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Janczak, Rachel R. *Coping Strategies of College Faculty Experiencing Stress and Burnout at Work*

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how faculty's' coping strategies were related to recovery from stressors at work. This study aimed to determine if available resources help them cope with the stress they experience at work, and whether such coping strategies were negatively related to burnout from the profession. It was predicted that the fewer resources faculty had available to use towards coping with their stress, the more stress they would experience, which was expected to relate to more burnout symptoms. Faculty at two different public universities were invited to complete questionnaires including the Conservation of Resources – Evaluation, Perceived Stress Scale, the brief COPE Inventory, and the Burnout Measure-Short Version. This study was an extension of prior work on stress, coping, and burnout in the workplace done in a K-12 context. The major question here was if findings would hold among university faculty working in the United States. A sample of 58 participants from UW-Stout and 14 participants from MNSU were collected. Correlation and regression analyses did not reveal support for the predictions. Implications and future research are discussed.

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Chapter I: Literature Review

According to Lease (1999), job-related stress causes a concern that manifests itself into absenteeism, turnover, and reduced productivity. New faculty in higher education have indicated more work stress than young physicians in general practice (Lease, 1999). Much of research done on this topic of stress in education has focused on K-12 level instructors. The primary aim here is to explore this topic among university faculty. Contrary to what most people believe, the problem of faculty attrition has less to do with a faculty shortage and retirements, and more to do with stress and dissatisfaction (McCarthy et al., 2014). Around one third of instructors in the K-12 level have reported leaving the profession within the first three years of service due to burnout from stress (McCarthy et al., 2014). According to Mintz (2007), those in the K-12 teaching profession experience a high incidence of stress. Around 50% of instructors at the K-12 level report being stressed daily (McCarthy, Lambert & Reiser, 2014). The purpose of this study is to determine how college-level faculty utilize coping strategies to recover from stressors at work. Specifically, the current study aims to determine if available resources help them cope with the stress they experience at work, and whether such coping strategies are negatively related to burnout from the profession. The current study is a replication of prior work on stress, coping, and burnout in the workplace using university faculty working in the United States. Much of what is being replicated was done in Australia using teachers at the K-12 level. It is predicted that the fewer resources college faculty have available to use towards coping with their stressors, the more stress they will experience, which makes them vulnerable to burnout. The current research is important given the value of retaining qualified faculty (Kaspereen, 2012; Parker et al., 2012) and rise in turnover for the past fifteen years (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus & Davidson, 2013).

The paper will be organized as follows. First, a theoretical framework will be presented to provide context for this project and predictions. Next, the literature on burnout, coping, stress and resources will be reviewed. Following background information, the current study and hypotheses will be presented. Methodology and results are described, followed by a discussion of the findings.

Theoretical Background: Conservation of Resources

According to Hobföll (1989), the Conservation of Resources theory states that individuals defend and build resources for themselves, and are vulnerable when there is a chance they will lose valued resources. When individuals are met with challenges to their resources (e.g., a decline in the economy, loss of a house, broken laptop), they are expected to take action to persevere and minimize the loss of the resources. The theory suggests there are four different types of resources that individuals have, which include objects, conditions, personal characteristics, and energy (Alarcon, Edwards, & Menke, 2011). Objects are the physical nature of a resource such as a laptop or sufficient equipment for a department's needs. Social support from a friend or colleague in the same department is an example of a condition resource (will be sought when needed). Personal characteristics include individual differences such as political views or being resistant or vulnerable. Energies are resources important for gaining other resources. An example of this is money or time (Alarcon et al., 2011).

There are many different outcomes that could occur if an individual loses resources (Hobföll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). The consequence will vary depending on the type of resource lost. If an object is lost, there may be emotional outcome such as sadness, but most individuals will not experience high stress reaction (Hobföll et al., 2003). If individuals have enough other resources besides what was lost, they will manifest fewer negative outcomes, as

they are adequately prepared to face adversity (Hobföll et al., 2003). For example, given staffing or enrollment considerations, a faculty member may not be able to continue teaching a course. With adequate support from his or her colleagues, the faculty member would be prepared for the adversity. According to Alarcon et al. (2011), those that experience energy losses will also lose social support (which is a condition resource), and will experience anger and mood shifts in response to that stressor. For example, a faculty member may lose the support of a colleague and feel vulnerable, and may experience anger in response. In sum, Hobföll et al. (2003) and Alarcon et al. (2011) confirmed in their findings that loss of resources is a central impact of life stress on psychological well-being.

Stress in the Workplace

When people experience a loss of resources, they can experience stress. The definition of stress is credited to Hans Selye, who defined stress as the general response of the human body to any demand made on it (Jex & Britt, 2014). This can include positive stress (eustress) and negative stress (distress; Parker & Ragsdale, 2015). Individual perceptions of whether a stressor is positive or negative vary. For example, accepting and beginning a new job can be a stressor in an individual's life. Common stressors that a college-level faculty member may experience can include working conditions (e.g., no office, loud office space, or poor classrooms; Robinson, 1989). Other common stressors can include low pay, student-teacher relationships, and discipline of students or other coworkers (Robinson, 1989). Some people will perceive this as a positive stress, while others will perceive it as negative (Parker & Ragsdale, 2015). The majority of research on stress describes stressors as threats to someone's physical, cognitive, and psychological well-being (Flinchbaugh, Luth, & Li, 2015). Some psychological and

physiological consequences of experiencing prolonged stress include: weight gain, heart disease, depression, anxiety, heart attack, stroke, and even cancer (Watson et al., 2012).

