While Kellenberger (2010) believed that humility and pride sit in contrast, scholars also acknowledge that an absence of pride does not denote a presence of humility (Tangney, 2000). Yet, Murray and Chadwick (2000) stated that the loss of humility leads to pride. Many authors are also quick to point out that despite common conceptions, humility is not low self-esteem, meekness, or modesty (Bobb, 2013; Comte-Sponville, 2001; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Richards, 1992; Tangney, 2000). One should not consider false humility a virtue, but rather as a vice (Richards, 1992). Pretending to think less of oneself or not acknowledging one’s real abilities is not true humility. These concepts are distinct from a full and properly constructed definition of humility.

When compared with the self-focused definition of narcissism, humility and narcissism come into stark contrast. Several authors have noted this contrast (Emmons, 2000; Exline & Geyer, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Understanding the process for the growth of humility could prove important for counteracting the noted narcissistic, self-focused tendencies of today’s college students.

Religion and Humility

Although humility is not exclusive to religion, it is often viewed positively in religious settings. Tangney (2000) touched on this in her definition of humility as she characterized humility as acknowledging our limitations. This is “often vis-à-vis a ‘higher power’” (Tangney, 2000, p. 73) and in “keeping of one’s abilities and accomplishments in perspective” (p. 73). Speaking more generally of spirituality, Emmons (2000) marked humility as one of five key

virtues of spiritual intelligence, writing that those who are spiritually intelligent are also humble. Comte–Sponville (2001) called humility “the most religious of virtues” (p. 148).

It is important to acknowledge that humility is not just present in the teaching of one religion but finds its way into many different religious perspectives. As scholars have written on this virtue, they have typically divided these religious connections into two categories, Eastern traditions (Buddhism and Taoism) and monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam). The Eastern traditions of Buddhism and Taoism both speak of connections to humility as a sense of letting go of the self and connecting with a greater reality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Monotheistic traditions more traditionally connect humility as submission to God and a realization of one’s place in the world (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Green (1973) wrote that humility is one of, if not the central virtue taught in Judaism. Alpyagil (2014) wrote about humility within Islam connecting it with the central Islamic virtue of generosity. Murray and Chadwick (2000) called humility true Christian nobility. Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Benedict are ancient Christian thinkers often associated with championing the importance of humility in the Christian life (Casey, 2001; Murray & Chadwick, 2000). Humility can be devoid of religious connections, but it many times has a religious connection with several religions claiming humility as a central characteristic of their followers.

Humility as a Virtue

One common word connected with humility in current scholarship is virtue. Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Van Hooft (2006) listed humility as a virtue and more specifically categorized it as a strength of temperance along with forgiveness, mercy, prudence, self–control, and modesty. Bobb (2013), Emmons (2000), Grenberg (2005), and Tangney (2000) also all referred to humility as a virtue, with Grenberg (2005) calling it “a central human virtue” (p. 6).

In order to understand how North American undergraduate students view humility, Exline and Geyer (2004) examined 127 undergraduate student's perceptions of humility. To gather data, the researchers gave participants a survey that combined open-ended and Likert-based questions as part of coursework in an undergraduate psychology course. While some students viewed humility as low self-esteem or a low view of self, leading to a negative view of humility, overall Exline and Geyer found that college students had positive associations with humility. Additionally they found that students were more likely to desire to be more humble. This admiration is consistent with the idea that humility is a strength or virtue and not a weakness.

The idea of humility as a virtue is the topic of writings by philosophers as well. Grenberg (2014) contrasted philosophers Wollstoncraft and Hume's definitions of humility as weakness with Kant's positive view of humility. Viewed by Hume and Wollstoncraft as "monkish" and inauthentic, Grenberg wrote that Hume called humility unproductive and disagreeable. "Humility-Kantian style," as Grenberg referred to it, falls in line with Tangney (2000) and others descriptions of accurate self-assessment previously mentioned, also adding the important characteristic of a lack of comparison with others. Comparison with others would be the false, monkish, humility that Hume referred to (Grenberg, 2014). For Kant, the admirable trait of humility was an attitude within which one "properly appreciates both one's abiding dignity and absolute value on the one hand, and the clear sense of how one's motives and behaviors fall short of one's best self on the other" (Grenberg, 2014, p. 241).

Furey (1986) in his book *So I'm Not Perfect*, wrote extensively on humility as a virtue and its importance in individuals lives. Calling humility "our most neglected virtue" (p. 4), Furey saw benefits to humility in all stages of life from birth all the way until death. Humility

allows individuals to acknowledge their limits, “it allows us to live with our flaws, defects, and limitations” (Furey, 1986, p. 4). Furey named several reasons he believes humility is a virtue. “It promotes growth of the individual;” it helps us in accepting ourselves allowing deepening of our interpersonal relationships by making imperfection acceptable; and humility, like “wisdom, courage, curiosity, hope, love, patience, and all other virtues come only as they are earned” (Furey, 1986, p. 12–13).

Humility and Leadership

One area of consistent connection with humility is writings on leadership. Both scholarly writing and references in popular culture make a connection between leadership and humility. In the race towards the Republican primary for the 2016 presidential election, Ben Carson ascended past other candidates in the fall of 2015 and some believed it was because of his humility (Castellanos, 2015). Castellanos (2015) saw Carson’s humility and selfless service sitting in contrast to the self-serving focus of other candidates and believed that this trait works well in leadership. “The greatest mass movements in history have been built, not on vaporous political promises, but on the twin pillars of humility and selfless service. Treat your neighbor as yourself. Do unto others what you would have them do unto you” (Castellanos, 2015, para. 27).

Collins (2001) wrote about the importance of humility in what he termed “Level 5 Leadership” (p. 68). Collins and his research team spent five years researching the question “can a good company become a great company and how?” (p. 69). Through their research Collins and his team found that one consistent aspect of companies that made the jump from good to great was unique Level 5 leadership. Level 5 leaders possess a combination of humility and strong will. This type of leader is contrary to the idea that a company needs a “larger than life” leader to turn around (Collins, 2001). Collins (2001) called these Level 5 leaders a “study in duality:

modest and willful, shy and fearless” (p. 70). Collins and his research team took particular note of how little Level 5 leaders spoke about themselves and actively worked to deflect praise coupled with a willingness to accept responsibilities for failures.

Collins’s (2001) research was aimed at discovering what made companies uniquely successful. From this purpose naturally stemmed the question of whether or not one can learn level five leadership. Collins admitted that this was not the focus of the study and therefore he did not have compelling data to understand this question. However based on his research, Collins speculated that, “Under the right circumstances—with self-reflection, a mentor, loving parents, a significant life experience, or other factors – the seed can begin to develop” (pp.75–76). Unfortunately, because the focus of Collins’s study was on what made companies successful he has only has a few anecdotal stories and no empirical data to back up his conclusions on the development of humility.

Following Collins’s (2001) study, Morris et al. (2005) further investigated humility in leadership. The authors noted the lack of empirical research despite the popularity of the topic. The article aimed to offer a definition of humility, identify traits that predict humility, and to find “specific leadership behaviors that are likely to be the outcomes of high levels of humility” (Morris et al., 2005, p. 1323). Morris et al. named several benefits of humility in leadership. Humility can influence leaders to “be primarily other-enhancing, rather than self-enhancing,” “shield the CEO from needing to receive public adulation, and may cause him or her to shun attention” (p. 1325). Quoting many of the humility resources already noted in this literature review, Morris et al. refined a definition of humility to self-awareness, openness, and transcendence. Humble leaders do not need to be equally strong in all of these areas, but they must possess at least some level of these traits (Morris et al., 2005).

Despite a lack of empirical research, Morris et al. (2005) believed that there were certain individual traits that may be predictors of humility. Based on their literature review, Morris et al. connected five trait patterns that they believed related to humility. Narcissism, Machiavellianism, low self-esteem, and excessively high self-esteem all predict lower levels of humility while “higher levels of emotional awareness and management predict high levels of humility” (Morris et al., 2005, p. 1339). Each trait with a negative influence on humility connects to how an individual improperly views herself. The positive predictors of humility relate to how one views herself accurately and interacts with others.

As with Collins’s (2001) article, the point of this leadership-based look into humility was leadership outcomes. Morris et al. (2005) connected the humble leader with the leadership concepts of servant leader and authentic leader. These leadership behaviors focus on leading others through service and of truly knowing oneself in order to lead well. “Humility is likely to significantly assist leaders in both engaging in objective self-examination, and also accepting whatever personal shortcomings that they may discover” (Morris et al., 2005, p. 1340). Humility also is important for the transformational leader allowing them to individualize their work with others, publicly praise individuals, and to consider the needs of others before their own (Morris et al., 2005).

The authors predicted outcomes for the humble leader adding to the propositions previously mentioned. Morris et al. (2005) proposed that “leader humility predicts supportiveness toward others” (p. 1341). The authors also noted a connection between leader humility and power. The humble leader is more likely to “encourage employee participation and involvement than their counterparts” (Morris et al., 2005, p. 1342).

Morris et al. (2005) concluded their article like many scholars, with a call to “develop a reliable and valid measure of humility given that, at this point, no widely recognized measure of humility exists” (p. 1343). For the authors the connection between humility and leadership seemed clear.

Nielsen et al. (2014) wrote about the role of humility in what they called socialized charismatic leadership (SCL). By analyzing SCL behavior and their definition of humility, Nielsen et al. demonstrated why they believed in the humility socialized charismatic leadership connection. Nielsen et al. defined humility with many of the same ideas as scholars before referencing Tangney (2000), Exline and Geyer (2004), and Comte–Spoonville (2001) among others. SCLs “serve collective interests, develop and empower followers, are follower oriented and tend to be altruistic” (Nielsen et al., 2014, p. 33). Three specific behaviors that Nielsen et al. believed connected humility and SCLs are vision generation, vision implementation, and communication which are all aspirational leadership behaviors. The authors concluded that leader influence is “maximized when followers attribute high levels of humility to their leaders and will be weakest when followers do not perceive their leaders as humble” (Nielsen et al., 2014, p. 39). More succinctly, the authors propose that humility positively impacts the influence of leaders on followers. Like other authors, Nielsen et al. concluded that there is need for more research to support their proposed ideas.

Owens et al. (2013) proposed that there was a connection between the expressed humility of leaders and the effectiveness of their organizations, teams, and leadership. Their article “Expressed Humility In Organizations” had three stated goals: systematically synthesizing current literature and defining humility, developing a measure of expressed humility, and finally demonstrating the usefulness of expressed humility in leadership.

Owens et al. (2013) used the term expressed humility to highlight the interpersonal nature of humility vs. the intrapersonal aspects of this virtue. The authors reviewed current literature to create a refined definition of humility that they outline as “(a) *a manifested willingness to view oneself accurately*, (b) *a displayed appreciation of others’ strengths and contributions*, and (c) *teachability*” (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1518). The authors proposed that each of these components has the opportunity to positively impact organizations. By viewing oneself accurately, individuals are less likely to be overconfident which can lead to poor decisions and self-complacency (Owens et al., 2013). Displaying an appreciation of other strengths and contributions allows individuals to see their coworkers with more understanding. Finally, Owens et al. saw teachability as vital for today’s organizations and said “a thirst for learning is one of the most critical capacities for effective leaders” (p. 1520).

Following the determination of their definition Owens et al. (2013) created an instrument to measure expressed humility and validated this measure through the use of multiple samples and factor analysis. This expressed humility measure was then used to test various hypotheses relating expressed humility with positive individual and organizational outcomes. The research demonstrated that “humble leaders foster learning-oriented teams and engaged employees as well as job satisfaction and employee retention” (Owens et al., 2013, p. 1533). The interpersonal realities of humility allow leaders and organizations to function effectively

Measuring Humility

As several scholars have suggested, humility is an important topic of research, but unfortunately it is also presents some difficult challenges. Tangney (2000) wrote that not only is finding a research tool for measuring humility difficult, research in humility is itself humbling. Slote (1983) wrote more broadly on the lack of virtue development research and of its

importance to both psychology and education. One of the major and often mentioned challenges in humility research is that while humility involves an accurate self-assessment, it is not reliable to self-assess one's own humility (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Hare (1996) called this the "paradox of moral humility" (p. 1). If one accurately self-assesses and he or she is humble, he or she will acknowledge her humility, thereby possibly making her think of herself as better than others, the opposite of humility (Hare, 1996).

Difficulty in measurement has lead researchers to use a wide variety of instruments with no agreed upon best practice. Davis et al. (2010) named four ways researchers have created to measure humility. First, despite the advisements against it, some researchers use a self-report measure called the Honesty-Humility subscale (HH). Using factor analysis the HH measures for subscales of fairness, sincerity, greed-avoidance, and modesty. While the HH has added to research on personality, unfortunately only the modesty subscale truly aligns with the definition of humility, leading the HH to be limited in its ability to measure humility (Davis et al., 2010).

A second method named by Davis et al. (2010) is an adaptation of the social comparison method in which individuals compared their own ability to follow biblical commands with that of their peers. While the authors of the original study (Rowatt, Ottenbreit, Nesselroade, & Cunningham, 2002) defined humility as an accurate view of self, this study is limited because it does not actually demonstrate whether or not individuals are accurately assessing themselves, "it cannot discern whether scores reflect attitudes of superiority or accurate perceptions of true differences" (Davis et al. 2010, p. 226). Also suggested was an implicit measures test which forced participants to make pairings between words with a "humble or arrogant connotation" (Davis et al., 2010) with self or others. The theory is that individuals who are humble will more naturally and more quickly make associations between humility and self. A final measurement

option is informant ratings, or allowing peers to respond to questions regarding an individual's humility.

In an attempt to study humility through accurate measurement, Davis et al. (2010) performed five different quantitative studies looking at relational humility. Davis et al. were looking at a specific type of humility that they referred to as relational humility. They defined relational humility as an "observer's judgement that a target person (a) is interpersonally other-oriented rather than self-focused, marked by a lack superiority; and (b) has an accurate view of self—not too inflated or too low" (p. 226). It is important to note that this is the observation by one individual of another. It is not allowing an individual to self-assess if they fit this model, but rather asking a peer to rate a target of the assessment. Is this target person humble? Through their work Davis et al. (2010) were able to propose a method for other-report measures of relational humility and to provide some initial validation. While these instruments measure a form of humility, the other's orientated focus of relational humility is different than Tangney's (2000) definition that the literature references earlier.

Tangney (2000) wrote of a possible self-report test created by Emmons (1998) that upon testing was found to be unreliable and resulted in an unpublished manuscript. Another informative quantitative study on humility collected both self-report ratings on humility and perceptions of peers and family (Rowatt et al, 2006). Owens (2009) created a self-report and other-report measure using Likert style questions that he used to measure humility in organizational leaders for his dissertation. After creating and attempting to validate his instrument, Owens (2009) believed that further research on the origins of humility could help to validate his criterion.

In another study, Peters, Rowatt, and Johnson (2011) investigated the connections between relational humility and social relationship quality. The authors hypothesized that there was a positive correlation between these two desirable traits. Using quantitative measures Peters et al. (2011) found this relationship to be positive. Researchers measured humility with a self and others report instrument while an adjusted marriage quality instrument was used to measure social relationship quality. This research showed that those who are humble are more satisfied with those who they are in social relationships with (i.e. friends or roommates)(Peters et al., 2011). Peters et al.'s research also "found self and others reports of humility correlated positively ($r = .33, p = .02$)" (p. 156), meaning that an individual's self-report of humility may prove accurate. This does not fully validate a self-report of humility, but it does suggest "some agreement of others with self-assessments of humility" (Peters et al., 2011, p. 156).

Exline and Geyer (2004) were able to complete research on college student's perceptions of humility, finding a positive overall perception of this trait. Exline and Geyer's research does not get at what specifically affects the development of humility in individuals and the authors note that instrumentation is the next major impediment to completing accurate empirical research on humility.

Kuh (1993) conducted another possibly connected study looking at the impacts of out of class experiences on the outcomes of college students learning. Through 149 interviews with seniors at 12 colleges and universities Kuh discovered 14 different areas of learning and personal development. While Kuh's study did not set out to specifically look at humility, this was one of the areas of findings. One of the 14 areas Kuh discovered he labeled altruism, referring to an "interest in the welfare of others, awareness of and empathy and respect for needs of others, tolerance and acceptance of people from racial ethnic, cultural and religious

background different from one's own" (p. 285). This description shares components with the definition of humility found in literature. Unfortunately, Kuh was not looking to see what specifically created these outcomes, but instead focused on the outcomes created by out of classroom participation. There is not enough information to draw a specific line between any one factor and Kuh's "humility/altruism" outcome.

Most humility research comes from the fields of psychology and counseling (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). Peterson and Seligman (2004) wrote an exhaustive 800 page volume on character strengths and virtues in which they have a specific chapter devoted to humility and modesty. Peterson and Seligman distinguished between humility and modesty despite a shared chapter. Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggested one key to developing humility is security in one's self. The authors also noted that some Christian devotionals suggest the work of menial chores as a way to counteract against self-enhancement. While Peterson and Seligman suggested humility cultivation is a possibility, they also noted that some interventions have the possibility to backfire and that empirical data are sparse in this area. Overall, there is a strong consensus on the need for further research in the area of humility (Exline & Geyer, 2004; Morris et al., 2005; Nielsen et al., 2010; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Rowatt et al, 2006; Tangney, 2000). Rowatt et al. (2006) summed up the call well:

Particularly important will be quantitative studies that continue to examine implicit-explicit humility correspondence, whether measures of humility predict spontaneous behaviors and observable outcomes (e.g., modest self-presentation, leadership, or volunteerism), and how humility develops across the life span and world cultures (p. 210).

Whole Person Education

The development of students has always existed as a goal of American higher education, but the definition of development and the factors that influence it continue to be contested (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Knefelkamp, Widick, & Parker, 1978; Strange, 1994). For religiously oriented institutions of early colonial American higher education, whole person development was a focus of a college education (Colby et al., 2003; Kuh & Umbach, 2004; Lancaster, 2005; Renn & Reason; 2013; Seider, 2012; Strange, 1994). Whole person education was why many colleges were first established (Kuh, 2000). John Dewey, an important voice in American educational philosophy, believed that education is “moral and that the duty of education is to develop that moral sense” (as cited by Berube & Berube, 2010, p. 1). Dalton, one of the key voices in higher education character development, said, “The conviction that learning has a moral context and that an educated person possesses certain traits of character including a moral obligation to the common good, is deeply embedded in American higher education” (Dalton, 1999, p. 45).

While collegiate learning is most often associated the academic classroom, this is not the only location learning takes place. Pascarella and Terenzi’s (2005) *How College Affects Students* described in depth the developmental aspects of a college education beyond simple cognitive knowledge. Pascarella and Terenzi (2005) wrote, “The nature and direction of the net effects of college were, in the main, toward more open, liberal, and tolerant attitudes and values” (p. 286). This is not a comment about academic cognition, but about the attitudes and values of college students changing. Kuh (1993) developed a list of 14 categories of learning and personal development specific to the learning that takes place outside of the classroom. Having a framework to understand this growth is very helpful. The college years are times of

significant transformation and colleges must make intentional choices to aid students on their journey to adulthood (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Through this concern for the whole person and for learning outside of the classroom grew the field of student development. Rodgers (1990) summed student development up as “concern for the development of the whole person” (p. 27). While some individuals focus on higher education simply as an avenue to learn a technical skill, whole person education remains an integral part of the growth that happens during the college years.

Student Development

The field of student development and student development theory allows practitioners to “identify and address student needs, design programs, develop policies, and create healthy college environments that encourage positive growth in students” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 7). Sanford (1966) defined *development* as being progressive, “Certain things have to happen before other events become possible” (p. 4). “He distinguished development from *change*, which refers only to an altered condition that may be positive or negative, progressive or regressive; and from *growth*, which refers to expansion but may be either favorable or unfavorable to overall functioning” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 6). King (2009) added three principles to the nature of cognitive and moral development:

- (a) individuals actively construct and organize their interpretations of experience; (b) there are discernable age–related patterns in the ways individuals organize their thinking; and (c) development occurs in context, in interaction with one’s environment, and thus is highly variable from individual to individual (p. 599).

Student development theory helps to put language and structure to this learning to help make sense of the ways in which students are developing (Evans et al., 2010).

Student development theories can be broken down by the areas of growth. Knefelkamp et al. (1978) categorized these theories into five areas: psychosocial theories, theories of cognitive development, maturity models, typology models, and person–environment interaction models. Others have chosen to categorize these theories into outcome–based categories classifying them as psychosocial, cognitive–structural, and typological (King & Howard–Hamilton, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Knefelkamp et al. also identified four key questions that theory should answer:

1. What interpersonal and intrapersonal changes occur while the student is in college?
2. What factors lead to this development?
3. What aspects of the college environment encourage or retard growth?
4. What developmental outcomes should we strive to achieve in college? (p. x)

Through these theories, researchers are better able to develop “theory–based educational practice” (King & Howard–Hamilton, 2000, p. 20)

While theories of student development cover a broad range of areas of development from intellectual to identity to spirituality to sexuality to ethnic identity to learning styles, for the purposes of this study a few basic frameworks will serve as a primary structure for understanding. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory of developmental ecology will serve as the primary framework for understanding the process of individual’s development with a few additional concepts serving to expand on Bronfenbrenner’s model.

Theoretical Framework

Foundational Theories

Lewin (1936), while working more broadly in psychology, developed a theory often referenced in student development. Lewin proposed the idea of *life space* which refers to “the

totality of facts which determine the behavior of an individual at a certain moment” (p. 12).

Expressed in a formulaic way, Lewin wrote *Behavior = function(Person and Environment)* or behavior is a function of the interaction of person with the environment.

Sanford (1966) is the pioneer of the often referenced student development concept of challenge and support. The challenge and support model helps student development practitioners understand how to bring about development in students. “The institution which would lead an individual toward greater development must, then, present him with strong challenges, appraise accurately his ability to cope with these challenges, and offer him support when they become overwhelming” (Sanford, 1966, p. 46). Sanford saw individuals as seeking to restore equilibrium from places of disequilibrium. Disequilibrium “sets in motion activity leading to stabilization on a higher level” (Sanford, 1966, p. 37). Sanford encouraged institutions to “induce a desirable change” (p. 37) by creating a developmentally appropriate disequilibrium and providing the support necessary to allow for development. While Lewin’s (1936) and Sanford’s developmental theories do not have a direct correlation to humility development, they prove relevant in this study because the research questions involve process and growth seeking to understand what the process of humility development is. Understanding the process of development also involves understanding the potential environment or personal characteristics that encouraged this development.

Developmental Ecology

Leaning on both Lewin (1936) and Piaget, Bronfenbrenner (1979) created a framework through which he hoped to not only understand the outcomes of development, but the causes of these outcomes as well (Evans et al., 2010; Renn & Arnold, 2003; Renn & Reason, 2013).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that much of developmental observation and understanding had occurred with a lack of attention paid to the environment.

The understanding of *human* development demands more than the direct observation of behavior on the part of one or two persons in the same place; it requires an examination of multiperson systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject (p. 21).

