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Impact of Monastic Practices and Spiritual Disciplines on Student Leader Development

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IMPACT OF MONASTIC PRACTICES AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES ON

STUDENT LEADER DEVELOPMENT

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Masters of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

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by

Haley B. Williamson

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL
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MASTER'S THESIS
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Impact of Monastic Practices and Spiritual Disciplines on
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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to understand if practicing monasticism and spiritual disciplines impacts the development of student leaders. Research was conducted through grounded theory qualitative interviews with eight student leaders participating in a monastic trip for the duration of January 2016. The present study sought to answer the following question: What impact does monasticism and spiritual disciplines have on the development of student leaders at a private Christian liberal arts institution? The eight students were interviewed before and after their trip, answering questions about monasticism, spiritual disciplines, student leadership, and trip expectations and experiences. Themes derived from the pre- and post-trip interviews concluded that participating in monasticism had a positive impact on the students in three core areas: inhabiting time, other-oriented leadership, and whole-person development. This study presents implications as a future theoretical foundation for how educators can effectively incorporate monasticism into student leader training to better equip students emotionally, mentally, and spiritually as they begin serving as leaders on campus.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

During her junior year of college, a resident assistant (RA) enrolled in a monastic trip taking place during January. Leading up to the trip, she was in the midst of her first semester as an RA, pursuing two bachelor degrees, struggling to maintain friendships around campus, and only seeing the women on her hall when she ran back to her room between classes and meetings. During the trip, she took part in various spiritual disciplines, service, and community. For the first time in a long time, she rested. During that month, she played, reflected, and began to see herself and others as God intended.

Coming back from the trip was understandably difficult. Life back at school was noisy, fast-paced, and, therefore, confusing. She knew something had to change, and that change needed to start with her role as an RA. She recognized the potential in her position to empower, support, challenge, and love the women on her hall. Immediately, she dropped one of her two majors, cut back on the number of credits she was taking, and spent more time being present on her hall, establishing relationships with the women. Through this process, she also became a better teammate on her RA staff as well as a better student, leader, and friend. Nothing was the same when she came back from that trip. Monasticism had embedded itself into who she was and how she wanted to live.

This study sought to assess the impact practicing monastic disciplines has on a student leader's approach to his or her role on his or her respective institution's campus.

Three main variables were thus explored: monasticism, spiritual disciplines, and student leadership.

Monasticism, in regards to the Desert Fathers, was a movement in the 4th century from populated towns to the deserts dotting the Roman Empire (Merton, 1960). Groups of men, and later women, retreated from their daily routines to live lives controlled by spiritual disciplines with the end goal of radical and spiritual connections to God. These men were cenobitic monks; they practiced disciplines and lived in community with one another (Gonzalez, 2010). The spiritual disciplines they practiced included fasting, the study of sacred texts, meditation, prayer, silence, solitude, poverty, and service.

Examples of these disciplines are silence and solitude, modeled after the Desert Fathers, and the discipline of celebration added on by Foster (1998). These disciplines build on one another with silence as the foundation for solitude and with celebration as the culmination of practicing spiritual disciplines. These disciplines, in turn, produce hope (Merton, 1955), strength, humility, trust, joy (Foster, 1998), compassion, gratitude (Brown, 2012), laughter, empathy, and the ability to see and interact with others in the ways God intends. The practice of these disciplines produces inter- and intra-personal qualities educators desire student leaders on their institutional campuses to cultivate.

Most colleges and universities have a large population of student leaders serving in a variety of areas on campus while developing skills such as responsibility, self-awareness, and communication. Through training, student leaders can unlock leadership potential (Kouzes & Posner, 2008), collaborate with members of a team, and advance academically as well as interpersonally (Hallenbeck, Dickman, & Fuqua, 2003). Additionally, when executed appropriately and effectively, student leader training results

in a positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral growth in the students while increasing their ability to become emotionally intelligent leaders.

An example of student leadership on campus is the role of a resident assistant. The goals of being an RA revolve around the residents he or she serves, desiring those students to grow, acquire resources, learn to live in community, feel included, and engage educational topics outside the classroom (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984). An RA goes through extensive training to learn how to effectively and appropriately lead and serve his or her hall. Many of the results of practicing spiritual disciplines coincide with the growth and learning outcomes educators desire RAs to foster as a result of training.

This study aimed to reveal the potential correlation between the implementation of spiritual disciplines, modeled after the cenobitic practices of the Desert Fathers, and student leaders' approach to their leadership roles. As previously stated, spiritual disciplines arguably produce inter- and intra-personal qualities viewed as desirable traits for student leaders to possess. These traits affect their ability to connect with the students they serve, engage in self-care, and contribute to a leadership team. If student leaders can engage these spiritual disciplines, potential exists to positively strengthen their leadership foundation and, in turn, serve and care for the students at their respective institution more effectively.

Overall, this research aimed to answer the question, "What impact does monasticism and spiritual disciplines have on the development of student leaders at a private Christian liberal arts institution?"

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Monasticism can help students to recognize their potential as leaders and grow as individuals. Student leaders at Christian universities and colleges can utilize the values of monasticism and the Desert Fathers with the practice of spiritual disciplines in order to produce positive interactions with others, self, and God. Three main components drove this research: monasticism, spiritual disciplines, and student leaders.

Monasticism

Monasticism is a spiritual approach to Christianity emphasizing spiritual disciplines, mysticism, and a deep search for salvation. Through monasticism, prominent individuals in the history of Christianity encountered God in unique, spiritual ways that inspired others to pursue the same. Many forms of monasticism exist and are often based on people (i.e., Benedict of Nursia), geographical regions, and/or branches of Christianity. This study specifically looked at the Desert Fathers.

The Desert Fathers were men, and later women, in the fourth century who decided to leave cities and towns and retreat to the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, and Persia (Merton, 1960). In *The Wisdom of the Desert,* Merton commented that the Fathers were "the first Christian hermits, who abandoned cities of the pagan world to live in solitude" (p. 3). They pursued salvation and radical, spiritual experiences. However, "what the Fathers sought most of all was their own true self, in Christ. In order to do this, they had

to reject completely the false, formal self, fabricated under social compulsion" (pp. 5–6) and "escape a tempting conformity to the world" (Nouwen, 1981, p. 14). The Fathers did not want to be ruled by a government, nor did they want to rule over others.