Regarding the workplace specifically, according to Richardson and Rothstein (2008), stress occurs when work-related conditions, (e.g., overload of material, angry coworkers) prompt the employee to change his or her mental or emotional state. This causes the individual to change his or her normal behaviors. For instance, if a faculty member is asked to teach an extra course the next semester, that faculty member may change his or her emotional state and become easily upset due to the stress. An individual can perceive the loss or harm to their resources as threatening (e.g., loss of colleagues, work overload, financial difficulties), increasing their level of stress (Watson, Goh & Wawang, 2012).

When considering the work of faculty specifically, those who believe they have few resources are more prone to developing high stress and will have their stress impact different areas of their life outside of work (e.g., home, hobbies, personal relationships (Lease, 1999). In contrast, faculty who believe that they have more resources available than their demands require will perceive challenges as less stressful (McCarthy et al., 2014). Given perceived demands, the resources faculty members have available will help them feel more prepared to cope with the produced stress (McCarthy et al., 2014). Also, faculty members perceive the resources as offsetting the stress they have experienced. The following hypothesis aims to replicate the findings of McCarthy et al. (2014).

Hypothesis 1: Resources are negatively related to the experience of stress, such that as the number of resources increases, stress decreases.

On top of using the resources an individual has available, there are three different ways to manage or cope with stressors; the first includes primary interventions. This type of intervention

requires removing the stressor completely (Quick & Tetrick, 2011). An example of primary intervention is flexible schedules for employees in response to time stressors. The next type of intervention is a secondary strategy. These interventions aim to modify an individual's response to the stressor when it cannot be fully removed. This involves training to reduce its harmful effect (Quick & Tetrick, 2011). An example of secondary intervention can be work strategies such as team building and diversity education and training. The final intervention level is tertiary. These interventions aim to minimize the effects on the problems that occur from stress. They do not prevent stress, but help individuals recover (Quick & Tetrick, 2011). For instance, psychological counseling is an example of tertiary intervention.

Coping Strategies: Problem-and Emotion-focused

While formal interventions aim to eliminate or manage stress more formally, employees often engage in a variety of less formal coping mechanisms on their own as well, some of which are healthier than others. Given stress cannot always be eliminated from one's work, coping mechanisms are an important way to help manage the experience of stress (Richardson & Rothstein, 2008). For the purpose of this study, two coping mechanisms will be of focus: problem- and emotion-focused coping, both of which are beneficial to the faculty (Parker et al., 2012). First, problem-focused coping has been defined as altering a stressful situation or environment in order to manage it (Latack, 1986). According to Gianakos (2000), it was found to be related to lower burnout and high work satisfaction. Emotion-focused coping, in contrast, involves altering the emotional distress or response one might be experiencing (Latack, 1986), and can lead to greater feelings of depersonalization (Gianakos, 2000). Gianakos (2000) looked at a sample of 176 adult undergraduate students that were employed and attending college to develop an understanding of gender roles in coping. An example of emotion-focused coping is

pushing the stress out of thought, eating out of stress, drinking alcohol, and praying for guidance (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Parker et al. (2012) determined that problem-focused coping behaviors tended to lead to more positive outcomes in comparison to emotion-focused coping. These authors studied faculty's well-being (defined as how people evaluate their life satisfaction) in the workplace. Findings indicated that faculty that engaged in problem-focused coping had higher engagement and well-being, and lower levels of stress and burnout. Additionally, Gianakos (2000) found that when psychology undergrads were engaged in problem-focused coping, they felt less negative outcomes from the stress they were experiencing from school. These findings suggest that individuals who choose to engage in problem-focused coping perceive higher control of their situation and use techniques such as planning and self-management to alter stressful situations (Parker et al., 2012). This coping strategy helps develop competence of how to handle the stress and overcome difficult obstacles, and is related to higher work engagement, greater job satisfaction, and lower absenteeism (Parker et al., 2012).

Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, is linked to low perceived control over the situation. It is meant to protect an individual's self-esteem by deflecting the emotional issue from their present thoughts (Parker et al., 2012). Parker et al. (2012) conducted a longitudinal study of over 400 teachers to determine how teachers' goal orientation predicted their coping strategies (including emotion-focused). Parker et al. (2012) also predicted that coping strategies would predict well-being, which included burnout. Individuals who use this coping strategy will not try to alter the environmental causes, but rather, address the feelings they experience from stressors (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). This coping style is associated with more depression than problem-focused coping (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). Additionally, physical pain-related outcomes are

more likely to occur when an individual copes emotionally (Thompson, Keogh, Chen, & French, 2012).