Building on of Lewin's (1936) $Behavior = f(Person \times Environment)$ concept, Bronfenbrenner (1993) reformulated his theory to read $Development = f(Person \times Environment)$. Bronfenbrenner (1979) focused on four main areas that could impact an individual's development: process, person, context, and time. "The four components of Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology model provide a useful framework for understanding how development occurs, if not *what* the outcomes of that development will be" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 130). Through examining the four core components and their dynamic, interactive relationships in proper context, one can understand development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Process. What Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) referred to as proximal processes, process is at the core of development in this model (Evans et al., 2010). Process is the primary mechanism of development and is the interaction between organism and environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Renn, 2012). Simplified, the person and the environment must interact in order for development to occur. Process is this interaction. Important to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) idea is that process should consist of increasingly complex interactions between person and environment while at the same time providing the necessary support so as to

not overwhelm in the individual (Renn, 2012). This follows Sanford's (1966) model of challenge and support.

Person. Person is the individual developing within the person–environment interaction of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model. The concept of person includes the individual's "background and demographic characteristics, abilities and preferred ways of interacting with the environment" (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 124). Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that the person is not a blank slate on which the environment makes its mark and therefore one must take into account these individual characteristics. Bronfenbrenner (1993) identified four specific personal characteristics which he referred to as *developmentally instigative characteristics*. First, are the *personal stimulus characteristics*, those characteristics that are the most likely to "induce or inhibit dynamic dispositions toward the environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 11). Second, are the characteristics that lead individuals to explore and react to their surroundings (Renn & Arnold, 2003). Bronfenbrenner (1993) referred to these as *selective responsivity*. Some students may look to become actively involved in student activities or athletics while others may opt for opportunities that are more solitary. Third are *structuring proclivities*. These are characteristics of the individual to "persist in increasing complex activities" (Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 269). Finally are the *directive beliefs*. This is the individual's view of his or her agency in connection with his or her environment (Renn & Arnold, 2003). What do individuals view that they can affect or not affect? Bronfenbrenner (1993) compared directive beliefs to "locus of control," but differentiated it because directive belief is focused on a dynamic developmental force and not a developmental outcome. In a later model of the framework, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) distilled *person* down to three characteristics labeling them "dispositions;" "resources of ability,

experience, knowledge, and skill;” and “demand characteristics that invite or discourage reactions from the social environment” (p. 796).

Keeping in mind that Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model involves person and environment, Bronfenbrenner (1993) described developmentally instigative characteristics as “putting a spin” on a body in motion. “The effect of that spin depends on other forces and resources in the total ecological system” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 14). The characteristics of the person alone do not control development, but are one important factor to examine.

Context. Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed a nested series of contexts (Figure 1) with the person located at the center. “These systems are where the work of development occurs as an individual’s developmentally investigative characteristics inhibit or provoke reaction—forces and resources—from the environment in the course of proximal processes” (Evans et al., 2010, p.163). Starting with the *microsystem*, context involves a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit, engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 15).

Bronfenbrenner (1979) purposefully used the word experience as he described context. The microsystem is not just about objective properties, but about the ways in which the individual interacts with them as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A microsystem is the immediate face to face in which a person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Renn, 2012). Renn and Reason (2013) noted of the changing time and also include digital interactions as well as face-to-face interactions in the microsystem. A *mesosystem* involves two or more microsystems “frequented by the same person” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 20). “Special attention is focused on the

synergistic effects created by the interaction of developmentally instigative or inhibitory features and processes present in each setting” (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22). It is important to look at the interactions of these microsystems and see that microsystems that make up the mesosystem can have amplifying effects, contradictory effects, or a mix of the two (Renn & Reason, 2013). “Attitudes and information from one microsystem filter into the other and modify behaviors and development accordingly” (MacKinnon & Floyd, 2011, p. 337). An important concept is that ultimately the mesosystem is providing increasing complexity in the developmental process or a balance of challenge and support. The *exosystem* involves one or more settings in which the individual is not involved, but which have an impact or effect on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This could be “parent’s place of work, a school class attended by an older sibling, the parents’ network of friends, the activities of the local school board, and so on” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25).

A *macrosystem* refers to consistencies across micro, meso, and exo systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Renn and Reason (2013) referred to the macrosystem, as “an all-encompassing sociohistorical context that contains historical trends, social forces, and cultural expectations that shape developmental possibilities for individuals and groups of students” (p. 129). *Context* is the main environmental component in the person–environment framework.

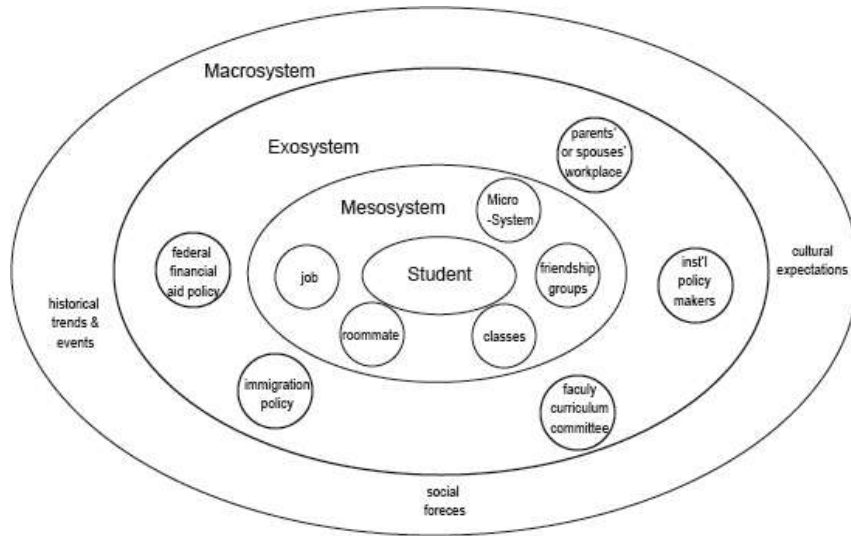


Figure 1. Applying the ecology model to a campus environment. “Circles and interaction between circles represent possible micro–, meso–, exo– and macrosystem factors for an undergraduate student” (Renn & Arnold, 2003, pg. 268). Reprinted with Permission (Appendix A)

Time. The final aspect of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model is time. Scholars often refer to time as the *chronosystem*. The chronosystem takes on several different forms of influence. Individual’s life course is “powerfully shaped by conditions and events occurring during the historical period through which the person lives” (Moen, Elder, Luscher, & Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 641). Moen et al. (1995) pointed to significant historical events such as global wars, economic depressions, and urban crises as examples of historical events that also impact development. A second aspect of the chronosystem is the “timing of biological and social transitions as they relate to culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring throughout the life course” (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 641). Students enrolling in college directly after high school have different roles, expectations, and opportunities than those who enter military service first, have children, or enter the work force and then attempt to achieve in a

collegiate setting (Renn & Arnold, 2003). By using the term *chronosystem*, Bronfenbrenner linked time to context and includes another factor in human development.

As Bronfenbrenner (1979) looked at research using this ecological method, he continued to push for the connection between person and environment.

In ecological research, the properties of the person and of the environment, the structure of environmental settings, and the processes taking place within and between them must be viewed as interdependent and analyzed in systems terms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 41).

As the research question for the current project looks at the process of development, keeping both the individual and the environment at the forefront is an important step.

Student Involvement Theory

In 1984, Astin attempted to clarify college student development theories using a newly proposed student involvement theory. Astin (1984) described involvement as both a physical and psychological process. An involved student is who one who is both present on campus and also active in the opportunities provided for students. Astin (1984) measured involvement both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is not simply about the amount of time an individual spends on a task, but how invested they are in that task as well. Similarly to Bronfenbrenner (1979), student involvement theory focuses on the methods of student development, “the behavioral mechanisms or processes that facilitate student development” (Astin, 1984, p. 522). Astin (1984) summed his theory up simply, “the greater the amount of student involvement the greater will be the amount of student learning and personal development” (p. 529). For this study, involvement connects to the research on student leaders. Leadership on campus is one form involvement that requires both a physical and psychological investment. While student

leadership specifically is not the subject of research, the impact of involvement helps to further accelerate the spin of development that Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed.

Moral Development Theory

“The function of morality is to provide basic guidelines for determining how conflicts in human interests are to be settled and for optimizing mutual benefit of people living together in groups” (Rest, 1986). The development of this morality has been the subject of much research and theorizing. Kohlberg’s foundational research on moral development was one of the first to develop a theory in this area, but several other theorists have critiqued and reconstructed the ways in which scholars view moral development. Kohlberg’s (1969) work was an extension of the work of Piaget, focusing initially on young children, but then moving into college—age students (Evans et al., 2010; Renn & Reason, 2013). Kohlberg (1976) proposed three levels of moral reasoning divided in six stages (as cited in Liddel and Cooper, 2012). The chart below from Renn and Reason (2013) offers a description of these three levels.

- *Level One: Preconventional.* Individuals do not yet understand societal rules. They are individually focused, in an effort to avoid punishment and please authorities. Rules are followed if they benefit the individual.
- *Level Two: Conventional.* Individuals seek to meet expectations and rules, especially those held by authorities. Concern is focused outwardly on being seen as a good person, gaining approval, and supporting the system of rules.
- *Level Three: Postconventional or Principled.* Individuals base decisions on overarching moral principles, such as human rights. They evaluate social systems and laws according to their consideration of these moral principles. Participation

in the social system is seen as voluntary and requires mutual commitment and trust.

(p. 139)

Stage 1 and Stage 2 are a part of Level 1, preconventional morality. In Stage one individuals follow rules so that they will not be punished (Evans et al., 2010). Stage 2 individuals are still rule followers, but only when it is in their interest to follow rules. Moving to the conventional level, Stage 3 individuals focus on meeting the expectations of others and of gaining approval (Evans et al., 2010). In Stage 4 individuals realize that there are societal structures and laws and they are focused on upholding these laws and duties. Moving to the postconventional level, in Stage 5 the laws and structures of Stage 4 are evaluated on the basis of how they promote “fundamental human rights” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 104). Finally, in Stage 6 “morality involves equal consideration of the points of view of all involved in a moral situation (Evans et al., 2010, p. 104). Kohlberg was unable to validate this final stage through his work (Evans et al., 2010, p. 105).

Kohlberg believed that individuals would be consistent across contexts and situations, thus his stages progressed in a sequential order, and that there was a hierarchy with each stage getting progressively more complex (Evans et al., 2010; Renn & Reason, 2013). Additionally Kohlberg believed that exposure to higher stage thinking and disequilibrium prompted development in these moral stages (Renn & Reason, 2013, p. 139). While Kohlberg ran several studies to verify these stages, he performed his research exclusively on men (Evans et al., 2010).

The next iteration of moral development theories came from Rest (1979). Rest’s early work with Kohlberg’s ideas created the Defining Issues Test (DIT) as an objective way to measure an individual’s moral thinking (Evans et al., 2010). Through continued work, Rest

(1979) and his colleagues developed a modified version of Kohlberg's work. With similar core aspects to Kohlberg, scholars refer to Rest's model as neo-Kohlbergian (Evans et al., 2010; Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Rest (1979) believed that moral development was a continuous process. This led Rest (1979) to see it as possible that individuals would be in multiple stages at one time. Some of an individual's thinking may be in one stage while a portion of it may fall in a different stage. Complementing this idea, Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, and Bebeau (2000) rejected the idea of step-by-step development and proposed a scheme-based model in which movement between schemes was more fluid than Kohlberg envisioned. "We believe that development is a matter of changes in the frequency of usage, moving from the less to the more complex" (Rest et al., 2000, p. 385). Additionally Rest et al. (2000) rejected Kohlberg's belief that his stages were universal. Rest et al. (2000) saw morality as a "social construction, evolving from the community's experiences, particular institutional arrangements, deliberations, and the aspiration that are voiced at the time and which win the support of the community" (p. 386).

Rest et al. (2000) proposed that there are four main components in one's journey to moral maturity. The first component is moral sensitivity. By this Rest et al. (2000) were referring to "one's alertness to the need for a particular action and an ability to quickly interpret a situation as having more than one course of action" (Liddell & Cooper, 2012, p. 12). Moral sensitivity is the awareness of the opportunity to make multiple choices. The second component, moral judgement, "involves deciding which course of action is right, just, or fair in a particular situation" (Liddell & Cooper, 2012, p. 12). Moral motivation involves the commitment to make the moral course of action, it is "the compass, the conscience, and the will to put aside personal interests in favor of moral values" (Liddell & Cooper, 2012, p. 12). Finally, moral action is where one's "sensitivity, judgement, and motivation integrate into execution" (Liddell & Cooper,

2012, p. 13). “Narvaez and Rest (1995) maintain that moral action requires self–confidence, perseverance, and steadfastness toward a final goal, and a belief in one’s ability to have success in the task. It is the component frequently referred to as ‘character’” (Liddell & Cooper, 2012, p. 13).

Citing these same four stages Cooper and Schwartz (2007) investigated the connection between moral judgement and student discipline in college students. In their literature review Cooper and Schwartz found connections between moral judgement and age, education and academic performance. In contrast the connection between Greek affiliation and moral judgement was negative. Through use of the DIT2 test, Cooper and Schwartz determined that “students who violated the code of conduct reasoned at a lower post–conventional moral judgment level than students who did not violate the conduct code” (p. 604).

Kohlberg’s Harvard colleague Gilligan (1982) felt that Kohlberg’s model developed only through research on men could not really speak for moral development in everyone and noted the differences in her work *In a Different Voice*. While rights and rules were Kohlberg’s focus, Gilligan (1982) focused on the importance of relationship with others as well as care for self (Evans et al., 2010). Gilligan identified three levels and two transition stages through which women’s moral development proceeds. “Each transition represents the achievement of a more sophisticated understanding between selfishness and responsibility” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 112). Moving from survival to goodness to truth with transitions in between, Gilligan’s model allows for care and relationships to play an important part in moral development (Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Slote (1983) connected the idea of moral development to virtue development by proposing the idea that if moral growth is chartable, perhaps virtue development is as well.

As character and virtues help to define one's morality or moral choices, ultimately moral development is also about the development of character and virtues. While initially individuals may make the right moral choice because someone has told them this is the right thing to do (preconventional moving to conventional). As they grow and develop morally these choices become more deeply ingrained and motivations for these choices may change as well as the ways in which an individual may think and make moral choices (post conventional). Decisions originally externally motivated become internally motivated or a part of one's character or a "habit of mind, body, and heart" (Dalton, 1999, p. 47)

Evans (1987) proposed a model for college and university student development professionals to be intentional in moral development. Evans noted the shift away from education of moral and religious values in early American higher education, but also believed that "establishing a congruence between one's beliefs and behavior, should be the culminating component of development during the college years" (p. 191). Evans called for moral development interventions both individually and institutionally. She also encouraged both planned and responsive approaches as well as explicit or implicit interventions. Evans encouraged programs and conversations that were specific in the addressing of moral issues but also believed that all student programs should address moral and ethical issues. Contrary to the beliefs of some, moral and ethical development is not solely a part of religious education nor is moral development addressed inherently higher education (Evans, 1987).

Psychological Framework

Tangney's (2000) definition of humility based on an accurate sense of self points to other important foundational psychology theories that lay a groundwork for development of self. Leary and Tangney (2012) have edited a volume titled *Self and Identity* focused on the many

ways in which science and psychology have begun to focus on the development of self (i.e. self-esteem, self-reflection, self-control, self-verification). After noting a confusion regarding the wide variety of definitions for self, Leary and Tangney (2012) defined self as “a mental capacity that allows an animal to take itself as the object of its own attention and to think consciously about itself” (Leary & Tangney, 2013, p. 6). Leary and Tangney (2013) also said that the phenomena of self involves “the capacity for self-reflection that lies at the heart of what it means to have a self” (p. 2). A sense of self and self-awareness both must involve self-reflection.

Rogers. In 1951 Rogers first presented what have become known as Rogers’s 19 propositions in his book *Client Centered Therapy*. Based on his own experiences and of his colleagues at the University of Chicago counseling center, Rogers developed what he called “a theory of personality and behavior” (Rogers, 1951, p. 481). Each of these 19 concepts of personality development speak in some small way to how the individual constructs their personality and behavior as a result of this personality (Rogers, 1951). Rogers’s purpose in developing his theory was to help therapists aid their clients in more effective ways. As a framework for understanding the development of humility, Rogers’s propositions provide a guide for how personality, behavior, and a sense of self are developed. While all 19 propositions speak to the development of self some are more fitting for a study focused on humility. As a framework Rogers’s concepts can be seen as the building blocks of self.

Taken as a whole, Rogers’s 19 propositions describe how an individual’s sense of self is constructed. As an individual experiences the world he is continually adjusting and changing his perceptions of reality based on his experiences (proposition I and II). The individual desires to respond to the world as an organized whole. “The organism reacts to the field as it is experienced and perceived. This perceptual field is, for the individual ‘reality.’” (Rogers, 1951,

p. 484). While there is a concept of a true reality, “reality is, for the individual, his perceptions” (Rogers, 1951, p. 485). These realities are really hypotheses that are tested and confirmed or adjusted.

While none of the theories discussed above can fully explain the process of humility development they can help to provide some initial foundation for generating new theory. The person and the environment are components that I utilized during the research phase and the connections between moral development and character development are clear. By examining these substantiated theories, I was able to better understand the new data that is collected.

The Road to Character

In his 2015, book *The Road to Character*, *New York Times* Op–ed columnist Brooks distinguished between what he called the “resume virtues” and the “eulogy virtues” (p. xi). The resume virtues are “the skills that you bring to the job market and that contribute to external success” (p. xi) while the eulogy virtues are those that someone talks about at your funeral, “whether you are kind, brave, honest, or faithful” (p. xi). These are the attributes that make up one’s character. Referencing Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, Brooks (2015) referred to these two opposing aspects of our nature as Adam I and Adam II. Adam I is concerned with the external while Adam II is the internal Adam and wants to “embody certain moral qualities” (p. xii). Brooks’s (2015) book was about Adam II.

Brooks (2015) began his journey to find what builds character after noticing the contrast between the personalities of a World War II victory television show and that of professional athletes in the 2000s. While the culture of the 2000s is one of self–promotion, the culture of the midcentury 1900s was one of self–effacement that said ““Nobody’s better than me, but I’m no better than anyone else”” (Brooks, 2015, p. 5). In order to understand the reason for these

differences, Brooks (2015) studied the period post–World War II and several prominent people. Brooks (2015) discovered that one of the biggest differences was “a strain of humility that was more common then than now” (p. 5). People were “more skeptical of their desires, more aware of their own weaknesses, more intent on combatting the flaws in their own natures and turning weakness into strength” and people were “less likely to feel that every thought, feeling, and achievement should be immediately shared with the world at large” (Brooks, 2015, p. 5).

Brooks (2015) referenced several ideas that support his view of today’s culture, naming what he called “the big me” (p. 6). According to a Gallup Organization poll, in 2015 80 percent of high school seniors view themselves as very important verses just 12 percent in 1950 (Brooks, 2015). Brooks also referenced Twenge et al.’s (2008a) narcissism study. In looking at popular culture, Brooks found what he referred to as “the gospel of self–trust” (p.7). Messages like “You are special. Trust yourself. Be true to yourself” (p. 7) fill contemporary children’s movies, while commencement speeches are filled with clichés like “follow your passion. Don’t accept your limits. Chart your own course. You have a responsibility to do great things because you are so great” (p. 7). In looking at the cause for these changes Brooks noted that an increase in technology encourages a broadcasting personality and for communication to be faster and busier. Moments of stillness and quiet are important for Adam I to quiet and Adam II to grow (Brooks, 2015, p. 250). Additionally Brooks also pointed to a culture of meritocracy as the reason for a moral shift. “This tradition tells you how to do the things that will propel you to the top, but it doesn’t encourage you to ask yourself why you are doing them” (Brooks, 2015, p. 254). Culture encourages us to focus our time and energy on external success rather than on internal change. In Brooks opinion, the thing that is missing that was present in the generation of the mid–20th century is humility.

While Brooks's (2015) wrote of character as a whole, he placed importance on humility as a foundational concept for character development. There are aspects of Brooks's description of humility that vary from the way scholars talk about this virtue. Namely, Brooks often referred to humility as "self-effacement" or of humble people as being "self-effacing" (p. 8). The inclusion of self-effacement in a definition of humility puts the description more in line with a definition based on timidity or lowliness contrary to how scholars and this paper are choosing to define the term.

For the most part though, Brooks's (2015) conversation on humility as a foundation of character is an interesting op-ed on how one develops character. He listed many qualities that come from the humble person including thankfulness, wisdom, and an acknowledgement of ones imperfections. "Truly humble people are engaged in a great effort to magnify what is best in themselves and defeat what is worst, to become strong in the weak places" (p. 10). They fight against the inclination that they are the center of the universe. Through an individual's life experiences they confront their strengths and weaknesses and grow in humility.

Brooks (2015) concluded his book with a list of ways to develop character: his road to character. It is not just that individuals must change, but that culture as a whole must change and move away from a "moral ecology [built] around the Big Me" (Brooks, 2015, p. 261) to one focused on the inner world of Adam II and the eulogy virtues. He called his list of 15 propositions the Humility Code. Based on Brooks (2015) observations of historical characters, his propositions provided an idea of how one may build character and humility.

1. We don't live for happiness, we live for holiness.
2. Proposition one defines the goal of life.
3. Although we are flawed creatures, we are also splendidly endowed.

4. In the struggle against your own weakness, humility is the greatest virtue.
5. Pride is the central vice.
6. Once the necessities for survival are satisfied, the struggle against sin and for virtue is the central drama of life.
7. Character is built in the course of your inner confrontation.
8. The things that lead us astray are short term—lust, fear, vanity, gluttony. The things we call character endure over the long term—courage, honesty, humility.
9. No person can achieve self-mastery on his or her own.
10. We are all ultimately saved by grace.
11. Defeating weakness often means quieting the self.
12. Wisdom starts with epistemological modesty.
13. No good life is possible unless it is organized around a vocation.
14. The best leader tries to lead along the grain of human nature rather than go against it.
15. The person who successfully struggles against weakness and sin may or may not become rich and famous, but that person will become mature.

(Brooks, 2015, pp. 262–267)

These propositions provide a potential path from the culture of big me to one of little me. Acknowledging one's strengths and weaknesses helps to grow the inner self and build the eulogy virtues that Brooks (2015) encouraged the reader to grow.

Summary

This literature review began by examining the recent literature on the failings of character and morality in society. American educational institutions such as colleges and universities have been a means of character education since colonial times and need to return to

these roots. Great moral, identity, and individual development happen along with intellectual development that is taking place during college. With the noted rise in narcissistic tendencies amongst college students, one area of focus is the development of humility in college students. A full definition of humility is a proper understanding of ones strengths and weaknesses and their place in the greater context of the world. Humility is the antithesis of narcissism. The lack of accurate assessment tools makes measurement of humility difficult. Frameworks of understanding growth and development were addressed to provide a foundation for the proposed research. The final section reviewed Brooks's (2015) book *The Road to Character*, to provide an understanding of one prominent writer's views on how character grows.