They desired to live in solitude and silence, practicing rigorous spiritual disciplines such as fasting and the study of sacred texts. Through studying the Desert Fathers, Nouwen (1981) stated, "[T]he words *flee, be silent,* and *pray* summarize the spirituality of the desert" (p. 15). They lived for simplicity, humility, spirituality, meditation, community, and service, accomplishing these disciplines and principles in a variety of ways. For example, "Abbot Agatho . . . for three years he carried a stone in his mouth until he learned to be silent" (Merton, 1960, p. 30). Lessons taught by the Fathers included what to hate (vain glory and an easy life) and how to be like a bee and produce spiritual sweetness.

While they lived in solitude, in their own cells in the desert, they also lived in community, surrounded by other cells. This form of communal monasticism is known as cenobitic monasticism, "a name derived from two Greek words meaning 'communal life'" (Gonzalez, 2010, p. 165). Cenobitic life was the result of the increasing number of people who desired to withdraw to the desert, learn from an experienced teacher, and live in solitude, not from those around them but rather from the world they left. In cenobitic communities, the gathering of students was called a "brethren" or "novice" while they studied under an "Abbot" or "teacher." While living in community, the monks would "observe each other with sympathy" (Huzinga, 1984, p. 12), "grow holy together, drawing upon one another's virtues to combat their own weaknesses" (Meisel & Mastro,

1975, p. 9), and "give advice with humility" (p. 51). The Abbots taught students the balance of living in community, while also practicing disciplines in solitude.

The Desert Fathers were not the first, or the last, monastic movement. However, they did lay a firm foundation for approaching a monastic lifestyle. Since many individuals followed the first Fathers into the desert, they eventually decided to bring their teachings back to the cities. Lay movements took place to include people who could not leave their homes, families, and jobs to retreat to the desert. This movement was the notion of making the spiritual disciplines applicable and practical for everyday life.

Spiritual Disciplines

A main attribute of the lives of the Desert Fathers included the practice of spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are a prominent attribute of monasticism; however, spiritual disciplines can be exclusive of the monastic life style. Retreating to the desert gave the Fathers the ability to escape the noise and control of society in order to practice these disciplines uninterrupted. Spiritual disciplines were not an option; rather they were a way of life that impacted their relationships with God, others, and self. Two examples of disciplines emphasized in the Father's writings and teachings were solitude and silence, while other authors who study monasticism expanded on the Father's disciplines to include the practice of celebration.

Solitude. Seeking solitude was the main reason the Fathers chose a location like the desert. Gonzalez (2010) stated that "the very word 'monk' is derived from the Greek word *monachos*, which means 'solitary'" (p. 161). Nouwen (1981) commented that most people today define solitude as privacy, while Desert Fathers like St. Anthony viewed solitude as "the place where the old self dies and the new self is born" (p. 27). Solitude is

being alone without being controlled by loneliness and having a state of mind that is still and not complacent.

Many fruitful benefits result from practicing solitude that impact an individual's whole being. For instance, practicing solitude frees individuals from loneliness (Foster, 1998), impacting his or her relationships and interactions. In *The Celebration of Discipline,* Foster noted that seeking out opportunities for solitude allows people to be with others meaningfully and begin to look at each other in the way God intends. By allowing solitude to break the bondage of fear and loneliness, opportunities emerge for people to be fully present and engaged with those with whom they interact. Additionally, when living in community, solitude invites spaces that create forgiveness and remove judgment (Nouwen, 1981). Merton (1955) explained that "solitude is as necessary for society as . . . air for the lungs and food for the body" (p. 237) and is "found in the virtue of hope" (p. 242). Finally, taking time to practice solitude also strengthens an individual's compassion and sensitivity for people (Foster, 1998), making him or her "ready to reach out to anyone in need" (Nouwen, 1981, p. 40). Practicing solitude impacts one's heart and mind, as well as one's surrounding community. However, a struggle can occur in discovering how to practice solitude regularly in today's society.

Not everyone can retreat to the desert to practice solitude. However, Nouwen (1981) explained that, for a lot of Desert Fathers, solitude was not necessarily about the physical space of the desert but about the transformation of the mind. Therefore, practical ways to experience solitude exist. Foster (1998) stated,

The first thing we can do is to take advantage of the 'little solitudes' that fill our day. . . . Think of the solitude of a morning cup of coffee before beginning the

work of the day . . . find new joy and meaning in the little walk from the subway to your apartment. Slip outside just before bed and taste the silent night. These tiny snatches of time are often lost to us. (pp. 105–106)

These moments of solitude allow for a reorientation of priorities and goals. However, what matters in seeking these times of solitude, even the little moments that escape us, is consistency and commitment to the discipline. Nouwen (1981) emphasized the need for solitude to be concrete and defined in an individual's life, and he or she must take ownership and responsibility for the practice. If one can take ownership over the solitude in their life, he or she can unlock a strength, rest, and compassion they may have never experienced before, much like the Desert Fathers did.

Silence. In comparison to solitude, "silence completes and intensifies solitude" (Nouwen, 1981, p. 43), while also making solitude a reality. Practicing silence is about control and being able to see and hear in a new way. Many times, silence involves the absence of speech, but the discipline is not dependent on it (Foster, 1998). The inner state of an individual and how one uses silence is what makes the practice significant. However, more often than not, people do not engage the discipline of silence. Nouwen (1981) noted that "silence has become a very fearful thing. For most people, silence creates itchiness and nervousness" (p. 59).

Silence embraces a transformative power that affects a person's speech, capacity to listen, engagement with hope, and ability to trust. For example, silence can create opportunities for people to control their tongue. Foster (1998) observed that "a person who is under the discipline of silence is a person who can say what needs to be said when it needs to be said" (p. 99). Nouwen (1981) also affirmed the notion that silence

produces an ability to speak with strength, stating that a powerful word results from silence, which, in turn, creates communion within a community. Other results of silence include the ability to listen. When one practices when to and when not to speak, he or she also learns to listen while in solitude or in the presence of others. The Desert Fathers practiced silence in solitude as well as in community and lived by the principle that "the master should speak and teach, the disciple should quietly listen and learn" (Meisel & Mastro, 1975, p. 56). Additionally, Merton (1955) claimed that, "if we fill our lives with silence, then we live in hope" (p. 249). With that hope, silence also leads to strength and morality.

