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Original Free Will Baptist Clergy Role Stress: A Definition and Its Emotional Consequences

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Acknowledgments

Rather than insert a cliché line here, I will say this: to move forward, a community is needed. Throughout this journey, the need for community was a daily necessity; I am thankful to have found one. This community began with classmates Jeff, Jill, Caryn, and more, who listened patiently, encouraged frequently, and pushed me beyond a stagnate place of complacency. This community further evolved when I had the good fortune to meet and be guided by my chair, Dr. Jackie Halstead. Dr. Halstead's wisdom and reassurance allowed me to move even when movement seemed unmanageable. Alongside Dr. Halstead came Drs. Ben Ries and BJ McMichael, committee members whose acumen and drive caused me to think in fresh, insightful ways. And finally, there were the numerous professors of Abilene Christian University that encouraged, challenged, and supported me throughout this process of academic growth.

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Finally, to all the clergy, leaders, and supporters of the Original Free Will Baptist denomination, thank you for seeing in me what God can do. I pray daily with you, hoping that

this study becomes a light that God can use to move among our people. There is much potential among this body, so let's get to the work that God is calling to each of us!

Abstract

The role of a clergyperson is often understood as one that creates a connection between the human and the divine, faith and God. However, such a vast role is typically executed in specific ways, such as leading Bible studies, visiting the sick, leading worship, and the act of preaching. At times, such a role demands even more nuanced behaviors based upon the context, population, and time. As this study posited, the problem is that such a multiplicity of clergy expectations inevitably create role stress, as understood through the constructs of role ambiguity and role conflict. In particular, how one might best define role stress as it is experienced by rural, Original Free Will Baptist clergy was previously unknown. Therefore, this study's purpose was to define role stress and its emotional outcomes based upon first-hand experiences by the Original Free Will Baptist clergy population. Research was conducted through an interpretative phenomenological analysis, which identified and interviewed nine Original Free Will Baptist clergy in a semistructured interview format. Data were gathered through semistructured interviews and memos and analyzed through a coding process. Emerging themes attested to the complicated nature of rurality and the role stress experienced, the perception of clergy as hired help, a tenure and age connection to negative emotional outcomes, and the physiological experience of role stress. Findings also suggested that professional development and self-awareness may be key in helping to limit role stress and its consequences. Furthermore, it is suggested that Original Free Will Baptist leadership and congregations be made aware of these findings, as the findings may give the opportunity for more targeted intervention strategies.

Keywords: role stress, role conflict, role ambiguity, burnout, compassion fatigue, rurality, clergy, and Original Free Will Baptist.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Across the United States, countless men and women of the cloth—clergypersons—are considering what life would be like if they were no longer in ministry (Spencer et al., 2012). For many, exiting ministry while they are still young has become a viable option (Spencer et al., 2012). While well beyond the average age of retirement, others continue to lead, feeling that without their presence, their congregations would not have a pastor (Lewis et al., 2007). The result of these trends, thoughts, and actions is a general shortage of clergymen and clergywomen across all denominations (Joynt, 2017). Should this continue, many Christian congregations may find their pulpits to be without pastors.

Without a doubt, clergy leave ministry for countless reasons that are both personal and contextual (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2018). According to Spencer et al. (2012) and Scott and Lovell (2015), this trend affects almost all Christian denominations, regardless of history, population, or size. Rural congregations are particularly vulnerable to this development and often have a more difficult time recruiting clergy to lead (Beebe, 2007; Scott & Lovell, 2015). Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2012) posited that much of this effect is due to the nature of rural churches, which are smaller, less financially abled, and geographically sparse. Such a phenomenon may also result from a litany of expectations that rural congregations frequently have of their ministers. As Beebe (2007) and Faucett et al. (2013) found, rural clergy are frequently expected to fulfill duties for which they lack formal training. Examples of such duties include counseling, serving as reference points, transporting parishioners in mental or physical health crises (Jacobson et al., 2013), providing social services (Scott & Lovell, 2015), and recruiting volunteers (Azuero et al., 2014). Clergy often attempt to fulfill these responsibilities, regardless of their level of training or preparedness. The outcomes of these attempts have been shown to

adversely affect a clergyperson's emotional health (Bledsoe & Setterlund, 2015; Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013).

In the heart of rural North Carolina, the Original Free Will Baptist (OFWB) denomination finds its home. The Original Free Will Baptists fit well among rural, American Christian denominations, as a smaller, less resourced faith tradition. This denomination, birthed from the General Baptist tradition (Pelt, 1996), continues to operate almost exclusively within eastern North Carolina. For decades, OFWBs have seen a decline in ministry recruitment, as well as an increase in the average age of ministers. Recent reporting to the OFWB convention has further indicated a waning trend among churches who, on average, report decreased giving, shrinking membership, and fewer congregations (Convention of Original Free Will Baptists, 2019). As a result of these trends, denominational leaders continue to engage in deliberate dialogue, focused on answering the question of why. From these conversations, a few trends have emerged: the Original Free Will Baptist denomination is failing to recruit and support younger ministers; current training and support efforts are insufficient in their desire to strengthen current clergy; and ministerial roles and duties have a wide variance from congregation to congregation, resulting in role conflict among OFWB clergy (R. Hobgood, convention address, May 15, 2019).

Of importance to this study is the phenomenon of role stress, which OFWB clergy feel they are experiencing but have yet to define clearly. As a construct, role stress is composed of role conflict and role ambiguity (Adams et al., 2017) and is generally understood as unclear or conflicting expectations between employers and employees. Such a lack of clarity often leads to negative emotional experiences (Snelgar et al., 2017). Within a congregational setting, role stress would likely be experienced by a clergyperson (pastor) as a result of conflicting expectations

levied by his or her congregation. By analyzing role stress among OFWB clergy, a deeper understanding of this phenomenon can be achieved. Furthermore, if properly understood, the OFWB denomination could more effectively create intervention strategies.

Within this chapter, one will find the statement of the problem, the purpose of this study, questions that guide the research, and key definitions and terms. Furthermore, I conclude this study by identifying limitations and delimitations, as well as summarizing the contents of this project and suggesting future research directions.

Statement of the Problem

As mentioned, leadership of the Original Free Will Baptist (OFWB) denomination has claimed that shrinking congregations, nonexistent recruitment strategies, and growing average clergy age are leading to a decline in the ministerial population (B. Card, pseudonym, personal communication, September 15, 2018; Baggett, 2019). Current clergy report emotional, physical, and spiritual fatigue as a result of inconsistencies between clergy and congregation role expectations (B. Card, pseudonym, personal communication, September 15, 2018). These experiences, documented in similar denominations (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012), show an increase in negative clergy experiences and outcomes such as compassion fatigue and burnout (Scott & Lovell, 2015).

Compassion fatigue, or vicariously experienced trauma, and burnout have frequently been studied among clergy (Cetrano et al., 2017; Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2018; Hendron et al., 2014). Prior research has linked compassion fatigue and burnout to hours worked (Spencer et al., 2012), congregation size (Ellison et al., 2009), perceived support (Doolittle, 2007; Joynt, 2017; Lewis et al., 2007), congregational demands (Beebe, 2007), professed ability (Hendron et al., 2012), and trauma involvement (Hendron et al., 2014). Role stress, which results in low job

satisfaction (Faucett et al., 2013), defensiveness and withdrawal (Beebe, 2007), vague boundaries (Spencer et al., 2012), and uncertainty about the future (Kemery, 2006), may also influence clergy emotional health levels, but research is limited as to how and to what extent (Kim et al., 2015; Rai, 2016). Therefore, defining and understanding role stress and its effects on the emotional health of Christian clergy are important.

One could hypothesize that rural, congregationally driven OFWB clergy may experience increased role stress due to small populations, geographic isolation, and lower congregational and minister educational attainment (Kitchen & McKibbin, 2018; Muskett, 2016). These experiences, as well as the previously mentioned helping nature of the clergy profession, are indicators that compassion fatigue and burnout may also be present (Cetrano et al., 2017; Noullet et al., 2018) among OFWB clergy. However, research lacks a specific definition of role stress among OFWB clergy and how it may affect burnout or compassion fatigue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to derive understanding and define OFWB clergy role stress through their first-hand experiences. By defining role stress among OFWB clergy, one can then see how this phenomenon affects mental and emotional health. Through the frameworks of role theory (Schneider & Bos, 2019; Zai, 2015) and role stress theory (Goode, 1960), I sought to answer the questions of "What does role conflict look like among rurally based OFWB clergy," "What does role ambiguity look like among OFWB clergy," and "How do these two occurrences affect mental and emotional health among OFWB clergy, particularly within the constructs of compassion fatigue and burnout." This study's findings add to the body of literature surrounding mental and emotional health, rural clergy experiences, role stress, and OFWB ministry. Furthermore, discoveries may allow OFWB

leadership to understand the consequences of role stress and guide future intervention strategies better.

Background

When it comes to faith traditions, the Original Free Will Baptist denomination epitomizes rural Christian faith. Tucked away in the corridor between Interstate 95 and the North Carolina coast, this rural denomination contains 229 member churches, 350–400 ordained ministers, and some 20,000 members (Baggett, 2019). As a small, rural denomination, the OFWB faith community has only loosely kept records, leaving numerous gaps in historical accounts and information. Recent demographics, however, indicate that clergy average over 60 years in age, with less than 20 ordained or licensed ministers falling under 40 years old (B. Card, pseudonym, personal communication, August 13, 2018). Furthermore, Barry Williamson, moderator of the Central Conference of the OFWB, ventured that over 25% of OFWB churches have less than 25 members, and another 25% have less than 50 (D. Fike, pseudonym, personal communication, November 8, 2018). Williams continued in his annual speech to the Central Conference by stating that churches of this size fail to make budget, have not contributed toward OFWB ministries, and fail to send representatives to convention meetings (B. Williamson, conference address, November 8, 2018).

While the above statistics document a decline, another issue must be considered in order to understand this group. Since its genesis, the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists has been divided into eight autonomous conferences, containing between 10 and 65 churches. Initially, these conferences were based upon geographic proximity, but geography has slowly given way to ideology. According to the Articles of Faith (2008), OFWB conferences retain power, set forth ordination protocol, and govern their member churches. This results in frequent

variations among the clergy population, based upon one's conference membership. Examples include women's ability to be ordained, the level of education required, pastoral responsibilities, level of employment, and translation of scripture to be used when preaching or teaching. Lastly, OFWB churches continue to be geographically close and ideologically diverse, which places strain on possible collaborative processes.

The characteristics of vocational decline, church membership recession, and conference diversity may create role stress in the lives of OFWB clergy. Role stress, according to Faucett et al. (2013), is defined as the combination of role ambiguity and role conflict, driven by a lack of understanding of one's responsibility or mutually competing responsibilities. In various studies, this phenomenon has been shown to increase turnover (Kim et al., 2015), cause depression (Rai, 2016), and nurture poor physical health outcomes (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016). However, prior research into how role stress affects clergy is limited (Faucett et al., 2013). From these limited studies of clergy, research indicated that role conflict and role ambiguity are not always fused together and may have differing effects when one is high and the other is low (Kemery, 2006). Another study found that when both role conflict and ambiguity are high, overall job satisfaction is significantly lower (Faucett et al., 2013). Yet, another compared role stress and food, finding that clergy often engage in unhealthy behaviors, such as overeating, in order to mitigate the effects of role stress (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016). Generally speaking, research agrees that role stress in one's vocation can lead to adverse effects physically, mentally, and emotionally (Kemery, 2006; Kim et al., 2015; Rennie, 2018). The way in which role stress contributes to compassion fatigue (Turgoose & Maddox, 2017) and burnout (Adams et al., 2017) is of particular importance to this study.

Negative vocational outcomes, like burnout and compassion fatigue, have become commonplace among helping professionals. According to Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2012), burnout among clergy is an emotional, physical, and spiritual exhaustion, resulting from high demands of time and resources from one or more parties. Clergy are often the first and only helping professional that individuals contact in the event of a crisis (Jacobson et al., 2013). Scott and Lovell (2015) posited that rural ministers often have fewer resources at their disposal, feel less confident in their ability to refer out, and feel a higher sense of demand from their parishioners. However, burnout is tricky, as Doolittle (2007) and Azuero et al. (2014) found, and not all clergy are affected the same. Prior studies indicate that chronological age tends to correlate with emotional exhaustion (Adams et al., 2017; Haik et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2007), meaning that older clergy tend to score lower on burnout inventories and feel less overwhelmed than their younger colleagues. Unfortunately, Shellnutt (2017) found that only one in seven senior pastors is under 40, and that many older clergypersons attest to staying longer, even in mismatched situations, due to their inability to leave. Thus, burnout at a young age directly affects young clergypersons who may feel called into ministry, leaving little incentive to pursue the profession.

The above evidence, which outlines many issues among rural clergy in general, may also describe the experiences of OFWB clergy. What is still in question is the story behind role stress among OFWB clergy and the effects such stress might have on them in their ministries, both personally and emotionally. The conversations outlined many issues among rural clergy in general that are likely experienced by OFWB clergy. The questions of “what is the story behind this” and “how does this affect OFWB clergy” remain. Also, is there a path toward understanding why the average age of ministers is increasing, while young men and women

resist answering the call into ministry? Are established role stressor issues, typical of rural congregations, present within the OFWB denomination? While these questions are not new, and many researchers have offered suggestions, I sought to define and understand how role stress is experienced by clergypersons of the OFWB denomination in order to analyze this phenomenon. By defining role stress and addressing how it may contribute to emotional health concerns, including burnout and compassion fatigue, intervention may become possible. Findings could influence recruitment, attainment, and the development of strategies to assist churches, conferences, and current and future leaders of the denomination.

Research Questions

These research questions were structured to define role stress among OFWB clergy and understand how role stress might affect unhealthy emotional outcomes.

RQ1. Based upon your experience, how would you, as an OFWB clergyperson, define role stress?

RQ1a. Based upon your experience, how would you, as an OFWB clergyperson, define role conflict, a key component of role stress?

RQ1b. Based upon your experience, how would you, as an OFWB clergyperson, define role ambiguity, a key component of role stress?

RQ2. How does the characteristic of rurality affect your experience of role stress by way of role conflict and role ambiguity?

RQ3. How have you personally experienced role stress in your ministry, and what did it look like?

RQ4. What emotional consequences have you experienced as a result of role stress?

RQ4a. Have you experienced burnout as a result of role stress? If so, can you describe it?

RQ4b. Have you experienced compassion fatigue as a result of role stress? If so, can you describe it?

This research was conducted using an interpretive phenomenological methodology. Recruitment of participants was through the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists and its eight conferences. Data were collected through in-person or phone interviews with OFWB clergy.

Definitions of Key Terms

Burnout. Burnout is a long-term exhaustion that diminishes one's interest and engagement in their work (Berg et al., 2016).

Clergyperson. A woman or man who serves in a pastoral capacity within a faith community (Wells et al., 2012).

Compassion fatigue. A sudden onset adverse effect of helping individuals suffering from traumatic events (Pehlivan & Güner, 2018).

Original Free Will Baptist. The Original Free Will Baptist denomination is a rural, eastern North Carolina-based Christian denomination (Original Free Will Baptist Churches, n.d.).

Role ambiguity. Unclear knowledge or lack of proper understanding of one's role (Wu et al., 2019).