The following chapter will explain the methodology for the research giving a definition for phenomenology and grounded theory. It will explain the process used for data collection and coding. Finally, it will give a brief overview of data collection locations and participants.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is research that produces “findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 10). Strauss and Corbin (1998) listed several reasons for conducting qualitative research. It may be the preference of the researcher. It may also be due to the nature of the research. A researcher may also be exploring the “meaning or nature of an experience” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11) leading a researcher to being out in the field finding out what people are doing or thinking. Qualitative research may also be most appropriate when there is little known about a substantive area.

Within qualitative research, there are several different methods of exploration (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The most fitting method for further exploration of the stated research questions is a grounded theory approach. The purpose of a grounded theory research study is to “move beyond description and to generate theory” (Creswell, 2013, p. 63). The purpose of this study was to discover the process through which college student leaders develop humility. Grounded theory focuses on developing theory through “emphasis on inductive strategies” (M.Q. Patton, 2002, p. 125) and not through previous assumptions that a researcher may have. Creswell (2013) said, “Grounded theory is a good design to use when a theory is not available to explain a process” (p. 66). The main outcome from a grounded theory study is a “theory with

specific components: a central phenomenon, casual conditions, strategies, conditions and context, and consequences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 68).

Initially proposed in the 1960s, sociologists Glaser and Strauss created the concept of grounded theory for research in which researchers felt that current theories did not fit or were not suited for the participants under study (Creswell, 2013). Glaser and Strauss continued to refine their grounded theory method. Eventually there was an ideological split between Glaser and Strauss with Glaser feeling as though Strauss’s method was too structured (Creswell, 2013). Strauss and Corbin developed a new form of grounded theory, known as systematic grounded theory. This title refers to a derived theory that comes from data that is systematically gathered and analyzed through the research process (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1998).

While the primary method of inquiry was grounded theory, there were aspects of the study that contained phenomenology. The purpose of a phenomenological research study is to understand the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). In this study, the research focused on the phenomenon of humility. This study tried to understand this phenomenon in the participant’s lives, but more specifically, it focused on the process of the development of the phenomenon. Primarily though, the researcher used grounded theory methodology with the outcome being theory derived from data that explains the process of acting with humility.

Philosophies, Assumptions, and Frameworks

As qualitative researchers conduct their work, the researcher holds certain philosophical assumptions. These assumptions affect how the researcher understands and interprets data (Creswell, 2013). The ontological assumption states that individuals have different perceptions of reality. Both the researcher and the participants can embrace differing realities (Creswell,

2013). Students may have differing perspectives on what has influenced their process of humility development, but the researcher must report each of these realities. The epistemological assumption rests on individual's ways of knowing as a reality. In order to understand subjective experiences the researcher must be in the field as close to the participants as possible (Creswell, 2013). The researcher also brings with him or her a certain set of values. The researcher must acknowledge this axiological assumption and the reality that he or she comes to the field with bias (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the methodological assumption acknowledges that as one conducts research the method of inquiry may change. The researcher will prepare a method for research, but the method may change with time in the field as the researcher discovers better questions or methods for answering the research questions (Creswell, 2013). It is important to acknowledge the presence of each of these assumptions in the current study.

Within qualitative research, a philosophical framework of meaning making helps to define findings (Creswell, 2013). Given the interpretative nature of the research questions and Bronfenbrenner's (1979) framework of development, the constructivist philosophy of research is a natural fit. Those who follow social constructivism believe that as individuals work to make sense of their lived experiences they develop subjective meaning and that these meanings can be complex and varied (Creswell, 2013; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). These meanings are not simply "imprinted" on an individual, but individuals develop them through interaction with others (Creswell, 2013). The researcher must work to rely on the participant's view as much as possible and understand that the individual's subjective meanings are "negotiated socially and historically" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). Social constructivism plays out in research through broad open ended questions that allow the participant to construct meaning of a situation. The

researcher must make sense of the meaning that others have made in the world (Creswell, 2013). Given Bronfenbrenner's (1979) acknowledgement of the role of context and one's environment in individual meaning making, the constructivist philosophy is a natural foundation for the conducted qualitative study.

Research Questions

The following research questions are of primary interest:

1. Based on Tangney's (2000) six-part definition of humility, what are the actions college student leaders identify as humble?
2. What is the process through which college student leaders develop humility?
3. How do colleges and college experiences provide opportunities for the humility development process to occur?

Participants

Participants were undergraduate students who are currently involved in leadership positions at three separate institutions. Each of these institutions are members in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). In his research, Kuh (1998) found that students at CCCU institutions demonstrated greater development of character when compared with students enrolled at general liberal arts institutions or institutions on the Templeton Character Honor Roll. While it is desirable to know the process of humility development in any college student, in order to complete the study the use of purposeful sampling narrowed the participant pool. Instead of recruiting from entire student population at each institution, gatekeepers who worked with student leaders invited participation in the study. Additionally, noting the connections made in the literature review between leadership and humility, examining student leader's process of humility development provided an opportunity for students to have a deeper level of

awareness with the concepts of humility. Using purposeful and convenience sampling to select participants was helpful in making meaning of participants lived experiences.

Initially I made contact with a “gatekeeper” (Creswell, 2009) at each institution who works in a senior or mid-level position within the division of student affairs. I provided the gatekeeper with a short email that they forwarded to students in leadership positions within student development (Appendix B). Each gatekeeper also chose to add a short intro paragraph that introduced who I was and why the gatekeeper supported participation in the research. Two and a half weeks prior to my campus visit the gatekeeper sent the initial email to a list of students whom the gatekeeper qualified as student leaders within student development. Interested participants then contacted me directly. I responded with more detailed information (Appendix C) and the informed consent document (Appendix D). If students were still interested in participating, we worked together to find a time where we could conduct the interview on their campus during a two day period I was available at each campus. I provided a demographic information sheet (Appendix E) for participants to fill out prior to our interview and received most of these back digitally before the interviews began. Others filled out demographic information as we started our interview.

On each campus, I worked to find 10 participants from the initial email and text responses I received back. On two campuses, I received interest from more than 10 individuals, but only interviewed the first 10 people with whom I could find a particular interview timeslot. In total, I interviewed 26 participants. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote, the researcher cannot say how many participants he or she will investigate in the beginning, “he [sic] can only count up the groups at the end” (p. 61). Heterogeneity of participants is an important aspect of data collection. Diversity of participants includes racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, socioeconomic, and

college involvement among other possible options. As is evident in the participant descriptions below, this research did not achieve racial and ethnic diversity. While religious, spiritual, or faith diversity was also desirable, all students participating attended religious institutions and all stated some type of Christian religious belief.

Data Collection Procedures

When grounded theory is the most appropriate method, the next step is to conduct numerous interviews to the point of saturation (Creswell, 2013). “This may involve 20 to 30 interviews or 50 to 60 interviews” (Creswell, 2013, p. 67). Ary, Jacobs, and Sorenson (2010) wrote that saturation might come from “as many as 20 to 25 subjects” (p. 464). These interviews focused on “understanding how individuals experience the process and identifying the steps in the process” (Creswell, 2013, p. 67). Interviews are the primary method of data collection in most qualitative studies (Creswell, 2013). “At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individual’s stories because they are of worth” (Seidman, 2013, p. 9). Using a semi-structured interview format, I looked to discover the actions college student leaders have taken that align with Tangney’s (2000) six-part definition of humility and the process through which student leaders develop humility. I conducted interviews at the participant’s location of choice on the participant’s campus in order to allow for the maximum comfort and disclosure by the participants.

In order to collect data I conducted in depth interviews following a preset semi structured protocol (Appendix F). The interview consisted of building rapport with the participant, gathering perceptions on the six-part definition of humility, allowing the student to identify actions they have taken that align with the stated definition, and allowing the student to identify the process that led to these behaviors. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to 75 minutes. In

order to allow for constant comparative analysis and to remain focused throughout these conversations, I made sure to conduct no more than five interviews in one day. Additionally, my three campus visits came two weeks apart to allow this same type of constant comparative analysis.

Institutions

The below descriptions offer institutional data. This information was pulled from institutional websites. In accordance with the American Psychological Association (2010), in order to maintain institutional anonymity in-text citations are not provided nor are specific references offered in the reference list.

The first institution I visited was Great Lakes University (GLU). I spent two and a half days interviewing students on this campus mostly in their student center with one interview taking place in the university library. Located in a suburb of a major metropolitan area, GLU is a Christian institution that does not have denominational affiliations. It has approximately 2,400 undergraduate students with 53% female and 47% male breakout. It considers itself an academically rigorous, residential college that has a six-year graduation rate of 89%. GLU reports a “total ethnic enrollment” of 21.6%. Demographic information for the 10 students I interviewed is in Table 1.

Crossroads University was the second institution I visited. This institution is located in a rural location in the Midwest. Crossroads considers itself “an evangelical Christian comprehensive university of The Wesleyan Church.” Crossroads has multiple locations, online, and graduate offerings, but all participants in this study were undergraduate students at the institution’s residential “main” location where it has a population of 3,040. Crossroads claims a 65% six-year graduation rate and 25.8% ethnic diversity among its 14,959 graduate and

undergraduate total student population in 2013. Diversity statistics for the current residential undergraduate population were not available. Demographic information for the students interviewed at Crossroads is below in Table 2.

The final institution I visited was Beltline University. Located five miles from an urban center, Beltline describes itself as “a Christ-centered university with a passion for global influence through the transforming power of the gospel.” With a traditional undergraduate enrollment of 1,250, Beltline is 70% residential and offers undergraduate and graduate degrees including on line programs. The last reported 6 year graduation rate was 47% in 2011. Beltline’s undergraduate population is 15% students of color and 4% international students. I conducted my interviews at Beltline with just one week of class remaining before the end of the spring semester. I asked my gatekeeper to send out emails to student leaders two different times, but only six individuals responded. Participant demographic information is available in Table 3.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information Great Lakes University

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Religious or Spiritual Background	Major	Student Leadership Position	Years of College Completed
Luna	Female	20	Asian American	Protestant Christian	Elementary Education	Residence Life	2.5
Paul	Male	21	White	Anglican Christian	Business and Economics, Minor in Philosophy	Residence Life and Student Activities	3.5
Peyton	Female	22	White	Protestant Christian	Christian Education	Residence Life	3.75
Mario	Male	21	White	Christian (No Denominational Affiliation)	Bible and Theology	Residence Life	2
Maria	Female	21	White	Evangelical	Elementary Education	Service Learning	2
Charles	Male	21	White	Christian; Confirmed in the Anglican Church of North America)	Economics/Philosophy	Residence Life	2.5
Emily	Female	20	White	Christian	Business and Economics	Student Activities	1.5
Soraya	Female	20	African American	Non-Denominational	Philosophy and French	Student Activities	2
Tabitha	Female	20	Brazilian	Christian	Mathematics	Multicultural Development	3
Drew	Male	21	White and Asian	Christian	Sociology, minor in Biblical and theological studies	Residence Life	2.5

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information Crossroads University

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Religious or Spiritual Background	Major	Student Leadership position	Years of College Completed
Jordan	Male	22	White	Christian	Youth Ministry	Resident Chaplain	4
Douglas	Male	23	White	Christian	Business Administration, honors humanities	Residence Life	4
Cable	Male	20	Latino/ Hispanic/ Chicano, White	Christian	Christian Ministries	Resident Chaplain	3
Tobias	Male	21	White	Christian	Christian Ministries	Residence Life	3
Ethan	Male	20	White	Christian/Non- denominational	Exercise Science/Health promotion	Residence Life	3
Skyler	Male	21	White	Protestant Christian – Baptist	Christian Ministries and Church Music	Residence Life	2
Nora	Female	20	White	Christian/Non- denominational	Social Work	Residence Life	2
Anthony	Male	20	White	Evangelical Christian	Human Communication	Residence Life	1
Brianna	Female	21	White	Christian	Leadership/Christian Ministries	Residence Life	3
Eliza	Female	21	White	Protestant	Psychology and Honors Humanities	Residence Life	3

Table 3

Participant Demographic Information Beltline University

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Religious or Spiritual Background	Major	Student Leadership position	Years of post high school education completed
Alyssa	Female	22	White	Christian	Family Studies and Ministry	Orientation	3.5
Sandy	Female	20	White	Christian	Ministry/Bible	Residence Life	3
AJ	Male	21	White	Christian: Wesleyan	Ministry and Business Administration	Residence Life	2.75
Patrick	Male	20	White	Evangelical Christian	Ministry, Biblical Studies, minor in Business Integrated Comprehensive Science Secondary Education	Residence Life	3
Nick	Male	21	White	Christian	Psychology	Residence Life	3.5
Lisa	Female	21	White	Non Denominational	Psychology	Residence Life	3

Data Analysis

Following each individual round of data collection, I coded and analyzed the data. Coding is the process by which a researcher assigns data a short word or phrases to give a “summative, essence–capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language–based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Through coding, data can be organized and put into categories to begin to show patterns that can be analyzed (Saldaña, 2013). Coding is a cyclical process and data was coded three times in order to properly “manage, filter, highlight, and focus the salient features of the qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 8). As Merriam (2009) recommended, I simultaneously coded data along with the data collection process. Through simultaneous collection, I was able to refine the data collection process and to test themes, ideas, metaphors, and analogies out on participants. Grounded theory refers to this simultaneous process of collection and analysis as constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Through this process, theory begins to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Creswell (2013) referred to grounded theory as a zigzag process: “out to the field to gather information, into the office to analyze data, back to the field to gather more information, into the office, and so forth” (p. 64).

In grounded theory the method of coding takes place in three steps. The first is open or initial coding (Saldaña, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Open coding is an appropriate title because through this process the researcher is able to remain open to all theoretical possibilities (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher codes the data for major categories. This initial open coding also included process coding. Process coding is a method that helps to label actions a participant has taken (Saldaña, 2013). Typically ending in –ing, process coding uses words like reflecting, identifying, or choosing. Through open coding I worked to identify a central phenomenon of the

process. Following first round open coding, I used axial coding. This second phase consists of creating categories around the core phenomenon. These categories consist of “casual condition (what actors caused the core phenomenon), strategies (actions taken in response to the core phenomenon), contextual and intervening conditions (broad and specific situation factors that influence the strategies), and consequences (outcomes from using the strategies)” (Creswell, 2013, p. 64). Then I used a process known as a coding paradigm or logic diagram to present the data. In the model the researcher identifies the central phenomenon and explores identified categories. Saldaña (2013) recommended a display or diagram to arrange and organize the central phenomenon and casual conditions. Finally, I used selective coding. In this process the researcher will identify propositions that interrelate the categories in a model. The created model can assume the form of narrative statements, visual picture, or a series of hypotheses or propositions (Creswell, 2013).

During the data collection and analysis process I also used memoing to assist in coding. Memoing is the “process in which the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory throughout the process of open, axial, and selective coding” (Creswell, 2013, p. 67). Just as data collection and analysis were simultaneous, memoing was a part of the continuous process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Saldaña, 2013). The memoing process involved thoughts, questions, code choices, participants, and the phenomena of humility itself (Saldaña, 2013).

Triangulation

Through the process of triangulation, a researcher can increase the credibility of his findings. Taken from the discipline of land surveying, the term triangulation refers to establishing validity or strength based on multiple data points (Merriam, 2009; M.Q. Patton,

2002). Merriam (2009) and M.Q. Patton (2002) both referred to four primary methods of triangulation

- (1) *data triangulation*, the use of a variety of data sources in a study;
- (2) *investigator triangulation*, the use of several different researchers or evaluators;
- (3) *theory triangulation*, the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data, and
- (4) *methodological triangulation*, the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program (M.Q. Patton, 2002, p. 247).

Some of these methods are more fitting for quantitative research than for qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). In order to help establish credibility I utilized data triangulation and theory triangulation. Data triangulation occurred through the use of interview transcripts as well as observation and memoing. Participants were also given the opportunity to check their interview transcripts following their interview. Theory triangulation occurred by looking at the data through multiple perspectives. While the main framework of understanding used was Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental ecology, other theories such as Kohlberg (1969) and Rogers's (1951) 19 propositions helped to provide a framework for understanding the data. Merriam (2009) also referred to "adequate engagement in data collection" (p. 219). Through getting as close as possible to participants and being thorough in data collection validity can be added to a study. In order to conduct this grounded theory study, I intentionally spread out campus visits for data collection making them two weeks apart. Additionally, I conducted no more than five interviews in one day. This spacing allowed me to perform the necessary constant comparative analysis for grounded theory and also allowed for thorough and adequate time in field to be immersed in data collection. Through these methods of triangulation, I was able test and strengthen the credibility of the data collected and my findings.

Summary

Qualitative research is an effective method for research that looks to explore a topic and establish theories. Using a grounded theory research method I looked to understand how college student leaders operationalize humility and the process in which humility is developed. Through individual, semi-structured interviews with student leaders who volunteered to participate in the study I collected data. I coded the data using open coding first and axial coding second. Following the identification of the central phenomena and surrounding categories, I created a diagram to display these themes. Finally, through selective coding I identified propositions connecting the phenomena and categories. The resulting theory is grounded in data. Chapter 4 will present brief profiles of each participant. Following that, Chapter 5 will describe the data collected through the interview process and the analysis of this data introducing participants and their interviews.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The participants of this study were 26 undergraduate students. Prior to each interview participants filled out a demographics information sheet (Appendix E). Each student was enrolled at a faith-based institution that is a member of the CCCU. The CCCU describes its mission as “to advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth” (About the CCCU, 2017). Participants also held a leadership position within the division of student development at their institution. Participants were recruited using campus gatekeepers who worked in upper level positions within student development. These gatekeepers forwarded an email invitation to participate to all student leaders within their division (Appendix B). In the email, students were interested in participating were directed to email the researcher directly. A \$10 Amazon gift card incentivized participation in the interview. I worked with the first 10 people who responded and were able to meet during the dates I was on each campus. At two out of the three campuses, I was able to recruit 10 participants. At the third only six students responded.

Of the 26 participants, 20 were in student leadership positions in residence life with the others serving in student government, student activities, service learning, and multicultural student services. The participant group was made up of 12 women and 14 men. Twenty-one participants identified as White and two identified as more than one race.

Common to all participants was their religious or spiritual background. Each participant responded to a fill-in-the-blank question regarding religion or spiritual belief by identifying as Christian. Many participants added additional descriptions of their beliefs. These included Anglican (2), Baptist (1), non-denominational (5), Evangelical (3), and Wesleyan (1).

Below is a brief biographical description of each of the participants. These profiles are organized by how participants defined humility. In each interview, before giving participants Tangney's (2000) definition, I asked them to define humility in their own words. There were two main ways in which participants defined humility: putting others first and keeping self and others in an appropriate perspective. Each profile contains basic reported demographic information, what the student identified learning through his or her leadership position, and the participant's definition of humility.

Others First

Many participants defined humility by describing the idea that humility is the act of putting others before themselves. Luna is a 20-year-old Asian American female. She has completed 2.5 years of college and is an elementary education major. Luna is currently serving as a resident assistant (RA) at GLU. When speaking of what she has learned through student leadership Luna said, "I learned that I am very independent person. I like kind of like working with myself. I'll like work with myself first and think of other things and like have other people umm kind of refine it." In defining humility Luna said,

Humility is letting others speak and letting um like you as a leader but you as a leader and a facilitator rather than you as an authoritative leader. Umm and yeah I think loving letting others speak instead of you kind of like just preaching and I have seen that a lot in my views and in my leadership because especially in RA I was like I got this, like its fine.

Mario is a 21-year-old White man studying Bible and theology. He has completed 2 years of post-secondary education. He is serving as an RA at GLU. Mario said, "I definitely like am a person who gets very on edge when tension happens and when conflict happens...Also have learned that I just am a lot more easily offended than I thought I was." Mario defined humility saying, "I have heard it described as thinking not so much less about yourself, which it is often as perceived by on a practical level, but as thinking of others more often than yourself."

Maria is a 21-year-old White woman. She has completed 2 years of undergraduate education and is studying elementary education at GLU. She works within her institutions Christian Service Learning department. Through leadership, Maria said that she has learned "interestingly enough, lots of humility." Maria went on to say,

So this job I have failed sometimes at things that I needed to get done. So learning how to acknowledge that failure, reflect, and then move on. Then also learning to rely on other people. So whether that is the staff members in charge of me or the people on my cabinet. Learning that it is ok to admit that I didn't do a good job or I didn't send that e-mail and that is why this is going to happen or yeah, it has been a tough lesson.

Especially at the beginning for me for sure.

Maria defined humility in relation to others saying,

I guess like the Sunday School answer that I always heard was thinking about others before yourself. But as I have like you know, matured, I more see it as like me recognizing my own place in the whole scheme of things. And then just like adjusting myself to like fit into my role. And recognizing the other people alongside me who like working together to get something done

Emily is a 20-year-old woman who is enrolled at GLU. She is serving in student activities planning events. Studying business and economics, Emily has completed 1.5 years of post-high school education. In connection to her learning in leadership Emily described it saying,

So relying on other people to just keep pushing them to do stuff was hard. So I kind of revealed like a kind of absence of patience there that I was like ugh this is like you know you have this idea of like I can lead things and then it really is like patience is tested.

When defining humility Emily said,

Yeah, not seeing yourself as above and then because you don't see yourself as better than, you act in line with everyone else. Um and I think it is also the amount that you are consumed with your own tasks. Not just how highly you think of yourself but how often you think of yourself.

Soraya is a 20-year-old African American woman. She is a philosophy and French major who has completed 2 years of college at GLU. She is serving in an organization within student activities that focuses on racial conciliation. Soraya explained how this is different from racial reconciliation saying,

Just that reconciliation implies there was a perfect state before and frankly we did not have that as a human race. So the term is conciliation to show that we aspire to that and will never fully achieve that but that is the goal.

Speaking about her leadership experience Soraya said,

So I think a key part of my whole experience has been learning what my weaknesses are, what my insecurities are, how those affect me in a group dynamic and affect others around me and what I can do to grow from them.

Soraya referenced the Christian author C.S. Lewis saying she thought of his idea that, “being humble is not thinking less of yourself but of yourself less.”

Jordan is a 22-year-old White man. He is serving as a resident chaplain responsible for the spiritual life and programming in his residential space at Crossroads University. He is studying youth ministry, and is in his fourth year of college. Through being in a leadership position Jordan said he had learned the need to be honest.

I think the group that we are in together. The honesty of being able to say ok this is where I’m not really feeling well and this is how I am doing and understanding that as a place of honesty. Being like ok I’m not doing well.

Jordan defined humility as “being a part of something but not always leading it ... and making sure that stuff works behind the scenes so that other people can succeed.”

Douglas is a 23-year-old White man who identified as Christian. He is in his fourth year of college and was studying business administration and honors humanities at Crossroads. He is serving in his second year in residence life. Douglas talked about learning saying, “I still have a lot of work to do” specifically speaking of needing to continue to grow in the ways in which he interacts with other people. He defined humility saying, “I think of the classic definition from C.S. Lewis and that humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less often.” He went on to say, “true humility ends up looking like you end up finishing a conversation with a person and realize I didn’t talk about myself at all during that. I didn’t even realize that.”