Finally, a main result of practicing silence is trust in a community and in God. Through silence, people trust God by placing their worth and value in Him while silence proves difficult. According to Palmer (1993), when practicing silence—in this case with solitude—"unhealed memories of the past catch up with us; unholy fears about the future crash in on us" (p. 123). Trusting God with silence is leaning into the difficult and painful while knowing that, in those moments, people are not alone. This trust in God strengthens an individual's trust in others. When people gather and sit in silence, an unsaid trust is expressed by not controlling the other or situation with meaningless words. Commenting on silence within communities, Nouwen (1981) stated,

> Words can only create communion and thus new life when they embody the silence from which they emerge. As soon as we begin to take hold of each other by our words, and use words to defend ourselves or offend others, the word no longer speaks of silence. But when the word calls forth healing and restoring

stillness of its own silence, few words are needed: much can be said without much

being spoken. (p. 57)

Trust is formed between people when silence is embraced, allowing words to become

uplifting and life giving. Silence is the foundation of solitude, and, together, they lead to

hope, strength, trust, and present engagement.

Celebration. When writing *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster (1998) included

celebration in the list of spiritual disciplines one ought to practice regularly in today's

cultural context. According to Foster, "celebration is central to all spiritual disciplines"

(p. 191). Without practicing celebration and bringing the disciplines together, an

individual can easily abandon them. Calhoun (2015) described the desire to practice

celebration as "tak[ing] joyful, passionate pleasure in God and the radically glorious

nature of God's people, Word, world and purposes" (p. 28). Celebration reminds

individuals why they practice these disciplines, with the end result of joy and delight.

Foster (1998) emphasized the importance of celebration and the joy it offers as a

result of the spiritual disciplines functioning in an individual's lives. Joy is a direct result

of celebration and strengthens an individual. Brown (2012) affirmed this notion that "joy

becomes part of who we are, and when bad things happen – and they do happen – we are

stronger" (p. 126). This strength allows one to practice the disciplines leading to

celebration and, in turn, fuels the cycle of living a life infused with spiritual disciplines.

Celebration frees people from judgmental spirits and pride while removing anxiety and

insecurities. Calhoun (2015) expanded on this conclusion, stating that celebration frees

individuals from negativity and cynicism. It also breaks down hierarchal views of others

and brings everyone to the same level: mighty and weak, rich and poor, and the powerful

and powerless (Foster, 1998). Another result of celebration is that it allows people to not take life and themselves too seriously. Calhoun (2015) upheld this result, commenting that with the ability to not take oneself too seriously comes the cultivation of gladness, a mentality that focuses on the gifts from God, and the ability to be present each day. Finally, Massey stated (1985) celebration is a communal discipline that "has a way of centralizing a Christian's life" (p. 104). This concept of centralizing leads to an awareness of self, others, and God. Celebration results in inner joy, strength, positivity, presence, and awareness of oneself and others.

Practicing the discipline of celebration can take various forms. One simple way is through laughter. Foster (1998) encouraged individuals to "poke fun at yourself. Enjoy wholesome jokes and clever puns. Relish good comedy. Learn to laugh; it is a discipline to be mastered" (p. 198). In addition, celebration is often accomplished through dancing, singing, and shouting, which directly parallels forms of celebration in the Bible. Imagination and creativity are other routes leading to celebration, along with encouraging the creativity of others, which builds communities on a solid foundation strengthened by joy. When communities come together to celebrate "an added dimension is given to the experience" (Massey, 1985, p. 103). Brown (2012) added another layer to celebration through the practice of expressing gratitude:

> I use the word practicing because the research participants spoke of tangible gratitude practices, more then merely having an attitude of gratitude or feeling grateful. In fact, they gave specific examples of gratitude practices that included everything from keeping gratitude journals and gratitude jars to implementing family gratitude rituals. (p. 125)

Brown's (2012) call to action is simple: be grateful, share the gratitude, and celebrate the ability to be grateful. The fruit produced by practicing spiritual disciplines impacts an individual's mind and heart as well as the communities of which he or she is a part. These practices are not confined to monastic settings but are transferable to anyone, anywhere.

Student Leadership

Two main aspects define student leaders: their development as an individual in a leadership role and their work on a team. Institutions offer a variety of opportunities for students to become leaders on campus, and research has shown "students can and, perhaps, should participate in the leadership process in that participation would contribute to the students' development" (Hallenbeck et al., 2003, p. 23). According to a study done by Hallenbeck et al., the experience of being a student leader equips students with tools and skills not otherwise acquired. Additionally, student leaders tend to advance in academic and interpersonal capacities more than students who do not participate in any form of leadership on their institution's campus.

Being part of leadership, students are entrusted with unique responsibilities, take part in extensive training, and develop strengths as a leader. Studies done by Kouzes and Posner (2008) indicated student leaders can take part in five main practices that unlock their leadership potential: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Most student leaders work under a supervisor who can see their potential and help to cultivate an environment of growth. While a student's individual development during the leadership experience is valuable,

many student leaders also work with and benefit from being on a leadership team with peers of different ages, backgrounds, skills, and strengths.

Komives (1998) defined leadership as "a relational process of people together attempting to accomplish change or make a difference to benefit the common good" (p. 11, as cited in Hallenbeck et al., 2003, p. 23). This definition is what a leadership team embodies with the understanding that every team member is crucial. Longo and Gibson (2011) defined a leadership team as a cohort and explained that "the relationships central to the new leadership fostered in this cohort experience provide spaces for students to take risks, to succeed, and to fail in a supportive environment" (p. 117). Being on a team thus contributes to the development of individuals as people and as leaders.