Role conflict. Conflicting expectations of one's role within an organization due to multiple anticipated roles (Rai, 2016).

Role stress. The combination of role ambiguity and role conflict that one might experience within an organizational model (Loveridge, 2017).

Rural. A characteristic or quality of an area that is defined by low population, low resource, and low access (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

The frameworks of role theory (RT) and role stress theory (RST) were utilized to design questions in order to explore how OFWB clergy learn of their role expectations, as well as identifying experienced consequences when role expectations are not met. Foundationally, role theory was first articulated in the early 20th century as a way to understand how an individual performs a particular role in an ordered society (Hindin, 2007). These roles often follow a typical framework and define certain expectations, norms, rights, and duties (Schneider & Bos, 2019). Said simply, one's social role helps to move a society along a trajectory when performed in the needed manner (Baert et al., 2019). However, role theory has often been criticized for its broadness (Fleming et al., 2019). Thus, role stress theory, an offshoot of role theory by mid-20th century sociologist William Goode, was also utilized to understand the stressors that one experiences due to role inconsistencies. Role stress theory recognizes that people tend to behave in ways that are reflective of their social networks. However, when members of a particular network are unable to meet these behavioral standards, stress is introduced (Beitman et al., 2004). Ultimately, the inability to fulfill obligations of one's social network can cause negative emotional outcomes such as burnout and compassion fatigue (Edwards, 2014; Hicks, 2008).

Chapter Summary

While clergy leave ministry for countless reasons, the phenomenon of role stress is a likely contributor but is not fully understood among OFWB clergy. Among OFWB clergy, there is an anecdotal belief that role stress may push men and women away from the pastoral vocation, but little empirical findings support this. Thus, through a phenomenological methodology, a

definition and understanding of this experience through semistructured interviews was attained. Findings may be of importance to the OFWB denomination, rural churches, and social scientists who seek to understand the outcomes of role stress.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In a modern society, the role of clergymen and clergywomen is one of great importance. These leaders of churches and congregations across the world are often seen as the bridge between the spiritual and the secular (Flatt et al., 2018), the voice and presence of reason in uncertain times (Kemery, 2006), and influencers of community health, livelihood, and connection (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016). Unfortunately, their influence does not always happen in positive or encouraging ways. When clergymen and clergywomen deal with occupational and role stressors, the impact is also felt within their families, congregations, and communities (Tanner & Zvonkovic, 2011). Such influence can often lead to unhealthy outcomes, both intrinsically and extrinsically; thus, creating negative ripples throughout society (Ratter et al., 2016).

When it comes to clergy leadership positions and behaviors, there is a variance in the degree by which clergy hold these. As Wong et al. (2017) posit, each denomination sets their own standards for leadership, including experience, gender, tenure, and education. However, at minimum, most faith traditions consider clergypersons who are assigned, employed, or appointed over a body of congregants to be considered a leader of these people (Guzman & Teh, 2016; Joynt, 2017).

As leaders, clergy take on titles like minister, pastor, elder, or bishop to differentiate them from nonclergy followers. These titles contribute to expected roles, responsibilities, and leadership approaches. However, while numerous studies have sought to identify the most effective leadership skills, traits, and approaches of clergy, none have claimed to have identified the most operable of conditions (Ferguson, 2018; Ferrari, 2016; Wollschleger, 2018). Thus, it can be said that regardless of title, skill, trait, or approach, leadership within the faith community

will vary by location, context, population, and need. It is possible that clergy—leaders of these faith communities—may face incredible role expectations throughout their tenure, leaving open the possibility of pressure and stress in their ministries.

As this literature review shows, occupational and role stressors (hereby referred to as role stress) among clergy are both general and specific in nature. In a general way, there are characteristics that are universally regarded as elements of such stress. Specifically, these stressors are particular of one's profession, one's denomination, and perhaps even one's setting. This study focused on Original Free Will Baptist clergy, leaders of a rural, eastern North Carolina-based denomination. Reviewing prior research assists in answering the question, "How would Original Free Will Baptist clergy define role stress based on their own experiences?" This review also analyzes research linked to emotional consequences that have historically been associated with role stress.

Statement of Purpose

To reiterate, the purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study was to derive understanding and define OFWB clergy role stress through first-hand experience. By defining role stress among OFWB clergy, findings may also indicate how this phenomenon affects the mental and emotional health of these clergypersons. Through the frameworks of role theory (Schneider & Bos, 2019; Zai, 2015) and role stress theory (Goode, 1960), I sought to discover how OFWB clergy perceive role stress and its elements of role ambiguity and role conflict in their particular settings. I also anticipated discovering how this construct affects mental and emotional health among OFWB clergy, particularly within the outcomes of compassion fatigue and burnout. Findings of this study may add to the bodies of literature surrounding the fields of mental and emotional health, rural clergy experiences, and role stress. Furthermore, this research

may prove to help OFWB leadership understand better the consequences of role stress, which has been posited to affect their clergy.

Research Questions

RQ1. Based upon your experience, how would you, as an OFWB clergyperson, define role stress?

RQ1a. Based upon your experience, how would you, as an OFWB clergyperson, define role conflict, a key component of role stress?

RQ1b. Based upon your experience, how would you, as an OFWB clergyperson, define role ambiguity, a key component of role stress?

RQ2. How does the characteristic of rurality affect your experience of role stress by way of role conflict and role ambiguity?

RQ3. How have you personally experienced role stress in your ministry, and what did it look like?

RQ4. What emotional consequences have you experienced as a result of role stress?

RQ4a. Have you experienced burnout as a result of role stress? If so, can you describe it?

RQ4b. Have you experienced compassion fatigue as a result of role stress? If so, can you describe it?

These research questions directed this study's focus toward defining and understanding role stress and its emotional consequences among OFWB clergypersons.

Key Search Terms and Availability of Literature

A detailed literature search for credible sources was conducted. Search terms used were clergy, Original Free Will Baptist, pastor, minister, rural, role stress, role conflict, role ambiguity, burnout, and compassion fatigue. Findings indicated a wealth of knowledge around

role stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue, especially among helping professions. Findings also showed an increasing body of research connecting clergy to these constructs. Findings were limited among rural clergy and how role stress might directly influence one's mental and emotional health. Finally, no empirical research was discovered referencing the Original Free Will Baptist denomination, a focus of this study.

Rurality and Clergy

Though definitions of rurality can differ (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019), most agree that smaller populations, scarcity of resources, and geographic isolation tend to be commonly accepted elements (Bernard, 2019; Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Muskett, 2016). According to Kitchen and McKibbin (2018), rural populations also tend to be older, with a slight skew toward Caucasians. Furthermore, rural populations tend to be more religious (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012; Neitz, 2005), with rural citizens more likely to claim religious affiliation, worship attendance, and faith-based support systems than urban populations (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Kitchen & McKibbin, 2018; Muskett, 2016).

Such religiosity both influences and is influenced by Christian leaders identified as clergymen and women. Prior research shows that clergy serving in rural areas are often older, appointed to multiple congregations, and less educated than clergy serving in urban areas (Bernard, 2019; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012; Scott & Lovell, 2015). Rural ministers also tend to feel more isolated and lonely in their ministry (Scott & Lovell, 2015), with many identifying as introverts who feel incapable of reaching out and connecting beyond their communities (Ratter et al., 2016). According to Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2012), there is also a large pay discrepancy between rural clergy and their urban colleagues. According to their findings, this

difference aligns with the difference between rural and urban congregations, the former of which often has access to smaller resources and population pools.

When it comes to rural clergy emotional health, not all research agrees. Through a mixed-methods study, Scott and Lovell (2015) discovered that many rural ministers felt emotionally and physically taxed beyond their abilities. Congregational overinvolvement also tended to be a problem, and creating and maintaining boundaries were always in flux. On average, participants reported lower satisfaction while feeling that self-care strategies were unavailable. In yet another study, Hall and Gjesfjeld (2013) found that rural clergy felt pressure to meet all needs within their community, regardless of ability. Because of the higher-than-average cost of delivering services into rural areas, clergy often become service providers for mental health, a role that many feel is beyond their ability (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013). By working with such a population on an interpersonal level, Hall and Gjesfjeld (2013) found that rural clergy are at a greater risk for emotional consequences such as compassion fatigue and burnout. Hall and Gjesfjeld (2013) attested the reason for this is that rural clergy, regardless of their training, are unable to seek supervision or support from other professionals. Thus, rural clergy feel both obligated and isolated in their ministries.

Research has also shown that rural clergy may experience more internal support than their urban counterparts. In the study of Methodist clergypersons, Miles and Proeschold-Bell (2012) found that although rural clergy face greater and more diverse challenges, they also receive greater support from their congregations. They posit that this is due to the nature of rural communities, which are historically more family-oriented and less transient. Thus, a congregation takes ownership of a minister, just as a minister takes ownership of a congregation. Likewise, rural United Methodist clergy deal with less organizational and denominational

stressors due to their isolation (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). Muskett's (2016) study revealed some positive outcomes of rural clergy experiences. Through a qualitative approach, Muskett (2016) discovered that rural clergy often experience greater social capital among their congregants. This social capital translated into greater amounts of trust, which is necessary for coordination and cooperation between a pastor and his or her congregation.

Sadly, rural clergy are still greatly underresearched, especially within an American context (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). Research into this population often relies upon larger denominations, such as the United Methodist Church and international research into rural contexts. Smaller, American rural denominations have little-to-no empirical research conducted within their confines. Many scholars regard this as tragic, an outcome of smaller faith communities that do not have the resources or personnel to undertake research projects (Neitz, 2005; Ratter et al., 2016). This is the case when it comes to the Original Free Will Baptist denomination. Thus, in the following section, a detailed but largely anecdotal picture of OFWB faith will be presented.

Original Free Will Baptists Characteristics

According to Pelt (1996), the OFWB denomination originated out of a General Baptist tradition in the earliest parts of the 18th century. Founded in eastern North Carolina, the denomination quickly found roots among the region's rural English General Baptists (Pelt, 1996). However, due to the rurality of the area, travel was precarious, and churches were typically established by one or two families within proximity of their homeplace(s), often on farms. In time, OFWB churches, unified under doctrine and covenant, amassed into conferences, to which they ceded authority. Presently, there are eight conferences of the OFWB denomination, each establishing their own framework of authority over member churches and

ordained clergy. This arrangement has allowed for diversity in the governance and ordination of OFWB clergy (i.e., some conferences will ordain women, while others refuse to allow women to stand in the pulpit to sing, announce, or pray).

As stated in the first chapter, the Original Free Will Baptist denomination claims just under 230 churches, 350–400 ordained ministers, and around 20,000 members (Baggett, 2019). Because of the nature of OFWB governance, with conferences retaining the authority over member pastors and churches, information gathering is difficult. This results in a lack of uniformity among OFWB churches, causing these numbers to be best estimates based upon [available] conference reporting to the annual convention (Convention of Original Free Will Baptists, 2019). Such a lack of uniformity inhibits scholarly research among the OFWB faithful, resulting in zero peer-reviewed articles. While much of the OFWB denomination history is recorded in Michael Pelt's book, *A History of Original Free Will Baptists* (up until the early 90s), more current publications simply do not exist. Thus, recent details of the OFWB denomination's history must be considered through common knowledge sources. Such sources include conferences, conventions, and interviews where details are publicly shared but inconsistently documented.

As a whole, the consensus among the OFWB denomination is that older clergy, due to age and other restraints, are unable to affect change as they once could (B. Fike, pseudonym, personal communication, January 23, 2020). Sadly, this trend is paired with low-to-no recruitment of younger men and women into OFWB ministry (M. Horne, pseudonym, personal communication, November 21, 2019), which is common among Christian denominations (Lewis et al., 2007; Spencer et al., 2012). Of more importance to the denomination are the presence of role stressors and the emotional health of clergy who are currently serving (A. Barn, pseudonym,

personal conversation, March 10, 2020). Truly, as Guzman and Teh (2016) found, clergy stress is growing in the United States, but the how, where, and whys of this among OFWB clergy are yet to be explored.

To further complicate this, prior OFWB clergy interventions into role stress and negative emotional experiences have been quickly embraced but longitudinally ineffective. In a conversation with Al Warrick, director of The Covenant, an OFWB leadership development initiative, it was disclosed that long-term viability for this initiative is not there. Warrick went on to claim that clergy were excited at first, but over time their enthusiasm greyed. Warrick claimed

> They get busy, and there are ten things they need to get done. The result of this is that personal development gets put on the backburner. They are expected to be in multiple places at once, and they just cannot do it. (S. Time, pseudonym, personal conversation, March 10, 2020)

It is as if OFWB clergy deal with the stressors of their roles by trying to be all things to all people, consequences aside.

However, all is not dismal among the OFWB clergy. In the fall of 2012, the Central Conference of OWFBs, after noticing an increase in negative emotional experiences among their clergy, decided to partner with Care Net Counseling East to provide its ministers with access to mental health resources. Since then, these resources have been accessed by at least a dozen ministers and their families, resulting in increased awareness of mental wellness (G. Full, pseudonym, personal conversation, March 25, 2020). As stated during the most recent meeting of the Central Conference, the goal is to work with clergy before they experience these negative outcomes. In order to do this, we must gain an understanding of what and how stressors are

experienced by OFWB clergy. Unfortunately, conference autonomy does not afford this opportunity to all OFWB clergy, only those who are Central Conference members.

According to the *Articles of Faith and Principles of Church Government*, the guiding document of the OFWB denomination, churches cede power to local conferences. Over time, each conference has developed its own set of organizational standards and procedures for member clergy. Furthermore, conference membership is no longer based upon geographic placement, meaning that churches in close proximity to one another can fall into differing conferences, resulting in different ministerial experiences. A recent conversation with Convention Director Gary Bailey revealed that many OFWB churches are often unaware of the needs or abilities of their pastors or what resources that different conferences might provide. This means, in Bailey's words, that ministers and congregations differ in their expectations, resulting from a lack of clear definition(s). Furthermore, as Scott and Lovell (2015) found, churches in rural communities go to their pastors for everything from spiritual crisis to medical intervention, regardless of their capabilities. In that same conversation with Director Bailey, whose position requires that he serve as the liaison between the Convention of OFWBs and local churches, it was disclosed that several pastors felt incapable of meeting congregational demands. According to the convention Director (personal communication, August 13, 2018), people in OFWB churches do not always know the right person(s) to call, so they go to the person whom they trust the most, their pastor(s).

Lastly, OFWB conferences do not have written descriptions of pastoral job responsibilities beyond the *Articles of Faith and Principles of Church Government*; thus, there is no clear consensus of pastoral responsibilities in the OFWB faith. The following statement is taken from the document:

> The pastor shall have general superintendence of the church as the chief administrative officer. It is the pastor's duty to faithfully preach the Word, to be an example to the flock, to visit the members—especially the sick—as he has opportunity; to do all within his power to promote the spiritual interest of the church which he serves, to promote all denominational institutions, enterprises, and programs, and to advance the cause of Christ among men. (Articles of Faith, 2008, pp. 67–68)

These direct but ambiguous statements leave great room for interpretation concerning a pastor's administrative and ministerial responsibilities. Furthermore, ambiguity of one's role has been shown to be a clear antecedent of turnover among clergy (Beebe, 2007). As a denomination, efforts to mitigate this ambiguity have been decentralized and infrequent, resulting in many OFWB clergypersons feeling ill-prepared to lead a congregation (G. Suggs, pseudonym, personal communication, August 13, 2018).