Cable is a 20-year-old man who identified as Latino/Hispanic/Chicano and White enrolled at Crossroads. He is in his third year of college, is studying Christian ministries, and serving as a Resident Chaplain. He described growing in self-awareness through his leadership position and of discovering the need for boundaries. Cable described what he learned saying,

Learning that it is ok to not help somebody right then. If it is not an immediate need I can shut my door or even maybe lock my door is a cool thing too where you can lock and say, I'm not available at this time.

He defined humility as “being others focused and being focused on the lives of those who surround you. So it is really taking yourself off the pedestal and putting somebody else on it.”

Brianna is a 21-year-old White woman. She is studying leadership and Christian ministries at Crossroads. Brianna is in her fourth year of college and is in her second year of serving in Residence life. Through her leadership position, Brianna said that she has learned

I am really bad at resting. I am really bad at drawing boundaries learning that and learning how much sleep I actually need to function. How much time by myself I need and how much fun time I need.

She also learned, “how to connect with people who are so different from me in a lot of different ways.” In defining humility, Brianna said, “humility is knowing your strengths and your weaknesses,” and said humility is being “willing to put yourself or put others above yourself and to see their needs and what their needs are and be willing to meet those.”

Eliza is a 21-year-old White woman. She is studying psychology and honors humanities at Crossroads. She is serving in residence life and is in her fourth year of college. In speaking about what she learned through leadership Eliza said,

I have learned that I need to set balances for myself cause I tend to push myself until I can't do anymore. And then I kind of need a long recharge period. Which isn't really great and so I've learned I need to have my own boundaries.

In defining humility Eliza said,

First thing I think of is thinking of others before yourself. So a lot of people think of humility as being like self-deprecating but that is—I'm actually very against that definition of humility. I think it is more of like being willing to listen first and being able to meet the needs of others before thinking of how to meet your own.

Alyssa is a 22-year-old White woman. She is studying family studies and ministry and was in the final month of her senior year at Beltline University. She is serving as an orientation student leader. When speaking of what she learned through student leadership Alyssa said,

Negatively, I'm definitely a people pleaser. They will be like oh I didn't do it, I'm like oh it's fine, just like give it to me next week or really whenever you can. So they are kind of like ok. But I have also learned like that I am able to say no, which I didn't think I could so that is kind of good.

Alyssa defined humility by saying that humility is "like not needing recognition and like being confident but like not having to let the whole world know. Like willing to put yourself second."

Sandy is a 20-year-old White woman. She is studying Bible and ministry and has completed 3 years of her undergraduate college experience at Beltline. Sandy was serving as an RA and said, "I learned that I'm terrible at delegating. I don't know that is something about me that just likes to do things on my own and I don't like letting other people help me out, which is terrible." When defining humility Sandy said, "I think of somebody who is serving not for the purpose of self-benefit. And like not doing things so they receive recognition but just to help people and love people."

Patrick is a 20-year-old White man. He is studying ministry, Biblical studies, with a minor in business and has completed 3 years of his undergraduate experience at Beltline. He is serving as an RA. When speaking of his learning in his leadership experience Patrick said, "So

just kind of learning how I function, what my strengths are.” He specifically connected this to his own vocational understanding. In defining humility Patrick said, “First thing that comes to mind is putting others before yourself.” He also referenced the idea that humility “isn’t thinking less of yourself, it is thinking about yourself less.”

Perspective

Another way in which many participants defined humility was keeping people and accomplishments in appropriate perspective. Paul is a 21-year-old White man. He has completed 3.5 years of college and is studying business and economics at Great Lakes University. He is currently serving in student government, but had also served as an RA in a previous year. Paul said,

Um, and I think one of the things I realized was as much as I care about like helping people along their paths and you know like sharing whatever lessons I have learned, I don’t think that is something that I want to do vocationally ... I like roles where I have tasks and I can do those tasks. Student government is much more suited to that.

Paul defined humility by saying,

I think that humility at the core is forgetting about yourself and recognizing that there are far greater things than your own personal self and your personal identity and ego, things like that. I think that truth, objective truth is one of those things that is bigger.

Peyton is a 22-year-old White woman. She is studying Christian education and has completed 3.75 years at GLU. She is currently serving as an assistant Resident Director having served as an RA the year before. Peyton described growing in self-awareness saying,

But also one of the biggest things that I have like been able to like see would be just being able to name other gifts too. Specifically, one of mine would be like just being like

level headed in emergency situations but also knowing how to adapt different processes based on the need of the specific situation.

In defining humility Peyton said, “It [humility] is having like a proper view of yourself as being like equally I don’t know like dignified, gifted. But also like specifically like gifted within the context” and referenced the idea that humility is “not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.”

Tabitha is a 20-year-old Brazilian woman. She is studying mathematics and has completed 3 years of post-high school education at Great Lakes. She works with an organization in the multicultural services office that serves students who identify as third culture kids (TCKs). When speaking about her leadership position Tabitha said, “Directly things I have learned about myself yeah I would say mostly things relating to the way that I communicate and how to work within that to communicate effectively with people who have different styles of communication.” When defining humility Tabitha said,

I think someone who is willing to consider others and consider them, their opinions and their perspectives as equal, to be able to approach those opinions and approach others, give validity to that. So I guess I would define it in relationship to other people. Like a way of relating to others and a posture. Even a posture towards self I guess.

Drew is a 21-year-old man identified as White and Asian. He is studying sociology with a minor in Biblical and theological studies at GLU. He has completed 2.5 years of undergraduate education. He is working in residence life as an RA. In speaking about his RA experience Drew said,

I didn’t realize that coming into RA year would be—I got a lot of I guess professional experience I think I would call it that. I thought it would be very relational, very straight

forward, but it is also a lot of like keeping up with you know e-mails, a lot of just like there is just a lot of busy work too that gives me a lot of good professional experience I think.

When defining humility Drew said,

I think the way I would understand it and define it is it would have to do with being very self-aware of your own shortcomings I think and just realizing that you don't know as much as you think you know. Or you don't understand as much as you think you understand.

Tobias is a 21-year-old White man. He identifies as Christian and was studying Christian ministries in his third year of college at Crossroads University. His student leadership position was in residence life as an RA. Through student leadership Tobias grew in self-awareness saying,

One thing I have learned is that I always knew I was an introvert and that I need to ration my time with people so that when I'm with people I can be charged up and ready to go. I have learned how much of an introvert I really am.

He called humility "a character trait that some people have, some people don't." He went on to say,

So I don't think of humility as thinking of oneself as really low, low self-esteem or think of yourself as trash. I don't think that is humility. But I think humility is having a proper perspective of your environments to the point where you aren't focused on thinking about yourself but thinking about others. So yeah I think humility is more about understanding others, understanding God properly and that way you aren't focused on yourself and thinking of your own words.

Ethan is a 20-year-old White man. He is in his third year at Crossroads studying exercise science and health promotion. He is in his second year serving as a student leader in residence life. He described his current leadership role “as mainly support.” When talking about what he has learned through leadership he described growing in self-awareness saying “I have learned about myself is just like I have a never ending fuel tank.” He also said,

I used to think it was more of an up front leader but I’m actually more of a behind the scenes, what can I do, what can I get done to help. Encouragement is like a big aspect of my leadership style.

When giving his definition of humility, Ethan used the term “self-efficacy” saying,

Because I think to be a humble person you have to also be confident in who you are.

Which is I think the difficult thing. So like since I view confidence as being such a major role of humility, you know if that scale tips over, that can very easily lead to like arrogance and pride.

Anthony is a 20-year-old White man. He is studying human communication and serving in a leadership position within residence life at Crossroads University. He is in his second year of college. Anthony said he decided to be a resident assistant because of the positive experience he had with his RA his freshmen year. Speaking of what he has learned he said,

Um I have learned that there is a lot more failure than you think there is ... So like I don’t really remember seeing my RA last year or all of my other RA friends last year like you know being—I didn’t see a lot of them like tripping up.

When defining humility Anthony described it as “like a posture you take based on certain like contexts.” He went on to say,

Like yeah humility is like not being prideful, is thinking less, not less of yourself, but of yourself less. But I think for me personally there is just a really big aspect of openness and recognizing your weakness and your faults. Because I think if you are not willing to recognize those, then you are not willing to put yourself on the level of other people who have faults as well.

AJ is a 21-year-old White man. He is studying ministry and business administration at Beltline University. AJ has completed 2.75 years of post-undergraduate education. He is serving as an RA and said,

I would say that I definitely learned about my strengths and weaknesses more. So I have learned for example, just delegating. I'm not too good at that so I have had to just realize how to delegate a little bit more.

When defining humility AJ said, "I would say humility is understanding that you don't have all of the answers and that others' opinions are just as valuable as yours."

Other Definitions

Several other participants defined humility in unique ways that did not fit within the two themes described above. Charles is a 21-year-old White man. He is studying economics and philosophy and had completed 2.5 years at GLU. He is serving as an RA in residence life.

When talking about what he learned from being an RA Charles said that,

I have become a lot less kind of scheduled and structured with my life.... As an RA, I have found like a lot of times the times that it really matters where I need to be present is just kind of random.

When defining humility Charles connected it deeply to his religious beliefs saying, “I think humility is primarily concerned with position. Are you acting and living out of the correct position? The reality is the only truly humble like being is God.”

Skyler was the only participant to define humility as meekness. He is a 21-year-old White man. He is studying Christian ministries and church music at Crossroads. He has completed two years of post-secondary education and is serving as an RA. Skyler said, “I am studying to be a pastor so I felt that the role of resident assistant was as close to being a pastor now as I could get.” He talked about learning his limitations through his student leadership position and also said he “learned about boundary setting with residents and it has been a really growing, good growing experience to learn that ministry doesn’t have a time clock.” As Skyler defined humility he said, “I wanted to initially say like lowering oneself, kind of a sense of the opposite of pride. A position of meekness.”

Nora defined humility as a willingness to do work. Nora is a 20-year-old White woman. She is studying social work and was in her third year of college at Crossroads. She was serving as an RA and identified as Christian/Non-denominational. When speaking of what she learned through her leadership position Nora spoke of learning about working in a group saying, “And I have definitely realized I think appropriate ways of dealing with conflict within a group and tension within a group. So I have learned that about myself I think.” In defining humility Nora said, “I would define humility I think as being willing to do the work that most people wouldn’t do.”

Patrick is a 20-year-old White man. He is studying ministry, Biblical studies, with a minor in business and has completed 3 years of his undergraduate experience at Beltline. He is serving as an RA. When speaking of his learning in his leadership experience Patrick said, “So

just kind of learning how I function, what my strengths are.” He specifically connected this to his own vocational understanding. In defining humility Patrick said, “First thing that comes to mind is putting others before yourself.” He also referenced the idea that humility “isn’t thinking less of yourself, it is thinking about yourself less.”

The final two participants defined humility as an ability to admit mistakes. Nick is a 21-year-old White man studying integrated comprehensive science secondary education and has completed three years of post-secondary education at Beltline University. He is serving as an RA. In speaking of his learning in student leadership Nick said, “I guess for me, I have been learning a lot about my habits and kind of how to address people as well.” More specifically Nick referenced the need to be organized and how he was “to control myself and then I guess learning how to talk with people.” In defining humility Nick said, “being able to admit that you are wrong, being able to go up to a situation or with a person and say that you are sorry, that you are wrong, and be able to just admit that to somebody.”

Lisa is a 21-year-old White woman. She is studying psychology and has completed three years of post-secondary education at Beltline University. She is serving as an RA and said, I think I have just been really challenged to think more about where my identity lies. Especially this year with just at the beginning of the year I came in trying to be a people pleaser and wanted my girls really like me because I cared about the legacy I was going to leave behind.

In defining humility Lisa said, “Um, I think I would define it as the ability to admit responsibility when you do things wrong. And not being prideful about who you are.”

Summary

Chapter 4 described participant biographical information. Twenty-six participants were

interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Participants described their leadership positions and what they learned through these positions. Each participant also defined humility in their own words. These definitions fit into two main categories: putting others first and keeping people and accomplishments in appropriate perspective. Five participants used unique definitions defining humility as perspective of God, meekness, willingness to do work, and admitting your mistakes. Chapter 5 will describe the themes that emerged through these interviews.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to discover the process of humility development for college student leaders. This chapter explores particular themes that emerged from the data. Each participant took part in an individual, digitally recorded, semi-structured interview. Recordings were transcribed after which participants were given the opportunity to review and check transcriptions for accuracy. These transcriptions were then coded and themed using open, axial, and selective coding. Through this coding process, three main themes emerged with several sub themes. Chapter 5 will explore each of these themes and sub themes.

Chapter 3 explained the methodology in detail. Specifically, it explained the constant comparative process of grounded theory. Using semi-structured interviews, I conducted 26 interviews on three different college campuses. These interviews produced rich data and themes began to quickly emerge. During each interview I allowed students to share their personal definitions of humility, but then as we continued to talk about humility I gave them Tangney's (2000) six-part definition. The purpose of this was to create common language across all participants. Without this shared definition, participants could have described acting with humility in ways that were too dissimilar to compare or were starting from very different ideas. All 26 participants accepted and understood Tangney's (2000) six-part definition of humility. After reviewing Tangney's definition, Maria said,

I just hadn't thought about it, I mean I think it fits really well but I had never considered

labeling someone maybe who has these characteristics as being humble. But now that I see it, I think it does work.

Tabitha said, “At first glance I would say I resonate pretty well with this definition.” Emily said, I like my initial thought is that this, every single, I have seen every single point applied to particularly I’m thinking being on college union and being on student leadership at (GLU). Because you just see not only the people that express these kinds of things like I recognize them as being—there is a tangible sense that these people are humble and the kind of person you want to work with.

Eliza said, “I think it is very comprehensive, which I like.”

With this six-part definition in front of them, I asked each participant to tell me a story from their own life that connected to one of the parts of the definition. Through these stories the themes emerged. Student leaders shared from their leadership experiences as well as other areas of their lives. Three main themes emerged as well as several subthemes. First, participants talked about how faith and humility go hand in hand. Second, participants spoke of their sense of self in connection to humbling experiences. Finally, participants described the effect of relationships on acting with humility.

Hand in Hand

The first theme that emerged was a connection between humility and the participant’s Christian religious beliefs. Every participant interviewed had a positive perspective of humility and thought of it as a desired trait. All 26 participants identified as Christian and were students at institutions that were faith based. Many of the participants referred to their belief system as their faith. This faith and humility were deeply connected. Jordan described this idea saying, “I think faith and humility is one of those things just like faith in action or like a lot of things that

go hand in hand with each other. You don't have faith if you don't have humility." Paul also used this same phrase when I asked how he connected faith and humility saying, "I am almost having a hard time putting it to words because in my mind they go hand in hand." Briana used similar language when she described the connection of faith and humility saying, "Well I think they go hand in hand." These participants saw both humility impacting faith and faith impacting humility.

Tabitha described the connection of faith and humility by saying,

Yeah um, I think humility is pretty central to Christian faith, honestly, because of what we believe about sin and the fall and the fact that we are in this helpless condition. We can't really, without humility, be in a place where we are able to be saved ... where we are willing to enter into communion with God and realize that there is an infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing being who is so much more than we can imagine.

Douglas saw faith and humility as woven together saying,

I think the connections between faith and humility are that I think true humility is not possible without faith. I think that you can achieve humility in a very profound form that is a very positive thing and that Christians would look at and say wow, that is great. I think that true humility needs that component of the reason why I'm humble is because I'm focused on God's work and I'm focused on other people as God's creation, as God's sons and daughters. I think without faith, you don't have that element of what is at the base of your humility. You can still practice humility in a way that looks like that but ultimately it is motivated in a way that is entirely different. I think that also, humility is possible outside the faith. I just think it is a lot harder. I think that if you don't have the

power, the empowering of the Holy Spirit, it just makes the struggle so much harder to do it on your own power.

Tobias described his connection of faith and humility saying,

Well going back to how I think of humility in my mind of having a proper understanding of others and those around us. I think the key person to understand is God because if we properly understand God and what he is doing in our lives and the lives of others, we are not really going to be focused on yourself at all. So I think it is my faith is absolutely vital and I couldn't be humble, I couldn't stay focused on outward things as opposed to inward without my faith. Cause my understanding of God is the start of my understanding of humility.

Drew said, "Um, I would connect it [humility] the way I see it is it is so integral to how I practice and embody my faith." Drew went on to say, "I want to be humble, not because I was told it is good to be humble, but I think that there is a biblical imperative and that there is wisdom there that can be traced back to scripture."

AJ talked about the connection of faith and humility saying,

But I think that for me personally, my faith is probably a major part of my humility. Just to understand that (a), I'm not always right. And many times I'm wrong. So other people's input and ideas are just as valuable if not more than mine. So just how I see others or treat others, I think that comes from my faith. So the humbleness in my social relationships. Then sports—just understanding that it is a gift from God to play and be able to play and to have the abilities to play at the level I do. To try to remember as best I can that it is not about me and just to honor Him on the court and how I act. In my relationship with my guys, just treating them, even if I don't want to, always be involved,

interact, or want to, cause some guys you can see really care about investing and developing a relationship with you and enjoy talking to you. Other guys it doesn't seem like they—it is not that they don't like you but they just don't care as much to invest or just their personality is they are more to themselves and don't really. I think that just taking the humility approach of they all have value and they all matter and they all care, kind of keeping that in perspective and what not.

For AJ, his faith led him towards humility and this desire to act with humility then impacted his actions both in how he saw his own tennis accomplishments and also in his relationships.

Paul described the root of humility being in his faith saying,

I mean I think regarding humility, one thing that we didn't talk about a lot is just like I think that with Christianity especially, one of the primary things, like primary beliefs, is, I forget the verse reference, but it is if anyone wants to come after me, he has to deny himself and take up his cross. And I think following the model of Christ and living by his words means like dying to yourself. And I think that, that is reflected in this definition. You know, relatively low self-focus, keeping one's own abilities and accomplishments in perspective. I think it all comes from realizing that we are not meant to be living for ourselves. Um, and a recognition of larger things, namely God and his kingdom. So, so I think if you want to pull religion into it, that is kind of where I would say the root of humility is.

For all of these respondents it was difficult to think of humility outside of the context of their faith, Christianity. These connections can also be broken down into two additional subthemes: Jesus as humble and faith providing perspective.

Jesus

One subtheme of the idea that humility and faith go hand in hand was the way in which participants desired to be humble like the central figure in the Christian belief system, Jesus. Within Christianity, a central tenet is the importance of imitating or acting like Jesus. Many participants identified Jesus as humble and identified that Jesus' humility made this a valuable character trait for Christians to possess.

When I asked Lisa how she connected her faith and humility she said, "Well I think Jesus is the epitome of being humble so that is where I get it from I think." When I asked Cable his definition of humility he said, "A lot of my world lens comes through ministry so I think immediately of Jesus and his example of washing the disciples' feet." Paul described his definition of humility saying, "I think ultimately like the first thing that comes to my mind when talking about humility is like Christ's example."

Skyler described Jesus as an example saying,

Um just over my span of growing up in the church you always hear sermons on humility and what it means to be humble. Pride is a sin so you don't want to be prideful so you want to work on, we hear sermons on Philippians Chapter 2 and Christ's posture of being humble and his divinity was not something to be grasped. So the same sense that we should too also model Christ in the example of lowering ourselves as well. I have just been told that a long time."

Skyler went on to add, "If our main icon in Christianity is willing to humble himself, should not the followers that are to be little Christs also do the same."

Drew described the importance of Jesus in his perspective of humility saying,

You know. Jesus exemplified humility as well. That is another thing when I think about Jesus, how Jesus did humility. How he led through serving others and how his authority came from his service of others. The ways that he condescended and loved us. So, there is also the model of who Jesus is. But yeah, I just think that humility is such a basic like, very core tenet to how I live out, how I live out, how I understand the Christian faith.

Nora said, “It is just seeing the example of humility that Jesus displayed when he died on the cross for me and for you. Seeing that I think is a way where my faith, my humility is definitely impacted by my faith.” When talking about where she got her perspective on humility Peyton talked about how her faith had shaped her definition saying,

Cause being like ok if there was anyone who could have been walking around on earth, the boss of everything, it would have been Jesus. But then like that is not what he did. So thinking through that has been really important. I think that is part of it.

Nick described a similar idea to Peyton saying,

Then look at me, I’m Jesus, I’m you know, doing what Jesus does. You know he just, feeding 5,000 people, walking on water, that is cool stuff. If somebody today could do those things, no doubt there would be some big press about it and that kind of stuff. But Christ remained humble in all of those things, to the point where even through all of his goodness, people wanted him crucified you know. So to me, I see that picture of like being humble in the good times when people were like thank you Jesus for feeding us, for saving us, for all that stuff. And then humble in the bad times when people were like you are a heretic, you should be put to death. He was still humble then. He didn’t say, ‘do you remember all those great things I did, how awesome I am,’ and he just remained humble through it all.

Nick saw that despite Jesus' accomplishments, he remained humble and Nick desired this humility in himself. Brianna spoke of Jesus' actions saying,

But I think that like Jesus put others needs obviously way above his own and served people so well. And like obviously he never made a mistake so there is that. But like he called out the strengths in people and then challenged them to grow the things they were struggling in. There was this idea like you can know who you are and know your strengths and then use those to serve people through service and not in like top of the chain kind of way. So I think they [humility and faith] go hand in hand.

With Jesus as an example to follow, participants saw humility as a positive trait and desired to imitate this behavior.

Higher Power

Finally, participants spoke about having the perspective that there was a higher power than themselves. They spoke of both the greatness of God, God being in control of everything, and of their imperfections in relation to God. As Tabitha spoke of God as a higher power she said,

I think because I don't see the point of my existence and my being, my mission here on earth as having to do with me so much. It is not about my being loved or my being this or my being that. It is about God being glorified through me in however he chooses to do that.

Tabitha added "I'm called to glorify God and to love God and love others. I'm not called to try and build myself up. I guess that would be the thinking behind that" and also to say,

But where we are willing to enter into communion with God and realize that there is an infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing being who is so much more than we can imagine.

And realizing how small we are in comparison to that. And I think so our relationship to God I think places us in a position of humility. Or in order to recognize that, we have to be in a position of humility.”

In my conversation with Paul, he said,

Cause like I mean obviously I know that like God is more important than me but I think that there are times in my life and like I think generally also helps me realize this when I am like trying to like put my plan above God’s plan, which is honestly in a way saying that like no, God, like I know how this should happen.

Lisa connected her faith and humility through acknowledging that God “is sovereign” and she is not in control.

And so like I think I connect my faith with being humble as like in the Bible it says you need to die to yourself and you need to like acknowledge that God is sovereign and you are not in control of the things that are going on totally. And just being willing to like trust him that he is sovereign. So I think like as a Christian, I have just had to like acknowledge that I’m not God and he is God.

When describing her perspectives on humility Soraya said,

I would be such a malicious person, Scott. I’m here to tell you this right now. I’m selfish. I’m broken. I’m lazy. But because I truly believe and have sold myself out to the idea that every human being I interact with is a reflection of God’s image. I believe certain things to be true about God and I respect Him because of that and love Him because of that. Since I and others are a reflection of that, I need to love and respect everyone baseline.

Soraya understands herself to be imperfect and others to be imperfect as well. However, because of her perspective of God, she chooses to value others.