When an individual grows, the team grows. Through intentionality with each other and individual contributions, student leaders strengthen their approach to their role, which, in turn, strengthens the team. Being on a leadership team "is viewed as a collective enterprise, rather than as top down, and as an ongoing interactive learning process that stresses inner reflection coupled with external and collaborative action" (Longo & Gibson, 2011, p. 3). Teamwork teaches students to be effective contributors to a team, communicate well, and listen. In the end, the experience is about respecting individuals on your team and seeking collaboration (Shankman & Allen, 2008). Three key factors then define a successful team: trust, communication, and cooperation. Shankman and Allen stated that teams need to develop high levels of trust over time through honesty. Effectively and appropriately working on a team is a key aspect of leadership development and success. The formation of a team, and the foundation of student leadership development, begins with leadership training.

Training and development. Educators create values and goals unique to their department and program structure. For example, a leader in student government goes through a different training experience than a student leader in a residence life department. When designing and executing leadership training, most educators establish learning outcomes based on core values and goals of the position and department, which Dugan and Komives (2007) called the Seven C's. Dugan and Komives believe student leaders should approach their leadership positions with consciousness of self, congruence, commitment, collaboration, common purpose, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. These values aim to develop students individually, on a leadership team, and in their community. Komives, Dugan, Owen, Slack, and Wagner (2011) expanded on the Seven C's by saying student leadership training and education should promote cognitive, behavioral, and affective outcomes.

Posner (2004) explored the development of student leaders and stated, "[L]eadership development is now an integral part of the educational program of college students, with courses and activities scattered throughout" (p. 443). When approaching training involved in student leadership, every training effort takes a different approach; "programs and courses vary in type, length, and desired outcomes, they share a common goal of developing students' leadership capacity and knowledge" (Komives et al., 2011, p. 231). While student leadership training takes different forms based on the position, most research surrounds training that is developed and facilitated for resident assistants (RAs) with results to apply and transfer across diverse leadership training programs.

When specifically studying RA training, Onge, Nestor, Peter, and Robertson (2003) said that RAs should focus on "on five competency areas: individual interactions,

conflict mediation, facilitation, programming, and crisis management" and that "dialogue and learning from peers was an essential component of the training experience" (p. 45). When observing training implemented at Christian institutions, Roussel and Elleven (2009) stated, "[R]esident assistants of Christian colleges and universities themselves are more prepared for life after college" (p. 393). Training sessions are often extensive and emotionally exhausting when topics include mental health, suicide, and sexual assault. Training also depends on several factors, such as degree of intensity, topics covered, RA maturity and experience, residence life mission, and staff attributes.

Residence life staff and educators are in a unique position to make the RA training experience transformative. Paladino, Murray, Newgent, and Gohn (2005) indicated that "staff members are encouraged to create an environment of continuous training programs and support" (p. 25). The training and development of RAs, along with other student leaders, should not end when training concludes. Training and encouragement in their job should continue throughout the year through meetings and mid-year, in-service programming. Because of their extensive job, RAs need to be encouraged, taught, and developed. Beyond training, faculty and staff need to find creative, unique ways to provide rest and rejuvenation for RAs multiple times throughout the year. Being an RA is a "unique role . . . that few students are privileged to experience" (Blimling & Miltenberger, 1984, p. 3). Many essential pieces of RA training can be applied and adapted to suit the needs of student leaders in different positions.

Emotionally intelligent leadership. Emotionally Intelligent Leadership (EIL) is a model derived from studies done by Shankman and Allen (2008) and is a concept of what leadership means for students. According to Shankman and Allen, "[T]he leader

must be conscious of three fundamental facets that contribute to the leadership dynamic: consciousness of context, self, and others" (p. 5). Awareness of context, self, and others is cultivated through intentional conversations that create space to interpret situations, acknowledge and define personal strengths and weaknesses, and practice transparency. Consciousness of context is two-fold, involving environmental awareness and group savvy. This awareness not only deals with understanding the location in which one works but also the dynamics of the group with whom they work.

Next is the consciousness of self that comes through self-reflection, perception, and honesty. This level of awareness is the ability of a leader to have emotional self-control as well as the capability to lead with authenticity, flexibility, optimism, and initiative. The final consciousness recognizes others. As a leader, individuals must be able to relate to others and strive to strengthen interpersonal skills. These skills involve empathy, influence, conflict management, developing relationships, and teamwork. With this consciousness, leaders can discover how to capitalize on people's differences, recognize strengths of others, and take part in coaching (Shankman & Allen, 2008). The EIL approach to leadership is a model applicable to student leaders in various roles.

Types of student leaders. Every campus has outlets for students to be involved as leaders in traditional and non-traditional ways. The title or position holds less regard than the importance of simply being a part of leadership. Posner (2004) said it directly— "[L]eadership matters" (p. 454)—and continued by stating that it does not matter where leaders are, only that they develop in leadership and understand the importance of it.

Komives et al. (2011) categorized student leadership opportunities into three sub-groups: formal leadership programs, individual leadership experience, and leadership

activity. Several key departments on college and university campuses that attract student leaders include student government, cultural and diversity offices, student development, student affairs, admissions, and athletics. However, residence life is a primary department on campus for students to identify as a student leader (Hallenbeck et al., 2003). Most students involved in leadership within residence life are resident assistants (RAs) or fill other positions that require the students to live in residence halls.

Conclusion

When combined, monasticism and student leadership training have the potential to produce an encouraging, developmental, and educational student leader experience. Practicing spiritual disciplines results in trust, self-awareness, compassion, joy, and strength, while student leadership training strives to promote positive cognitive, behavioral, and affirmative growth. This research aimed to unpack the possible impact of monasticism and spiritual disciplines on student leaders' development. A grounded theory, constructivist approach, in turn, was utilized to conduct appropriate research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This study used qualitative methods of approaching research. Qualitative research collects data through interviews, observations, documents, surveys, focus groups, journal or portfolio reflections, role play, case study discussions, and portfolio artifacts (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009). For this study, participants were selected through purposeful sampling in order to further understand the specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Interviews occurred over the phone, and the data was collected, coded, and themed.