It is important to remember that the coping mechanism a person chooses to use depends on characteristics of a person, and what type of stress he or she may be experiencing (Thompson et al., 2012). According to Gianakos (2000), individuals can engage in *both* problem-focused and emotion-focused coping at the same time for different stressors. Depending on the threat, people decide if they feel able to engage in problem-focused or emotion-focused coping per their resources (Gianakos, 2000). When individuals, such as faculty, have adequate resources at their disposal, they are able to deploy positive and successful coping strategies when faced with stressors that threaten resources (Alarcon et al., 2011). In this case, problem-focused coping is used to protect their feeling of self-worth, but will not last long if they do not have many resources to devote to the coping (Parker et al., 2012). The following hypothesis aim to replication findings of Parker et al. (2012):

Hypothesis 2a: Resources are positively related to problem-focused coping.

Hypothesis 2b: Resources are negatively related to emotion-focused coping.

Gender and Coping Strategies

In addition to the volume of resources people have access to, other variables might relate to the type of coping people select. For example, there is literature that suggests gender may relate to coping. Gender is an important variable to consider since previous research has shown education is a female-dominated occupation (González-Morales, Rodríguez, & Peiró, 2010). Research has shown that males and females use different coping strategies and, therefore will experience stress outcomes differently (González-Morales et al., 2010). For instance, males tend to engage in problem-focused coping (attempt to decrease the stressor), while women tend to

engage in emotion-focused coping (deflect the problem; González-Morales et al., 2010). Researchers believe these results are due to the role constraint hypothesis (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). The role constraint hypothesis suggests that gender differences in coping with stress are a result of the different roles society expects men and women to occupy. This results in men and women being affected differently by the same stressors and situations in their occupations (Felsten, 1998). Females are expected to express their emotions, which aligns with emotion-focused coping (González-Morales et al., 2010), while men will practice competency and rationality by using problem-focused coping (González-Morales et al., 2010). Females have reported greater occupational stress than males as well (Martin et al., 2013). To replicate past research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3a: Females will report engaging in more emotion-focused coping.

Hypothesis 3b: Males will report engaging in more problem-focused coping.

Burnout: Consequence of Prolonged Stress

If individuals continue to experience stress that outweighs their resources, they can eventually experience burnout. Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion, which occurs when an individual experiences stress to the extent that they feel the only way to get rid of the stress is to leave the situation (Malach-Pines, 2005). Burnout is a multidimensional construct consisting of: emotional exhaustion, absence of feelings of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Parker et al., 2012). Faculty members who report that their demands outweigh their resources have reported more burnout symptoms (McCarthy et al., 2014). There are a number of consequences that result from burnout in faculty, including feelings of job insecurity, health issues, teaching students who lack motivation, time pressure, coping with change, dealing with colleagues, and poor working conditions (Akbaba, 2014).

According to McCarthy et al. (2014), instructors at the K-12 level affected by an overload of job stress will lower their occupational commitment and raise their intentions to quit. Furthermore, burnout has been correlated with turnover in teachers (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus & Davidson, 2013). Over 40% of the instructors at the K-12 level ($n = 185$) questioned in the McCarthy et al. (2014) study reported considering leaving the teaching profession due to feelings of burnout.

Of particular interest in the current study is the connection to resources. Hobföll et al. (2003) found that loss of resources is central to the impact of stress on psychological well-being of an individual. If people experience a loss of resources, research has shown that they will experience stress (Hobföll et al., 2003), which can lead to burnout if the resources are not replenished.

Hypothesis 4: Resources are negatively related to burnout.

Past research has shown that emotion-focused coping is associated with higher levels of burnout (Akbaba, 2014). A study done by Payne (2001) identified emotional exhaustion as the first phase of burnout. Individuals coping emotion-focused will experience emotional exhaustion. Working to meet the emotional demands of a job, such as educating, will cause greater stress and burnout (Payne, 2001). Coping with the emotions will also cause individuals to become burned out. Parker et al. (2012) noted that when individuals perceive less control of a stressful situation, they are likely to engage in emotion-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping is related to higher stress levels, and over the long term, will increase vulnerability to burnout. In contrast, individuals that perceive control of their stressful situations are likely to engage in problem-focused coping, which reduces stress levels further. The following hypothesis is a replication of Parker et al.'s (2012) prediction:

Hypothesis 5: Emotion-focused coping is more strongly related to burnout than problem-focused coping.

Chapter II: Methodology

The intention of this study was to examine college-level faculty at a full circle level that has not been done in the past. Specifically, the variables included gender, stress, coping strategies, burnout levels, and level of available resources. Additionally, the participating faculty were asked to list their top three current stressors at their job.