Maria described having a perspective that God knew more than her saying, Cause like I mean obviously I know that like God is more important than me but I think that there are times in my life and like I think generally also helps me realize this when I am like trying to like put my plan above God's plan, which is honestly in a way saying that like no, God, like I know how this should happen. I know how to do this better than you. Which is not helpful. But that is also a little tricky to recognize in yourself and I think it is something that I often recognize after it happens and not as much in the moment of when I'm doing it.

When talking about her own abilities Maria added, "And like I mean to pull a spiritual thing to realize I'm not doing it on my own but I can't do anything on my own. But only God through me." Emily described a similar perspective saying,

I guess if I am thinking of the essence of humility as where the source of it is recognition that it is anything you do is not of your own power. And just a consistent posture of knowing that God is good...

Emily and Maria's perspective of God as being in control and being the giver of their abilities led them towards a posture of humility

Alyssa talked about Jesus as a model and also added in a perspective of God giving abilities saying,

I guess I just always think of like this is what God is calling us to be is like to be humble and confident in who he is and not in ourselves. So I haven't really thought much further than that, it is like well, this is what Jesus said so might as well do it. But like not

necessarily knowing exactly what that means, it just has always been like everything that I am good at and that I have is because Jesus gifted that to me.

This view of a higher power's impact on humility lines up with Tangney's (2000) definition as she wrote about acknowledging weakness and limitations "often vis-à-vis a 'higher power'" (p. 73) and in "keeping of one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective" (p. 73). Additionally other scholars connected humility and monotheistic traditions as submission to God and a realization of one's place in the world (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). While not exclusive to Christianity, this theme does align with information found in the literature review.

For these Christian students at Christian institutions, there were external expectations and motivations that they would possess and grow in humility. Participants saw their faith as the source of their motivation for humility. They also spoke of imitating Christianity's central figure, Jesus, as a model of humility. Finally, they felt that their faith called them to acknowledge that there was a higher power and that they were imperfect. For all 26 participants humility and their belief system were connected.

Sense of Self

A second theme that emerged from the data was a connection between humbling experiences and a person's sense of self. When I asked participants to describe specific experiences in which they acted with one of the six aspects of Tangney's (2000) definition of humility these descriptions followed a clear pattern. Most stories participants told included or connected a description that the participant had given of themselves or of how they saw themselves. This sense of self would lead to describing a particular situation in which the individual faced something counter to this perception or description of himself or herself.

In describing herself Luna said,

One of my strengths is discipline and I just gotta get things done. Umm and so and I always thought of myself as like oh I am like a super great RA because I got these floor decorations done on time. I get things done on time, like my residents seem to like me a lot and like ya know all the things that give you affirmation and validation.

Luna then went on to describe a situation in which she failed to get things done on time.

I was like nope I always get things done on time on deadline and like I never miss anything which is true. I like hate turning things in late I never ask for deadlines blah blah blah blah, but then I had completely forgotten to like register for the conference that I was going to and pay for the conference I was going to present at and I started freaking out and I was like God this is you taking down my pride because I thought I was really good at deadlines and I'm not and I'm making mistakes and I'm not this super disciplined person. I am still disciplined, but I'm not as like a perfect disciplined person as I thought I was.

For Luna, who saw herself as someone who gets things done on time, forgetting to register for a conference she was presenting at was a humbling experience.

Describing herself in a similar way, Maria said, "I'm like there is no average (GLU) student, but when people talk about the average (GLU) student, I definitely fit into that type A, I can do everything on my own type of personality." In her leadership position on one particular occasion Maria had a moment where she did not live up to this perception of herself.

Yeah I send a ton of e-mails in my job and there was like an important e-mail at the beginning of the year about a chapel that we did and I just didn't send it and it ended up creating a lot of work for the other people on my team. And I just would not

acknowledge that I had just forgotten to send it and I just remember having a million excuses. Oh, I thought I told you to do it and them being like no. I would be like oh yeah well you know, oh I had other things going on and I think I sent it after that. I'm going to check my e-mail. I just knew that I hadn't sent it but I just couldn't bring myself to like admit that and be vulnerable in a leadership role in front of other people.

For Maria, this particular experience became humbling because she saw herself as someone who was type A, but her actions did not line up with this when she forgot to do the work she said she would do .

Another example of this is when Douglas described himself as “highly intellectual” saying,

When I was in ministry school there was a guy that I was really good friends with. And he and I, we both saw ourselves as highly intellectual and we were on the opposite side of almost every single place that you could be opposed. And it was great because we had a great friendship.

For Douglas the act of humility came in the form of having “an openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice” (Tangney, 2001, p. 72). Douglas described this relationship saying, “We both respected the other person and we both learned that there is somebody out there who is highly intellectual, who believes things that I think are, why in the world would you believe that?” Douglas had to figure out how to reconcile the idea that he was highly intellectual and that someone whose intellect he also respected might have a different perspective than him.

Cable described a similar sense of self and humbling experience sharing about when he first came to Crossroads University.

I was in the honors college here for the first three semesters that I attended (Crossroads). And I had always considered myself to be a pretty well read and educated person. Like I said I was in Podunk nowhere. I loved reading and taking time doing that. I'm like I have read a lot of books, I know a lot. And day one of honors college immediately recognized, I have no idea what is going on here. The students who were there were much more well read than I am and much more intelligent. They had like done academic things I had never done.

Cable understood himself to be well read and educated, but through his time in the honors college he was humbled by the knowledge of others.

Mario, Jordan, and AJ all thought of themselves as athletes or athletic. Mario was a wrestler and said, "My worth was sort of in like I'm a good wrestler." When he broke his arm he was forced to reevaluate this idea.

Yeah I look at my arm breaking when I was, I was playing a game of tag junior year of high school and my friend was chasing me and I jumped over a fence and kind of like the back of my foot caught it and I fell just on my arms and one of them broke. And like I couldn't wrestle. I would define that as a humbling experience in so far as I had no use of my right arm so I couldn't really write. I couldn't even do like regular things that I didn't even realize you can't do without a right arm, brushing your teeth is really hard. Bathroom things are really hard without your dominant hand. Things I didn't even think about. That experience was humbling in so far as my idea of worth was taken away by something.

Mario also talked about how coming to college impacted his perspective of himself saying,

I think that when I was on the wrestling team freshmen year, I got like clobbered a ton. By like a bunch of different people who were way better and stronger than me. So that was also a humbling experience in so far as like there are way bigger fish than me. So this thing that I valued myself as very good at.

Jordan also saw himself as an athlete and talked being someone who “loved sports.” His humbling experience came in the form of being injured doing athletics and continuing to try to stay active, eventually having six knee surgeries. He described this experience saying,

Are you either going to just completely forget about all of them (knee surgeries) and just keep on going on your own or are you going to be able to be like ok, these knee surgeries changed me. And being able to look at the world differently and humbled me to a point of where I know I need to not be prideful anymore. And being able to give up in the fact of sports. I loved sports but I couldn't do it and I kept on trying and trying knowing that like ok, I physically can't. But I'm still going to try and do it anyways cause I just wanted to. But understanding ok, that part of my life is over. I need to give that up and go a different way.

For both Mario and Jordan physical injuries brought about a reevaluation of how they saw themselves in relation to their physical abilities.

AJ is a college athlete and described himself saying,

Yeah I'm part of our tennis team at (Beltrine) and so to play at a college level and on a team that is pretty solid—most people train their whole lives and have put a decent amount of time, effort, and pride into their ability.

He also said that each of his family members, including his parents, also played collegiate tennis. In describing his humbling experience, AJ went on to say,

And then you have a rough day and lose to a guy that maybe you should have beaten. Or you just play a guy who is flat out better than you and it is—definitely is a humbling experience. I think it is pretty easy, especially in sports, to not keep your accomplishments in perspective. And to yeah just start to believe you are better than you are.

For AJ, humbling experiences came within the context of who he saw himself to be as a tennis player.

For Mario, Jordan, and AJ physical prowess was a way in which they described themselves. When injury or defeat took away physical ability Mario, Jordan, and AJ had to find their sense of self in a different way. In the words of Mario,

That experience was humbling in so far as my idea of worth was taken away by something. My worth was sort of in like I'm a good wrestler. My worth was in I can do these cool things. But I really couldn't do any of the things I thought were awesome. Another form of identification or sense of self came through scholastic accomplishments. Eliza connected with this idea of self-perception and humbling experiences saying, All my life I have been straight A student, like president of every club, valedictorian, all those kinds of things. Like definition of over achiever. And then coming to college like my first year was a lot harder than I thought it would be. I still did really well but then I have been dealing with a lot of health issues and that is really what has humbled me. Because like I'm dealing with like chronic fatigue type things and it is just not diagnosed at all and I have been going to doctors for like two years. And like it is really like incapacitated me school wise. I can't take on as many leadership activities as I want to. I have had to quit a lot of stuff. I have had to withdraw from my classes, that kind of thing.

I had to get lower grades than I want. And that has just been such a humbling experience to see like wow I put a lot of my identity and like my success as a person in like how well I did in school. And like I didn't realize I wasn't thinking of who I am outside of school and like what my identity is and what my life's purpose should be like outside of being a good student. And I realized a lot of the way I thought other people perceived me was like by how good of grades I got and how hard I worked and that kind of thing.

When Eliza was unable to live up to her description of herself as someone who achieved academically this was a humbling experience for her.

Nick described himself when he came to college saying,

I came out of high school not like anything stellar. Came out with a 3.5 GPA and scholarships to here and stuff. I was like all right cool, going to college. This is awesome. Excuse me. I had a lot of friends in high school. I was like this is going to be great, I'm going to go to a new place, meet a bunch of cool people, just make great friends, and then I'm going to make—get good grades, get a good job, whatever. It will be awesome.

Nick's actual experience of college brought into question his abilities, perceptions of himself, and perceptions of what college was going to be like.

And I got to college and it kind of kicked my butt that first semester a bit. I thought you know I have my classes spread out, so that will be fine. I can kind of, classes will be easy so I can just be more social. So I ended up trying to be social and didn't treat my classes as well and it ended up backfiring really hard. So I had to play a lot of catch up that freshmen year. It is all good now but at the time I was very prideful about going in and

being like oh I got this. College is going to be super easy. And then it not being super easy.

Throughout my conversation with Soraya she talked extensively of her family. She told stories of her mother, her father, and her grandmother. She said of her father,

My dad is one of my closest friends. Thankfully he still is. My dad is probably the person I look up to the most in my life. I drew so much inspiration from my dad; I quoted my dad all the time. I didn't think he was infallible by any means but he was as close as it got to what I want to be when I grow up personality-wise and character-wise. He was my model.

Soraya was deeply connected to her family and identified herself as one of its members. Soraya was also serving as the president of an organization that was working towards racial reconciliation on her campus. These two identities conflicted during the 2017 presidential election as her father voted for Donald Trump and she was an outspoken Trump opponent on her campus.

I thought it (voting for Donald Trump) was the antithesis of everything we were supposed to do as Christians, let alone in my role. I was just so baffled as to how he, as an educated, black male, African immigrant, knowing all the policies and platform that Donald Trump was supporting, knowing who I am and what I stand for. I'm a very vocal person. Very politically active. My whole family knows I'm outspoken. It broke me. And it contradicted everything I thought I knew about him. It was definitely a new idea. And he advised me to re-evaluate who I was voting for and why I voted for them. I was not all content who I voted for at all, it was Hillary Clinton. I wrestled with that for a

very long time. I cannot justify it now. No, I can justify but I was very angry that I did that and I still stand by my choice but clearly polar opposites in how we voted.

Soraya wrestled through how to bring these conflicting senses of self into alignment.

Part of what made the connections of sense of self and humbling experiences so significant was that I did not ask questions about identity or sense of self during the interview process. I simply asked participants to tell me about a time when they acted or practiced one of the parts of Tangney's (2000) definition. In explaining their stories, individuals first explained parts of who they were, how they identified themselves, or their sense of self followed by descriptions of humbling experiences where they acted with part of Tangney's (2000) definition. A few examples of how participants identified were as family members, athletes, intellectual, type A, and organized. Similar experiences are not humbling for all people. If I do not see myself as an athlete then an inability to do athletic activities is not humbling. If I do not see myself as someone who always gets things done on time, then missing a deadline becomes far less significant or difficult to acknowledge. If participants had not identified or seen themselves in a particular manner, responding with openness or an acknowledgement of mistakes would not have been so difficult.

The Effect of Relationships

The effect of relationships on acting with humility quickly emerged through the responses of participants. Paul said, "Having relationships with people and trusting relationships with people makes humility easier to practice in some ways." Paul went on to add,

I think if you are or if you trust someone really like deeply, it is much easier to be honest with some of the realities in your own life that you might be ashamed about. And so I think that practicing humility builds relationships.

He saw relationships as building humility and humility building relationships. Mario spoke of the effect of relationships by describing how these relationships led him towards openness to others ideas even when he disagreed,

I think for the particular individuals I was talking to, it was a love and respect for that person. Having been through the good and difficult and sort of enriching experience of being an RA was one thing. Having heard their voice and acknowledging them as wise people and loving people and people who don't just do things for no reason. So, I trusted who I knew them as people, while simultaneously wrestling with something that I thought was a thought of theirs that was really misguided and not true.

Douglas described a similar idea of openness through relationship saying,

And you know I just remember one day him and I were talking and he looked at me and said you know, you are one of the most reasonable people I know. Just the idea that we had this relationship where we could have these completely opposite beliefs and sit down with each other and talk about them and be ok with it.

These descriptions of the effect of relationships were then also explained by other participants through the specific stories they told. Some of these stories were already written about earlier in this chapter. Douglas was in a friendship with another "highly intellectual" individual who had a different perspective than him. Soraya was in relationship with her father that allowed her to be open to his perspective on the election. Eventually Soraya and her dad were able to have a conversation about their differences. Soraya described this by saying

But all that to say, there was a clear opposition to new ideas, contradictory information and advice from my father. And we had a very difficult, very tearful conversation over the phone two months ago. And we talked about it and he was so patient, like I knew he

would be. He was so understanding; like I knew he would be. And he was like yeah, I figured you were, you needed space and I was here waiting for you whenever you would come back. I love my dad. So that exposed me.

Maria spoke of a similar experience with someone who had an alternative perspective when she told a story about her roommates.

Ok um so like I live in an apartment and like I'm sure you know that like cleaning can be sort of like a contentious area when you live together. I felt like I was taking out the trash 100% of the time. I like genuinely believed that. So I like sat all my roommates down and I was like I feel like I have been taking out the trash 100% of the time and I don't feel like you guys are appreciating me and all the hard work I do. And they were like no; you just think you are taking out the trash 100% of the time. We take it out just as much as you do. I don't know what you are talking about. That was definitely a humbling experience from like wow, I have been so actually kind of angry at you guys for like a week now cause I feel like I'm doing all this work.

Maria was friends with her roommates and when she confronted them and they responded with an alternative perspective she was able to hear it rather than being closed off.

Mario told two stories of individuals who he worked with on his RA staff. Both stories involved Mario saying something to a peer in an attempt to be funny, but that was received in a negative way. When Mario's friends confronted him, he did not turn defensive. Instead, he said acknowledged his mistake and apologized. In explaining the first story Mario described himself as "a Christian, as an RA, as a friend." He then went on to explain the story saying,

And as sort of a joke that I thought would be taken in a good way when she got off the phone I was like, cause she had been talking the entire opening while we were opening

the floors like 15 minutes. I was like welcome back to America, B. Cause she had been talking in Spanish and I was just trying to get this sense that isn't it great that I'm not like that. Whereas like it just came across as, I think she didn't really like it at all. So I had to sort of admit to, even though I didn't intend it to be anything. That was really cool too cause she even, she took my acknowledgment of a mistake really well and didn't like lord it over me and trusted sort of in like the person she has seen who I am and knew that it was sort of incongruent with that particular action. We were able to work through that and what not.

In the context of relationship, Mario was able to hear that his actions were received as unkind. Rather than being defensive or negating the experience of another individual, Mario was able to admit his mistake to his friend.

Maria also shared a story in which she was confronted by a mentor leading to acting with humility. When she had forgotten to do something she said she would do and instead made excuses or blamed her peers Maria's supervisor said to her,

You didn't send it, you know what I mean. You need to just admit and like you just have to let go of this idea of being 100% perfect, 100% of the time. You have just got to let it go now or it is going to be a long year.

After this conversation, Maria admitted to the group that she led that she had failed to do what she was supposed to and took responsibility for this.

Others similarly mentioned this idea of being called out and each time it was by someone they trusted. After Jordan had his sixth knee surgery one of his friends came to him challenged him,

He said are you going to keep on trying without any help? Are you going to let these knee surgeries completely define who you are and being like ok, I'm going to completely discount the fact that I have had these knee surgeries. I'm going to keep on going. Or are you going to be able to say ok, God has used these knee surgeries to bring me closer to him and in turn, it changed my life.

Jordan remembered this as an important moment in his ability to redefine how he saw himself.

Sandy told a story in which someone she supervised over the summer confronted her on the way in which she was being treated. "There was one day at lunch where she goes, (Sandy), I just get the feeling that you don't like me." In thinking about it later Sandy said, "I think to her face I was definitely like no, I like you, I like you, I like you, but internally I was like wow, what did I do wrong to get her to that point." When I asked Sandy what led her to be open to hearing what her coworker had to say she said,

So one of my best friends, she was on my staff also and so she kind of talked to me about it afterwards and was like you know yeah it is maybe a little obvious in how you treat us. You know that like you don't give her the same attention as you do the rest of us. So that was like really hard for me to hear because I always obviously try to treat people fairly. But hearing that from one of the girls that worked for me, but also from a friend, made me realize like ok, thank you for pointing that out. And so I made it so I did notice what I was doing wrong and wanted to make that change.

When sharing an experience in which she acted with one of the elements of Tangney's (2000) definition Eliza said,

I mean just today. Um so, like the openness to new ideas. I actually have been talking with my boss. We just had like a conversation about how like sometimes my RA role

like the tone I use, when I talk about things, can come off like defensive or like I really don't want to like talk about certain subjects and things like that. She actually brought that up and I was like so taken aback by that. I was like wow I did not think at all that is what it was. We actually kind of agreed to drop the conversation and pick it up later. And like I was thinking about my first reaction was, I never came off that way. I never, that is never my intention. Like, I can't believe she thought that, no one else has ever said that to me. But the more I thought about that I was like she wouldn't just make this up and I need to like step back and realize that I'm not perfect. We actually had a really good conversation about it and just realized we were both misunderstanding each other.

These are just a few of the stories that were shared in which participants mentioned specifically hearing about how their actions were impacting others. Sometimes mentors brought this up, other times it was friend or family. These individuals changed their perspectives based on these conversations and these relationships. Two subthemes also emerged: comparison and empathy.

Comparison

Many participants mentioned the idea of comparison. Participants described observing the accomplishments of others in relation to themselves. For some participants it brought them to the idea that they did not measure up to others. Paul said,

I think one of the biggest things for me has been I think that coming into [GLU], I would say now that I was probably pretty proud. Um, and I think my freshmen year I couldn't help but compare myself to other people. And for whatever reason, in all those comparisons, I came up short.

Mario compared himself with other wrestlers saying, “I think that when I was on the wrestling team freshmen year, I got like clobbered a ton. By like a bunch of different people who were way better and stronger than me.” Luna talked about presenting at a conference saying,

This is not the most positive thing, but um seeing others accomplishments made me compare. Comparison, that brings down your pride, real down. Like you’re not that big of a deal. Like I remember I presented at a conference this past December and I was like ohhh I am so cool I presented at a conference, whatever. And then I heard one of my friends from the same major she presented at like, I presented at a statewide conference, she presented at a nationwide conference, I was like Luna, what were you thinking, you’re fine. And like maybe cool, but like you shouldn't think of yourself that way as much.

Douglas described comparison saying,

Yeah it is because I am somebody who was like oh I’m really smart and therefore what I believe must be pretty right. Then coming into contact with people that are smarter than me and realizing that they hold different views, has been a chance for me to really focus on that.

Cable talked about comparison when he first entered college and was in the honors college. He described this saying, “Compared to everybody else, I was struggling.” He elaborated on this idea.

I graduated from a public school with a class of 30 people. Middle of Podunk New York. We had a higher population of cows than people in my county. That is just the way it was. But, because we were a small school I excelled there. I was able to do everything I wanted to do. I was an athlete. I was a salutatorian. Participated in student government.

Participated in county government. I could do whatever I wanted to and be somewhat successful at everything because of that, if not successful like extremely successful. And coming to (Crossroads), which is not a big school by any standard, but coming to a school, which I graduated with 30 people and this is a school of 3,500 and I am not the smartest person here. I'm not the second smartest person here. I am not the most accomplished person here by a long shot. Simply being put into a larger pool of people than I was in high school has made me recognize the fact that I am maybe not as great as I thought I was. I mean in high school I did everything. I was captain of the wrestling team, captain of the soccer team, honor society president. You know all these honors and awards and leadership positions and coming here and realizing that there is a lot of other people who have done a lot more than that. And what I did, all those were accomplishments for me at that time, really don't mean a whole lot in the grand scheme of things.

Alyssa talked about her sister saying,

So I have a twin sister and she is like brilliant and I used to hate that because I'm like everybody knows like that she is the smarter one. I hated that but now I see with her being in the college at the same time, she is able to like help me understand things and my older brother is super goofy and just chill. That used to drive me nuts a little bit too because I like to be that way and people always like kind of compared us to that.

Ethan also talked of being compared to his family saying,

So I have three older brothers. So that right there. So I really, really, really struggled with comparison through forever. Really up through you know freshmen and sophomore year of high school. And then like the sophomore, junior year of high school is sort of

where that started to change a little bit. But I was like most definitely on the other side. I struggled with depression from just comparison, not like that only but that was a big part of having the shadow of three older brothers kind of looming over me essentially. And no matter what I got involved in, what I did, where I went, like someone would always one of my brothers and I would like I wouldn't be me, I would be you know Brandon's little brother or Justin's little brother. It wouldn't be like oh hey you know like I see you for you.

Some individuals also talked about how they observed or interacted with others who were more talented than them and that this helped them to develop a healthy perspective of themselves. Tobias said,

I think a positive way it (college) has affected my humility is because in college I get to meet a lot of different people on a regular basis. People that are talented in a wide variety of areas. And it is just good to be reminded that I'm not the best at something. Or even close to it. So I think it is just really cool to see so many talented people, so many intelligent people that are passionate about what they do and just be reminded whoa, there are some awesome people out here. I'm not all that. That is really cool. So that has definitely been a positive experience for me.

Tabitha said,

Definitely I would say the people who I have gotten to know are things that have made me more humble. So yeah, the friends I have made and even just people who I have observed from afar who are incredible, incredible people and it is just like wow, there are so many amazing people in the world. This person is so cool.

Peyton talked about comparison positively saying,

I think working with like a lot of different teams and different people and seeing different gifts and even like hearing different ideas in class have really helped with that (humility). Because someone might say something and I'm like wow I never would have thought of that and that is really good...But then especially this year, watching some of my like RA's lead, I can see them doing things that I'm like I never would have been able to do that or lead that way or even like handle this floor you have been given. And so being able to see people that I work with do things really well has helped me to be able to like both like name my shortcomings but also like appreciate other people's gifts and accomplishments.