Role Stress

There is a saying that is attributed to the American diplomat Henry Kissinger, "There cannot be a stressful crisis next week, my schedule is already full!" This quote, though humorous, embodies the thought processes of working women and men from all different professions. Said differently, many within the working population often feel overworked and unable to add anything else to their busy schedules (Rennie, 2018). This feeling is particularly strong among men and women who find themselves working within helping professions, namely, those who work in careers that require one to dutifully serve another (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2018).

As already established, this study's focus is particular to rural Christian leaders (clergy), particularly among the OFWB denomination. However, before an understanding of how role

stress affects this population can be determined, a baseline understanding of role stress must be established. More must be said about how role stress affects helping professionals in general, a population that includes clergymen and women. Afterward, we will look at several studies that have examined role stress among clergy and follow this by reviewing role stress's two main elements: role conflict and role ambiguity.

From healthcare workers to mental wellness laborers, clergy to customer service professionals, the truth is that helping others is stressful (Hight & Park, 2019). Such an act requires one to be vulnerable to the demands that originate from another individual. This invitation of critical feedback, often indirectly, has been shown to be a source of anxiety for the helper (Adams et al., 2017). Furthermore, helping professionals often deal directly with individuals who are experiencing some level of crisis or hurt in their lives. By dealing with a hurting population, one often invites raw, emotional criticism that may or may not accurately reflect an unbiased reality (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013).

Role stress is most often defined as a combination of role conflict and role ambiguity intertwining to affect one's professional occupation (Faucett et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2015; Loveridge, 2017; Rai, 2016). However, role stress may also affect other elements of one's role, such as one's place in a family system, one's function in a religious or civic organization, or one's place in society (Brandão et al., 2017). In early writings about role stress, Kahn et al. (1964) showed that this construct has frequently been connected to systems, organizations, communities, or families that lack resources but have high demands. Shortly after Kahn et al.'s (1964) findings, Rizzo et al. (1970) discovered that this imbalance could easily cause dysfunction on individual and organizational levels.

Often, studies of role stress have been focused within the community of helping professionals. Some of these early studies included social workers, schoolteachers, nurses, and clergy (Loveridge, 2017; Rai, 2016; Richards et al., 2019), but more recent studies have looked at restaurant servers (Hight & Park, 2019), hotel and hospitality workers (Kim et al., 2015), information technology personnel (Rennie, 2018), and construction project managers (Wu et al., 2019). Furthermore, clergypersons have now become a popular choice among role stress researchers (Faucett et al., 2013; Kemery, 2006; Manister & Gigliotti, 2016). Unfortunately, only a small pool of research exists on how role stress affects rural clergy.

The description by Kahn et al. (1964) easily encompasses rural clergy, who are often tasked with multiple responsibilities and limited resources (Lewis et al., 2007; Payne & Hays, 2016). Over the last decade, research into the effects of role stress upon rural clergy has begun to increase (Lawson, 2018; Milstein et al., 2019; Noullet et al., 2018), with findings clearly connecting negative emotional outcomes to the presence of role stress. However, not all research that utilizes clergy participants agrees that role stress is completely harmful (Kemery, 2006). In fact, when this construct is broken down into its two main components, role ambiguity and role conflict, results sometimes differ. Therefore, both role ambiguity and role conflict will be separately analyzed in order to paint a full picture before returning to the unified construct of role stress.

Role Ambiguity

According to Wu et al. (2019), the experience of role ambiguity is like walking into the first day of a new job, only to find the most general of duty descriptions, no person to directly report to, and unclear or completely lacking expectations. First identified through Kahn et al.'s

(1964) writing on organizational stress, role ambiguity is best understood as a lack of understanding of one's job, function, or place within a system or organization.

Following Kahn et al.'s (1964) lead, Rizzo et al. (1970) sought to develop a tool that would help organizations measure role stress and its subsets: role ambiguity and role conflict. Concerning role ambiguity, Rizzo et al. (1970) posited that organizations have a formal structure that sets forth specific tasks or responsibilities for each organizational member. Such tasks give guidance to one's role (Madera et al., 2013) and aid in the fulfillment of organizational goals. However, when necessary goals, information, or resources are lacking, one's role is said to be ambiguous (Konstantinou et al., 2018). Rizzo et al. (1970), through a framework of role theory, claimed that such ambiguity in one's role might cause an increase in stress and decrease satisfaction. More modern studies (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016; Tanner & Zvonkovic, 2011; Wells et al., 2012) have also connected a lack of necessary goals and information with increased ambiguity, ultimately resulting in greater stress.

Among clergy, ambiguity of one's role is often high (Faucett et al., 2013; Randall, 2013). Much of this is due to the dynamic nature of ministry, which is based on a community or congregation's needs, which may change frequently (Adams et al., 2017; Beebe, 2007). In one study, Adams et al. (2017) compared levels of role ambiguity between United Methodist clergypersons and other helping professions. Their results showed that, even among the high levels of ambiguity within all helping professions, clergy saw the highest levels of role ambiguity. Additionally, Adams et al. (2017) found that United Methodist clergy are expected to remain flexible, despite the diversity of roles that may change daily. They found such expectations required clergy often made decisions they felt not equipped to make or did not have clear right or wrong answers; thereby, making one more vulnerable to criticism.

Role ambiguity is environmentally determined, meaning that both expectations and one's ability to fulfill them are context-bound and specific (Bledsoe & Setterlund, 2015). For ministers, this creates a large problem, as one context can vary from another in vast ways. According to Muskett (2016), clergy in general, and rural clergy in specific, often have unclear directives of their duties beyond preaching, teaching, and visiting. Muskett (2016) found that even those roles present ambiguity, as they can be (and often are) based largely upon a prior (or just another) minister's approach. To be specific, congregations rarely tell their ministers that they expect expository preaching, book-by-book Bible studies, and three visits a month to shut-ins. Rather, feedback comes in general, often dismissive ways, leading to further role ambiguity (Payne & Hays, 2016; Snelgar et al., 2017).

For rural clergy, unclear expectations are common (Scott & Lovell, 2015), especially among denominations that do not have a strong hierarchy of leadership. Due to the governance of the OFWB denomination, leadership and direction are often absent. As stated, OFWB churches are expected to hire clergy that have been ordained by the Board of Ordination of the conference in which they are members. The tasks of these boards are simply to test and substantiate one's call into ministry, not to teach, equip, or govern. The one exception to this is the board's obligation to discipline a minister who has been accused of impropriety, though a full definition of impropriety is lacking from the denomination's governing articles (Articles of Faith, 2008). Thus, when an OFWB church hires a minister, roles and expectations are anticipated to be decided between the church and the minister. Sadly, according to several OFWB leaders, these conversations are often assumed but rarely realized (B. Austin, pseudonym, personal communication, March 10, 2020). As a result of this, OFWB ministers often experience the second part of role stress, role conflict, which will be discussed next.

Role Conflict

Like role ambiguity, role conflict has historically been seen as a component of role stress (Evans, 2017), though not always intertwined with ambiguity (Randall, 2013). According to early research by Kahn et al. (1964), this construct is often the result of multiple lines of authority, issuing conflicting or contradicting directions to the same individual or group. As research into this finding continued, Rizzo et al. (1970) began to see this as an equally present part of role stress, resulting in creating an assessment that blended and measured elements of ambiguity and conflict in order to measure stress. In their research, Rizzo et al. (1970) discovered that role conflict can be present between a person's values and an organization's goals, between goals and allotted time and resources, and between differing roles and expectations within an organization. For this study's purpose, we will look at how Kahn et al. (1964) initially saw role conflict as a tension that results from multiple lines of authority issuing conflicting or contradicting directions to the same individual or group.

According to Wu et al. (2019), when an organization has multiple levels of authority that differ in their expectations, role conflict may be experienced by those who attempt to fulfill these directives. Thus, the more complex the organization, the more possibilities there are for role conflict or conflicts (Rai, 2016). Like role ambiguity, role conflict has been most notably seen within helping professions, such as social workers, hospitality professionals, and nurses (Rai, 2016). Konstantinou et al. (2018) posited that this was due to the helping professional's desire to alleviate pain, comfort hurt, or rectify an injustice, even when doing such would decrease profit, increase liability, and other unflattering organizational outcomes.

Clergy, like many other helping professionals, are no different in their desire to aid and assist those in need. In a study of clergy whose denominational structures include appointments,

Kemery (2006) discovered that role conflict is typically present between one's received role, the formally or informally transmitted expectations of a congregation to a minister, and the sending role, the role a minister believes that he or she has to fulfill. Because of a breakdown in communication between congregation and minister, the expectations of the two are often dissimilar, resulting in perceived role conflict. This, like all conflict, can move beyond perception to quickly become interpersonal in nature (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018). Once conflict becomes intertwined in the interpersonal, parties often polarize, recruit, and align themselves in a distributive way against the other(s) and their goals (Shapiro, 2017). Within most helping professions, clergy included, such conflict causes an increase in anger, resentment, and stress (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016).

When stressed, leaders tend to experience heightened sensitivity, while reacting in thoughtless, abrasive ways (Northouse, 2016). Such stress, as the result of role conflict, leaves leaders with only a few options: change their understanding of the role(s), change the organization's understanding of the role, or leave the organization (Northouse, 2016). As leaders, clergy may be forced to behave in ways they are less comfortable with, as a result of congregational (or denominational) expectations (Edwards, 2014; Francis et al., 2017; Milstein et al., 2019). Furthermore, when a church is congregationally governed, meaning that the individual congregation sets the rules, roles, and expectations, there can be little recourse for a pastor who finds him or herself in a role conflict scenario (Francis et al., 2017; Manister & Gigliotti, 2016; Wong et al., 2017). This is particularly true of rural clergy who serve in congregations that have seen multiple generations of one family attend, have smaller, often related populations, and who are less likely to embrace change (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012; Neitz, 2005).

Consequently, clergy frequently find themselves in role conflict due to inconsistencies between expectations. Such experiences amplify normal stress and often lead to unintended negative outcomes (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016). As stated previously, role conflict is only one element of role stress but is often present within helping professions, especially clergypersons. From here, this review will continue its focus on role stress, as defined by the combination of role ambiguity and role conflict.

Role Stress Continued

As a reminder, role conflict is defined as an individual's inability to differentiate between what their role is and what it is not (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016), while role ambiguity is defined as the space between an employee and employer's expectations for a person or position (Faucett et al., 2013). For clergy, these two stressors often manifest in the space between congregational expectations, which can vary from member to member, or lack of clearly defined responsibilities (Francis et al., 2017). However, these two constructs do not always retain a positive correlation, and at least one study found that when role ambiguity is high and role conflict is low, clergy may experience above average satisfaction (Kemery, 2006).

In Kemery's (2006) study of clergy, findings showed that when ambiguity and conflict were looked at individually, they were not always dependent upon each other. In fact, when ambiguity is high and conflict low, clergy often feel more creative, less stressed, and more satisfied. However, Kemery (2006) was quick to state that such a finding was rare, and in every discovered instance of high conflict, ambiguity was similarly high. Other studies among human resource managers (Evans, 2017), mental health staff (Cetrano et al., 2017), and hotel workers (Kim et al., 2015) confirmed that the presence of high levels of ambiguity often leads to more creativity among participants but was inconclusive as to how conflict influenced said ambiguity.

Ministers of the OFWB denomination likely encounter role ambiguity and conflict in a unique way due to a decentralized denomination. At its core, role ambiguity exists when an employee (clergy) feels that they have unclear expectations of their role (Wu et al., 2019). Due to the variance of role expectations between OFWB conferences and churches, ministers may not receive clear expectations from their congregations. Likewise, role conflict exists when multiple, conflicting expectations are placed upon an employee (clergy) by his or her employer. Congregations, particularly of rural nature, often exert demands upon their clergy that conflict, overlap, or contradict other demands (Scott & Lovell, 2015).

In general, role stress negatively affects those who experience it. As helping professionals, rural clergy tend to experience greater amounts of role stress due to the nature, population, and resources of a rural community (Adams et al., 2017; Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013). Thus, one can posit that negative effects, such as role stress, might affect rural clergy's emotional health, including OFWB ministers. In the next section, an analysis of two of the most common negative emotional outcomes, burnout and compassion fatigue, will help to develop some of the vocational risks to OFWB clergy who may experience role stress.

Negative Emotional Experiences

Between leader-follower relationships, a leader's emotional health matters greatly (Köppe et al., 2018). Said differently, when a leader finds him or herself in a place of emotional health, they and their followers tend to be more productive, less prone to conflict, and more effective in their organizations (Edelman & van Knippenberg, 2017; Köppe et al., 2018). However, the alternative is also true; when leaders find themselves in a place lacking emotional health, followers (and entire organizations) often suffer from conflict, disarray, infighting, and other negative consequences (Hendron et al., 2012; Li et al., 2016). Thus, it may be true that

when leaders bolster their own emotional intelligence, stronger organizational health may follow (Barling & Frone, 2017).

However, followers' emotional balance can also affect a leader's emotional experiences. In a longitudinal study of various leaders and followers, Wirtz et al. (2017) found a strong connection between follower emotional intelligence and a leader's emotional health. Wirtz et al. (2017) found that followers' emotional health has a greater effect on a leader's emotional health than a leader's emotional health upon a follower's. This is of particular importance in a ministry context, as clergy are often leading congregants who have varying levels of emotional awareness (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Spencer et al., 2012). Furthermore, because of the unique construct of congregationally driven churches, such as the OFWB, it is likely that congregant behaviors may strongly influence clergy (Bledsoe & Setterlund, 2015).

When studying negative emotional experiences, scholars most often refer to occurrences of burnout and compassion fatigue. Burnout, according to Wu et al. (2019), refers to physical and mental exhaustion, resulting in reduced work achievement and enthusiasm. Compassion fatigue is defined as a reduction in empathetic capacity (Cetrano et al., 2017), disassociation between the helper and those helped (Turgoose & Maddox, 2017), and withdrawal from responsibility (Snelgar et al., 2017). As stated, these constructs are often associated with the men and women of helping professions, and prior research has often focused on social workers, nurses, teachers, physicians, and clergy (Adams et al., 2017; Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2018). However, burnout and compassion fatigue are not identical, and each will be examined below.

Burnout

Prior research into burnout has yielded a plethora of studies. Among studied populations, mental health professionals are the most common (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Hendron et al., 2014;

Payne & Hays, 2016); but studies also have examined trauma teams (Berg et al., 2016), burn clinicians (Haik et al., 2017), nurses (Pehlivan & Güner, 2018), construction managers (Wu et al., 2019), and beyond (Rai, 2016). Over the last decade, research into clergy burnout has been steadily growing (Scott & Lovell, 2015; Tanner & Zvonkovic, 2011; Wong et al., 2017), likely as a result of research findings that indicate that clergy are frequently the first (and sometimes only) source of mental and emotional support for men and women of the Christian faith (Doolittle, 2007; Joynt, 2017; Randall, 2013).