Participants and Procedure

Faculty from the University of Wisconsin – Stout (UWS) and Minnesota State University - Mankato (MNSU) were invited to complete an online survey regarding their perceived resources, experience of stress/burnout, and coping. All faculty members had equal opportunity to participate in the study. A power analysis suggested that a minimum of 105 participants are necessary for sufficient power to detect effects. A total of 58 participants (21 male, 17 female, 20 unknown) were collected from the University of Wisconsin – Stout. Participants from UWS varied in age from 31-68 ($M = 50.00$, $SD = 10.01$). They taught for 17.51 ($SD = 9.03$) years. A total of 14 participants (4 male, 4 female, 6 unknown) were collected from Minnesota State University - Mankato. Participants from MNSU varied in age from 36-67 ($M = 50.00$, $SD = 13.45$). They taught for 18.69 ($SD = 12.85$) years.

An email was sent to University of Wisconsin – Stout faculty through addresses obtained from the PARQ office on January 19th, 2016. Participants had until March 26th, 2016 to complete the survey; one reminder email was sent. After obtaining permission to perform research at Minnesota State University - Mankato, an email was sent to the faculty at MNSU through addresses obtained from the faculty search website on April 14th, 2016. These participants had until May 21st, 2016 to complete the survey, a reminder email was sent during this time. The original email message explained the purpose of this project, and that it was completely

voluntary. A link containing both an implied consent document and the survey questions was placed at the end of the message. Names were not collected. However, basic demographic questions were asked to describe the sample (e.g., age, sex, years of experience, and position obtained at the university).

Measures

Various test measures were used in this study. Participants were asked to complete four different measures that aimed to determine stress, level of resources, coping strategies, and burnout. The final questions included demographic information and top three stressors. Each of the measures is described in more detail below.

Perceived resources. The Conservation of Resources-Evaluation created by Hobföll and Lilly (1993) was used to assess perceptions of resources. The questionnaire included 148 statements regarding perception of resources (e.g., personal transportation, free time, hope). There were 74 statements related to the feeling or threat of a loss or actual loss and 74 statements related to the extent of resources gained. See Appendix A for the full scale. Individuals were asked to rate how much their perceived actual loss and threat of loss felt they had a loss/gain of a variety of resources in the last six months. They were then asked their perceived gain of a variety of resources. This scale provides an indication of overall perception of resources (Hobföll & Lilly, 1993). These were rated on a 5-point Likert scale of (0) *not at all/not applicable* to (4) *to a great degree* (Hobföll & Lilly, 1993). Although the original measure describes three potential ways of examining resources, the current study focuses only on perceived actual loss and perceived gain. For the purpose of this research, only the average for perceived actual loss and average for perceived gain will be used. The perceived actual loss scale has a coefficient alpha of .99 from this study and the perceived actual gain scale has a coefficient alpha of .99 also.

Coping strategies. For the purpose of measuring coping behaviors, the brief version of the COPE Inventory was used (Carver, 1989). This 28-item scale determined various ways individuals cope: problem-focused coping, active coping, emotion-focused coping, and social support coping. Active coping is related to and part of problem-focused coping and social support coping is related to and part of emotion-focused coping (Carver, 1997). There are three composite subscales that measure emotion-focused, problem-focused, and dysfunctional coping (Cooper, Katona, & Livingston, 2008). The current study focused only on the emotion-focused and problem-focused dimensions. Example questions include “I’ve been taking action to try to make the situation better”, “I’ve been expressing my negative feelings”, and “I’ve been blaming myself for things that happened”. Participants responded on a 4-point Likert scale from (1) *I haven’t been doing this at all* to (4) *I’ve been doing this a lot*. See Appendix B for the full scale. A Cronbach’s alpha of .83 for problem-focused coping, and .72 for emotion-focused coping was found from this study.

Perceived stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) was used to assess work stress. The scale consists of 14 questions that asked participants to report about their feelings during the month prior to the study. They were asked how often they felt a certain way (e.g. “How often have you felt nervous and stressed?”), and scored on a 5-point Likert scale from (0) *never* to (4) *very often* (Cohen et al., 1983). The responses were scored by computing the average of each participant. The average coefficient alpha reliability for this scale is .85 (Cohen et al., 1983). See Appendix C for the full scale.

Burnout. The Burnout Measure-Short Version (Malach-Pines, 2005) was used to measure burnout. This survey had been supported in previous research with K-12 level faculty, and is the second most frequently used self-report measure of burnout (Malach-Pines, 2005).

This 10-item measure was rated on a 7-point frequency scale from (1) *never* to (7) *always*, and assessed the different dimensions of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion (Malach-Pines, 2005). Individuals received one overall score from these dimensions from an average of the ten items. Example items included tired, hopeless, depressed, and disappointed with people (Malach-Pines, 2005). The internal consistency coefficients of the measure in this study were found to be .93. The construct validity of this measure has been shown through clinical validations and correlations with relevant variables including a negative correlation with work satisfaction and a positive correlation with work stress (Malach-Pines, 2005).

Demographics

In addition to the scales above, participants were asked to provide information about their gender, age, years of experience, and the position they hold at the university.