Many participants mentioned the idea of comparison with those around them. When they had the chance to observe others, it helped them to put their own skills and abilities in perspective. Some participants talked about comparison like Luna who described humbling experiences as "the peg (of pride) being knocked down" adding, "This is not the most positive thing, but um seeing others accomplishments made me compare. Comparison, that brings down your pride, real down." Other participants observed those around them and appreciated their abilities and knowledge. Through the data, this subtheme of comparison emerged.

Empathy

A second subtheme of the effect of relationships was the idea of empathy. Soraya described her thoughts on this saying,

I think a key part of humility that I'm seeing less and less in the church is rejoicing with others when they rejoice and mourning with others when they mourn. I see a lot more rejoicing with others when they rejoice as opposed to mourning with others when they mourn. I think a huge part of humility is knowing that yeah, this is how my brother and

sister in Christ feels and I'm here to be with them in that experience. So empathy is a huge part of humility.

Nora shared a story of working at a nursing home for individuals with dementia and Alzheimer's during high school. Twice during the same week Nora was tasked with cleaning up bathroom messes in the dining room. When I asked her why she didn't quit Nora responded saying,

So after that I almost quit. I was like I'm in high school, I'm only 17 years old, why am I doing this work where I am seeing all of these things in one week. So I almost quit. I told my mom I was quitting and I was like I cannot do this anymore, it is disgusting. But I guess I just thought if these were my grandparents in this nursing home I wouldn't want someone to quit on them because of the disease that they had you know. What if that was my grandpa? It is not his fault. It is his Alzheimer. It is because there is a plaque build up in his brain, not because this is who he is. So I think it says relatively low self-focus.

The ability to put herself in someone else's shoes was critical to allow Nora to respond with humility in this situation.

When I asked Eliza what helped her to respond with humility in a particular situation she said,

Um, one, I think it is empathy. I think that is a big theme in my life is just knowing that like I don't know, I wouldn't want to be excluded. And just because of like if someone didn't agree with my faith, that is a big part of me, I wouldn't want them to be discriminatory towards me because of that.

Alyssa told a humbling story of academic frustrations in college. Because of some course selection choices she made early on in her time in college, she was being forced to take a basic math course over the summer after senior year rather than graduating on time.

I think after trying a few times and seeing that they (the registrar) weren't going to budge, I had to evaluate what am I hoping they will do cause if I was the registrar, I wouldn't let me do it. I would be like no, you didn't do what you were supposed to do, despite being told four times. So I think it was just kind of like putting myself in their situation, they are right and I'm totally wrong so I need to actually get it together and just do what needs to be done.

Nick told a story of what made him willing to admit that he was failing or making mistakes in student teaching saying,

When I saw my situation, I realized if I don't get the help I need, I'm hurting the students, not just my grade. It is not about my grade cause I was teaching. You know these kids were learning what they needed to learn from me. If I wasn't getting or if I wasn't able to teach them well then all of a sudden there are 150 kids that I'm not failing and not just me. So that kind of led me to that point of I better get some help.

When Nick was able to put himself in the place of his students, he realized that his mistakes were impacting more than just him.

Lisa described an openness to others and their perspectives telling a story of engaging with atheists who held different perspectives than her. She felt as if she was able to engage with these individuals because she understood them, their ideas, and their feelings.

Yeah um well I had experience talking to people that didn't believe the same things as me before. And then I also didn't grow up like in a Christian home. So I have been exposed

a lot to people that had different views. I was a person like that before. And I really value like just understanding where people are coming from. So I think that is kind of where I was getting it from. I also have a brother that is an atheist and him and I often have to have like, we often get into conversations where we need to respect each other or we are going to get into fights.

For each of these individuals the ability to put themselves in the place of someone else also them to be willing to act with the traits from Tangney's (2000) definition.

Through the interview process, the theme of humility and relationships emerged. Comparing with others around you as a means to change self-awareness and perspective was one way humility and relationships connected. Another form of the effect of relationships on participants was that being called out by someone often led to humble actions. Finally, several participants identified the idea that empathy, or putting themselves in the place of someone else allowed them to respond with humility.

Summary

The data that resulted from the interviews conducted three main themes and several sub themes emerged. Participants made connections between their faith and humility. Specifically, participants saw their faith and humility as going hand in hand. Two subthemes of this idea were that there was a desire to imitate Jesus as a humble figure and viewing a higher power impacted participants perceptions of humility. A second theme was the connection of humbling experiences to an individual's sense of self. Finally, the effect of relationships on humility emerged as a theme. Participants talked about how being called out by those they trusted and building relationships with others affected their humility. Two subthemes of this were the use of comparison in relationships and empathy encouraging participants to act with humility. Chapter

5 discussed these findings in depth with specific examples from participants. Chapter 6 will discuss the implications of these findings and explore a theory grounded in this data.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Chapter 6 will describe the theory that is grounded in the collected data. The purpose of a grounded theory research study is to “move beyond description and to generate theory” (Creswell, 2013, p. 63). Through the data collection process and coding of data a clear pattern emerged. One of the three research questions for this study was what is the process of humility development for college student leaders? By using Tangney’s (2000) six-part definition I was able to develop a theory which lays out the steps which lead a college student leader to act with humility within a given situation. Each participant described times from his or her own life in which he or she acted with humility within a given situation. Through these descriptions the model of situational humility emerges.

Theory

Axial Coding

In the second phase of grounded theory research, the researcher works to identify a core phenomenon as well as several other categories that impact this central phenomenon. This is known as axial coding and the process of relating categories and properties to each other” (Merriam, 2009, p. 200). “The ‘axis’ of Axial Coding is a category (like the axis of a wooden wheel with extended spokes) discerned from first cycle coding” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 244). The researcher also identifies additional categories noting causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, strategies and consequences (Saldaña, 2014).

Central Phenomenon

Allowing themes to emerge from the data, a central phenomenon was found. Corbin and Strauss (2008) refer to the central phenomenon or core category as “the concept that all other concepts will be related to” (p. 104) and as “the category that appears to have the greatest explanatory relevance and highest potential for linking all of the other categories together” (p. 104). Through the stories that individuals told, I identified humbling experiences as this central phenomenon. For each individual there was variation in what this specific humbling experience was. For some participants the central phenomenon was a physical injury or illness. Mario described breaking his arm. Jordan described knee surgeries. Eliza described an undiagnosed illness. For other participants it was specific to their leadership positions. Nora described a situation in which she heard from someone she was an RA for that she was not available enough and was not doing her job well. For Maria it was not sending an email that she was supposed to send. Emily described having the details of a social event she was planning not going her way. Others described having their perspectives on individuals changed. Jordan described an overseas trip working with refugees in which he realized that people with a different belief system than him were also doing good things. Soraya told a story of disagreeing politically with her dad. All of these stories share in common the idea that participants experienced something going differently than they expected. Specifically, their sense of self and their experience of the world did not line up. This sense of disequilibrium can be described as a humbling experience.

Causal Conditions

“Causal conditions refer to the factors that lead to the occurrence of the phenomenon, the subject under study, or the central idea” (S. C. Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002, p. 5). Creswell (2007) describes the causal conditions as the “categories of conditions that

influence the phenomenon” (p. 67). In these situations, what caused these particular situations to be humbling for these individuals was their particular sense of self. As described in the findings section of Chapter 5, through the data, the central theme of connections between humbling experiences and sense of self emerged. During axial coding, I identified this sense of self as the causal condition for the central phenomenon of humbling experiences. A humbling experience occurred for an individual when his or her experience of the world was different from or incongruent with how he or she understood themselves or who he or she understood themselves to be. Jordan and Mario’s injuries were humbling because they saw themselves as athletes. Eliza, Maria, and Emily had humbling experiences in their leadership positions because they saw themselves as good leaders or at least as people who were able avoid the types of mistakes that they had made. If these women had not seen themselves as type A or as good RAs then these particular experiences may not have come across as humbling or at least may have not had the same impact. If Soraya did not identify so closely with her family and as an anti-racist, then disagreeing with her father’s political views may not have been so significant. These are just some of the many examples from the numerous stories that were told. Through analyzing the data, I identified the causal condition for humbling experiences as an individual’s sense of self.

Strategies

The next step in the process of axial coding is identifying an individual’s strategies for responding to the central phenomenon, in this case humbling experiences. Strategies or consequences are the “outcome of the phenomena as they are engaged through action and interaction” (S. C. Brown et al., 2002, p. 5).

As discussed above, humbling experiences were a result of a misalignment of one's sense of self and of their actions. In order to cope with this realization, individuals had several options and most times utilized several forms of these strategies.

The first strategy was for the individual to reorient their sense of self. This is what happened for Mario and Jordan with their injuries. They were finding their identity in their physical actions or accomplishments. When they were no longer able to accomplish the same things they were forced to change where they found their identity. Cable described coming into college and seeing himself "to be a pretty well read and educated person." When he came to Crossroads University he was humbled as he interacted with others who knew more than he did or were more well-read. In responding to this difference Cable said,

Like is that really an accomplishment or does that just mean I was one of the only people there (high school)? And being able to say this means nothing, not nothing but it doesn't have any weight necessarily to me getting a future job or pursuing life in general. And saying the things that put value in then are maybe not quite so important as I thought they were. And the accomplishments I had in high school, in the end, they were high school. They are not life.

Nora described wanting to quit her role at a nursing home, but then she reoriented her perception of herself and she no longer saw herself as better than the work she was doing. Jordan described interacting with people from other religions also doing good work with refugees. Jordan described this saying,

What we did was we were able to come in to a non-profit organization that was government funded that there was all religions, all races. It was just a, it opened my eyes to the fact of like ok, there are so many people that have been able to do so much for our

world and so much for honestly God, even though they don't really know. Even if they don't believe in our God. Like it was crazy to me. And one thing that opened my eyes the most is one of my friends said he was like wow, we don't always give non-believers a lot of credit for what they do. And even though they don't believe in the God, like I said, that we believe in, as we were talking we were like they still contribute to the world in a way that is positive and might not be for a higher purpose. But it is also positive. I'm like wow that was very profound in understanding so many people around the world are helping and trying to help.

Jordan's original perception was that only other Christians like him were doing good work for people, but after interacting and seeing differently he had to change both this sense of self as the sole person who could be doing good and also his understanding of others.

Mario described two stories in which he said things that were culturally insensitive to his friends who were minoritized individuals. At first he did not believe that what he had said was wrong. He understood himself to be a good friend and did not think of himself as someone who would say hurtful things to his friends. After his friends confronted him, Mario came to a new understanding of these comments and admitted that he should not have said them. Mario described this saying,

That is sort of what I hung on to is that she was hurt by something I said and I want her to know that I ache because of that and that I love her enough to understand that when you hurt, I hurt and want to make that right. Even if I don't quite understand why you are hurt. I want to seek to understand why, I want to try and reconcile that as best as possible, and then most importantly make sure it never happens again. I think that is what sort of kept me in the conversation with her is that I believe she was hurting when

she said she was hurting. I believe she was offended when she said she was offended and wanted to seek to do whatever I could to make her not feel that way anymore.

Nick told several stories in which he changed his understanding of himself which led him to change his actions. The first story happened when he first arrived at college. He understood himself to be a good student, but then struggled academically and did not live up to this understanding. Rather than just give up on his studies or not care about his low grades, Nick responded saying, "So I had to play a lot of catch up that freshmen year." His identity as a good student and also as someone who wanted to be a teacher led him to reinvest in his studies.

The second story involved Nick's time student teaching in a classroom with 36 students. Nick described this saying,

For me, when I was first starting out, this was last semester, I was doing teacher assisting. I was very just confident in going into the teaching field and things like that. It came from kind of friends and family saying oh you are going to be great. You will be a natural teacher, which was really encouraging. But it may have given me too much of that pride in there. So, for me, I went into the teaching experience and definitely made a few mistakes right off the bat. I just didn't have good classroom management, wouldn't control the kids that well. I tried to you know calm them down using different things that I heard. But I was in more of an urban setting. So it didn't really work out that well with some of the things I had to learn. I had to acknowledge that I wasn't the perfect teacher, that I definitely had some gaps in my knowledge, I was like I don't know exactly how to deal with this group of students. So I had to look to my other teacher and my professors and be like look, my head is almost under water here.

Once Nick realized he needed help he changed his actions and stopped trying to do things on his own.

The final story is of an intramural championship game that got overly competitive. Nick said, “And both teams walked away pretty angry at each other because both of us felt like we were the better team and the way things turned out.” Once Nick and his teammates came to the realization that their actions weren’t in line with how they saw themselves they changed their actions.

We ended up having to, that night, we all Facebook messaged each other in one big group Facebook message and all apologized to each other. We were like, that was too much, we are sorry, and we just needed to move on and stuff like that.

Nick and his teammates realized that their actions and who they saw themselves to be were out of line so they changed the way they were acting.

When individuals found that their sense of self was out of alignment with their experience they had to make an adjustment so that they could bring these back into congruence. This change of sense of self took many different forms. When this sense of self changed, so did the individuals actions.

Intervening Conditions

A fourth part of axial coding is identifying intervening conditions. These are the conditions that lead to or help an individual in the strategy stage (S. C. Brown et al., 2002). Through the data, several specific conditions emerged that led individuals to a reorienting of self and actions. Two of these conditions were discussed in the themes section of chapter five.

The first intervening condition for these participants was their belief system or faith. They saw humility as a central part of their religious beliefs and desired to act like the Biblical

Jesus who they believe acted with humility. “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8, ESV).” Lisa called Jesus the “epitome of humility.”

Another intervening condition that was discussed at length in Chapter 5 was being in relationship with others. When individuals were in relationship with others this often led them towards a reorientation of their sense of self or of their actions. Several of the stories already mentioned in this chapter share examples of these impactful relationships. Mario was in a working relationship and was friends with the individuals he offended with his words. Soraya is in relationship with her father. Maria was in a working relationship with those on her team and was friends with her roommates when she admitted her mistakes to each group. Nick desired to change and said,

When I saw my situation, I realized if I don't get the help I need, I'm hurting the students, not just my grade. It is not about my grade cause I was teaching. You know these kids were learning what they needed to learn from me. If I wasn't getting or if I wasn't able to teach them well then all of a sudden there are 150 kids that I'm failing and not just me. So that kind of led me to that point of I better get some help.

A more specific form of relationship that also seemed impactful was interacting with difference. Interacting with people who were different than them and being in relationship led participants towards a use of the strategy of reorientation. Emily talked about this as she described her experience on the debate team and also as described being at college saying,

I grew up super, I guess conservatively and in a certain way, not that there is anything wrong with that, but in a town that this was the way you thought it was. I think my town is like 98% white. And like there are more cows than people, it is very rural. So in a

sense, I didn't grow up seeing differences in people. I didn't grow up like, not that I was super racist or anything but like you just don't grow up seeing I guess the way that everyone and everything contributes. And like the innate value of what other people have to bring to the conversation. And college has just changed everything about that in a really major way. So I think this has been more a trend just over the past year and a half as an aspect of growing and looking at college and being in community with people that are different from you.

Similarly, Jordan was interacting with people who were different from him in refugee camps and building relationships with them along the way. This led to him seeing value in them and what they did. Luna experienced difference throughout much of her life. She said, "I lived in Los Angeles and everyone's, everyone's different and so that's been kinda natural for me to accept different ideas, different viewpoints and different perspectives." Through regularly interacting with people who were different than her she found herself being open to others ideas and perspectives.

A final intervening condition I identified was empathy. When individuals were able to practice empathy and put themselves in the place of others this often led them to respond to a humbling experience with the reorientation strategy. This was discussed as a subtheme in Chapter 5. Both Nora and Alyssa told stories that identified their ability to put themselves in the place of others that led them to reorient their perspectives and their actions. For Nora it was understanding that the patients she was caring for were somebody else's grandparents. She asked herself, "What if that was my grandpa? It is not his fault. It is his Alzheimer. It is because there is a plaque build up in his brain, not because this is who he is." Alyssa came to the realization that even though she did not like it, if she was in the registrar's position she would

have responded to her predicament in the same way that she was experiencing from the registrar. By putting themselves in someone else's shoes, individuals were more likely to use reorientation.

Context

Another category within axial coding is referred to as Context. What are locations of the events that are taking place? The data did not produce a clear and specific location. For some individuals these events occurred in high school while others shared events that took place in college. Some were at home and some were on the job. There was not a specific location in which these humbling experiences were more likely to happen. While much of the context was decided by the sense of self of individual, it also became clear that college provided many of these moments for interacting with difference, comparison, and being in relationship with others.

Consequences

The final phase of axial coding is identifying the consequences of the use of the stated strategy or strategies. I believe that this consequence is what I initially set out to find in this research process. What leads an individual to act with humility? In this case, what are the consequences of the use of reorientation. Or in this case, the consequence of reorientation can be identified as acting with humility. Specifically acting with humility can be described with Tangney's (2000) six-part definition.

- Accurate assessment of self
- An ability to acknowledge mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge and limitations
- An openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping of one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective
- Relatively low self-focus

- An appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world. (p. 73–74)

When individuals were able to reorient their sense of self or their actions they were able to admit their mistakes, understand their abilities in context, be open to what others have to say, think about themselves less, and to appreciate others despite their differences.

Model of Situational Humility

In grounded theory research, following axial coding the researcher works to create a visual or narrative representation of the grounded theory (Cresswell, 2013). This final phase takes place during the third round of coding known as selective coding. Figure 2 is a visual representation of the model of situational humility. “These illustrative techniques bring codes and analytic memos to life and help the researcher to see where the story of the data is going” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 248). The model of situational humility begins with the individual represented by the box on the left of the diagram below. The individual is made up of one’s sense of self and of his or her experience of the world. The individual then goes through a humbling experience. This is a moment or moments in which one’s sense of self and one’s experience of the world are incongruent. The individual then faces what I refer to as the point of change. Within this point of change are influences on the individual, relationships, interacting with difference, faith, and empathy. These factors have the ability to influence the direction in which the individual heads in the future. At this point, the individual has a few options. The first option is that the individual can remain unchanged. Her sense of self and her actions remain incongruent. She can choose not to change either of these and continue on the same path. Many times this is a path towards pride. The second option is to change one’s sense of self or to change one’s actions so .

Model of Situational Humility

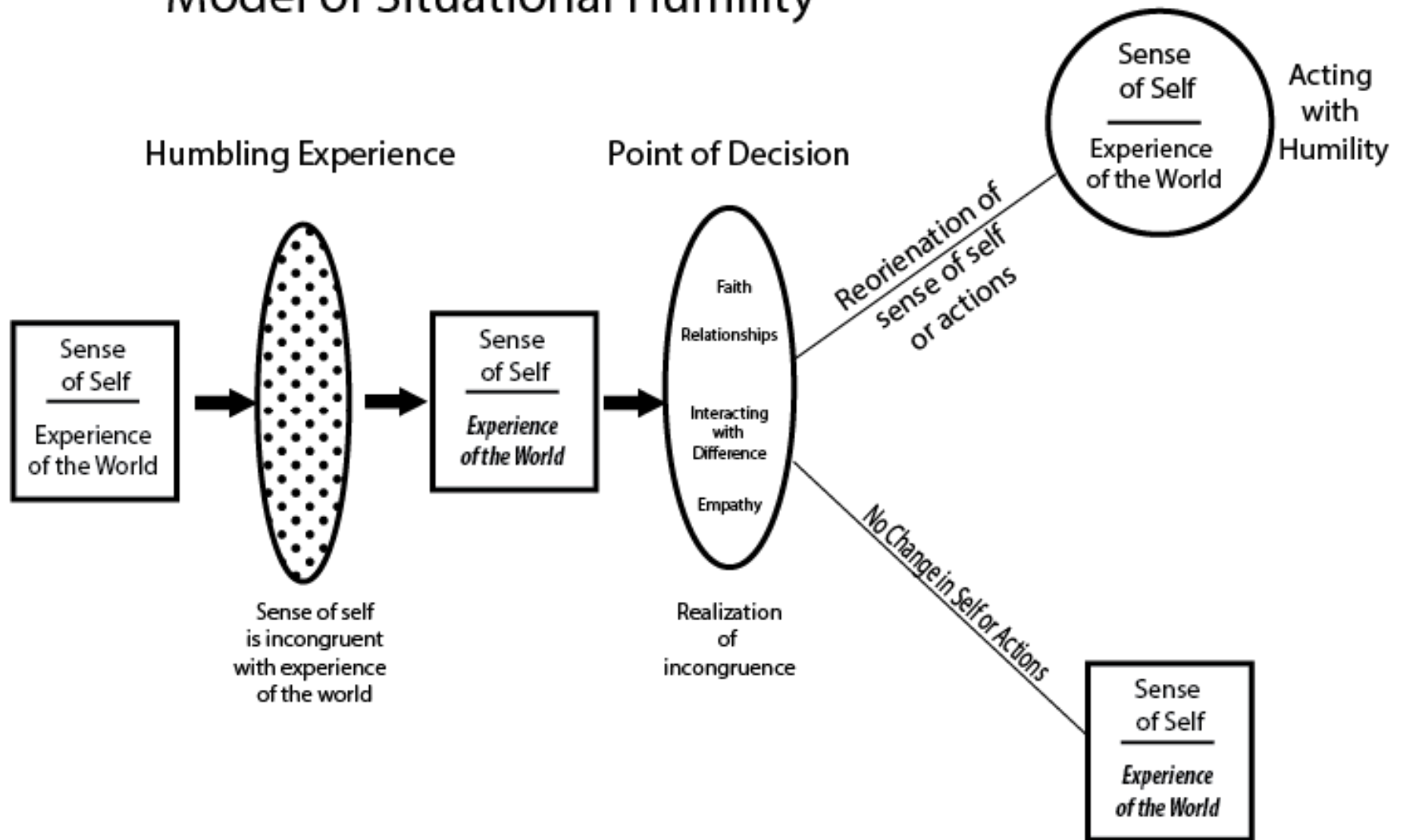


Figure 2. Model of situational humility

that they come back into alignment. When this sense of self and actions are aligned, one is responding to a humbling situation by acting with humility.

As one reads this model, he or she should think of the individual as moving through their life on long straight line. Some developmental models are designed in a cycle to show the return to an original stage or feeling within the developmental process. The individual is made up of a sense of self and of their experience of the world. When the individual goes through a humbling experience this is one small segment of this longer line. The individual has the humbling experience and continues on along the path of his or her life. They will most likely have multiple of these humbling experiences, segments, along the long path of their life with an unknown time or distance in between each one. However, they are unlikely to return to the exact same location along the path of their life

Soraya

In order to better understand this model I will share specific examples from participant interviews and how they fit into this model. Soraya is a student at Great Lakes. As we talked in our interview she described deep connections to her family. She also held a leadership position in an organization focused on racial reconciliation. These are both descriptions of Soraya's *sense of self*. Soraya's experience of the world also affirmed this sense through reciprocal relationship with her family and her anti-racist work. Soraya's humbling experience took place during the 2017 presidential election when her father, whom she admired, supported Donald Trump. Soraya's identification as a member of her family and as an anti-racist came into conflict. Soraya described this *humbling experience* saying,

I froze out my dad for two months and I just couldn't talk to him. I could not reconcile the idea of this man, who I knew so intimately and so well and who knew me so

intimately and so well, could justify his voting decision. I thought it was the antithesis of everything we were supposed to do as Christians, let alone in my role. I was just so baffled as to how he, as an educated, Black male, African immigrant, knowing all the policies and platform that Donald Trump was supporting, knowing who I am and what I stand for. I'm a very vocal person. Very politically active. My whole family knows I'm outspoken. It broke me. And it contradicted everything I thought I knew about him.