At its core, burnout occurs over time (Jacobson et al., 2013), with the effects becoming stronger the longer burnout grows (Hendron et al., 2012, 2014). According to Berg et al. (2016), this long-term process of exhaustion and diminished interest tends to begin within an individual when stress is introduced and left unmitigated. As time passes, those who experience burnout begin to depersonalize their work and the individuals that their work connects them to (Hough et al., 2019). Burnout also increases feelings of insignificance, with those affected feeling as if they are doing a job but getting nowhere (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2018). Ultimately, burnout spills outside of one's profession and begins to affect all facets of one's life (Adams et al., 2017).

For clergy, the experience of burnout often leads to dissatisfaction with one's ministry (Adams et al., 2017). According to Tanner and Zvonkovic (2011), in their study of Assemblies of God clergy, churchgoers are often very demanding of the minister's time and efforts, resulting in role stress. When that stress remains unmitigated, clergy become insecure in their own efforts and feel worn down by even the simplest of obligations. Scott and Lovell (2015) also reported similar findings among rural ministers, many of whom felt personally obligated to fulfill each request from each parishioner. Scott and Lovell (2015) posited that rural clergy often struggle to find or define boundaries between friendship and pastoral responsibility, leading to increased

loneliness and isolation. Thus, when demands are constant, boundaries are vague, and alternative assistance is lacking, rural ministers feel obliged to constantly act (Faucett et al., 2013). Such regularity of request, act, and repeat leads back to Adams et al.'s (2017) findings that burnout, as a condition of being exhausted mentally and physically, can easily lead to dissatisfaction in one's ministry.

Beyond dissatisfaction, what happens when a clergywoman or clergyman experiences burnout? According to Randall (2013), clergy can become cynical about their congregants and callings. In an early clergy burnout study, Beebe (2007) posited that such an experience would cause clergypersons to pull back from working with other individuals, preferring isolation to collaboration. Jacobson et al. (2013) and Joynt (2017) also reported that clergy dealing with high levels of burnout may even resign or leave ministry altogether. Thus, findings indicate that burnout, as a negatively experienced emotional outcome, typically leads to negative outcomes in the lives and ministries of clergy.

However, burnout has been shown to affect people differently, especially where age is concerned. According to Doolittle (2007), Lewis et al. (2007), and Wells et al. (2012), older clergy tend to be less burned out than their younger colleagues. Azuero et al. (2014) also discovered a connection between age and burnout within volunteer teams, while Haik et al. (2017) posited that clinicians with little family support, who are younger in age, deal with burnout in greater intensity. Wells et al. (2012) posited that this is due to older ministers (and other helping professionals) having developed better coping strategies than younger professionals. Manister and Gigliotti (2016) also reported on this, claiming that perspective comes with age, as well as the ability to say no to incompatible roles. Thus, the question exists of how can younger clergy learn the skills their older counterparts have? This is especially relevant

to rural settings, where clergy feel obligated to say yes to every role expectation (Hendron et al. 2012).

Compassion Fatigue

A second negative emotional outcome, compassion fatigue, has also been studied for some time among helping professionals (Scott & Lovell, 2015). Like burnout, compassion fatigue tends to affect men and women whose work places them in a helping role, and the stress of another can easily be projected onto the helper (Jacobson et al., 2013). Historically, this construct was identified among men and women who supported survivors of intense trauma (Hendron et al., 2012) and was initially known as secondary traumatic syndrome (STS; Hendron et al., 2014; Jacobson et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2012). Further explained, STS or compassion fatigue is a state of tension and preoccupation with another individual's trauma, so much so that helpers may eventually experience the symptoms and trauma themselves (Berg et al., 2016; Hendron et al., 2014).

As stated, compassion fatigue was initially witnessed and studied among populations frequently associated with trauma (Berg et al., 2016). Among these studies, there exists research into medical trauma teams (Berg et al., 2016), burn clinicians (Haik et al., 2017), psychiatric nurses (Pehlivan & Güner, 2018), mental health professionals (Cetrano et al., 2017; Turgoose & Maddox, 2017), and oncologists (Kleiner & Wallace, 2017). A growing body of literature has also begun to look at how compassion fatigue affects clergy (Hendron et al., 2012; Jacobson et al., 2013; Noullet et al., 2018; Snelgar et al., 2017).

First documented in the mid-90s by Charles Figley, compassion fatigue differs from burnout in that it tends to be a sudden onset experience and can be extremely incapacitating (Figley & Beck, 2011). Many who experience this phenomenon compare it to post-traumatic

stress syndrome (PTSD), in that the one who is experiencing compassion fatigue suddenly finds him or herself reliving (vicariously) the trauma again (Pehlivan & Güner, 2018; Scott & Lovell, 2015). According to Jacobson et al. (2013), episodes of compassion fatigue are typically easy to predict, especially if one is aware of the events, people, or images that may trigger such an episode. This knowledge may be of great importance to the helper who is working in a high-stress, trauma-filled environment.

As stated, research into how clergy might experience compassion fatigue is growing. At present, findings indicate that, while clergy may not witness first-hand the traumatic event (as might a trauma physician), they are often the first to hear of events from the first-person perspective of the one who experienced the trauma (Hendron et al., 2014). Jacobson et al. (2013) and Payne and Hays (2016) agree that clergy are often the first to hear of these events due to the level of trust that parishioners may have with their ministers. For the most part, people tend to feel safe and secure speaking to their pastor or pastors (Adams et al., 2017), especially in rural communities where access to mental health care is limited (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013). Hall and Gjesfjeld (2013), in their study of rural clergy as mental health allies, found that rural communities have fewer resources, more intimate populations, and are more religious by nature. Unfortunately, their findings also indicated that clergy believe they lack the skills to truly support or manage the mental and emotional health demands of their congregations. Regardless, they continue in their desire to help, which often results in their exposure to high levels of trauma from within their congregations (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013).

Like most negative emotional outcomes, research has indicated that an effective way to protect against compassion fatigue is proper resourcing, professional training, established boundaries, and clear support systems (Spencer et al., 2012). Unfortunately, rural clergy often

lack access to many of these (Charlton et al., 2009; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). Furthermore, as Wirtz et al. (2017) found, the emotional health of a follower (in this case, a minister's congregation) has a strong influence on a leader. Thus, one could easily understand how trauma within a congregation, if disclosed to a clergy member, can strongly influence the minister's emotional health and ministry.

Lastly, a direct connection back to how compassion fatigue might influence role stress is necessary. According to Hendron et al. (2012), when clergy are expected to function in the role of a mental health professional, regardless of their training or ability, they often acquiesce. Through acquiescence, untrained clergy often find that such a role places stress in their lives, both inside and out of ministry (Finzi-Dottan & Kormosh, 2018). Finzi-Dottan and Kormosh (2018) found this to be true of all helping professions, as helping professionals often describe their work as a calling. Sadly, compassion fatigue extends beyond the vicarious suffering of caretaking, and if one's calling includes roles that they are unable to execute or are unfamiliar with how to refer out, they begin to experience emotional drainage, despair, and a lessening sympathy and empathy (Snelgar et al., 2017).

Negative Emotional Experiences Continued

Whether experiencing the sudden onset of compassion fatigue or the slow, drawn-out experience of burnout, clergy who are dealing with negative emotional experiences need both understanding and help. As shown, the work of clergy can be stressful, and such stressors can lead to negative health outcomes mentally and physically (Ellison et al., 2009; Faucett et al., 2013; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). This is a frightening truth to both clergy and parishioner alike. As stated, Doolittle (2007), Joynt (2017), and Randall (2013) agree that clergy are often the first, and sometimes only, source of support for members of Christian congregations. This

finding is very real in rural communities (Beebe, 2007; Scott & Lovell, 2015), as they lack many of the resources that more urban communities have access to (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Kitchen & McKibbin, 2018; Muskett, 2016). The results of this pressure may cause rural clergy to retreat from even basic responsibilities (Wells et al., 2012), leaving congregations without [effective] leadership in place.

Many factors hold influence over a clergyperson's emotional health, such as history with trauma, training, and work environment. Furthermore, age, gender, and family status have been consistently linked to greater or lesser levels of negative emotional consequences (Adams et al., 2017; Doolittle, 2007; Haik et al., 2017). Several researchers (Beebe, 2007; Faucett et al., 2013; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012; Randall, 2013; Scott & Lovell, 2015; Spencer et al., 2012) have also been able to identify role conflict or role ambiguity among the factors that contribute to an increase or decrease in clergy compassion fatigue. However, understanding role stress, as experienced by OFWB clergy, does not presently exist. Furthermore, how emotional health influences or is influenced by role stress within OFWB clergy is also lacking. These connections were explored through a qualitative process, guided by role theory and role stress theory.

Theoretical Framework: Role Theory and Role Stress Theory

First articulated in the early 20th century, role theory posits that individuals perform particular roles within an ordered society, and these roles contribute back to society's stability (Hindin, 2007). These roles often follow a typical framework while defining certain expectations, norms, rights, and duties of the role holder (Schneider & Bos, 2019). Simply, when performed in the needed manner, one's societal role helps to move culture along a trajectory (Baert et al., 2019).

In the case of leadership within the church (clergy), one's role is highly dependent upon their individual context (Crosskey et al., 2015). Said differently, a church may represent a microculture of society in which the minister and congregants are expected to conform to roles that are unique to that faith group or congregation. One common role of clergy is an elevated status in which they are able to lead, direct, and assume responsibility for a particular church or congregation (Adams et al., 2017).

However, role theory has often been criticized as being too narrow of an approach to understanding social systems and individual role responsibilities (Fleming et al., 2019). According to Schneider and Bos (2019), one's role can evolve and change in rather dynamic ways. Such changes will then necessitate renegotiation, expansion, or contraction of expectations, rights, and duties (Zai, 2015). Edwards (2014) posits that this frequently happens in religious settings, where expectations shift and roles no longer fit. Thus, it becomes necessary to look deeper into role theory to determine how such shifts might affect clergypersons.

In the mid-20th century, sociologist William Goode, while working through role theory, began to recognize that people tend to behave in ways that are reflective of their social networks. However, when members of a particular network are unable to meet these behavioral standards, stress is introduced (Beitman et al., 2004). Goode (1960) suggested that this moves beyond role theory into a theory of role stress, which is defined as the inability to fulfill obligations of one's social network.

Historically, role stress theory has been utilized to study single mothers (Spencer, 2005), caregivers (Beitman et al., 2004), university faculty (Boardman & Bozeman, 2007), interracial church pastors (Edwards, 2014), and prison chaplains (Hicks, 2008). Like role theory, role stress theory posits that social structures determine appropriate attitudes and behaviors at the micro-,

meso-, and macro-levels. Because social structure dictates roles, individuals often understand their responsibilities in light of other's expectations, regardless of one's own abilities (Hecht, 2001). Role stress theory goes on to explain that when expectations and abilities do not match, stress develops between one's social network and oneself (Barling & Frone, 2017; Boardman & Bozeman, 2007). The same is true in work environments in which one's role or duty lacks clear alignment between needs and skills (Barling & Frone, 2017). Finally, an imbalance between one's role and societal expectations often requires one of two solutions: a renegotiation of one's role or the removal of oneself from the network, system, or organization (Barling & Frone, 2017; Hicks, 2008).

Congregations or denominational hierarchies are often the most relevant forms of social or organizational networks from which rural clergy draw forth expectations (Edwards, 2014). For OFWB clergy, these signals are received from one's conference, church, and community members, regardless of skills or abilities. When one's role expectation and role ability do not match up, they are forced to ignore the expectation, adapt or develop toward the expectation, or renegotiate the expectation (Barling & Frone, 2017). If none of these presented options promise viability, role stress will likely increase (Edwards, 2014).

Consequences of role stress, as already established, include burnout, fatigue, depersonalization, and possible termination of the relationship (or job; Faucett et al., 2013; Kahn et al., 1964; Wu et al., 2019). For rural churches that are facing a shortage of qualified clergy (Joynt, 2017; Spencer et al., 2012; Tanner & Zvonkovic, 2011), these consequences may cause dire outcomes (Martin, 2019). Ultimately, the frameworks of role theory and role stress theory conclude that individuals within cultures and organizations have roles they are expected to fill,

but that fulfillment of these roles is not always possible. Thus, when roles are unable to be filled, and stress is introduced, outcomes are poor.

Chapter Summary

As leaders of the Original Free Will Baptist denomination, clergy roles, expectations, skills, and stressors matter. Through this literature review, an understanding of role stress and emotional consequences has been established. However, research still lacks an understanding of the unique definition of role stress among rural OFWB clergy as experienced first-hand. An interpretive phenomenological analysis was conducted to aid in developing a definition of role stress among OFWB clergy and role stress's emotional consequences. This study was guided by a theoretical framework, using the principles of role stress and role stress theory. By allowing OFWB clergy to give definition to experienced role stressors and their outcomes, the research around role stress, rural clergy, and the OFWB denomination will grow.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As previously established, role stress is a phenomenon experienced when one's duty, role, or purpose is vague and ambiguous or multifaceted and conflicting (Faucett et al., 2013; Kahn et al., 1964). Role stress is often documented among helping professionals (Adams et al., 2017; Hight & Park, 2019; Rai, 2016), many who serve populations with a broad diversity of needs. In particular, understanding role stress's effects upon clergypersons is a growing interest to scholars (Lawson, 2018; Lewis et al., 2007; Payne & Hays, 2016), as clergy are often sought after by women and men that are experiencing a crisis (Jacobson et al., 2013). This is especially true within rural communities that lack many of the resources of larger, urban areas (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Kitchen & McKibbin, 2018; Muskett, 2016). Role stress has been consistently linked to negative emotional outcomes, such as burnout and compassion fatigue (Adams et al., 2017; Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Wu et al., 2019). Thus, one may suppose that rural clergy who are experiencing role stress may also experience negative emotional consequences.

By nature, role stress depends upon one's role expectation, making it widely subjective (Manister & Gigliotti, 2016). While prior research may have identified those who are at risk, and even specifically acknowledged rural clergy are among this group, little has been done to understand this phenomenon among Original Free Will Baptist clergy. Thus, the purpose of this study was to qualitatively analyze role stress and its emotional consequences through the voice and experience of OFWB ministers. Because such an experience is both human and highly individual, a phenomenological approach was utilized. According to Horrigan-Kelly et al. (2016) and Noon (2018), a phenomenological approach endeavors to uncover meaning through a participant's own experience, using their own words, thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Furthermore, I used the theoretical frameworks of role theory (Schneider & Bos, 2019; Zai,

2015) and role stress theory (Goode, 1960) to develop interview questions, as I sought participants' feedback to contribute to the questions of "What does role stress and its components of conflict and ambiguity look like among OFWB clergy" and "How does role stress affect mental and emotional health among OFWB clergy, particularly within the constructs of compassion fatigue and burnout."

Population

The Original Free Will Baptist denomination began and remains exclusively in rural eastern North Carolina. Clergy, the leaders within this faith community, also tend to be the products of such rural origins and share a fair amount of sameness demographically. Beyond demographics, however, an understanding of OFWB clergy experience goes largely undocumented. One reason for this gap in the research of OFWB experiences might be traced to the denomination's polity, which yields complete autonomy to each of the eight conferences, decentralizing data-collecting, keeping of records, and all other acts of research. This is further evidenced by an absence of empirical research, peer-reviewed journal articles, or other scholarly publications. Finally, anecdotal observation points to a lack of impetus among OFWB leadership to document fully the experiences of its ministers (B. Wise, pseudonym, personal conversation, March 10, 2020). However, the former director of The Covenant, an OFWB leadership development initiative, has claimed that such a gap is not due to intentionality but primarily the outcome of underdeveloped skills and abilities from within the denomination.