Chapter III: Results

Data were collected from faculty at University of Wisconsin – Stout ($n = 58$) primarily, and Minnesota State University – Mankato ($n = 14$) for comparative purposes. Data from both samples were downloaded from Qualtrics into SPSS. They were then cleaned. Hypotheses 1, 2a and b, and 4 use correlations and the findings will be explained in greater detail farther down in this section. Correlations, descriptive statistics and reliabilities for all study variables from the UW-Stout sample are shown in Table 1. Given the small sample size of the comparison group of faculty, only descriptive information is presented here, whereas the hypothesis tests below utilize the primary Wisconsin university faculty sample.

Table 1

Correlations Among all Study Variables (N=58)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Age	50.36	10.09								
2. Years of Experience	17.51	9.03	.65**							
3. Resources: Actual Gain	151.57	61.54	.30	.40*						
4. Resources: Actual Loss	121.92	54.48	.16	.13	.30					
5. Emotion-focused coping	22.79	5.34	.10	.23	.23	.25				
6. Problem-focused coping	14.95	4.15	.04	.26	.15	.52**	.74**			
7. Burnout	3.30	1.23	-.19	.03	.19	.48**	.15	.45**		
8. Stress	3.32	.30	-.02	-.10	.01	.06	-.05	-.04	.44**	

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

In addition, at the end of the survey, faculty members were asked to describe their three greatest (current) stressors at work. The question was addressed to faculty at both universities to compare and contrast responses. The keywords were highlighted and themes were created based off these findings. See Tables 2 and 3. While the comparison sample is small, note that workload-related comments appear near the top of both lists.

Table 2

Primary Stressors of Faculty at the University of Wisconsin – Stout

Theme	Definition	N	Examples
Daily job duties	Responsibilities and expected job duties	21	“Class preparation”; “Grading papers”; “Planning research”; “Needing to be my own administrative assistant”
Too much work	Too much work to get done	20	“Workload: simply too much work to get done during waking hours”; “Excessive workload”
Time/Resources	Not enough time or resources to accomplish work	17	“Lack of resources to do my job well”; “Lack of time due to excessive workload”
Administration and Government	Problems with administration or the state	16	“Administration is destroying the department I work in”; “Lack of State Government support for faculty”
Pay	Pay is too low or lack of increases	10	“Low pay, regular pay cuts”; “Morale with lack of pay increases” Continual decrease in take home pay”;
Students	Students or students’ attitudes or needs	7	“Demands from students”; “Dealing with students”
Other		22	

Table 3

Primary Stressors of Faculty at Minnesota State University – Mankato

Theme	Definition	N	Examples
Workload	Amount of work and tasks that come along with work	9	“Grading papers”, Writing more to publish in journals”, “Workload”
Other individuals	Administration, coworkers, students	7	“Incompetent people”, “Department senior male faculty bullying behavior”, “Unprofessional coworker conduct”
Other		3	“Lack of job security”, “Lower levels of service in support offices”, “Needing to get tenured”

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis one stated that resources would be negatively related to the experience of stress. A Pearson's correlation ($r(33) = .01, p = .955$) revealed a no correlation between actual loss perceptions of resources and stress, and similarly, a ($r(35) = .07, p = .699$) no correlation between actual gain perceptions of resources and stress. Hypothesis one was not supported.

The second hypotheses suggested that resources would be positively related to problem-focused coping (H2a) and negatively related to emotion-focused coping (H2b). A Pearson's correlation ($r(29) = .15, p = .439$) showed a small positive relationship between resources and problem-focused coping, although the relationship is not significant. Unexpectedly, the correlation between resources and emotion-focused coping was trending towards a positive relationship ($r(29) = .23, p = .242$). Support was not found for H2.

Hypothesis 3 suggested that females would report engaging in more emotion-focused coping (H3a), and males would report engaging in more problem-focused coping (H3b). Two independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to explore these hypotheses. The first *t* test examined gender differences in emotion-focused coping. Results indicated that men and women use this coping mechanism similarly, $t(33) = -.04, p = .965, d = -.08$. The results show that on average, females ($M = 22.93, SD = 6.26$) engage in about the same level of emotion-focused coping as men ($M = 22.85, SD = 4.90$). The second test, exploring gender differences in problem-focused coping, resulted in a similar outcome, $t(33) = -.07, p = .946, d = -.1$. The results of this test show that on average, males ($M = 14.90, SD = 4.18$) did not engage in more problem-focused coping compared to females ($M = 15, SD = 4.36$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was not supported. Men and women engaged in both forms of coping similarly.

Hypothesis 4 stated that resources would be negatively related to burnout. A Pearson's correlation ($r(34) = .19, p = .281$) did not reveal a significant relationship between perceived gain resources and burnout. The correlation between perceived loss resources and burnout was significant, ($r(36) = .47, p = .003$), but not in the expected direction. Therefore, support was not found for hypothesis 4.