Grounded Theory

Specifically, this study drew upon what is known as grounded theory. According to Creswell (2012), "Grounded theory enables you to generate a broad theory about your qualitative central phenomenon 'grounded' in the data" (p. 422). Grounded theory is used when researchers want to study a specific process of events or interactions. Strauss and Corbin (1990) expanded on this definition of grounded theory: "[this] theory is derived by putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation" (p. 12). This study used grounded theory to present an approach to student leader training at a college or university.

Several approaches to grounded theory exist; however, this study, in particular, took a constructivist approach. Creswell (2012) described this approach as "focused on

subjective meanings by participants, explicit researcher values and beliefs, and suggestive or tentative conclusions" (p. 443). Charmaz (2014) viewed constructivist grounded theory as flexible, moving away from specific mechanical applications. This study approached grounded theory through a constructivist lens in order to provide a subjection approach to the data and use of the resulted theory.

Participants and Setting

The eight participants in this study were male and female students, ages 18-22, enrolled at a Christian liberal arts university. Participants were either sophomores, juniors, seniors, or early graduates in their first year of graduate school at the university. The respective university has approximately 2,500 students and is located in the Pacific Northwest. Participants engaged a month-long, living-learning monastic trip in central Washington under the leadership of a theology and history of Christianity professor. Students were current student leaders at their university with positions including small group leaders, choir section leaders, or resident assistants.

Participants were intentionally chosen for two reasons: 1) They were current student leaders at a Christian liberal arts university halfway through their year of leading and serving on campus; and 2) They were participating in a trip focusing on monasticism, spiritual disciplines, the Desert Fathers, and bringing a particular daily routine back to life at school. The combination of these two elements provided necessary data for a qualitative, grounded theory methodology.

Procedure

Students enrolled in the respective 3-credit theology course and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposal to conduct research. The collection of data

took place through interviews over the phone. The recording and transcription of those interviews gave depth to a central phenomenon. Further, interviews went through a coding process, "the analytical process through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form a theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 3). Coding then led to the grounded theory focus of the qualitative data.

Interviews. Participants engaged a pre- and post-trip interview over the phone. Creswell (2012) indicated that "a qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers" (p. 217). Open-ended questions were used "so that the participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (p. 218). Before the trip, interviews with the participants explored three areas (see Appendix A): current perceptions of spiritual disciplines and monasticism, current reflection of their role as a student leader, and preconceived notions about the trip. A month after the trip, interviews with trip participants explored three additional areas (see Appendix B): current views and practices regarding spiritual disciplines and monasticism; present approach to the leadership role and what has changed since their return to campus; personal, spiritual, and emotional growth—or lack thereof—and challenges upon returning.

With prior IRB approval, names and contact information of participants came from the professor leading the trip with permission requested on behalf of the students taking part in this study. Throughout December 2015, participants took part in pre-trip interviews. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and emailed back to the respective participants for further clarification and understanding. Upon their return, students integrated back into their daily lives and resumed their positions as student leaders.

Once the students were immersed back into their school routine for a month, the same participants who interviewed before the trip participated in post-trip interviews. These interviews were again recorded, transcribed, and emailed back to students. The data was coded, themed, and compared to the previously collected data. These two sets of data presented a generalized answer to the research question and provided grounds for the proposed theory.

Coding. Once data was collected, it went through a coding process. Creswell (2012) explained this process as "segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (p. 243). Coding data allowed for a better understanding of the larger themes embedded in data. Themes were then interpreted and presented. The presentation of themed data below includes comparing it to literature, offering restrictions in the research process, and providing reflections. For this research, interviews were themed by recognizing key words and phrases and grouped with other similar answers, creating themes presented to encompass the coded responses.

Research Benefits

This study proves that the implementation of monastic principles during student leadership training can further equip and positively impact a student's approach to his or her position and work on a team. This research also provides the data necessary to create a monastic program for future leadership training. Determining if spiritual discipline practices positively affect leadership allows educators the potential of creating a segment of training devoted to these practices, executed in the form of a spiritual retreat, experiential learning, or training session. Coded and themed data are presented in the succeeding chapter, followed by a discussion of results.

Chapter 4

Results

Eight student leaders participated in pre- and post-trip interviews regarding their monastic experience that took place for the duration of January 2016. The displayed results are based on three themes that emerged from transcribing and coding participant interviews. Each theme is defined and subsequently divided into codes derived from the data. The three themes are the perception of time, a shift to other-oriented leadership, and overall whole-person development.

Perception of Time

The first theme that emerged from the data centered on how participants view time. In the pre-trip interview, many participants talked about the busyness of their schedules and the need for a break. Upon return, many participants reflected on the theme of inhabiting time rather than consuming time, which is maintained through an established rhythm of life. By inhabiting time, students continue to discover how not to be controlled by the busyness of college but, instead, become present throughout the day.

Busyness and college campuses. In the pre-trip interviews, half of the participants commented on the busyness of life and desired to discover ways to unwind and cultivate a peaceful mindset. One participant mentioned longing to unplug from society while another wanted to escape the pressures of deciding on grad school. Participant one was excited to "have a long break and . . . reboot for the spring."

Participant six had not had a break in a while and was excited to "take a breather." Additionally, in their pre-trip interview, many participants thought the trip was designed to remove students from the busyness of every day life, affirming the notion that these participants recognized the unhealthy, fast-paced environment in which they lived.

When commenting on how monasticism could impact society today, in both the pre- and post-trip interviews, participants commented on the fast-paced nature of college and humanity. Participant two stated in her pre-trip interview that monasticism "can really teach a lot of people what it means to slow down." In the post-trip interview, Participant five affirmed this theme that "our world is becoming increasingly . . . fast-paced" and people are not willing to slow down, therefore monasticism forces them to slow down. With the recognition of their fast-paced culture on campus, many of the participants returned from the trip with a heightened awareness of how they view time and a desire to discover what it means to inhabit time back on campus.

Inhabiting time. During the post-trip interview, seven of the eight students mentioned feeling a sense of calm and peace—no longer worried or stressed—because the trip exposed them to what it means to inhabit time. Participant seven affirmed the theme of inhabiting time as a student leader in her post-trip interview: "[W]e're not supposed to consume time or pass time but inhabit time looking at those discussions as an opportunity to inhabit time and inhabit other people's stories."