The findings of inconsistent data keeping, gaps in research, and lacking skills and abilities are also commonly found among small, rural Christian denominations. As documented in the review of literature, small, rural faith communities often lack the structure needed to gather and maintain data properly (Muskett, 2016), have lower educational standards (Miles &

Proeschold-Bell, 2012), and have less access than urban communities to resources that can benefit their ministry (Scott & Lovell, 2015). Therefore, one could posit that the OFWB denomination also shares in these experiences.

Qualitative Research

The goal of qualitative research is not to measure precisely but to document, define, and provide a narrative of an experience (Groenewald, 2004). Within the world of qualitative research, there are many designs for particular problems, audiences, and research goals. Among these strategies, I chose to approach this particular population and problem with a phenomenological frame of reference. Phenomenological studies, according to Groenewald (2004) and Valentine et al. (2018), aim to return to the concrete, as experienced by participants. Identified in the early 20th century by Edmund Husserl and further developed by his student, Martin Heidegger, the phenomenological approach allows participants to communicate their feelings, beliefs, experiences, and convictions through semiformal interviews (Boyd, 2001).

Research Process

By approaching this inquiry from a phenomenological stance, the goal of understanding role stress as participants understand it could be accomplished. According to Gill (2014), a phenomenological approach allows the lived experience [of role stress] to be documented among a particular people [OFWB clergy]. Using the language of narrative, Bansal et al. (2018) claimed that phenomenology allows a particular story of human interaction to be told through the research process. This story is not the researcher's but that of the participant, as told to the researcher. It is the task of the researcher to hear, process, interpret, and report what they are told.

In the case of role stress, a phenomenon that occurs among humans with great diversity, a phenomenological approach allows this diversity to come forth. As stated, this study's goal was not to quantify or measure role stress, nor was it to prescribe effective ways to eliminate stress for an OFWB minister; the goal was simply to develop and document an understanding of role stress among this particular population. Thus, this approach allowed for the capturing of the diversity of experiences among said population, while allowing a definition to emerge that is consistent with these experiences. Furthermore, the connection between role stress and negative emotional outcomes (burnout, compassion fatigue, etc.) is often subjective in nature. This approach allowed participants to fully express their experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions as they relate to this phenomenon.

Traditionally, phenomenological research works best through a semistructured interview process (Noon, 2018). This means that interview questions were designed in such a way that they move the conversation toward role stress and emotional consequences without leading participants towards a particular conclusion (Thompson, 2018). Trust, which will be discussed in further depth later, is built through active listening and reflecting participant responses without coaxing in one direction or another (Englander, 2020). Englander (2020) posits that things like body language, tone, and eye contact also aid in the interview process by relaxing and assuring participants of interviewer competence and empathy.

Initially, this project's goal was to interview OFWB clergy in person, in a setting of their choice. While this was a desire, alternative mediums of the interview had to be considered due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Thus, Zoom, a digital meeting medium, and telephone calls were used for data collection. Consent was obtained through an emailed, signed, and scanned form, as well as through the digital medium, DocuSign. Interviewees were given ample

information prior to the interview, including the ability to terminate the interview at any point. Furthermore, information gathered, notes taken, and recorded dialogue will be maintained in a secure space and then deleted (or destroyed) after five years. Lastly, because role stress and emotional consequences are issues of personal interest to the researcher, the process of bracketing, encouraged by Saldaña and Omasta (2018), was used to set aside premature assumptions.

Interviews

This study's central research question focuses on role stress and emotional consequences among OFWB clergypersons; thus, participants were drawn from OFWB clergymen and clergywomen who are licensed or ordained in the OFWB denomination. As stated, the OFWB denomination is located exclusively in the eastern part of North Carolina and has large ideological divisions at the conference level. However, clergy are [loosely] unified through the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists, a denominational ministry that aids in data distribution, event planning, and data publication.

Due to the narrowness of this population, participant selection occurred through purposive sampling. As Gill (2014) and Wu Suen et al. (2014) posit, such an approach is typical of phenomenological studies, as they attempt to discover meaning among a particular population. By utilizing this approach, one can trust that participants are reliable sources of information and the most qualified to speak to the research topic.

The OFWB clergy pool is relatively small (less than 250), and communication between ministers is often infrequent. Thus, participants were recruited through two methods. First, I used the OFWB convention headquarters' email database to recruit participants digitally. Specifically, this email contained an explanation of the study, as well as a link to a SurveyMonkey

demographic survey (see Appendix A). Second, I contacted each conference's Board of Ordination and requested an opportunity to explain the purpose of this research, the structure of the research, and requested that they offer support by informing their ministers directly. Such an attempt did not yield and further participants beyond the first recruitment method. In total, 12 participants consented willingness to participate in this study through the digital survey. Ultimately, nine participants signed and returned the consent form, leading to nine study participants.

Once identified, participants were again informed of potential risks and asked to consent to the study. Following consent, participants and I engaged in semistructured interviews, with questions moving from general toward specific (see Appendix B). As Horrigan-Kelly et al. (2016) suggested, I remained open as the researcher to where the participant was going. Thus, I employed active listening, reflection, probing, and summarizing as the interviews unfolded (Allison et al., 2007). This was particularly important from an interpretative phenomenological stance, which looks to move beyond description toward what it means to have an experience (Noon, 2018).

Interview Questions

The central research questions, explored through an interpretive phenomenological methodology, were "What does role stress, and its components of role conflict and role ambiguity look like among OFWB clergy" and "How does role stress affect mental and emotional health among OFWB clergy, particularly within the constructs of compassion fatigue and burnout." Throughout this process, I maintained the position that one's perspective is based upon their individual experience, including context, time, and knowledge (Valentine et al., 2018). It was my job to then interpret "meaning" from the responses given by interviewees in a

way that represents their intentions fairly. Often, this is referred to as a double hermeneutic, which Smith (2017, p. 303) defined as a researcher attempting to make sense of a participant's sensemaking of their world. Peat et al. (2019) further defined this interpretative process by comparing the researcher to a guide that helps keep the topic in focus but allows participants the freedom to explore. Thus, interview questions were open-ended and gradually narrowed toward the research's focus.

To design these questions, I used the theoretical frameworks of role theory and role stress theory. Role theory has traditionally been seen as a way to understand one's role or place in society. It provides the assumption that each person has a place in an ordered society (Hindin, 2007) and that one's place (or role) provides certain expectations, norms, rights, and duties (Schneider & Bos, 2019). These characteristics and behaviors, when performed in a needed manner, progress a society, community, or organization forward (Baert et al., 2019).

However, people often fail to perform their prescribed roles, which leads to a breakdown between expectations and execution. Role stress theory, the product of sociologist William Goode, explains what happens when expectations and reality fail to align. According to Beitman et al. (2004), Goode (1960), and Spencer (2005), we often understand our expectations based upon other's perspectives rather than our own abilities. So, when one fails to fulfill the expectations of a society, community, family, etc., stress is introduced (Boardman & Bozeman, 2007). Such an imbalance often requires one of two solutions: a renegotiation of one's role in the network or the removal of oneself from the network (Hicks, 2008).

To explore the research questions, I conducted these interviews through Zoom conference calls and telephone. As already established, though in-person interviews were preferable, the current situation due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, required physical distancing between

research subjects and myself. By moving from general-to-specific, key interview questions were asked (see Appendix B).

Prior to the interview process, participants were given a digital consent form to be signed, as well as a verbal disclosure from the researcher (see Appendix C). All interviews were recorded using both a handheld recorder and Zoom's built-in recording feature. Audio and video interviews were then transcribed into Microsoft Word documents to be coded and presented as research findings. Following the completion of this study, all documents, recordings, notes, and analyses will be maintained in a secure space for five years. At the completion of the fifth year, all records, notes, documents, and analyses will be deleted, shredded, or disposed of in a manner that maintains participant confidentiality.

Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of both the research process and findings are of the utmost importance to this study. While these terms have meanings of their own outside of a research context, inside of said context, they speak to accurate intentions (measurement of what is said to be measured) and consistency when utilized multiple times (Ali & Yusof, 2011; Buus & Perron, 2020). Within qualitative research, validity focuses on the appropriateness of the process, approach, and data (Leung, 2015). As explained above, the research questions favor a dialogical, narrative approach that cannot be fully documented through a numerical analysis; thus, resulting in the choosing of an interpretive phenomenological methodology. Reliability, the second half of these assurances, focuses on the ability to replicate the process (Leung, 2015; Stanley & Nayar, 2015). This study also retains reliability, in that questions are open-ended, funneled, and directed towards the research question. Should they be applied to two different groups of OFWB clergy, they should yield similar data. Lastly, the term generalizability comes into play within the

process of research. Due to the nature of qualitative research, generalizability is rarely a goal (Leung, 2015). Findings were specific to a particular phenomenon and people within a small context (Carminati, 2018).

Transcription and Coding

As stated, this phenomenological approach utilized semistructured interviews, moving from general to specific. Due to the nature of Zoom or telephone interviews, reading of body language and use of active listening were stymied. However, in all possible cases, notes or memos were recorded on a separate piece of paper. Interviews were recorded and securely stored until transcribed to maintain participant confidentiality. The transcription process occurred quickly thereafter, retaining data cogency (Englander, 2020; Thompson, 2018).

After transcription, each participant's interview was coded to draw forth recurring themes. According to O'Brien et al. (2014) and Saldaña and Omasta (2018), coding is a process by which raw data are analyzed to pull forth common responses. I used two approaches to coding: NVivo and thematic. NVivo coding, according to Castleberry and Nolen (2018, p. 808), operates by the standard of what stands out and looks to identify specific words or short phrases frequently used with emphasis or in a nuanced fashion by the participant. Codes are compared to one another, and frequency is recorded. Afterward, thematic coding was used to group together common themes to draw forth large ideas (Noon, 2018). Finally, identified themes of each participant were compared to those of other participants to identify themes that are potentially generalizable to the OFWB clergy population.

Assumptions

This research's primary goal was to explore among OFWB clergy the experience of role stress and its emotional consequences. An interpretative phenomenological qualitative approach

was taken to define this phenomenon, where individuals were sought from OFWB clergy to take part in semistructured interviews based upon the above interview questions. This research assumed that OFWB clergy would feel a desire to explore and define role stress through this process.

Furthermore, it was assumed that OFWB clergy experience role stress due to reasons documented in the literature review. These reasons include findings that identify clergy as a population that is vulnerable to role stress (Faucett et al., 2013; Milstein et al., 2019), the linkage of role stress to a disconnect between skills and expectations (Hight & Park, 2019; Kahn et al., 1964; Loveridge, 2017), and the diversity of expectations in rural ministry (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012; Ratter et al., 2016; Scott & Lovell, 2015). Original Free Will Baptist ministers are, by nature, rural clergy who serve in areas of low populations, limited resources, and geographic isolation. For these reasons, it is assumed that they are susceptible to role stress and its emotional consequences.

Finally, it was assumed that participant experiences have some amount of predictability based upon age and ministry tenure. Doolittle (2007) and Haik et al. (2017) found that age often corresponded with stress, with younger individuals experiencing greater stress than their senior colleagues. Wells et al. (2012) posited that this was due to the development of coping strategies by older ministers throughout their tenure. Diversity in age and tenure of clergy among the participant population was sought to test this assumption.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with all research, there are limits in both exploration and discovery for this study. For starters, this study was limited by its OFWB clergy population, making it less generalizable than a quantitative approach that is looking to quantify role stress levels and their correlation to

negative emotional outcomes. This study was also limited within the OFWB context to the conferences that support empirical research and its findings. Thus, I did not see representation from all eight OFWB conferences. Finally, of the nine participating clergy, six have terminal degrees, and only two were female. Such a population creates a limitation in that little can be done to understand differences of experience(s) as they relate to gender or educational attainment.

Delimitations, which are a type of limitation or boundary I established, are also necessary. Due to the specific nature of this study, participants were the most significant boundary imposed. In particular, the population, which was made up of OFWB clergymen and clergywomen, was the main boundary. Furthermore, efforts were made to include minority voices, which in the OFWB denomination include women and ministers under 40, as part of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Lastly, as one should anticipate, ethical consequences of this research project were considered (Morrison & Sacchetto, 2018). This included maintaining confidentiality, properly storing and disposing of data, and presenting findings. By completing institutional review board approval (IRB) and training (see Appendix D), I am aware of the risk that research using human subjects poses. To that extent, I worked to maximize benefits while minimizing risks. Verbal and written consent was requested from participants, while names, recordings, and transcriptions were anonymized. Only minimal demographic information was requested, including age, gender, and ministry tenure, which posed a low risk of being associated with any one particular individual. Upon this project's defense, the information will be stored for five years on a secure database or in a locked cabinet and then deleted (or destroyed) thereafter.

Conclusion

In sum, I approached the questions of "What does role stress and its components of conflict and ambiguity look like among OFWB clergy" and "How does role stress affect mental and emotional health among OFWB clergy, particularly within the constructs of compassion fatigue and burnout" through an interpretive phenomenological qualitative framework. Semistructured interviews were utilized, allowing participants to narrate their individualized experience of role stress through funneled queries. The interpretive stance allowed me to interpret the participant's experiences, just as they made sense of role stress and its emotional consequences. Transcription and coding gave life to this collective account and aided in the findings and conclusions. Finally, throughout this process, care was given to maintain high ethical standards, both for the human subject and the data produced.

In Chapter 4, I offer an analysis of findings, as well as my own preconceived notions of these explored constructs. Results and elicited themes are stated, with supporting participant data used to back up these findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study aimed to understand the experience of role stress among OFWB clergy and its resulting consequences. In specific, this study's goal was to construct a working definition of role stress, as experienced by OFWB clergy. Through the depiction of role stress among this contextually bound population, OFWB leadership can now more easily provide intervention and support to clergy throughout their ministry tenures. Furthermore, congregations and ministries that have OFWB clergy in their employ may also benefit from understanding firsthand experiences of OFWB clergy role stress. This phenomenon was analyzed through an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), and results will be documented.

Personal Awareness

Prior to conducting the research portion of this study, I personally underwent a process of awareness. According to Horrigan-Kelly et al. (2016), researchers who use IPA as the framework for understanding a particular phenomenon are not immune to their own biases or presuppositions, particularly as they concern the topic under study. However, biases and presuppositions are not themselves problematic if they are explored, documented, and used to support research and its findings. As an OFWB clergyperson myself, much of what I experienced about role stress in my 10 years of vocational ministry will need to be documented. Thus, after extensive internal analysis, three themes emerged that are central to my own experience and understanding of role stress as an OFWB clergyperson. First, role stress takes time to present; second, issues, rather than interests, tend to be the easiest role stressors to recognize; and third, the more affinity a congregation has for its former leadership, the more significant the role stress may be for the current minister. Each will be lightly explored below.