Lastly, Hypothesis 5 predicted that emotion-focused coping would be more strongly related to burnout than problem-focused coping. A multiple linear regression was conducted, regressing burnout onto both emotion and problem-focused coping. A significant overall model ($R^2 = .282, F(2,35) = 6.883, p = .003$) indicates that the combination of coping strategies did predict burnout. Looking more closely at the individual predictors, emotion-focused coping ($\beta = -.42, p = .056$) was not found to be significantly related to burnout. However, problem-focused coping ($\beta = .77, p = .001$) was found to be significantly related to burnout, but in the opposite direction from expected. Here, the positive beta weight indicates that the more problem-focused coping people engage in, the greater their level of burnout. Therefore, hypothesis five was not supported. See Table 4.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Coefficients Predicting Burnout

Variables	B	SE	β
Emotion-focused coping	-.10	.05	-.42
Problem-focused coping	.23	.06	.77**
<i>Adjusted R²</i>		.24	
<i>F</i>		6.88	

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Chapter IV: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation

The purpose of this current study was to determine how faculty's coping strategies were related to recovery from stressors. It was completed to extend a more comprehensive look at the issue with university faculty working in the United States. Faculty at two different public universities in two different states (University of Wisconsin – Stout and Minnesota State University – Mankato) were asked to complete questionnaires that measured perceived stress, the amount of resources they felt they had gained and lost in the past few months, how burnt out they felt, and how they coped with stressors in their lives.

The first hypothesis aimed to understanding how resources were related to the experience of stress. Although resources had previously been reported to be negatively related to stress in the context of K-12 instructors (McCarthy et al., 2014), this prediction was not supported here among university faculty. In fact, resources were unrelated to stress. It is possible that other variables that were not measured are related to the experience of stress in this context (e.g., workload). Another reason this hypothesis was not supported could be that the stress the faculty experience is beyond help from their resources, or that additional resources do not decrease these particular stressors. Such as, a faculty member may report having high resources, but few of those resources help manage their stress. The two primary themes to emerge in this case included daily responsibilities and workload. It may not be the case that either of these stressors can be changed at this time with additional resources.

The next two predictions focused on types of coping. First, hypothesis two was also related to resources, here suggesting that resources would be positively related to problem-focused coping and negatively related to emotion-focused coping. The research showed that, although there was a relationship between coping and resources, it was not significant. The result

that indicated a positive relationship between emotion-focused coping and resources was against the previous research. This finding could be because of the perception that, in this context, participants have of their resources. If a participant has more social resources, they may cope more emotion-focused and that may be beneficial to them. Hypothesis three suggested that females would report engaging in more emotion-focused coping, and males will report engaging in more problem-focused coping. Although past research showed females often report using emotion-focused mechanisms (more than males), that finding was not replicated here. In fact, males and females reported using both coping options similarly.

The next hypothesis (H4) focused on resources relating to burnout, specifically that there would be a negative relationship between the two. Hobföll et al. (2003) concluded resources are central to the impact of stress on the well-being of an individual. The current research on university faculty did not produce a significant relationship between resources gained and burnout. The research did produce a significant relationship between loss of resources and burnout which was to be expected. As more resources were lost by a participant, the more burnout they felt. Given the small sample size, it is possible that an effect was missed for the gain of resources.

Lastly, Hypothesis 5 explored coping styles and burnout. Again, this prediction was not supported. While problem-focused coping was significantly related to burnout, it was in the opposite direction as anticipated. A reason for this may be due to the types of stressors faculty identified experiencing. If an individual is experiencing stress from a coworker, for example, this person may not change, which causes the stress to stay and burnout to possibly occur.

Implications and Recommendations

The current study expanded on coping and stress among educators. Results indicate that the relationship between stressors, coping styles, and burnout may be more complex than originally anticipated. The expected outcomes were that faculty would cope based on the resources they had access to. The anticipation was that female faculty would cope more emotion-focused while male faculty coped more problem-focused; that was not the case. Research can be done to find resolutions to the administration issues UW-Stout faculty expressed. Time management was found to be a big stressor at both universities (17 reports from UWS and 7 from MNSU); faculty need more time to do all that is expected of them. What was not expected is that no hypotheses would be fully supported. Faculty at the universities expressed stressors and feelings of burnout but do not seem to experience and cope the way that past research has found. I would recommend more focus on college-level faculty and their stress levels. This may improve retention and satisfaction levels among universities.

Limitations and Future Directions

It is important to note limitations of this study. First, Wisconsin public education experienced extreme budget cuts in 2015 that affected higher education and the participants in this study. Per the Executive Budget for the state of Wisconsin (2015), the Governor of Wisconsin, Scott Walker, cut \$250 million from the University of Wisconsin; which includes UW-Stout. Another cut in this budget was for faculty at the University of Wisconsin to lose tenure protection. This likely caused high stress for any faculty member concerned about retaining their job. Many faculty expressed anger and stress from this budget. Multiple participants identified their top stressors as stressors done by other individuals. In total, 14 people out of 37 reports mentioned the “state government” or “budget cuts” as one of their current top three stressors.