Furthermore, seven participants listed the notion of inhabiting time as one of the three main lessons they learned while practicing monasticism on their trip. When expanding on these lessons surrounding time, participant one said inhabiting time "allows you to be engaged where you are," while others commented on the ability to be mentally

and emotionally present to one thing at a time. Placing value on practicing presence resulted from the emphasis placed on inhabiting time. Participant four captured the importance of practicing presence as a student leader:

> Being present at one place at a time is important . . . if I am going to lead it is not helpful or healthy for me to be thinking about anything else or to be worried about my own abilities . . . appreciate that moment and thank God for thing things I get to do as a leader.

Several participants returned to their roles as student leaders with a heightened awareness of being fully present where they are, resulting from establishing a healthy rhythm in their daily life.

Importance of a rhythm. In their post-trip interviews, participants commented on the concept of rhythm and consistency embedded into their daily schedule. Five respondents commented that not having a rhythm was a challenging aspects of returning home, along with feeling overwhelmed by technology and noise, which were not part of their rhythm for the past month. When commenting about what was difficult returning home, participant four said, "[N]ot having a rhythm for quiet time and time set aside for meals . . . not having worship as much as a regular part of the day and . . . not having the sleep schedule."

When commenting on lessons gleaned from the experience, three participants said the importance of rhythm. Participant five captured how rhythm impacted his approach to student leadership:

> It was cool for three weeks to be in this place . . . where it was mandatory to rest and to do things that allowed us to feel like we were alive and living. It created

margin in our lives, it created spaces where we felt like we were actually enjoying where we were and who we were with, and so . . . the experience of that I think definitely informs the way that I get to speak encouragement into [students] lives.

When reflecting on the trip, participants commented that having a set rhythm each day allowed them to get full nights of sleep, linger at tables for meals, and not worry about busy schedules. This idea of a structure, a rhythm to daily life, influenced the participants' ability to inhabit time and, in turn, be present to each day.

Other-Oriented Leadership

When comparing pre- and post-trip interviews, participants identified a shift in their approach and perspective of leadership from self- or achievement-oriented to other-oriented. This development surfaced when participants were asked how their monastic experience applied to their specific job as a student leader as well as over-arching characteristics of a student leader.

Half of the participants commented that the lessons they learned from their experience revolved around the value of community. Additionally, half of the participants stated the lessons they learned about community applied to their student leadership position. When describing what they learned about community from the trip, participant three said she can apply this lesson in how she works and has conversations with those whose opinions may differ. Another student stated after the trip that he began to understand everyone's humanity.

When commenting on their goals as student leaders, in the pre-trip interview, two participants focused on community, which increased to five participants in the post-trip interview. Additionally, three participants said their relationships grew with the students

they served and their teammates since returning from the trip. Participant four said his goal since returning from the trip was to "continue to provide support," resulting in being "able to connect with some of them . . . in ways I haven't in the past." Participant six had a similar experience, stating his relationship with team members developed upon return, while participant seven became increasingly attentive to others and their stories.

Finally, when defining spiritual disciplines, five participants stated in their post-trip interviews that they implemented the discipline of community in their life in comparison to three who mentioned community as a spiritual discipline in the pre-trip interview. For example, when asked about the implementation of spiritual disciplines, in the pre-trip interview, participant three listed internal and external disciplines that were practiced alone. In contrast, the same participant in the post-trip interview listed all communal and corporate disciplines as those implemented in her life, including chapel, small groups, church, and time to pray with her family. This other-oriented approach to student leadership that developed during the trip is more specifically seen in the increased emphasis on humility as a characteristic that student leaders should embody.

Humility. When asked in the pre-trip interview what characteristics a student leader should embody, one respondent included humility. However, in the post-trip interview, the number who included humility as a student leadership characteristic grew to half of the participants. While the other participants did not explicitly list humility, they did list servanthood and other-oriented as values for a student leader, showing a shift in their leadership approach. Additionally, seven participants drastically changed their list of leadership characteristics; the eighth participant had two of the three remain the same, replacing assertiveness in the pre-trip interview for humility after the trip.

Participant two described humility in leadership as "understanding your strengths and your weaknesses and . . . using them to the best of your ability and not using them against others." Participant eight expanded on that view of humility and stated that being humble as a student leader is the ability to learn from other students around you. The data collected from this section of the interviews further emphasizes this shift to an other-oriented approach to student leadership.

Social justice. Based on their readings of St. Basil's sermons on money, wealth, and social justice, over half of the participants listed St. Basil as an influential individual in church history they studied while on the trip. When reflecting on lessons they learned, participants commented on the idea of social justice as a virtue of monasticism and the accompanying personal challenges when engaging with St. Basil's work. For participant one, St. Basil challenged him with the idea of living simply and looking out for one's neighbor, while participant three focused on St. Basil's outward driven monasticism that manifested itself in hospitals, schools, and monasteries. Participant five commented on St. Basil's emphasis on social justice and affirmed this shift to an other-oriented approach to student leadership by stating, "[U]ltimately that informs the way that we love the people around us and actually care for them and their needs."

During the post-trip interview, participants listed social justice as a spiritual discipline, which is a development from the pre-trip interview, in which social justice was not on any of the participants' lists of spiritual disciplines. This focus on social justice as a facet of monasticism introduced by St. Basil further affirmed the shift that the participants experienced, developing an other-focused mindset that manifests in their leadership.

Whole Person Development

While the research question focused on the impact of monasticism on student leadership, the data revealed this monastic experience impacted the students in ways beyond leadership. In reality, it impacted them as whole persons. By experiencing monastic practices and partaking in spiritual disciplines, students began to discover what it means to implement their experience into daily life, resulting in various forms of direct and indirect whole-person transformation. For some participants, this whole-person impact was explicit and seen in their change of demeanor and responses to questions surrounding vocation. While other students were still discovering the lasting effects of the trip, participant five described the impact of his experience as a "very out of the ordinary thing that has this lasting impression that you know something was different about my life for three weeks." Furthermore, participant six summed up this internal, whole-person, lasting impact:

I don't think I'm really going to understand the significance of this trip until you know March, or, or even years from now . . . the change that I've seen in my role . . . has not been a practical change, but more the personal change within me.