The first personal understanding I have concerning OFWB clergy role stress and its emotional consequences is that this construct takes time to present. As Guzman and Teh (2016) and Wong et al. (2017) posit, early experiences in a clergyperson's tenure are often less stressful, reflecting a period of grace that some refer to as the honeymoon phase. I have both witnessed and experienced this phase, which typically includes a heightened sense of joy by all parties, mutual admiration, and little in the way of significant change. At this point, the goal seems to be to keep the other (be it the one who gives or the one who embodies the role) happy. Small adjustments within this period are seen as less threatening. However, at some [varying] point in time, the newness of one's role fades, and differences that were once minimized become focal points for conflict, stress, and dispute (Guzman & Teh, 2016; Jacobson et al., 2013).

The second personal understanding that I document is that role stress usually occurs on the surface but is driven by interests underneath. According to Hocker and Wilmot (2018), conflict usually presents by way of a deep issue (surface-level disagreements, but is driven by interests), often undiscovered or undeveloped components of one's identity that are under the perception of threat. In a personal example, I faced role stress when it came to the translation of scripture I used in a prior church. As an educated student of biblical studies and theology, I had no issue with the translation that I used, and I often used the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). However, a significant number of congregants *strongly encouraged* me to use the King James Version (KJV), as it was what they were comfortable with. On the surface, there seemed to be a question of accuracy, readability, and familiarity with this text. I responded to this by teaching a Bible study course on the history of biblical translation. However, deeper than the issue lay the interest, which was that the KJV had been the translation from which they memorized verses, had been read to as children, had seen countless ministers before me use, and

most importantly, did not require them to change anything about how they thought or acted. Unfortunately, this subject was only addressed at the issue level, meaning that behavior change did little to satisfy the underlying interest.

Finally, the third theme to emerge from personal reflection was that of a congregation's affinity for the former leader. My experience and observation matched that of Eagle et al. (2019), who found that clergy perceived less support in congregations who recently lost (due to death or retirement) a long-tenured leader. Beebe (2007) also found that clergy often feel that they are being compared to former leadership, an action that is directly connected to increased stress. Personally, I have witnessed firsthand how congregations grew familiar and comfortable with certain leaders, their behaviors, and their beliefs. When presented with a new leader (and his or her attributes), there was and is an often unaware comparison that happens in congregants' minds. This may include dress, sermon preparation and delivery, pastoral behaviors, knowledge, and more. This comparison will often include an unspoken standard, based upon how much the congregant connected with or gravitated toward the prior minister. Said differently, if the former pastor was loved, then it will be difficult for the new pastor to live outside of his or her predecessor's shadow. If the former pastor was not liked, then the new minister has much more freedom to assume a role more fitting to him or her. The obvious conclusion of this reflection is that clergy who follow leaders who were highly regarded, but yet themselves do not embody those valued characteristics, will experience greater amounts of role stress, especially early on in their tenures.

Research Setting and Demographics

As stated, this study utilized a purposive sampling strategy in order to specifically recruit clergy of the OFWB denomination. These clergy, many of whom serve as pastors of rural,

eastern North Carolina OFWB congregations, were targeted due to their own, firsthand experience(s) of OFWB ministerial role stress. Recruitment occurred through an email solicitation, which was sent to all OFWB clergy who have an email address on file with the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists. Once solicited, clergy were encouraged to follow a link that took them to a SurveyMonkey survey where demographics of age, ministry tenure, education, and gender were captured (see Tables 1, 2, and 3). This survey also allowed respondents to indicate their willingness to participate, as well as a space to enter their email address. In total, 13 ministers responded, with 12 indicating their willingness to participate.

After a period of one week, I sent a direct email to the 12 clergy who had agreed to participate in the research portion of this study. Within that email, I attached the IRB-approved consent form and thanked them for their willingness to participate. From these 12 emails, nine clergy responded with both a signed consent form and their range of availability for an interview. Tables 1, 2, and 3 document the demographic breakdown for participating clergy ($N = 9$), based upon their gender, tenure, and education.

Table 1

Age of Participating OFWB Clergy

	Male	Female
18–30	0	0
31–50	1	1
51–70	5	1
70+	1	0

Table 2

Ministry Tenure of Participating OFWB Clergy

	Male	Female
1–5 Years	0	0
6–10 Years	1	0
11–20 Years	1	0
20+ Years	5	2

Table 3

Education of Participating OFWB Clergy

	Male	Female
High School	0	0
Some College	1	0
Bachelors	1	0
Masters	0	1
Doctorate	5	1

As evidenced by the demographic tables, participants tended to be male, educated, and with more than 20 years in ministry. Unfortunately, due to decentralized record-keeping of the OFWB denomination, it was not possible to compare the demographics of this group to the entirety of the OFWB denomination with absolute certainty. However, as documented in the background section of this report, the majority of OFWB clergy do not have advanced academic credentials. Thus, results from this study skew heavily toward a more educated population within the OFWB denomination. Furthermore, there are presently only three females ordained in the OFWB denomination, two of which participated in this research.

Research Process

As established, the questions that guided this study focused on defining role stress and its components of role conflict and role ambiguity: how that role stress affects the mental and

emotional health of clergy, and how the characteristic of rurality influenced OFWB clergy role stress and its outcomes. To answer these questions, the nine participating clergy were asked to take part in semistructured interviews, focused on the interview questions documented in Appendix B. Interviews were to be conducted via Zoom, and were set to last between 45 and 60 minutes, with transcription to happen soon thereafter.

In total, nine semistructured interviews were conducted (six via Zoom and three via telephone, due to technical glitches) with OFWB clergy over 12 days. These interviews were recorded on a handheld recorder, as well as through the Zoom record feature, in case of audio failure. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, with phone interviews being slightly shorter than the Zoom interviews. Each interview was transcribed as quickly after its conclusion as possible, with most being transcribed within three hours of completion. Memoing, a process of taking field notes (Groenewald, 2004), was also used throughout each interview.

Upon completion of all nine interviews, a process of coding began. Initially, transcripts were coded by way of NVivo coding to establish what stood out. Once this process was completed, codes were transferred over to another document that was used to help identify constant themes inside of each transcript. Each participant's interview yielded between six and 10 substantive themes that connected back to initial research questions. Each of these themes was assigned a coded color and then matched up with corresponding quotes from the participant transcripts. Once individual themes were established, the process of thematic coding allowed me to couple together these individual themes into themes that showed up in multiple participant engagements. From these themes, a narrative understanding of OFWB role stress, the effects of rurality, and emotional consequences were derived.

In the following section, I will present the findings as they relate to the interview questions through sample tables. Afterward, I will explore four large themes that surfaced during participant interviews that connected back to the larger research questions.

Interview Questions

The first question was, by nature, very general (see Table 4). Within the scope of qualitative research, general beginnings led toward narrowed and targeted questions. Such a design opens the participant to dialogue while building trust between researcher and participant. For the most part, clergy see themselves as called by God to minister to people, particularly OFWB individuals. Out of the nine interviewed participants, only two had not grown up in the OFWB denomination; thus, their experience was almost exclusively OFWB by nature. It was also important to note that, of the clergy that had served at multiple locations, there was a strong testament to a difference in their experiences at each unique location. Finally, it was almost universally stated that, as one aged (both in tenure and chronologically), that maturity followed.

Table 4

Tell Me About Your Experience as an OFWB Clergyperson

Response	*f*
Divine calling	7
Roles vary as locations vary	5
Age brings wisdom and maturity	8
Opportunities are limited	3

Note: $N = 9$

For most respondents, defining their role as a minister came down to a relationship between congregants and themselves (see Table 5). Almost exclusively, these participants saw their role in light of that dynamic, meaning that if the clergy and congregant relationship were to dissolve, they would no longer have a place in the social system. When considering role theory, the guiding framework of this study, such a dynamic makes sense in that participants frequently

alluded to the idea their church was an ordered system in which all members [of the system] have particular roles to play (Hindon, 2007).

Table 5

How Do You Define Your Role as a Minister

Response	*f*
Servant of others	6
Teacher, equipper, model of Christian behavior	5
Leader	4
Preacher	3

Note: $N = 9$

With no exception, participating OFWB clergy drew their identities and purpose from being OFWB ministers or pastors of particular congregations. Thus, stress in one's ministry proved to be impossible to delineate from stress in one's role. To understand sources or causes of this, participants were invited to reflect upon episodes or constant patterns that result in above-average stress. As shown (see Table 6), stress on one's role was frequently a result of seeking change or congregants that expressed their dissatisfaction. Often, the two constructs were linked together, with congregants becoming unhappy or dissatisfied as a result of the anticipated or actualized change.

Table 6

Describe Stress in Your Ministry

Response	*f*
Dissatisfied congregants	7
Result of seeking change	8
Unwilling or complacent congregants	5
Poor communication or lack of follow-through	4

Note: N = 9

The entire OFWB denomination is contained in a part of eastern North Carolina that is widely considered to be rural. When asked about rurality and its influence in and through ministry, most ministers attested to a type of fish in water mindset, meaning that they had little to compare rurality against (see Table 7). Such a mindset, when analyzed through role theory, makes sense in that individuals inside of a system can rarely have an objective experience. The result of this is that it takes experience and self-awareness to see a system differently from the inside (Francis, 2017; Kemery, 2006).

Table 7

What Influence Does Rurality Have on Your Ministry

Response	*f*
Rural churches are the center of a community or family	6
Resources and people in rural areas are lacking	8
Rurality is a mental model	4
Rurality affects the ability to implement change	7

Note: N = 9

In particular, many of these participants reflected upon rurality and could [to some degree] differentiate between rural and nonrural factors. As a result, this construct will be explored in more depth later in this chapter. However, it must be established here that most

participants understand rurality to encompass a slowness (hesitation) to change that often intertwines with limited resources.

As a whole, the expectation question proved to be more difficult for clergy to answer, with responses rarely connecting to larger themes (individually or as a whole; see Table 8). However, eight out of the nine participants attested to a type of belief that their congregations embodied concerning their role as the hired help. While this theme will be explored in further depth, it is of importance to note here that such a mentality was perceived as a justification for why congregants expected so much of their clergy. Connected to this was the idea that the minister should show up for visitations, weddings, funerals, birthdays, etc., and even on days off or when on vacation.

Table 8

What Expectations Challenge Your Role, or Do You Lack the Ability to Fulfill

Response	*f*
Be the hired help	8
Mental health counselor	2
Resident expert	3
Ever-present figurehead	5

Note: $N = 9$

As stated, role stress theory (RST) posits that when a member of a society is unable to fulfill their role expectation, they will be forced to act in one of three predictable ways: ignore the expectation, renegotiate, or remove themselves from the system (Barling & Frone, 2017; Hicks, 2008). For OFWB clergy who feel a divine call from God to their role, ignoring the stressor (or attempting to) is the most likely response to such an experience (see Table 9). However, more than half of the interviewed OFWB clergy attested to a moment(s) in which they considered resigning or walking away from a particular ministry.

Table 9

What Happens When You Cannot Fulfill a Role

Response	*f*
Attempt to renegotiate	3
Consider quitting or resigning	5
Ignore it	7

Note: $N = 9$

Connected to the former question, the question of how such stress affects one mentally or emotionally was designed to understand the consequence of role stress upon OFWB clergy (see Table 10). Almost all participants attested to an increase in frustration as a result of these stressors, much of which still persisted at the time of the interview. Interestingly, most participants who attested to experiencing burnout or compassion fatigue also claimed that it was a short-term, resolvable phenomenon. When explored further, it became clear that, due to age and tenure, many of these participating clergy had learned at some point in their ministry how to handle these outcomes. This connection of age and tenure and role stress and its consequences will be explored further.

Table 10

How Do Role Stressors Affect Your Emotional or Mental Health

Response	*f*
Feeling of burnout or fatigue	7
Consider of self-harm	3
Increased and persistent frustration	8

Note: $N = 9$

The final question invited participants to explore their understanding of role stress in order to offer a concise definition proved to be somewhat elusive (see Table 11). Hesitancy existed around this question, as most respondents could only think of this concept in terms of a particular experience rather than in a more general way. This finding, however, should not be

surprising, as prior research frequently posits that role stress is bound by context, time, and even an individual's perception (Adams et al., 2017; Muskett, 2016; Snelgar et al., 2017). In coding the responses to this question, I noticed two particular (sometimes overlapping) directions that participants chose: defining role stress in terms of other's behaviors and defining role stress in terms of their own experience. The codes of inflexibility meeting unrealistic expectations and space between pastoral expectation and congregational willingness were connected to the behaviors or others, in this case, congregants. The codes of physiological experience and mental and emotional experience connected readily to the clergy person's own physical and mental experience(s). From this question emerged a particular theme that will be explored later in the chapter.

Table 11

As an OFWB Clergyperson, How Do You Define Role Stress

Response	*f*
Inflexibility meeting unrealistic expectations	5
Space between pastoral expectation and congregational willingness	7
Physiological experience	3
Mental and emotional experience	6

Note: $N = 9$

Findings

Original Free Will Baptist clergy that participated in this research attested to the existence and experience of role stress within their ministries, the rural influencing nature of their ministries, the connection between age and maturity, the ability to mitigate stress, and the emotional consequences that such stress will have upon an individual if not properly mitigated. In this section, I will revisit the four themes that emerged throughout this series of interviews and

report them through a phenomenological narrative. According to Valentine et al. (2018), this is the goal of a phenomenological analysis, which utilizes the experience of participants to draw forth a consonant narrative.

Rurality

For most participants, the notion that they were serving in a rural congregation, in a rural area, was of little surprise. As one participant stated, "[we] understand that we are a rural congregation, and we like it that way. We want to stay rural!" For most, rurality encompassed a lifestyle in which not only did the minister have a role, but the church had a central role in the community. "The church is where people socialize, catch up on news, and build community," said one respondent. However, these mental models, and even the historic role(s) played by a church in a rural community, are beginning to change.

> I would say that up until about 10 years ago, the rural nature of a church was not thought about, nor was it something that I could have objectively understood, 'like a fish in water.' But the last decade has changed this and people are moving out of rural areas. In fact, people do not need the church anymore to provide social or communal structure; they get that in other places!

Thus, when invited to move deeper, most participants spoke about the rural nature of the church, the OFWB denomination, and their ministry in a respectful but honest way.

> The rural nature of our church causes it to take time to make things happen, and this usually takes a long time. Decisions have to be made by the body, which has to go through a few committees. Even then, it takes a long time to implement.

One participant stated, "I believe our church is called to go to the community with the Gospel, but most of the time we focus internally on ourselves. 'We are just a family here,' people will

say, 'that's how we have always been.'" Another said, "We have less money than churches that are not rural; and with less money, we cannot do as much. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does make it easy to compare ourselves to others."

Several participants also indicated that one of the main missions their church had was to reach the lost with salvation. This, they posited, happens when individuals can be brought into the church, discipled, and then join the body and mission of the church. Unfortunately, participants also indicated that there were low birth rates in their church and that growth from the outside was extremely difficult. A participant said, "Rural churches are static in their membership; growth does not happen from the external, it is only internal. If people are not having babies, then there is little growth that is occurring."

Another commented,

> On the road that the church is on, there are a lot of people, and we have spoken out to them to invite them, but some come and some do not go to church…most of the time our church is good with just who is here on Sunday.

The last characteristic of rurality that proved to have an effect upon one's role was the nature of resources within a rural congregation.