Another limitation to this study is the small sample sizes from both UW-Stout and MNSU. As mentioned earlier in the current study, a power analysis suggested a minimum of 105 participants to detect effects. Unfortunately, only 58 participants were collected from UW-Stout and 14 from MNSU (72 total). With such a small sample size, it was hard to detect any strong relationships. According to the UW-Stout website, in fall 2016, there were around 271 total faculty. This means that the sample size collected from UW-Stout only represents about 10% of the teaching faculty. The intention of gaining data from MNSU was for a comparison study to the UW-Stout sample. Unfortunately, with only 14 participants from MNSU, there was no ability to create a meaningful comparison. Future studies may require more opportunities for participation than this current study.

Another limitation may be that the measures used in this study were based on perception and self-report. Although there is no current paper measure of stress; a participant may have recorded an answer differently if asked their perceptions another day. A participant may have also recorded having lost resources when they may have never actually had them. Depending on their perceived stress level that day, a participant may have ranked themselves as more burnt out than they truly were on a day-to-day basis. As such, future research would benefit from longitudinal study of these processes and perceptions.

Although this study focused on public universities in the Midwest, it could be duplicated for other universities in the United States. UW-Stout may look at increasing the sample size to determine a clearer picture of the stress experienced by their faculty. Future research at MNSU may isolate only their faculty to determine the level of stress they experience. Overall, more research should be focused on college-level faculty and their experience of stress.

Conclusion

Although not the first study of its kind, the current study was important due to the lack of research on stress and burnout for faculty at the college-level. Faculty support and teach individuals to be successful after education, if there is a continued burnout, there may be a shortage in the faculty needed to teach individuals the tools to advance our world. It was important to measure coping strategies, burnout levels, resources, and perceived stress levels in order to try and capture a full picture of how a faculty member truly feels. Results showed trends towards significance for relationships with stress and resources, stress and burnout, and coping and burnout. Although the hypotheses were not supported, this research was important for future studies at the University of Wisconsin-Stout on stress in their faculty.

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Appendix A: General Resource Evaluation – COR-E

We are interested the extent to which you have experienced **actual loss** or **threat of loss** in any of the list of resources listed overleaf in the last 6 months. Resources can include objects, conditions, personal characteristics, or energies.

Actual loss of resources occurs when the resource has decreased in availability to you (e.g. actual loss of personal health or actual loss of intimacy with spouse or partner). If you have experienced “actual loss” in any of the resources in the last six months, you would rate that “actual loss” from 1 to 4 (1 = actual loss to a small degree, to 4 = actual loss to a great degree) and write your response in the “actual loss” column. If the availability of the resource has not changed, or the resource is not applicable, you would rate “actual loss” as 0 (zero = not at all / not applicable).

Threat of loss occurs when you have been threatened with the loss of the resource but no actual loss has occurred (e.g., there has been a chance that you may lose your job and therefore your stable employment has been threatened with loss). If you have experienced “threat of loss” in any of the resources in the last six months, you would rate that “threat of loss” from 1 to 4 (1 = threat of loss to a small degree, to 4 = threat of loss to great degree) and write the number in the “threat of loss” column. If there was no “threat of loss” of the resource, or the resource is not applicable, you would rate “threat of loss” as 0 (zero = not at all / not applicable).

IMPORTANT

PLEASE NOTE: **DO NOT RATE** the availability of the resource to you. We are only interested in the **CHANGE** in the availability of the resource (i.e., actual loss), **OR** if there has been a “threat of loss” to that resource.

FOR EXAMPLE: **RESOURCE item 26 - Status / Seniority at work:** If the status / seniority of your job 6 months ago is still the same as today then you write a “0” in the actual loss column. If you had experienced no “threat of loss” in the status / seniority of your job during that time then you would also write a “0” in the threat of loss column. If you had experienced some doubt as to whether you may be demoted in your job, but it hasn’t happened yet, then you would rate the “threat of loss” between 1 (threat of loss to a small degree) and 4 (threat of loss to a great degree).

To what extent have I experienced **actual loss** during the past 6 months?

To what extent have I experienced **threat of loss** in the past 6 months?

0 = not at all / not applicable

1 = to a small degree

2 = to a moderate degree

3 = to a considerable degree

4 = to a great degree

1. Personal transportation (car, truck, etc.)
2. Feeling that I am successful
3. Time for adequate sleep
4. Good marriage
5. Adequate clothing
6. Feeling valuable to others
7. Family stability
8. Free time
9. More clothing than I need
10. Sense of pride in myself
11. Intimacy with one or more family members
12. Time for work
13. Feelings that I am accomplishing my goals
14. Good relationship with my children
15. Time with loved ones
16. Necessary tools for work
17. Hope
18. Children's health
19. Stamina/endurance
20. Necessary home appliances
21. Feeling that my future success depends on me
22. Positively challenging routine
23. Personal health
24. Housing that suits my needs
25. Sense of optimism
26. Status/seniority at work
27. Adequate food
28. Larger home than I need
29. Sense of humour
30. Stable employment