The *point of change* for Soraya came during a conversation with her father.

And we had a very difficult, very tearful conversation over the phone two months ago.

And we talked about it and he was so patient, like I knew he would be. He was so understanding, like I knew he would be. And he was like yeah, I figured you were—you needed space and I was here waiting for you whenever you would come back. I love my dad. So that exposed me.

Soraya identified this *act of humility* as an openness to new ideas and contradictory information.

Her relationship with her father aided her as she tried to be open to the idea that someone so much like her could hold a different political perspective.

Jordan

Jordan described himself as someone who loved to play sports. This was his sense of self and his experience of the world affirmed this through physical activity. For Jordan the *humbling experience* was having six knee surgeries. Jordan described this saying,

It was knee surgery, knee surgery, knee surgery, knee surgery, then I got a concussion and then two weeks later after my concussion healed, knee surgery and then knee surgery again. This is like 6 years of that. That really broke me to a point of before then, I was very prideful, very haughty, very cocky, honestly, in thinking that I knew what I had to

do. I knew my own way. I knew what needed to happen. But during all those experiences, especially the concussion, but like all those 6 knee surgeries, I got to a point of like ok I can't do this on my own.

Jordan's *point of change* came from a conversation with his friend Tyler. Tyler challenged Jordan to take a different perspective.

Are you either going to just completely forget about all of them and just keep on going on your own or are you going to be able to be like ok, these knee surgeries changed me. And being able to look at the world differently and humbled me to a point of where I know I need to not be prideful anymore. And being able to give up in the fact of sports. I loved sports but I couldn't do it and I kept on trying and trying knowing that like ok, I physically can't.

This conversation helped Jordan to reorient his sense of self and realize his own limitations. He redefined himself as more than someone who does sports. His *act of humility* was "the ability to acknowledge mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge and limitations (Tangney, 2000, p. 73).

Nora

A final story to illustrate the model is Nora. Nora described working in a nursing home during high school and some of her specific experiences.

So I was serving them their food and I was cleaning up after them, but through that role I got to get to know the residents a lot. So I wasn't only serving them their food, I really got to develop close relationships with them.

Nora's *humbling experience* came during one week in which two residents defecated in the dining hall and her job was to clean the mess up. She did not state that she was above cleaning up fecal matter, but this seems to be a fair assumption that Nora's *sense of self* would be that she

is above the task of cleaning up human feces. Nora's relationships with these people also factored in to her *point of change*. Nora described her *act of humility* as one of relatively low self-focus.

So after that I almost quit. I was like I'm in high school, I'm only 17 years old, why am I doing this work where I am seeing all of these things in one week. So I almost quit. I told my mom I was quitting and I was like I cannot do this anymore, it is disgusting. But I guess I just thought if these were my grandparents in this nursing home I wouldn't want someone to quit on them because of the disease that they had you know. What if that was my grandpa? It is not his fault. It is his Alzheimer. It is because there is a plaque build-up in his brain, not because this is who he is. So I think it says relatively low self-focus. If I was focused on myself I would have quit in that moment, but I thought, and it seems little, you are just serving them meals but really you have such an opportunity to invest in these people in the last year of their life. Even through just serving meals, you have the opportunity to make them smile every day. So I thought about that and I thought I'm not going to quit. So I didn't quit, I stayed and I have experiences that I will never forget like those.

Limits of this Model

Out of this model several questions arise and boundaries must be drawn on its application. This model does not explain what makes a person humble, rather it explains what leads an individual to act with humility in a given situation. Tangney (2000) describes this difference as dispositional humility and situational humility. Tangney (2000) describes dispositional humility as "a component of one's personality, as a relatively enduring disposition which a person brings to many different kinds of situations" (p. 76). Situational humility is

“humility ‘in the moment’” (Tangney, 2000, p. 76). This model describes what leads one to act with situational humility. Understanding what creates or develops dispositional humility is also a valuable question, but the model does not answer this question. Several participants mentioned that it became easier to act with humility when they acted with humility once, but there was not sufficient data to support a conclusion on this question. Emily said,

It (admitting mistakes) got so much easier, yeah, which is, now thinking about it, I love the idea of this kind of thing being so natural. Cause it just like hasn't been. Um, I am hoping from here on out and I think it will get to a point where my first reaction and I even saw that towards the end. It just became like, a problem arose, I'm really sorry if there was anything—maybe either putting a name to it like I know I did this. Or like I'm sorry this happened, regardless of how I may have impacted it. Yeah I think I'm hoping it will get more natural over time.

Drew described a similar feeling saying,

Um, I think part of it I think what I mean by that is it (admitting mistakes) is becoming normalized as well. Like it is still hard to do, still embarrassing to do. But in many ways I think I am just getting better and better at it—that I'm being prepared for harder and harder things as well.

Maria also described humility as a practice, “I think like humbling experiences and humility might be two like different things. Humbling experiences are experiences you have and you can choose to practice humility in those experiences or you can choose not to.” I asked participants to share with me specific situations in which they acted with humility. These acts of humility most often happened following a humbling experiences. The model of situational humility helps

one to understand what causes an experience to be humbling for an individual and what leads an individual to act with humility within a given experience

Pride

One way in which someone could view or respond to this model is to question how it fits for the prideful individual. Many participants described the quick and obvious acknowledgment of when individuals are not acting with humility. Tobias said,

I think I try to avoid not just pride but anything that can be perceived as prideful because I really don't like seeing pride in others. And so it has been an awakening to a point realizing hey, some things I do can be perceived as prideful and I need to check myself.

So, how does this model make sense of prideful individuals? What happens when an individual who is narcissistic or self-focused has humbling experiences? Through this research, my questions did not ask participants to describe these type of situations; however, a test case can still be created.

In order to understand how pride fits within the model one should start at the beginning of the model with the concept of *sense of self*. When someone is prideful, their sense of self is that they are better than others or of more value than others. Narcissism often contains an overly inflated view of self, seeing oneself as better than others (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004; Buffardi & Campbell, 2008; Morris et al., 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Tangney, 2000). The *humbling experience* in the model of situational humility is described as a moment when one's sense of self and experience of the world are incongruent. For a prideful or narcissistic individual the humbling experience may be when they are not given the right or privilege they think they deserve. It may occur when they are asked to do work they believe is below them. It also may occur when their work, schooling, or their professional life does not go as expected.

This person is then faced with the *point of change*. They can reorient their actions, they can reorient their sense of self, or they can choose to not reorient. For the person who has a disposition of pride or narcissism, he would not consciously or subconsciously reorient. Within the point of change a lack of trusting relationships, a lack of empathy, a lack of interacting with others who are different from them, or a lack of a belief system or external encouragement discourages reorientation.

Bronfenbrenner

The literature review in Chapter 2 identified Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental ecology model as one framework through which to view this research. Bronfenbrenner's model contains four parts: person, process, context, and time. These four parts can also be applied to the model of situational humility and specifically on the individual within the model.

Bronfenbrenner's model is about development. The model of situational humility is about behavior, but describes the process through which someone develops to act with a certain set of behaviors within a situation.

Person

Bronfenbrenner (1993) described the person as made up of developmentally instigative characteristics. Bronfenbrenner wrote that these characteristics helped to put a spin on a body in motion. "The effect of that spin depends on other forces and resources in the total ecological system" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 14). In the model of situational humility, the person is the individual who moves through the model. This individual is made up of their sense of self and of their experience of the world. In both Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model and the model of situational humility the individual is the center component who is being developed through the process.

Process

In the literature review, I described Bronfenbrenner's (1979) process as the primary mechanism of development and is the interaction between organism and environment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Renn, 2012). Simplified, the person and the environment must interact in order for development to occur. Process is this interaction. In the model of situational humility, process is the humbling experience through which an individual goes. It is the interaction between their person and their environment or situation that creates this humbling experience.

Context

Bronfenbrenner (1979) described a "nested" series of contexts with the individual at the center. This is seen below (Figure 1).

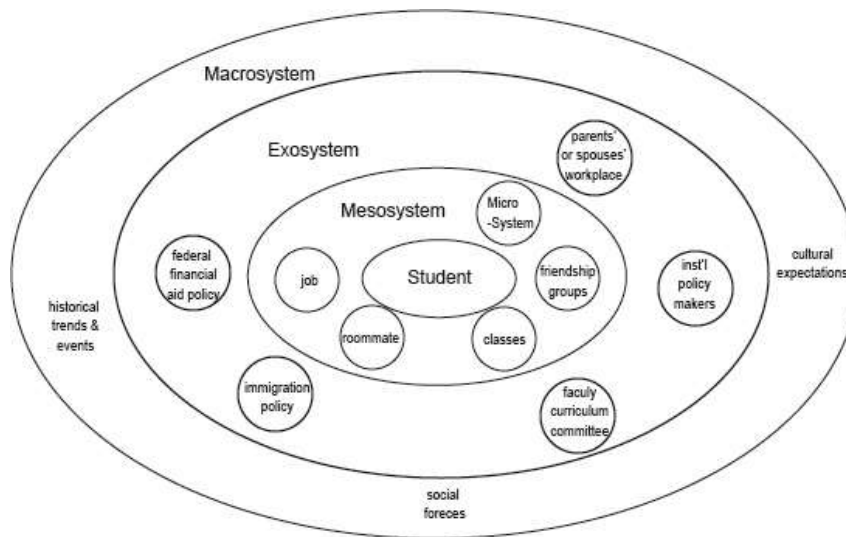


Figure 1 Applying the ecology model to a campus environment. "Circles and interaction between circles represent possible micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystem factors for an undergraduate student" (Renn & Arnold, 2003, p. 268).

Several of the components of the point of change relate to the context portion of Bronfenbrenner's model. A microsystem is the immediate face to face in which a person lives

(Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Renn, 2012). These are the relationships that an individual develops or that help to open them to change. Through being called out by friends and through interacting with people who are different than them, individuals are pushed towards acting with humility.

Time

The chronosystem is the “timing of biological and social transitions as they relate to culturally defined age, role expectations, and opportunities occurring throughout the life course” (Bronfenbrenner, 1995, p. 641). This area of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) developmental ecology model does not have a clear connection to the model of situational humility. In this research study I only looked at what leads college students to act with humility. Age, time in history, and situation in life were not determined to be themes, but if additional research investigated different age groups further connections could be found.

Summary

Chapter 6 explained the theory that was created through this research process. Following grounded theory method, I used axial and selective coding to create a model grounded in data surrounding a central phenomenon. This central phenomenon was an individual’s humbling experiences. Incongruence in one’s sense of self and experience of the world cause these humbling experiences. When the individual is able to change their sense of self or their actions, they act with situational humility. This chapter also provided several examples that participants described that followed this model. Chapter 7 will offer a conclusion providing limitations, future research questions, implications for colleges, and a personal statement on this research.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Chapter 7 will provide a conclusion of this research study. First, it will address limitations of this study. Next, it will provide a literature for empathy. Third, it will discuss implications for college and university experiences. Fourth, it will address implications for future research. Next, it will contain a personal impact statement regarding the development of this research study and the findings. Finally, it will conclude with a summary of the previous chapters and the research conducted.

Limitations

Within any research study, the findings have certain limitations. The purpose of this study was to discover the process of humility development for college student leaders. In this grounded theory study, the researcher discovered what led participants to act with humility within a given situation.

The most major and specific limitation is the homogeneity of participants. Although diversity of participants was desire, this diversity was limited based on the student leaders who volunteered to participate in this study. Twenty-one out of the 26 participants were White. This homogeneity limits the understanding of how race impacts an individual's ability to act with humility within a given situation. Additionally, all of the participants identified as Christian. Participant's Christian beliefs emerged as an important part of the decisions they were making. This does not explain whether all belief systems or all religions would have the same impact on

an individual. All participants thought of humility as a positive trait. How would participants respond to a humbling experience if they did not view humility as a positive trait?

Another limitation is that participants self-selected into this study. During the initial recruitment process, they were made aware that the study was about humility. When I asked Cable what led him to be interested in participating he said, “So it (humility) is something that is very dear to my heart and I’ve been working through it this time too.” Anthony said,

I know (gatekeeper) personally so I just thought it would honestly be a really cool opportunity and as an RA, humility is something that personally for me is super important. Because it is kind of like an avenue that helps me interact with my residents and get to know them better.

Many participants responded in a similar way. There is no way to know for sure, but the topic of the study could have also lead some students to self-select out of the study. Would students who are not interested in humility have responded to these questions differently?

Finally, this study specifically looked at how college student leaders respond to humbling experiences. With the current data, this model cannot be extended to the experiences of individuals who do not fit the profile of a college student leader. Not every story told by participants revolved around student leadership, but student leaders were selected for this study because of the ways in which their leadership opportunities provided them access to mentorship, training, and reflection. Student leadership did not emerge as a core theme of the data, but without more data collection with non-student leaders, this study should not be generalized to all students.

Empathy

One specific concept that emerged from the data, but that the literature review did not discuss, is the concept of empathy. Soraya said, “So empathy is a huge part of humility.” Several other participants either specifically used the word empathy or described gaining a perspective of others allowing them to put themselves in their place. Empathy emerged as one component of influence in the model of situational humility during the point of change for individuals who had humbling experiences. Possessing or thinking with empathy encouraged participants to act with humility.

In his chapter in *The Model American College* titled “Humanitarian Concern,” White (1981) described empathy as

feeling the feelings that another person appears to be feeling. The definition includes any kind of feeling. We can share, with a joy of our own, the joy of someone blessed by sudden good fortune. We can participate in the elation of a victor or in the happiness of someone whose life and work are prospering. We can be angry when a friend is angry at an injustice, and surely as every child so painfully knows, we can be anxious when we sense that those around us are anxious. (pp. 160–161)

White described that these feelings “arise(s) most directly out of what we have already experienced in ourselves” (p. 161). Peterson and Seligman (2004) described empathy as “(a) the ability to experience the affective state of another person or (b) a soft tender emotion of pity and concern that is associated with imagining the plight of another person” (p. 330). When an individual has personally had a specific experience, he or she is quicker to understand the experiences of others and to feel the feelings that the other is feeling.

White (1981) went on to explain what he calls an “expansion of empathy” (p. 162), a description of how empathy grows. Present in early adolescents, empathy continues to grow as individuals develop more complex ways of thinking. White also pointed to interacting with people and things who are different than oneself as a means for this empathy growth.

The expansion of empathy is aided by variety of social experience. The adventurous wanderings of many contemporary young folk, during which they encounter a wide variety of people, often result in a marked increase of empathic understanding. Studies of college students show that empathic side effects can arise out of summer employment. A young man from a comfortable, vehemently Republican home, for instance, surprises us with a highly sympathetic description of laborers, white and black, in the construction industry. To make himself financially less dependent, he had taken a summer job on a construction project. Through sharing experience with his fellow workers he found new channels for the outflow of empathy. (White, 1981, pp. 162–163)

White’s ideas align with the findings of this study. As students were able to interact with individuals and ideas that were different from their own or what they had experienced before, it built their relationships and opened these students to new perspectives encouraging them to act with humility and empathy.

In her chapter titled “White Privilege, Color and Crime: A Personal Account” McIntosh (1998) wrote from her own experiences and relationships. In setting up her list of 46 conditions of white privilege McIntosh said

For this analysis, I have broadened the sample to include friends, and colleagues in other racial/ethnic groups who are engaged in a variety of occupations outside of this building and line of work. Once again, I know something about their experiences and have heard

some of their stories. It is by contrast with these that I tell of my own experience, and of racial over advantage that makes my life markedly different from theirs in most circumstances, including many involving law, crime, and the courts. (p. 1)

Through her relationships McIntosh gained and understanding of the experiences of others and became more aware of herself. McIntosh went on to write,

The White readers who have found the analysis most unsurprising are in general those who, through interracial relationships, cross-cultural adoptions, and other ‘border crossings’ are positioned so as to have double or triple perspectives seeing on both sides of lines of privilege. (p. 6)

When individuals are able to see and understand the perspectives of others through their relationships with them they are more likely to accept these differing perspectives and be open to the ideas of others.

Participants in this study shared about empathy and the concept of “boarder crossing” referenced by McIntosh (1998). Emily described this saying,

I grew up super, I guess conservatively and in a certain, not that there is anything wrong with that, but in a town that this was the way you thought it was. I think my town is like 98% white. And like there are more cows than people, it is very rural. So in a sense, I didn’t grow up seeing differences in people. I didn’t grow up like, not that I was super racist or anything but like you just don’t grow up seeing I guess the way that everyone and everything contributes. And like the innate value of what other people have to bring to the conversation. And college has just changed everything about that in a really major way. So I think this has been more a trend just over the past year and a half as an aspect of growing and looking at college and being in community with people that are different

from you. So yeah that was not my—I would, I don't want to expand on the definition, but at least the way that it has kind of happened in my life is that it is not like I never or it is not like I didn't appreciate other things. I just didn't, how do I explain this, when presented with other opinions or other ways of doing things, my natural reaction is to just believe that my way was better. Anyway. And so it has been a process of taking in the way that people see and do things and realizing that I guess when people say there are many ways to, there is more way to skin a cat, that like concept, that morbid as it is, there is a lot of different ways to do things that aren't necessarily, none of them are wrong.

Emily went on to describe her time on the debate team and in a course on civil rights that exposed her to different ideas and different people. Each of these helped allow Emily to put herself in the shoes of another.

Jordan told a similar story of change describing a trip overseas,

It was just a, it opened my eyes to the fact of like ok, there are so many people that have been able to do so much for our world and so much for honestly God, even though they don't really know. Even if they don't believe in our God. Like it was crazy to me. And one thing that opened my eyes the most is one of my friends said he was like wow, we don't always give non-believers a lot of credit for what they do. And even though they don't believe in the God, like I said, that we believe in, as we were talking we were like they still contribute to the world in a way that is positive and might not be for a higher purpose. But it is also positive. I'm like wow that was very profound in understanding so many people around the world are helping and trying to help.

For Jordan this also affected the ways in which he viewed and talked with others at his university when he returned.

And then coming back and having my eyes open to a fact of wow, so many people around here do so many different things even if they are someone who works in the cafeteria or one of the vice presidents of the school. I was just like they all have a little part, which makes (Crossroads) better, and it is like it honestly has been growing more and more steadily I guess.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) wrote about the idea of empathy and the value of relationships in their foundational work *Education and Identity*. Chickering and Reisser described seven vectors of development for college students. “The vectors describe major highways for journeying toward individuation—the discovery and refinement of one’s unique way of being—and also toward communion with other individuals and groups, including the larger national and global society” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 35). The fourth vector is titled “developing mature interpersonal relationships” (p. 48).

Developing mature relationships involves (1) tolerance and appreciation of differences (2) capacity for intimacy. Tolerance can be seen in both an intercultural and an interpersonal context. At its heart is the ability to respond to people in their own right rather than as stereotypes or transference objects calling for particular conventions (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48).

In their description of this vector, Chickering and Reisser referred to a movement away from narcissism towards the development of mature relationships. It is very difficult for one to develop empathy if he or she is narcissistic and only able to focus on himself or herself.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) called academic institutions to help students develop empathy. “Now that multicultural communities are growing, academic institutions have a responsibility to equip their graduates with tolerance and empathy as essential survival skills”

(Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 150). A lack of empathy can lead individuals to an ethnocentric perspective rather than an ethnorelative view. “New friends, work experiences, and messages that altruism is a duty can foster the growth of empathy” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 159).

Through the research process, empathy emerged as interrelated to humility. White (1981) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) did not write specifically about humility, but their descriptions of empathy contain several of the components of Tangney’s (2000) definition of humility. Empathy leads to an openness to others and a valuing of others and their perspectives. Additionally, White and Chickering and Reisser described individuals developing empathy through interacting with and being in relationship with diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Empathy and humility are closely connected and both are valuable to growth and development of college students.

Recommendations for Higher Education

While not generalizable, the information contained in this study has implications for both university leaders working to create an educational experience and for individuals who desire to act with humility. Researchers acknowledge a rise in self-focus and narcissism (Twenge et al., 2008a), humility sits in contrast to these characteristics. In an age of self-promotion and social media based bragging, the idea that our sense of self impacts humility is important. When we believe ourselves to be more valuable than others because of what we have accomplished, we are prone to act with pride more than with humility. The development of character is an important outcome of higher education (Hersh & Schneider, 2005). If this is the case, then university leaders should be working to find ways to help students grow in humility. While this study did not find specifics on how to help individuals develop dispositional humility, it has identified

ideas that help lead an individual to respond with humility within a given situation. These traits and experiences should be developed and grown.

One specific recommendation for university leaders who desire to see students act with humility is to provide opportunities for students to build relationships with and get to know people and ways of thinking that are different from their own. For some students, something as simple as attending college provides them with opportunities for this type of interaction and growth. For some students like Charles simply taking classes outside of his academic discipline was humbling,

So I have been humbled a lot of times just by taking, with [Great Lakes] being a liberal arts college, by taking classes of different disciplines. You take a different discipline and they use a whole different set of vocabulary and you realize I don't understand—you don't have anything to like hang your hat on. You are kind of like trying to grapple with new issues. And so I actually really enjoy doing that. I love the experience of getting in a class, a gen ed class where this isn't in my major. If I could, I wouldn't really major, I would just kind of take classes.

For other students the opportunity to interact with difference came from the interacting with peers. Mario shared several stories, mentioned above, about friends he worked with who came from different backgrounds than he did. These relationships allowed him to act with humility when confronted with some of his actions. The opportunity to interact with difference does not simply mean interacting with people who hold different perspectives than you, but it means building relationships with people who are different from you. Chickering and Reisser (1993) refer to this as developing mature interpersonal relationships. When individuals interact with

and build relationships with others who are different from them or hold different perspectives it leads to a greater openness and to empathy.

A student's most important teacher is often another student. Bonds formed in college with classmates, hallmates, teammates, or blind dates may last one semester or a lifetime. Friends and reference groups filter and modulate the messages from the larger student culture. They amplify, dampen, or distort the force of curriculum, instruction, codes of conduct, and institutional norms. They can trump the best teacher's ace and stalemate the most thoughtful dean. (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 392)

The relationships that the individuals in this study described were face to face, interpersonal connections.

Traditional, on-site course work and co-curricular activities allow for these types of relationships to form. Residential experiences also provide rich opportunities for these types of interactions. Living with a roommate or being in a community of peers in a housing unit provides an incubator for meaningful interpersonal relationships to develop.