Participant three explicitly stated that, when comparing semesters before and after the trip, the semester of returning home was more relaxing, less stressful, and had a good, healthy rhythm. Additionally, she said the monastic experience helped her "stay more grounded despite the day to day craziness."

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to discover what type of correlation, if any, exists between the practice of monasticism and spiritual disciplines on student leadership

development through grounded theory utilizing pre- and post-trip interviews. The data and themes that emerged affirmed a positive correlation between student leaders who experienced monasticism and their approach, definition, and growth as leaders on their campus.

Therefore, this study recommends that student leadership training needs to incorporate consistent sessions focused on the topics of other-oriented leadership, social justice, inhabiting time, and whole-person development. Additionally, the data pointed to the importance of student leaders partaking in consistent acts of service towards one another, times of silence and solitude for reflection, and ways to create their own rhythm of life based on the rhythms introduced during training that are inspired by historical coenobitic monasticism. Through the incorporation of these themes into student leader training, students could begin the school year with an other-oriented approach to leadership, a positive view of time, and a healthy view themselves as whole persons, not only as student leaders.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This research sought to explore a possible correlation between monasticism and student leader development. Therefore, this chapter summarizes the findings, discusses the implications, and reviews the limitations from the study. The data gathered from eight pre-trip interviews and eight post-trip interviews presented three themes that correlated to monasticism's impact on student leader development. The outcome of practicing monasticism and spiritual disciplines manifested itself in a new perspective of time, an other-oriented shift in leadership, and overall whole-person growth.

Review of Results

Inhabiting time. To begin, the data outlined a drastic shift in students' perception of time upon returning from their monastic experience. Before the trip, students viewed their current campus and community culture as busy and fast-paced. However, students returned home with an increased awareness of what it means to inhabit time, be present, and not become overwhelmed by schedules and deadlines. These student leaders learned to become emotionally, physically, and mentally present to the people they were with and served as well where they were and what they were doing.

The concept of inhabiting time was introduced and modeled on the trip through a rhythm and rule of life defined by consistency and cenobitic community. According to Foster (1998), spiritual disciplines allow individuals to be fully present to the people they

are with while breaking the bonds of fear and loneliness. Gaining an ability to inhabit time as a result of experiencing cenobitic monasticism and spiritual disciplines allowed students to enjoy meals, engage one another's stories, turn off their phones, and create a rhythm to their life, much like the rhythm modeled on the trip.

Other-oriented leadership. Participants in the present study exemplified a shift from self- and achievement-oriented approaches in leadership to an other-centered mentality. This shift was evidenced through an increase in value placed on humility as a leader and an emphasis on social justice from studying St. Basil while on the monastic trip. An other-oriented approach to leadership affirms Kouzes and Posner's (2008) studies on what creates potential within a student leader. According to Kouzes and Posner, five main practices cultivate an exemplary leader: be a good role model, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Each practice touches on empowerment, encouragement, and inspiration surrounding the interaction between student leaders and those they serve and work alongside. Additionally, Merton (1955) concluded that practicing spiritual disciplines produces humility, affecting the ways individuals interact with one another.

Several participants also returned from the experience noticing a change in their relationship with team members. Those relationships began to grow, which Longo and Gibson (2011) concluded is an imperative part of being on a leadership team. Working well on a team is integral to the leadership experience and growth. By experiencing monasticism, student leaders returned to their leadership teams engaging support and communication, which strengthened team relationships and dynamics.

Additionally, Shankman and Allen's (2008) EIL claimed that student leaders need to continually grow in the awareness of context, self, and others. By experiencing monastic practices, the students in this study demonstrated growth in awareness of others, while several also commented on their awareness of self, which, in turn, impacted their relationships with peers. Furthermore, participants' heightened understanding of social justice in correlation to monasticism and student leadership further emphasized a development within the context of EIL. Research on EIL also proposed that student leaders must be aware of their context and others, which is accomplished through an emphasis on social justice, and expanded on Kouzes and Posner's (2008) study, inspiring their peers to think critically and emotionally about social justice and its role on campus. This critical thinking and emotional development is where the impact of the trip went beyond student leader development into impacting the whole person.

Whole-person development. What educators must attend to is that student leaders participating in monasticism and spiritual disciplines returned from the trip having experienced growth as not only student leaders but as whole persons. Recognizing whole-person development is imperative to moving forward with the present research and implementing the findings.

Whole-person development is what Hallenbeck et al. (2003) noted happens when students are involved in leadership positions. According to their research, student leaders not only acquire leadership skills but also advance in academic and interpersonal settings, which is affirmed by students participating in monasticism and exhibiting growth personally, communally, and academically.

Furthermore, research conducted by Paladino et al. (2005) concluded that educators must "create an environment of continuous training programs and support" (p. 25). Educators should be aware of the big picture and take into consideration the entire being of students and how they are impacted beyond their leadership roles when seeking to incorporate monasticism into student leader training. Focusing on the big picture of development then allows for intentional conversations and continual growth to occur throughout the year with a consistent implementation of monasticism and spiritual disciplines in order to foster the personal and leadership development.

Implications for Practice and Research

Understanding the impact of monastic practices and spiritual disciplines on student leaders and their whole-person development has several implications for both student leadership training and ongoing forms of training throughout the school year. One cannot look at the present results without concluding that a positive experience took place by separating students from their traditional environment. Therefore, when it comes to student leader training, educators need to take the themes embedded in the data and incorporate this information in at least three ways.

Practice. First, training sessions can cover a variety of topics implemented on the monastic trip, including social justice, service, inhabiting time, being present, and other spiritual disciplines. These sessions can explicitly look at the historical monasticism, replicate the communal pieces of monasteries, study leaders in church history (i.e. St. Basil), and facilitate time spent in silence, solitude, and reflection. Furthermore, these training sessions can take place outside of the institution, removing students from campus and engaging these topics while they are unplugged from everyday life.