31. Intimacy with spouse or partner
32. Adequate home furnishings
33. Feeling that I have control over my life
34. Role as a leader
35. Ability to communicate well
36. Providing children's essentials
37. Feeling that my life is peaceful
38. Acknowledgement of my accomplishments
39. Ability to organize tasks
40. Extras for children
41. Sense of commitment
42. Intimacy with at least one friend
43. Money for extras
44. Self-discipline
45. Understanding from my employer/boss
46. Savings or emergency money
47. Motivation to get things done
48. Spouse/partner's health
49. Support from co-workers
50. Adequate income
51. Feeling that I know who I am
52. Advancement in education or job training
53. Adequate financial credit
54. Feeling independent
55. Companionship
56. Financial assets (stocks, property, etc.)
57. Knowing where I am going with my life
58. Affection from others
59. Financial stability
60. Feeling that my life has meaning/purpose
61. Positive feelings about myself
62. People I can learn from
63. Money for transportation
64. Help with tasks at work
65. Medical insurance
66. Involvement with church, synagogue, etc
67. Retirement security (financial)
68. Help with tasks at home
69. Loyalty of friends

- 70. Money for advancement or self-improvement(education, starting a business, etc.)
- 71. Help with child care
- 72. Involvement in organisations with others who have similar interests
- 73. Financial help if needed
- 74. Health of family/close friends

We are also interested if you have experienced **gain** in any of the following resources in the last 6 months.

Gain of resources occurs when the availability of a particular resource has increased for you (e.g., you and your family have spent more time together in the last 6 months so you have experienced gain in the resource of “time with loved ones”). If you have experienced “gain” in any of the resources in the last 6 months, you would rate that “gain” from 1 to 4 (1 = gain to a small degree to 4 = gain to a great degree) and write your response in the “gain” column. If the availability of the resource is unchanged to you, or the resource is not applicable, you would rate “extent of gain” as 0 (zero = not at all / not applicable).

IMPORTANT

PLEASE NOTE

DO NOT RATE THE AVAILABILITY OF THE RESOURCE. We are only interested in the **GAIN** you have experienced in the resource.

FOR EXAMPLE: **RESOURCE item 4 - Good Marriage:** If you had a good marriage 6 months ago and you still do now, then you would rate the extent of the gain as “0”.

To what extent have I gained them during the last 6 months?

(Same set of 74 items are rated for gain).

Appendix B: Brief COPE

Brief COPE

These items deal with ways you've been coping with the stress in your life since you found out you were going to have to have this operation. There are many ways to try to deal with problems. These items ask what you've been doing to cope with this one. Obviously, different people deal with things in different ways, but I'm interested in how you've tried to deal with it. Each item says something about a particular way of coping. I want to know to what extent you've been doing what the item says. How much or how frequently. Don't answer on the basis of whether it seems to be working or not—just whether or not you're doing it. Use these response choices. Try to rate each item separately in your mind from the others. Make your answers as true FOR YOU as you can.

- 1 = I haven't been doing this at all
- 2 = I've been doing this a little bit
- 3 = I've been doing this a medium amount
- 4 = I've been doing this a lot

1. I've been turning to work or other activities to take my mind off things.
2. I've been concentrating my efforts on doing something about the situation I'm in.
3. I've been saying to myself "this isn't real."
4. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to make myself feel better.
5. I've been getting emotional support from others.
6. I've been giving up trying to deal with it.
7. I've been taking action to try to make the situation better.
8. I've been refusing to believe that it has happened.
9. I've been saying things to let my unpleasant feelings escape.
10. I've been getting help and advice from other people.
11. I've been using alcohol or other drugs to help me get through it.
12. I've been trying to see it in a different light, to make it seem more positive.
13. I've been criticizing myself.
14. I've been trying to come up with a strategy about what to do.
15. I've been getting comfort and understanding from someone.
16. I've been giving up the attempt to cope.
17. I've been looking for something good in what is happening.
18. I've been making jokes about it.
19. I've been doing something to think about it less, such as going to movies, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, or shopping.
20. I've been accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened.
21. I've been expressing my negative feelings.
22. I've been trying to find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.
23. I've been trying to get advice or help from other people about what to do.
24. I've been learning to live with it.
25. I've been thinking hard about what steps to take.
26. I've been blaming myself for things that happened.
27. I've been praying or meditating.
28. I've been making fun of the situation.

Appendix C: Perceived Stress Scale - 14

INSTRUCTIONS:

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during THE LAST MONTH. In each case, you will be asked to indicate your response by placing an “X” over the circle representing HOW OFTEN you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don’t try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

0 = Never; 1 = Almost never; 2 = Sometimes; 3 = Fairly often; 4 = Very often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?
4. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with day to day problems and annoyances?
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?
6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?
9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?
13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?
14. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Appendix D: Burnout Measure: Short VersionBurnout Measure: Short Version

Please use the following scale to answer the question: When you think about your work overall, how often do you feel the following?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never	almost never	rarely	sometimes	often	very often	always

Tired

Disappointed with people

Hopeless

Trapped

Helpless

Depressed

Physically weak/Sickly

Worthless/Like a failure

Difficulties Sleeping

“I’ve had it”

Appendix E: Final Questions

Demographics:

Gender: Male or Female

Years of experience teaching:

Age:

Open Ended Question:

What are your current top three stressors you experience at work?

1.

2.

3.