In addition to simply having individuals who are different than each other attend a university together and interact, providing opportunities for cross cultural or intercultural relationships and experiences allows these openness developing relationships to form. University leaders should work to create these opportunities for cross-cultural interaction to happen and should encourage dialogue between individuals with differing perspectives. These could be course requirements, programs, or service learning opportunities. This recommendation echoes the experience of Jordan who traveled overseas and worked alongside others who were of different religions and backgrounds than him. He saw the value of these individuals and this led to him to see value in others even when he returned from his trip. It is important to recognize

that the purpose of these trips impacts the outcome. Cross-cultural experiences should be set up as learning opportunities that value every individual. They should not be set up as opportunities for privileged, educated students to come and serve as a means of saving those they are serving. Emily describes this well when talking about a history of civil rights course she was taking saying,

We talk a lot about in that class about understanding other people and understanding their context as a means for loving other people. Because you bring validity to their struggle, which is why it is so important to appreciate the different ways that they do things.

The purpose of cross-cultural experiences should be to provide opportunities for understanding people and contexts helping to bring validity to who they are and their struggle.

A second recommendation to university leaders is to cast humility as a desired trait among students. The participants in this study all identified as Christian and for them, acting with humility was a virtue they desired. Jesus was seen as the model of humility and as the person they desired to be like. This encouraged them to respond to humbling experiences by acting with humility. If university leaders desire to encourage their students to act with humility then representative role models could help to encourage students to act in this way. University leaders themselves need to model humility in their own actions. This lines up with Kuh's (2000) recommendation of six principles for institutions trying to make character development an outcome of higher education. Kuh pushed that if character education is going to become part of what institutions do, it must become part of culture. At non-religious institutions, having faculty role models who act with humility could provide students with motivation and encouragement to act in a similar way. "After relationships with peers, relationships with faculty members are most important for students" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 316). Chickering and Reisser

(1993) cited numerous studies that demonstrate the impact of faculty members on student's growth and development. "Mentors can play key roles in helping students clarify purposes, values, aspirations, and career and educational goals" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 325). Through authentic relationships, faculty role models are able to impact and influence students.

One recommendation for both individuals and for institutional leaders who desire for individuals to act with humility is to provide opportunities where students can have humbling experiences. If individuals want to have opportunities to act with humility they should choose to put themselves through humbling experiences. For many of the students in this study, student leadership provided these opportunities. Luna said,

I've experienced these things (humility), I've experienced that a lot in my leadership. As I have been saying like it, like RA has just helped me acknowledge my mistakes and being open to new ideas and there's a lot of ideas, keeping my abilities in perspective, low self-focus, that I'm much, that I have to exert a lot of my energy for the benefit of others.

When talking about student leadership Soraya said, "every leadership role I've had has made me more humble" adding,

I have just been more intimately aware of my own flaws and my insecurities. And that has forced me to understand why those are there and given me more empathy for others like well if this is how I experience it, surely someone else does. Oh that is hard.

Jordan described this saying,

I think failure has impacted me in college the most. And the fact of just being able to understand that like I will fail and knowing that with humility I will be able to come back from that failure I think.

Through student leadership, many participants had the opportunity try new things and had humbling experiences where they had to respond. In relationship and with proper support, these opportunities allowed these students to act with humility. By providing challenge and support (Sanford, 1966), the college experience provides opportunities for development.

There are many additional recommendations for an individuals who desires to grow in humility. As the themes and model represent, there are certain factors that lead individuals towards acting with humility. Cultivating these factors could prove valuable for individuals who desire to act with humility. They should seek out opportunities to interact with those who are different or hold different perspectives than them. In the words of Chickering and Reisser (1993), “develop mature interpersonal relationships.” Individuals should work to develop empathy. When one is able to put himself in the position of someone else, he is more likely to act with humility towards that person. In general, being in relationship with others led individuals to respond to humbling experiences by acting with humility. Individuals who are not in relationship with others and do not receive feedback from others are not likely to act with humility when faced with humbling experiences.

A second recommendation for individuals is to assess their sense of self. Where is this sense of self coming from? If this sense of self is counter to the components of Tangney’s (2000) definition, it is going to be difficult to act with humility. More specifically, if one sees himself as having no gaps or limitations or has the perspective that he is of more value than others, humility will not be present. As an individual with that prideful sense of self moves through humbling experiences, they will need to reorient their sense of self and find their identity in new ways. The themes of comparison and being in relationship with others emerged from the data.

Two specific actions that individuals could do to try to grow the ability to act with humility were shared in participant interviews. One, someone could work to name ways in which others are more skilled, more accomplished, or seemingly better than themselves. Peyton described this saying,

I think working with like a lot of different teams and different people and seeing different gifts and even like hearing different ideas in class have really helped with that. Because someone might say something and I'm like wow I never would have thought of that and that is really good. So we are assessing different Bible Study methods right now and I'm just like some of these I don't like doing by myself because I love hearing other people's perspectives. But then especially this year, watching some of my like RA's lead, I can see them doing things that I'm like I never would have been able to do that or lead that way or even like handle this floor you have been given. And so being able to see people that I work with do things really well has helped me to be able to like both like name my shortcomings but also like appreciate other people's gifts and accomplishments.

By comparing and naming these strengths, it may help someone to acknowledge their own gaps or limitations. Also by focusing on others, it will lessen the focus on oneself. Secondly, as mentioned above individuals should seek to be in relationship, specifically relationships with those who are different from them. When we interact with and build relationships with people who we are different from, we can become more open to their ideas and perspectives altering our sense of self.

Kuh's (2000) belief that character is built through the culture of an institution is important. Institutional leaders should be working to create a culture in which diverse opinions and perspectives are valued and appreciated and where the value every individual is championed.

Through creating an environment of mutual respect and value that encourages dialogue members of that community will be encouraged to act with humility.

Future Research

While this research study has added to the field of virtue development by creating a model for situational humility, it also raises additional questions. Several of these questions relate to the limitations discussed above. What leads individuals who do not identify as Christian to act with situational humility? Also, does race or culture have an impact on the way in which an individual moves through the model of situational humility? This study used purposeful sampling and investigated student leaders. Are non-student leaders, prompted to act with humility by the same elements or experiences as student leaders? These questions all relate to college students who are the age of traditional undergraduate.

I did not begin this research with the understanding that I was specifically investigating situational humility. Through the participant interviews, this difference became clear. Participants described specific situations in which they acted with humility, but they did not describe always acting with humility or having a humble disposition. Further research into the development of dispositional humility could be valuable. In addition, identifying the point at which situational humility turns into dispositional humility would be an important step in dispositional humility research.

Further research on several components in the model of situational humility could also be valuable. One particular question is what forms an individual's sense of self? If this sense of self impacts an individual's humbling experiences, then understanding what develops someone's sense of self could be valuable. Additionally, after the reorientation phase of the model when an individual has re-identified or has a new sense of self, what is this sense of self? Ultimately,

what is a healthy sense of self? In contrast to humility, further research on pride, both situational and dispositional, would also be valuable.

Personal Impact of Research

Through this research project, I have realized the depth and intricacies of the concept of humility. As noted in the literature review there is a growing amount of research on humility much of which notes the difficulty of researching humility. I looked at each of these 26 conversations I was able to have as opportunities to be curious about humility. These conversations, coding, and the theming process have led me to ask questions about my own humbling experiences. When do I act with humility? When do I fail to do so? What is my sense of self and what has led me to this perspective? Am I able to admit when I make mistakes? When does my sense of self prevent me from admitting these mistakes? I am writing a dissertation on humility, would others view me as humble? While I do not have definitive answers for all of these questions I have certainly been more mindful and reflective of my sense of self and my actions.

These findings have also impacted my work. Much of my work is talking with students about their own growth and development. Many of these conversations are conduct related. A student has made a poor choice or violated community standards and I have the opportunity to be a part of conversations that try to help them grow. In the last weeks and months since I conducted this research I have often asked myself the question, what about this individual's sense of self or identity is preventing them from admitting they made a mistake or admitting that they are wrong? How do I help individuals to develop a sense of self that encourages a view of themselves as somebody who is still growing or imperfect rather than a finished product? All of

these questions have been meaningful and led to worthwhile conversations. I am hopeful that as I continue to practice situational humility it will also lead to dispositional humility.

Contemporary Need for Humility as a Response

Scholars have made a broad call for character (Burns, 2012; Hunter, 2000; Liddell & Cooper, 2012). Mass killings, riots, and cheating scandals are these scholars evidence of the loss of character. A return to character growth is intended to prevent these tragic situations from happening. This is a valuable cause; however, humility could also prove valuable in response to these painful situations.

When I look at current events like natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes, floods) or white supremacist demonstrations in Charlottesville, Virginia (August 2017) the humility of an individual could not have prevented these situations. These situations are angering, tragic, and heart breaking, but the responses to these current events demonstrate individual acts of humility in mighty ways. Individuals have demonstrated both a low self-focus and a value of all people and all things. Stories of neighbors caring for neighbors in the face of devastating loss or ideas like #dearyoungperson postcard initiative (<http://www.maxient.com/archives/7419>) aimed at bringing hope to the children of Charlottesville are a demonstration of situational humility. Humility is a virtue that leads individuals to respond to their own humbling experiences in positive ways, but it could also help to provide profound responses in the face of tragedy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to discover the process of humility development in college student leaders. With the noted rise in narcissistic tendencies (Twenge et al., 2008a, 2008b), the character trait of humility sits in contrast to those tendencies. The research questions of interest were

1. Based on Tangney's (2000) six-part definition of humility, what are the actions that college student leaders identify as humble?
2. What is the process through which college student leaders develop humility?
3. How do colleges and college experiences provide opportunities for the humility development process to occur?

I began by conducting a literature review. This review looked at the call and need for character in society and in higher education. Then, it identified an apparent rise in narcissistic tendencies and self-focus in today's college students and situated humility in contrast to these tendencies. Following that it reviewed literature on the definition of humility, connections between humility and religion, connections between humility and leadership, and current scholarly research on humility. Finally, it looked at relevant frameworks identifying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental ecology as a fitting lens.

Attempting to identify a theory of humility development, I used a qualitative grounded theory method of research. I conducted research at three different institutions over the course of a month and a half to allow for constant comparative analysis. Through purposeful sampling, 26 student leaders at CCCU member institutions volunteered and participated in 30 to 75 minute semi structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and then coded using open, axial, and selective coding. Through this process themes emerged from the data.

There were three main themes that emerged and several sub themes. The first theme was a how participant's faith and humility went hand in hand. Subthemes that emerged in this theme were participants desire to emulate Jesus as the central figure of Christianity and how their perspectives on humility were influenced by their belief in a higher power. The second theme was that there was a connection between humbling experiences and an individual's sense of self.

Finally, the theme of the effect of relationships on humility emerged. Two subthemes of the effect of relationships were the use of comparison and the impact of empathy on humility

These themes helped to develop a model of situational humility. In this model, an individual is made up of their *sense of self* and their experience of the world. When these two things become incongruent, the individual is faced with a *humbling experience*. At the *point of change* the individual can work to change their sense of self, their actions, or can choose to not change either. Influences in this point of change included empathy, relationships, and based on this research sample, one's Christian beliefs. If the individual did choose to reorient their sense of self or their actions, this led them to respond to the humbling experience with an act of humility.

This study was limited by the homogeneity of participants. Religion and race were largely homogeneous across participants. Given this homogeneity, future research with a more diverse group of participants would be worthwhile. Additional research on how individuals develop their sense of self and on what brings an individual to a place of dispositional humility would also be valuable. As college and university leaders look to help students act with humility, they should look to provide opportunities for students to develop mature interpersonal relationships particularly diverse relationships. These relationships open a door to empathy and understanding others. "Now that multicultural communities are growing, academic institutions have a responsibility to equip their graduates with tolerance and empathy as essential survival skills" (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 150). On an individual level, people looking to act with humility within a given situation must be mindful of their sense of self. Asking oneself, how are my perspectives of myself preventing me or helping me to act with humility is a valuable exercise on the journey towards acting with humility.

As individuals learn to find their value simply in being rather than in accomplishments or comparison they can be quick to act with Tangney's (2000) definition of humility practicing self-awareness, openness, perspective, a low self-focus, admitting mistakes, and valuing others.

There's joy in a life filled with interdependence with others, in a life filled with gratitude, reverence, and admiration. There's joy in freely chosen obedience to people, ideas, and commitments greater than oneself. There's joy in that feeling of acceptance, the knowledge that though you don't deserve their love, others do love you; they have admitted you into their lives. (Brooks, 2015, p. 269)

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APPENDIX A PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE DEVELOPMENTAL ECOLOGY GRAPHIC

Sent: October 26, 2015

To: Scott Barrett

Subject: RE: Permission to use Developmental Ecology Model Graphic

Hi Scott.

First, congratulations on getting to the dissertation stage of your doctoral program! That really is what the degree is about: Doing original research and writing it up for others to learn from. Courses, comprehensive/qualifying exams, etc. are the lead-up, but now you're at the distinctive moment of the program. Very exciting!

And I'm interested in your topic – I love the possibilities for looking at what might very broadly be considered "character development" through an ecological lens. (OK, to be honest, I love the possibilities of looking at ANYTHING through an ecological lens..) And whatever possibilities there are for developing humility, I'm all for. We've certainly got enough "opposite of humility" in society these days... Plus, I'm a fan of naming, studying, and trying to cultivate what some people think are old-fashioned traits (humility, purpose, duty, responsibility). Good for you!

As for the figure...so...I signed over my copyright to the *Journal of Higher Ed* when we first published that piece. And *JHE* is owned by the Ohio State University Press (the THE Ohio State U Press?). They have given other people permission – at no cost – to reproduce it in their dissertations. If you were to publish it later in a book or a journal article, then you would likely be charged for it, but certainly not for a dissertation. I suggest that you go onto the OSU Press website and look for the permissions information – I think it's an email address. You can let them know that you contacted me and I am fine with it (I'm not even sure that matters), and told you to contact them for permission. Permission should come within several days – if not, give them a call to see what's up. They are a small and usually responsive outfit – it shouldn't get lost with them.

If it was just up to me, I'd say yes immediately. (Word to the wise: Consider not signing away your copyright...which you do have the right to retain when you publish, I just didn't think to decline.)

with regards and good wishes for your dissertation,
Kris

On 10/24/15 9:26 PM, Scott Barrett wrote:
Dr. Renn,

My name is Scott Barrett and I am a doctoral student at Indiana State University. I have completed my coursework and am in the midst of writing my dissertation. My dissertation is investigating the process of humility development in college students. One of the main frameworks upon which I am basing my theory development is Urie Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology model.

I have referenced several of your articles throughout my lit. review. Your work has been really helpful. Your explanations of Bronfenbrenner's model have proved particularly helpful. One piece that I am looking to include in my lit. review is the chart found on page 268 in your 2003 article "Reconceptualizing Research on College Student Peer Culture" published in the June 2003 *Journal of Higher Education*. The chart is shown below. Would you grant me permission to use this chart for my dissertation? Thank you for considering this. I look forward to hearing from you. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Scott Barrett
Doctoral Student
Indiana State University

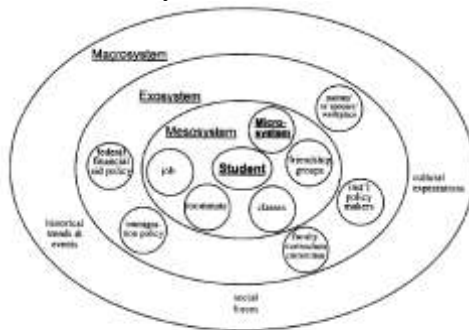


FIG. 1. Bronfenbrenner's Model as Applied to a Postsecondary Environment

— Scott Barrett
[\(847\)951-7849](tel:(847)951-7849)

Sent: Wednesday October 28, 2015
To: Scott Barrett
Subject: RE: Permission to use Developmental Ecology Model Graphic

Dear Scott,

Hello, my name is Rebecca Sullivan, and I handle permissions for The Ohio State University Press. We grant you permission to use this figure in your dissertation free of charge. However, if at some point in the future your dissertation becomes part of an article or a book, please recontact us about use of the figure. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Best,

Rebecca Sullivan
rebecca@osupress.org
[614-292-6376](tel:614-292-6376)

On Mon, Oct 26, 2015 at 9:18 PM, Scott Barrett <scottbarrett@gmail.com> wrote:
 Dear OSU Press Staff,

My name is Scott Barrett and I am a doctoral student at Indiana State University. I have completed my coursework and am in the midst of writing my dissertation. My dissertation is investigating the process of humility development in college students. One of the main frameworks upon which I am basing my theory development is Urie Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology model.

I have referenced several of Kristen Renn's articles throughout my lit. review. One piece that I am looking to include is the chart found on page 268 in her 2003 article "Reconceptualizing Research on College Student Peer Culture" published in the June 2003 *Journal of Higher Education*. The chart is shown below. I emailed Dr. Renn seeking permission to use her chart which she agreed to, but communicated that officially she no longer has the rights to this article and that I needed to contact the *JHE*. Would you grant me permission to use this chart for my dissertation? Thank you for considering this. I look forward to hearing from you. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Scott Barrett
 Doctoral Student
 Indiana State University

Author/Editor – Renn & Arnold
 Title – Reconceptualizing Research on College Student Peer Culture
 ISBN
 Year published –2003
 Page numbers – p. 261–291
 Publisher – Journal of Higher Education

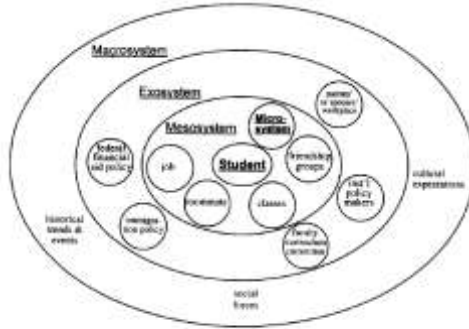


FIG. 1. Bronfenbrenner's Model as Applied to a Postsecondary Environment

-Scott Barrett
 (847)951-7849

APPENDIX B EMAIL INVITING PARTICIPANTS

Dear Student Leader,

Hello, my name is Scott Barrett. I am a doctoral student at Indiana State University and I am conducting research on the process of humility development in college students. For this study I am interviewing students participating in student leadership positions to learn more about their lives and experiences as it relates to the development of humility. I am wondering if you would be willing to participate in one of these interviews. We would meet at a location of your choice somewhere on your campus for this 60–90 minute conversation walking through a list of predetermined questions. I will be conducting these interviews on your campus (**Dates of Campus Visit**) and would work with you to find a time for our conversation. **For your participation I would email you a \$10 Amazon gift card.**

Would you be willing to participate in one of these interviews? I know you may have some questions before you can agree so I would love to answer whatever I can that would be helpful. You can email me at scottbarrett@gmail.com or you can give me a call or text at the phone number listed below. I am looking forward to hearing from you. Thanks for considering this chance to share about your life and experiences.

Scott Barrett
Doctoral Student
Indiana State University
847.951.7849

APPENDIX C SECOND EMAIL

Dear Student Name,

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in my research study on the process of humility development within college students. I want to provide you with a few more details about your potential participation and allow you to ask any questions you may have. Attached you will find an informed consent document which mentions the potential risks of your participation.

If you agree to participate in this study, I would work with you to determine a time and location for our 60–90 minute interview. I plan to be on your campus on (date). We could meet on campus or at an off campus location of your choosing. Ideally this would be a public location, but one in which you would feel comfortable sharing about your life and experiences with me. Prior to our interview, I would ask you to fill out a demographics info sheet and pick a pseudonym. This would help to assure your anonymity. During the interview you would be able to skip any questions you desired to or stop the interview at any point. I plan to digitally record these interviews and then have them transcribed. Following the interview, I would email you a digital transcript of the interview that you could review and respond to if you desire. I would also email you a \$10 Amazon gift card following our time together.

If you have any questions about this process or research I would be happy to answer them. You can respond to this email, call, or text me at the number below.

If you are still interested in participating in this interview, please let me know and we can work together to find an interview time. Thanks for considering.

Scott Barrett
Doctoral Student
Indiana State University
847.951.7849

APPENDIX D INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**OPERATIONALIZING HUMILITY: VIRTUE DEVELOPMENT OF COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERS.**

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Scott Barrett (Principal Investigator) and Dr. Mary Howard–Hamilton (Faculty Sponsor), from the Department of Education Leadership Administration, at Indiana State University. This study is being conducted as part of a dissertation. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to discover the process of humility development for college student leaders.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

- Complete a sheet of demographic information prior to an interview
- Participate in a 60–90 minute interview that will be digitally recorded.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no known risks for participants of this study.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no known benefits to participants in this study, there are noted benefits for humility in society. By further understanding the process of humility development college and university leaders may be able to more intentionally develop humility in their students leading to a more humble society.

- **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will be compensated with a \$10 Amazon gift card for completion of this interview.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of pseudonyms. Digitally recorded interviews will be stored on a password protected computer and only be shared with a paid transcriber who has agreed to maintain confidentiality. Following transcription digital recordings will be stored for one year on password

protected hard drive. Following one year they will be destroyed. Typed transcriptions will be maintained indefinitely for the purpose of future research.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Scott Barrett (Primary Investigator), 236 W. Reade Ave, Upland, IN 46989, 847-951-7849, scottbarrett@gmail.com or Dr. Mary Howard-Hamilton (Faculty Sponsor), Indiana State University, Bayh College of Education, Professor, Terre Haute, IN 47809, (812) 237-2907,

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Indiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) by mail at Indiana State University, Office of Sponsored Programs, Terre Haute, IN 47809, by phone at (812) 237-8217, or e-mail the IRB at irb@indstate.edu. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with ISU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Scott Barrett
236 W. Reade Ave
Upland, IN 46989
(847)951-7849
scottbarrett@gmail.com

Indiana State University
Institutional Review Board

Approved: DATE
Expires:

APPENDIX E DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

In order to maintain confidentiality you will be asked to select a pseudonyms. Please select two possible options and list them below.

Pseudonym _____ and _____

Age _____

Gender _____

Major/Minor _____

Years of Post-Secondary Education Completed _____

Race/Ethnic Background:

- African American/Black
- Asian American
- Latino/Hispanic/Chicano
- Native American/American Indian
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- Two or more races
- White/Caucasian
- International _____
- Other: _____

Religious or Spiritual Affiliation _____

APPENDIX F INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Leadership Position

1. What lead you to choose to step into a leadership position on campus?
2. What are some of the things you have learned through this opportunity?

Perspective on Humility

3. What do you think of when you think of humility?
4. How would you define humility?
5. Where did this come from?
6. Describe someone you see as humble and why you would describe them this way.
7. Describe a peer that you identify as humble.

Give participants Tangney's (2000) six part definition of humility

- Accurate self-assessment
- An ability to acknowledge mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge and limitations
- An openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping of one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective
- Relatively low self-focus
- An appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world. (p. 73-74)

8. What do you resonate with when you see this definition of humility and what do you disagree with?

Process of Humility Development

9. Can you think of a time when you showed one of these behaviors?
10. How would you describe this? A conscious choice, a reaction, a natural response?
11. Have you continued to act this way? Does it happen more often now than before?
12. How do you connect humility and religion?
13. Do you remember talking about humility with your family?
14. Do you talk about humility with your friends?
15. With what you just described, in what ways has your college experience helped you to become more or less humble?