

A Grounded Theory Investigation into Depression in Freshmen College Students

Background

- As many as 30.3% of college students have reported feeling so depressed it was difficult to function (ACHA, 2015)
- In a study of college freshmen at a private, faith-based, Midwestern university ($n = 188$), 47.87% demonstrated significant depressive symptomology (Brandy, et al., 2015)
- Healthy People 2020, (2010) has identified decreasing the number of adolescents with depressive episodes as a Leading Health Indicator for the United States
- The consequences of unrecognized or untreated depression in adolescents can be significant:
 - High-risk behaviors
 - Poor academic performance
 - Disrupted relationships
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Suicidal ideation
 - Physical health problems(Reeves & Riddle, 2014)

Purpose

- The majority of published studies examining depression in college students have used a quantitative approach and have not differentiated between age and points in their academic careers
- Therefore, *the purpose of this study was to allow sophomore level college students to freely discuss their experiences of living with depression as a college freshman*

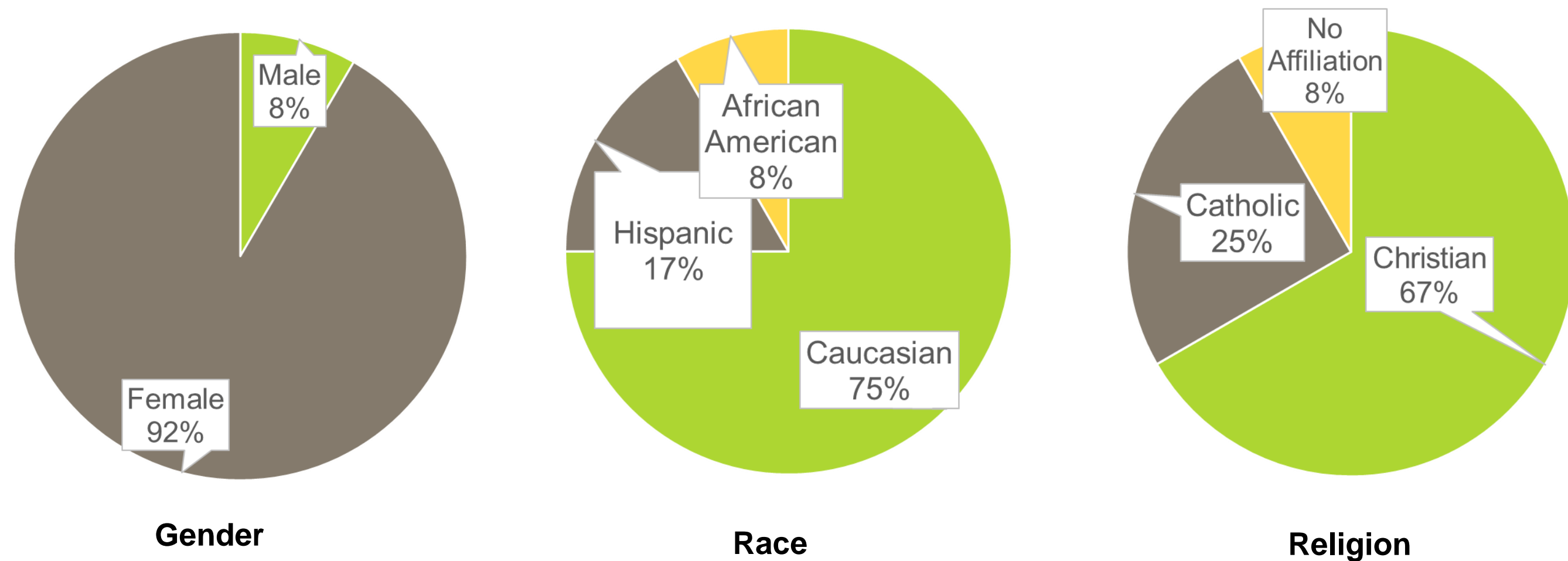


Method

Approval: University IRB
Setting: Private, faith-based, Midwestern University
Design: Grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
Sample: Sophomore undergraduates
Interviews: September, 2015 – November, 2015
Question: *“What is the experience of your freshman year in college?”*

Sample

Age ($N = 12$) : range 19-22, $M = 19.9$



Qualitative Analysis

- Verbatim analysis of the interviews using a constant comparative method resulted in a description of the students' perceptions of the experience.
- Four major themes emerged:*
 - expression of stress*
 - changes in eating habits*
 - sleep issues, and*
 - procrastination/putting things off.*
- Through reflection, students connected these themes in their statements
**see underlined statements*

Examples of the Themes

Expressions of Stress

“And then you start to fall behind on your homework, and then you start to fall behind in your class, and then you start to fall behind just emotionally, and you start to feel like all the stress comes together, and it all builds up into one big problem. And then that’s where the depression hits..”

“I just fell apart, and I just would end up in my room, and I just lost...I think one time I had a nervous breakdown, and I literally just cried in the closet for two hours, ...”

Changes in Eating Habits

“I gained some weight. But I mean, the freshman 15 or whatever they want to call it. But it should be called the stress 15 because that’s why.”

“I lost weight. I lost like 10 to 15 pounds because I wasn’t hungry and when you sleep a lot you also – that like, I don’t know, at least for me when I sleep it can sort of – I’m not hungry when I was up right after sleeping because my stomach feels all weird and so when I was sleeping a lot I was just not hungry....”

Sleep Issues

“I felt like all I wanted to do was sleep, and it started to get to the point where like I didn’t want – I was so tired that I couldn’t find the energy to go to the class in the morning. And I feel like that’s one of the signs. You are so tired and so exhausted that you’re like oh, I’m just going to sleep for two more minutes, and then soon ten turns an hour, an hour turns into five, and then you just don’t get out of bed, and you don’t go to class.”

Procrastination/Putting Things Off

“I didn’t want to go to class. I didn’t really care. I felt like I was in a big pond and life if I was scuba diving, no more air. That’s really how I felt.”

“So, it felt like oh my gosh, can I really make it through this and I just didn’t want to do anything. I would go to class and I would go back to my room and I would just like lay there and I didn’t want to like even just going to union to get dinner was like oh my god.”

Conclusions & Recommendations

- Themes emerged across participants and reflected their perceptions of freshman year in college
- Descriptors suggested the emotional, social, physical, and behavioral responses to what is perceived as depression
- Explore data further for additional insight into prevention strategies to help college students through the freshman experience