Second, educators must be aware of how to challenge their student leaders continually to make monastic values and spiritual disciplines a consistent part of their life. Several participants commented during the interviews about the value of having a rhythm and routine that was consistent and also taking their studies one step further into a space of reflection. These two components—consistency and reflection—are the fuel that made the practices of monasticism and spiritual disciplines take deep root. While students find it a challenge to set aside time each week to fully engage monasticism, educators can use weekly or monthly student leader meetings to set aside time to partake in reflection or a specific discipline to continue reinforcing monastic practices.

Finally, educators can implement monasticism halfway through the year by facilitating a retreat for their student leaders. Creating intentional time to leave campus and engage monasticism halfway through the year, much like the participants of this study, can allow students to take a break, check their priorities, and re-center themselves. While the present research provided useful data and themes for developing student leaders, room still exists to take the future research deeper.

Research. Potential remains for a more refined approach to the impact of monasticism on student leaders by specifically looking at seniors compared to the present research that studied sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Over half of the participants were seniors and occasionally commented on how the monastic trip provided space to reflect on their vocation and life after their undergraduate experience. Seniors were given time to process what being a senior means to them and confess their worries or concerns about the future to the Lord. Therefore, future research on the impact of monasticism can specifically look at the different impacts the values can have on varying grade levels.

Also, future research can look at the implementation of monasticism at a variety of universities, regardless of religious affiliation. While monasticism has roots in the history of Christianity, the practices and values need not be exclusively religious. Thus, experiencing monasticism may produce different, but still beneficial, results on a variety of student populations. This study only interviewed students from a Christian university; future studies can explore other forms of spirituality, religion, and beliefs.

A final implication for future research is to take a narrower approach to student leaders. The present research looked at a range of student leaders on campus, including choir leaders, small group leaders, and RAs. Therefore, future studies can focus on one specific student leader group and see the internal impact monasticism has on that group. Studying student leaders from one department can allow a deeper look at student leader development and their unique responsibilities and circumstances, making the practice of monasticism and spiritual disciplines different for each sub-group of student leaders.

Limitations

While several implications result from the present data in practice and future research, at least three limitations must be taken into consideration. The study resulted in a lack of depth with only eight of the thirty trip participants identifying as student leaders willing to take part in both pre- and post-trip interviews. Therefore, a small sample size may not present a valid theory for a grounded theory approach to research.

Another limitation was the timing of the monastic trip. This study sought to develop a theory for student leader training that happens at the beginning of the school, but the data on the impact of monasticism was taken halfway through the school year. To collect timely data, researchers should collect data before the school year begins.

Prior to the present study, the researcher had participated in the same monastic trip, which leads to the third limitation. Having gone on the monastic trip as a student leader and benefitted from the experience, there is the potential for researcher bias in the data collected and presented in this study.

Finally, the present study collected data from one private Christian liberal arts university, causing a generalization of results that may vary at differing institutions. Conducting research at one university created a narrow lens through which the data was viewed and applied. Studies on monastic impacts have potential to be taken to a larger, and more in-depth level in order to continue to discover positive or negative impacts that monasticism has on student leaders.

Conclusion

The practice of monastic values and spiritual disciplines has a positive impact on the development of student leaders. With the use of grounded theory qualitative interviews, this research studied a specific event, remaining subjective with a constructivist lens to produce a theory regarding student leader training. These student leaders experienced life as cenobitic monks for a month, engaging spiritual disciplines that impacted their approach to leadership and daily life upon returning home. On this monastic trip, participants discovered rest, healing, presence, strength, humility, and peace that affected their relationships with self, God, and others. Experiencing monasticism internally impacted these students in ways traditional student leader training cannot. The theory proposed from this study concluded that incorporating monastic practices consistently into student leader training can better equip student leaders emotionally, mentally, and spiritually as they begin to serve and lead on campus.

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Appendix A

Pre-Trip Interview Questions

Spiritual Disciplines:

How would you define spiritual disciplines?

What spiritual disciplines do you currently implement in your life or would desire to?

What spiritual disciplines would you count as important?

Who in your life embodies spiritual disciplines? What have you learned from them?

Monasticism:

What is your current understanding of monasticism?

What exposure, if any, have you had to monasticism?

What role, if any, does monasticism play in today's society? On your campus? In your

life?

Student Leadership:

What are three characteristics a student leader should possess?

Why did you become (position)?

What were your goals for being a (position) when you started? Have they changed?

What are your goals now?

What aspects of student leadership training helped prepare you for your job?

How do you describe your current relationship with your hall? With your

team?

What are your strengths as a student leader? What are your weaknesses?

How have your grown as a student leader since school started?

How do you view your role as a (position)? What is the definition of your role?

What is your role on your leadership team? How does that reflect that type of person you

believe you are?

What are the dynamics of your leadership team?

Monastic Trip:

What is your understanding of the trip on which you are going?

Why did you decide to apply for this trip?

What are your learning goals? Personal growth goals?

What about the trip excites you?

What about the trip makes you nervous?

How do you feel about leaving your position for a month?

Appendix B

Post-Trip Interview Questions

Spiritual Disciplines:

How would you define spiritual disciplines?

What spiritual disciplines do you currently implement in your life or would desire to do

so?

What spiritual disciplines would you count as important?

How does engaging in spiritual disciplines affect your daily life?

Monasticism:

What is your current understanding of monasticism?

What, if any, are your views of historical monastic figures that you studied?

What role does monasticism have in our society and in your life?

Student Leadership:

What are three characteristics a student leader should posses?

Why did you become a (position)?

What are your goals now for being a (position)? What goals do you have for finishing

the year?

How has your relationship with the students you serve changed since you

returned? Your relationship with your team?

What are your strengths as a student leader? What are your weaknesses?

How do you view your role as a (position)? What is the definition of your role?

What advice would you give to future student leaders?

Monastic Trip:

What, if any, were the challenges of returning home? And/or, what was easy?

What are three key lessons you learned?

How would you describe this trip to someone from the Midwest?

Why is this trip important, or not important?

How has this trip impacted you? Is it still impacting you a month later?

Are pieces of the trip applicable to your role as a (position)? How so?