> Other [city] churches have more money, buildings, and people; they even have the big city atmosphere. We have a church in a town that has a huge physical body and a big fellowship hall that can accommodate lots of people…we are a small building and a small number, so we cannot.

> If you're in a rural OFWB church, then you preach. They do not have money for other types of ministry…if you are called to ministry in this denomination, you are called

> to be a preacher…if you feel called to anything else, you have to preach and pastor to do it.
>
> Our church is a bit hesitant to change…we only have enough money to do a few things, and most of those things are focused on who is already in the church…we struggle with having updated technology. I once did a Bible study on an overhead projector because the church did not have anything newer.

To summarize this finding of rurality, participating OFWB clergy felt that it was a part of the DNA of the church, whether for good or ill. They recognize that rurality has created an in-group and out-group mentality that is often reflected in limited growth, slowness in making decisions, and a noticeable lack in resources. However, clergy were also quick to point out that rurality was not seen as a negative construct, and often fuels the perception of safety, familiarity, and loyalty for both the clergyperson and his or her congregation.

Clergy as the Hired Help

As established in earlier sections of this study, clergy assume the formal role of leader within Christian congregations. This framework holds steady among OFWB congregations and clergy, with the pastor being seen as the public face of a congregation. However, with that title also comes the reality that clergy in OFWB congregations are paid (salary, stipend, etc.) by the church for their work (B. Card, pseudonym, personal communication, April 24, 2020). Such an arrangement, according to participants, often results in clergy being seen as the paid or hired help of a congregation. This mental model often creates role conflict among OFWB clergy, who almost exclusively see themselves as being called by God to minister at a particular location, to a specific people, at a unique time. In particular, three findings of this theme will be discussed.

The first finding regarding the theme of clergy as hired help results in their role being reduced down to the "paid worker," who answers back to those who give to the church. One respondent stated, "People can be somewhat selfish; they want their goals and ideas to be done by the pastor… 'you are the one that is making money here, not me!'" (Referencing what a congregant said).

Another participant stated, "'Ask the preacher to do it,'" I overhead them say…I didn't even want to do it, but I felt like I had to because they were the ones that were paying my salary!" An additional comment included, "He told me, 'if they give money into the offering plate, they can evaluate you,' as if I were not really called by God but was called by those who give money."

The second theme of clergy as the hired help is the creation of stress among ministers who see their job as equipping people for service and salvation.

> The most important thing I try to communicate to my congregation is that it is not just my job to witness to people or invite them in. If you are a professing Christian, it is your job, too…I do not think that everybody understands that.
>
> My priority is to be the one who disciples by teaching and modeling Christ to other people…this is central to my ministry…sometimes they are like chickens (reference to herding chickens) and sometimes they look at me and say, 'not my job…'
>
> I try to teach my people…to see more lost being saved and brought into the church. But when I ask them to take part in this, they are reluctant at best! It is like they think that it is only my job to be a witness to the world of Jesus Christ.

The third theme of clergy being viewed as the hired help is that they are expected to be present at every event, every celebration, and every moment that a congregant wants them to be,

regardless of the minister's own schedule. "In my first church, there was a lady who was having a toenail removed, and she expected me to be there for the operation, which was going to be like 10 minutes!"

> For years, my family and I have gone on vacation. For several years in a row, I would get a phone call while we were on vacation because somebody had died and the family expected me to officiate the funeral. One time, my family and I were going to North Dakota, and as soon as we got there, I got a call that a lady had died…I took a flight back home, did the funeral, took a flight back to North Dakota, and then drove my family home.
>
> I just did not go, I couldn't go, I had too much going on. When they got back, they were so angry with me because I was not there…they were still angry when I left that church many years later.

Like the theme of rurality, the theme of the clergyperson as hired help was not perceived as negative by all participants. For many of the participating clergy, they felt that this was simply part of their calling to serve people: to show up, to do the work, and to put all other things aside. However, this theme did prove to create a fair amount of stress, especially when one was unable to fulfill the desired outcome by the congregant. For the most part, OFWB clergy see themselves as called to equip the people for the work of ministry; likewise, OFWB congregants often cede the work of ministry to the paid professional.

Emotional Outcomes Based Upon Tenure and Age

In this particular study, all participants were either above 50 years of age or had been in ministry for at least 20 years. Thus, the connection between age, tenure, and stress was explored in a highly reflective way. More specifically, participating clergy were able to identify key points

in their lives and careers in which mental models and experiences shifted, affording them a different perspective. Three distinctive findings connect back to a central idea that a connection exists between stress, age, and tenure.

First, when it came to age or tenure in ministry, young ministers were often overly ambitious but practically unprepared.

> To really invite change, you need to build trust…the problem is that young ministers do not know how to build trust, or they do not stay in one place long enough to accrue it. Trust is like chips that you can only earn over time…eventually you can spend those chips, but only if you have enough.
>
> Coming into ministry at my age helped save me from the mistakes I would have made in my 20s...I am not so young, and I have been around a while, so I told them I did not have time to spend on trying to change things just a little.

A participant stated, "I was young and didn't want to ask for help! In fact, I do not think I knew how to ask for help because I had not been around enough…I ended up exhausted and upset."

Next, when it came to a minister's age or tenure, a younger minister is less likely to feel comfortable in saying no, even if the expectation is one they cannot fulfill. "I was easily influenced by others, and I did not want to say no. Older people used to tell me to 'just have faith,' as if faith was the only thing that I needed at that time!" Another said, "Younger ministers think differently than I do now, which is not a bad thing…when I was young I thought I could do everything, so I just said yes (chuckle)…I realized that I am human and cannot do it all!" A participant also commented,

> I have permission to say no to things that, when I was young, I would have immediately said yes to. This happened about 10 to 15 years into my ministry, and I only regret that I did not learn this lesson before!

Finally, when it came to the age or tenure of a minister, several participants claimed that being young in ministry should be perceived as a time to learn and grow, to gain credibility, wisdom, and understanding.

> If there was something that I could share with young ministers, it is this, when you are in the struggle, see what God might be teaching! These lessons will help you in both the present and future ministry that God has for you!

Thus, many participants attest to seeing their role(s) and expectation(s) evolve over the course of their life or tenure. What might be stressful in the present could potentially be a lesson learned for the future. If nothing else, age and tenure bring with them the ability to say no to a role or expectation that does not fit or would not work in a particular instance.

Defining Role Stress: Two Directions

When it came to defining role stress, participating OFWB clergy seemed to visualize this construct in two separate, but overlapping, ways. First, there emerged this idea that role stress could be best understood as the disconnection between pastoral expectation and congregational willingness. Second, role stress was seen as a mental and physical experience that resulted from conflict or lack of strong, delineated objectives. In order to arrive at a clear definition of role stress among OFWB clergy, I will explore both constructs.

Disconnect Between Pastoral Expectation and Congregational Willingness. When it came to the alignment of pastoral expectation and congregational willingness, participants indicated a noticeable disconnect. As the interview process matured, it became clear that clergy

in the OFWB denomination saw themselves as both leaders of and servants to the particular people within their congregation. On the one hand, they believe they are called to be witness to life, death, pain, joy, suffering, and victory: to serve people where they are and how they need it. On the other hand, they saw themselves in a leadership role that was called to empower the same people to serve and witness to these experiences in the lives of others (Joynt, 2017; Wong et al. 2017). One role is almost exclusively dependent upon the clergy's ability to show up and be present; the other is based upon the expectation that congregants, too, will see themselves embodying the pastoral role in their families, communities, and social networks. When the latter of these roles fails to be actualized, stress is created, causing questioning, consideration of role termination, or some other negative outcome.

> I talked with some people about this and one of two were in favor and one or two were not. So, we made a decision that we were going to leave because of this. I had interviewed at another church and we were going to be leaving. I went to our deacon board and told them…
>
> When they told me what they were considering, I thought to myself, 'maybe I should just resign?' For almost a week I was there, back and forth, until finally a resolved that God had called me there and I was going to try and stay.

A further comment included, "I try to teach them to become witnesses in their own community…when they do not act on this, I ask God, 'is it time?'…I consider what I might do next because they are unwilling to move forward."

Another said,

> I am not the only one who should be doing this…we went through a series where I equipped people to be witnesses themselves, and we had great attendance…a week after the study was done, nothing had changed. This was 10 years ago.

The Physical and Mental Embodiment of Role Stress. For several clergy, the concept of role stress could not be understood apart from a physical and mental experience. In a word, role stress was traumatic for them, even causing two to consider self-harm. Such an understanding is consistent with prior research into role stress, as it often manifests in various physical or psychological symptoms (Hall & Gjesfjeld, 2013; Manister & Gigliotti, 2016; Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012). Unfortunately, most participating clergy did not feel they have sufficient access to mental or emotional resources (therapists, etc.) due to the rural nature of their context. A few responses from how clergy see role stress as a physical and mental experience served to reinforce this finding.

> I also felt like that on Wednesday of last week…we were starting back our in-person services and some folks [on both sides of the debate] just kept complaining. Some wanted to come back earlier, some didn't want to come back until a vaccine was available…it was all so much. I left with a headache and dizziness that took me a day to shake.

> Oh yeah! In particular, that year that we had so much going on personally…I was dealing with so many personal emotions and stress, plus the church and ministry stress. I physically became sick. To the point where I had all sorts of infections and the doctor told me that I needed to sit out of work for a whole week.

One participant revealed, "Honestly, some of them have almost crushed me. I even contemplated suicide at one point when things were so ugly. The only thing that kept me going was my family…"

Discussion of Findings

As has been made apparent, role stress among these participating OFWB clergy is a very real construct, resulting from a disconnect in pastoral expectation and congregational willingness. This phenomenon is further aggravated when one is younger, lacking the maturity of a more tenured minister. Consequences are often more impactful earlier in one's ministry, with seasoned ministers more adeptly managing role expectations and emotional outcomes. Interestingly, the concept of rurality does prove to be influential but only to the degree that the minster is aware of an alternative model (urban, suburban, etc.). In the next section, I will briefly connect the theoretical frameworks of role theory and role stress theory back to the above findings. Lastly, I will conclude this section with a few interesting findings that will be discussed in the following chapter as areas for future research.

Connection to Theoretical Framework

As established, role theory posits that ordered societies function best when individuals perform unique and complementary roles within said society (Baert et al., 2019). When applying this theory to the society of the OFWB denomination, we find that both clergy and congregants are assigned particular roles, and these roles require the fulfillment of unique tasks or responsibilities. In the case of clergy, it was clear that OFWB clergy saw themselves as both the leader and servant of particular congregations, requiring them to both teach and exemplify particular behaviors. Likewise, according to participating clergy, congregants have unique roles or callings to be witnesses and servants in their own communities. However, it is often the case that clergy, as leaders and servants, suffer greater consequences when they fail to fulfill their role than when congregants fail to fulfill theirs.

In order to fully understand this, our attention turns to the second framework that has guided this study—role stress theory. According to Beitman et al. (2004), role stress theory serves to explain what happens when an individual in a particular society fails to uphold their particular role's behaviors, requirements, or expectations. According to Boardman and Bozeman (2007), failure to uphold these obligations results in either the renegotiation of one's role in the network or the removal of the role-breaker from the said network.

Concerning OFWB clergy, findings indicated that OFWB clergy believed they received their role foremost from God. However, individual ministers and congregations often understand that role in different ways. As documented, this gap between expectations has historically been seen as the cause of role stress. Furthermore, role stress is also understood as a physically and emotionally negative experience caused by the difference between pastoral expectation(s) and congregational willingness. Said plainly, when the responsibility for a congregation and community's wellbeing lies exclusively within the role of the pastor, stress occurs. This stress, if left unmitigated, can result in negative emotional experiences that include feelings of resignation, the desire to quit ministry, and even thoughts of self-harm.

Outlier Findings

Finally, within these research findings, two themes emerged but were only minimally addressed by participants. The first was the presence of an educational experience that largely helped to mitigate the consequences of stress as experienced by participants. This experience, known as clinical pastoral education (CPE), served to develop self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and helped the two respondents that mentioned it to create a framework for coping with stress. Above all, CPE served as a way to help these two participants understand their call (role) from God, despite congregational expectations. Lastly, due to the restrictive nature of the

OFWB denomination when it comes to the ordination of women, only two female voices were heard in this study. However, throughout their interviews, both participants acknowledged strong spoken and perceived gender roles that were at play in their ministries. One participant even acknowledged that on multiple instances, “An individual went to the head pastor to get his opinion on something that he knew very little about. In fact, I have training and education in this particular field that he does not have…”

This participant, who was female, speculated that these instances might result from a cultural bias that makes it difficult to acknowledge women in leadership positions. Such speculation leads me to wonder if or how gender bias might play into role expectations.

Conclusion

For participating OFWB clergy, the concept of role stress is something familiar but largely overcome through age, tenure, and the presence of healthy coping strategies. Rurality, an accepted characteristic of the OFWB denomination, uniquely influences both role stress and its emotional consequences but largely goes unnoticed. In Chapter 4, the findings of nine semistructured interviews serve as the foundation for the phenomenological narrative that gives birth to a working definition of OFWB clergy role stress, a physically and emotionally negative experience caused by the difference between pastoral expectation(s) and congregational willingness. This construct is further augmented in situations where pastoral ability fails to align with anticipated role behaviors of individual OFWB congregations. In the next chapter, I summarize why I performed this research, the conclusions that can be drawn from this research, the implications of this study, and recommendations for future directions.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In the eastern, rural part of North Carolina, the vintage roots of [Christian] faith spread both deep and wide. This is an unsurprising fact, as most rural populations tend to be more religious, more conservative, and older on average (Miles & Proeschold-Bell, 2012; Neitz, 2005). Another fact that lacks surprise is the documented trend that clergy, especially in smaller, rural, older congregations, are increasing in average age, with younger men and women rarely seen in church pulpits (Beebe, 2007; Doolittle, 2007). Trends among the Original Free Will Baptists are no different, with leaders attesting to the fact that in as little as a generation, many OFWB congregations will be without leadership. In the research portion of this study, this trend was confirmed as almost all participants claim that they have aged (or retired) congregations that have little willingness to work toward change and growth. This final chapter reiterates the importance of defining and understanding role stress and its emotional consequences among OFWB clergy. Throughout this process, I highlight the results and themes that were documented in Chapter 4. Afterward, I look at recommendations for OFWB clergy and congregations. Finally, I posit a few directions for future research.

Early in this study, it was established that leaders from among the OFWB denomination have verbally claimed that there is often a gap between a pastor's expectation or ability and a congregation's expectation or ability. This gap, which we have defined as role stress, is a constant among helping professionals who spend their careers serving and caring for others in need. However, as Finzi-Dottan and Kormosh (2018) and Hight and Park (2019) posit, role stress is contextually bound, with one's experience often being entirely unique to them alone. Thus, the need existed to understand what OFWB leaders mean when they claim that clergy in the denomination experienced role stress.

To answer this question, I chose to examine three research questions concerning role stress, its emotional consequences, and the role that rurality might play through an interpretative phenomenological lens. In total, I conducted nine semistructured interviews, which were guided by eight interview questions and their follow-ups. In total, four major themes emerged from these interviews.

Summary

Population

By nature, the OFWB denomination lacks a central leadership structure that would bind together congregations, members, and clergy, due to its conference breakdown. As previously stated, power and guidance are held at the conference level of this faith tradition, of which there are eight. Due to the autonomy of each conference, leadership looks and functions very differently across the region. Differences may include mandatory usage of a particular translation of the Bible, ordination requirements or educational necessities, gender roles (including ordination), church property ownership, and more. Thus, when one becomes an ordained clergyperson of the OFWB denomination, they do so through a particular conference rather than the denomination as a whole.

However, there is denominational connectedness, sharing of information, and networked ministry, that exists through the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists. As it is referred to, the Convention is both an annual, one-day conference and an office that connects ministries, disseminates information, and compiles records for the entire faith community. It was through the Convention that I was able to solicit participants for this research project.

As stated, 13 individuals responded to an initial email, with 12 affirming their willingness to participate. By the end, nine individuals (two females and seven males) participated, with

most having at least a graduate degree, being in ministry for more than 20 years, and being at least 50 years of age. Due to the lack of centrality of record-keeping, it would be impossible to compare this participating sample to that of the whole OFWB denomination. However, anecdotally, I would claim that age and tenure were near the median of OFWB clergy, while the educational level of this population is far greater than that of the average OFWB minister.

Results

The theoretical frameworks of role theory and role stress theory were used to guide interview questions and interpret results to understand the experience of role stress and its outcomes. As anticipated by role theory (Schneider & Bos, 2019; Zai, 2015), OFWB clergy see themselves as members of a particular system in which they are assigned a unique role. When they are unable to fulfill that role, or if other members of the system cannot fulfill their role, stress becomes frequent (Beitman et al., 2004). This stress often moves towards other negative outcomes, such as burnout or compassion fatigue (Edwards, 2014), particularly when left unaddressed. It was supposed that rurality, which comes with higher clergy demands (Beebe, 2007), and lower access to resources (Spencer et al., 2012), may affect clergy's perception of role stress and its emotional outcomes.

Overall, interviewed clergy believe that they are serving in a rural denomination and that their particular ministry or congregation exists in a rural area. This was not surprising, as eastern North Carolina is a highly rural area with only a few large cities within its confines. This, as was explained in the themes section of the previous chapter, is not seen as a negative construct, but does carry with it many characteristics that limit a pastor's ability and role in the church and community. Such limitations result from limited resources, family ideology of particular churches, and an aged congregation.

Concerning role stress, respondents claimed that there were often competing interests for their time and energies. From this question emerged the idea that the pastor is viewed as the hired help whose job it is to do the church's work. One participant recalled a time in which the line, "the offering plate is passed for your job," was said regarding a question about how they were being evaluated. Other respondents indicated a strong correlation to youth and a congregation's pattern of verbalizing multiple, often contradictory, expectations. In particular, the line, "when you are a young minister, people think they can tell you exactly what to do," was said in similar ways by four participants. Finally, seven of the nine participants indicated that the best way they could understand role stress was through the idea that pastoral expectations and congregational willingness were often unaligned. In particular, there was a strong sense that clergy see themselves as equippers of the congregation and the congregation as the workers in the community. However, due to an unwillingness of congregants (likely as a result of the above hired help or similar motifs) to be the workers in the community, clergy strongly perceived role stress as a normal experience.

Finally, this research explored the emotional consequences of role stress among OFWB clergy. Prior research by Doolittle (2007), Lewis et al. (2007), and Wells et al. (2012) found that, when it comes to experiences of burnout or compassion fatigue, there is a strong correlation between age and outcomes. In these studies, older individuals tended to be less affected by negative emotions, and when they experience it, it is often shorter in duration and intensity. The reverse of this was also true, that younger individuals tended to perceive their experiences as more intense, longer lasting, and resulting in more long-term consequences. Without surprise, the only two participating clergy under 50 years of age claimed to have the most memorable and lasting experiences of negative outcomes. Older participants, however, did attest to these

experiences early on in their ministry. For most of these participants, there was a period in which a transition occurred, usually aided by some sort of mentor, where they were permitted to live into the role that they felt God was calling them to.

Themes

Throughout the interview, transcription, and coding processes, several unique themes emerged. Upon further analysis, which included cycles of reading and rereading, coding and then coupling thematic codes together, four particular themes held consistent across the particular participant population of OFWB clergy within this study. These themes of rurality's influence, clergy as hired help, age and tenure's impact among emotional consequences, and role stress as both behaviorally based and emotionally or physically felt were explored in depth in Chapter 4. Below, I will offer a synthesized narrative that encompasses these coupled themes.

Synthesized Narrative

Like many rural denominations, the clergy population of the OFWB denomination is aging, with young clergy being a significant minority in all conferences. However, with age comes wisdom and maturity as a result of having experienced various stressors throughout one's life and career. In many ways, age is a virtuous characteristic, especially among the participants of this research study. For most participants, their early years of ministry were full of competing expectations, both internally and externally, that often left them feeling stressed, exhausted, and considering different careers. However, the turning point was often the presence of someone (or several people) who constantly affirmed the call that God has placed upon their lives – reinforcing their role in the OFWB denomination (system). These influencers were family members, former pastors, friends from inside and outside of the ministry, and others who gave these clergy permission to mature and develop.

Flash forward several years (or decades), and many of these participating clergy had weathered the early "role stress storms." They perceived the best years were yet to come, as they had learned how to reduce stress, avoid burnout or other emotional consequences, and helped their congregants see the possibilities that came with growth and change. However, it was often the case that these same clergy had learned to lower their expectations of their congregants. Change, especially change in a small, rural environment, happens at a very slow pace. In an OFWB setting, it is common that change only happens when the entire body is willing to agree, which may or may not ever fully happen. Much of this is, in the words of participants, a product of a rural environment, which by nature is resistant to change.

But rurality is not something that is looked upon as an entirely negative construct. Within a rural church (system), roles are traditionally seen as connecting one to a multigenerational family. With family, there comes the feeling of belonging, but this takes quite a bit of time. In fact, almost every participant attested to feeling, either in the present or past, like they are no more than the hired help whose job it was to take care of the church and the people. One participant compared this to the idea that "Churches only want chaplains. Someone who can marry, bury, and visit them when needed." Such a dynamic seemed to shift when a pastor had been in one location for more than 10 years, a time in which they felt comfortable saying no to expectations that they felt did not align with their role.

Finally, when it came to understanding role stress as a construct among OFWB clergy, participants seemed to understand this as both a result of behaviors and a personal experience, mentally and physically. Upon analysis, participants believe role stress begins largely from an outside source, based upon behaviors and expectations. Almost all of these participating clergy claimed that they felt God called them into their current roles. That role, in particular, was to be a

servant of the people in whatever congregation or ministerial capacity in which they found themselves. Said differently, they willingly subjected themselves to the expectations and needs of others, seeing themselves as embodying a Christ-like servant spirit. However, with that role, they also believed they were responsible for properly equipping and commissioning congregants to go and serve their own world(s). It was here that, most often, role stress was amplified by congregational unwillingness to respond to pastoral leadership. Furthermore, this role stress experience compounded over time and frequently resulted in emotional or physical ailments such as high blood pressure, depression, physical exhaustion, and thoughts of self-harm. In seeing this theme through the framework of role stress theory, clergy were forced to ignore the stress, renegotiate the expectations, or leave the system in totality. Ultimately, many unique factors affected one's experience of role stress; thus, it can be said that role stress continues to be an individualistic experience.

Recommendations for OFWB Clergy and Congregations

As stated throughout this study, there is a real sense among OFWB leadership that many OFWB churches are just a generation away from no longer being viable. It has been posited that the lack of younger clergy coming into the ministry (or leaving soon after coming in) is directly influenced by the stress experienced in the leadership role of pastor. This study's results and the particular participant population indicate a strong connection to role stress being at its most intense in the early stages of a minister's life and tenure. The limited resources and mentality of rural communities and congregations further compound this stress. However, if clergy can receive support and encouragement through these formative years, they are more likely to go on to become more confident leaders of congregations. In this section, I will explore three

developmental recommendations for OFWB clergy and congregations that will aid them in helping to mitigate role stress and its consequences.

Professional Development

In the process of interviewing these participating clergy, one thing stood out among those who dealt with less role stress or emotional consequences: self-awareness. According to at least three participants, self-awareness was a process that transpired over an extended period but was key to their ability to understand stress and its consequences. One participant, who had come into ministry late in life, stated, "I learned about myself prior to coming into the pulpit; this was the most valuable thing I could have brought." It was this skill that allowed another participant the ability not to take things personally. During our interview, they stated,

> …then I heard 'you do not have to listen to the preacher,' which bothered me. However, had it not been for the self-awareness process that I have undergone, I might have taken that personally, which would have ended poorly!

Self-awareness training, however, is not a readily available opportunity for many OFWB clergy. Again, as a rural denomination, the OFWB clergy population has lower educational attainment (a direct correlation with educational requirements), and exposure to personal or professional development interventions are limited. Often, this type of development does not even happen within a baccalaureate-level experience. It is only when clergy pursue advanced degrees or specialized training that they have these opportunities. In particular, a few participating clergy referred back to CPE as one of the most transformative experiences of their career. Sadly, CPE is almost exclusively available to women and men who are pursuing advanced level degrees.

Ultimately, as one participant stated, “a congregation will never take as good of care of you as you will take of you.” This means that clergy must be intrinsically driven toward these opportunities, as they will not likely just fall in their laps. If pursued, professional development affords clergy the opportunity to be more secure in who they are, regardless of others’ feelings or expectations. Thus, it is vital that all OFWB clergy undergo an intentional process of self-awareness, for both individual and organizational viability.

Congregational Development

Referring back to role theory, we now understand that, apart from a congregation (system), OFWB clergy have a limited identity or role. This means that the congregation plays an incredibly important role in the development, stress, or success of a minister. However, congregations, like clergy, must utilize the tools and skills of awareness if they are to navigate these waters of role stress successfully. In other words, congregations must understand the direct impact they have upon a minister (and vice versa), for better or worse.

The starting point for such congregational development may be in hearing what some of these clergy have reported in this research. As one participant put it, “my church does not see this…I am called to serve them, so they do not see this.” Sadly, such a practice only creates a culture of ignorance among faithful congregants. They cannot address what they do not know anything about. Furthermore, if congregants were to see some of these large themes in the aggregate, especially the theme of the clergyperson as the hired help, they may see that it is more of a systemic issue, rather than one individual’s perception.

Like self-awareness, group-awareness is key to hearing this type of critical feedback. Thus, congregations, too, need to walk through a process that ultimately helps them to see themselves and their roles in a more healthy light. Again, in a rural area, opportunities such as

this are limited, and small congregations may not have the resources (or may not perceive the necessity to spend resources) to bring in qualified trainers to assist in walking through this process. This leads to the last of my recommendations: denominational development.

Denominational Development

Admittedly, the governing structure of the OFWB denomination makes it very difficult to enact anything denomination-wide. However, in this particular recommendation, I will substitute the word conference for denomination, as conferences hold the highest position of OFWB leadership.

Like congregations, conferences hold a large amount of influence over clergy and their roles. The conference's role is to validate, support, test, and ordain clergymen and clergywomen's call among the OFWB denomination. Furthermore, it has been the tradition of OFWB conferences to appoint a Board of Ordination to oversee these responsibilities. Without getting too deep into OFWB conference polity, it can be said that Boards of Ordination are the [small] group that helps clergy to understand their purpose(s) and role(s), prior to being hired by a church. It is here that development and understanding must also occur if future clergy are to properly understand themselves, their role, and their expectations.

For this to happen, conferences need to invest in regularly scheduled, high-quality developmental training. Such training needs to be facilitated by learned professionals who are particularly sympathetic to the experiences and stressors of rural clergy. Furthermore, conferences must also be aware of the perception of one's role, its stressors, and the consequences that have been addressed in this research. If OWFB conferences were to undertake this, there would likely be a trickledown to congregations and then clergy.

Future Research Directions

While no study is perfect, the hope is that it has a solid process, supported results, and connected themes. As outlined in Chapter 3, limitations cited several areas where this study lacks generalizability to a wider population. However, due to this study's reliability, it can be assumed that, if used with a different population, results would again maintain validity. In the following paragraphs, I will outline areas of future research that, if undertaken, would add robustness to the understanding of OFWB clergy role stress and its emotional consequences.

The first area where I believe future research could benefit this study would be in looking at the difference in role stress as experienced by males and females in the OFWB denomination. Even within the limited number of female perceptions this study contained, there was a strong understanding that roles and expectations often paralleled a gender-normative framework. Sadly, there are currently only three ordained women in the OFWB faith. In time, I pray that number drastically increases, and when it does, it would be a worthy investment to understand how women perceive role stress versus how men do.

The next area that would help future research would be to look into the differences in role stress as perceived by someone with limited educational attainment (high school or some college) versus the majority of this study's population: clergy with advanced level degrees. Only one participant in this study had less than a baccalaureate degree, and six had terminal degrees. This likely speaks to the population who felt compelled to answer the invitation email, as I heard many times, "I remember what this process was like, I am glad to help out." However, should future research intentionally solicit clergy with less education, it is likely that large differences would be found between the two populations.

A third area that could help bolster research into OFWB clergy role stress would be in the area of clergy (or former clergy) who had left OFWB vocational ministry. Unfortunately, this is a somewhat common happening among OFWB clergy, especially in the early years in ministry. However, it is difficult to track down those who are no longer serving in ministry, as reports do not document them as having left until years after, if at all. Thus, if future research could find a way to contact clergy who no longer serve in the OFWB denomination, it would likely give a great comparison to the participants of this particular study. Furthermore, it may directly result in information that could be used to understand why and when clergy leave OFWB ministry.

Finally, the last area ripe for future research would be a study into OFWB clergy role stress as experienced by members of their family. Numerous prior studies (Brandão et al., 2017; Ratter et al., 2016; Tanner & Zvonkovic, 2011) documented an increase in stress among clergy spouses, children, and other relatives directly exposed to clergy role stress. However, very little research has been done (inside or outside of the OFWB denomination) into how that experience looks among clergy families. Thus, it could be of great importance to clergy, congregations, and denomination(s) alike if future research were to address this.

Overall Conclusion

In conclusion, the phenomenon of role stress is very much a part of the OFWB clergy experience. It is best understood as a physically and emotionally negative experience, caused by differences in pastoral expectations and congregational willingness. If left unmediated, role stress has the potential to force clergy to have to make a decision about their role in ministry (the system). However, if given opportunities for development and support from denominational and congregational bodies, clergy stand a chance to develop strategies in which to mitigate that stress on a personal level. Lastly, if congregations and denominational bodies are made aware of these

findings, they, too, will benefit from self-awareness, which may result in transformative change and lessened clergy role stress.

It is my hope and expectation that this research has created the space necessary for present and future OFWB leadership to reflect upon the effects of role stress on OFWB clergy. I am optimistic that there is time to create a framework that allows clergy, and the denomination, to thrive. If successful, such a framework will not only see pulpits filled but the next generation of OFWB clergy growing and developing into the faith leaders of tomorrow.

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Appendix A: Email Solicitation for OFWB Clergy Participants

Greetings, Brothers and Sisters in Ministry.

For the last few years, I have been studying the phenomenon of role stress and the effects it can have upon individuals who experience it. Much of this research was due to my own doctoral work, and the time has come for me to ask for your help and participation. In order to finish my doctorate, I must complete an applied research dissertation, which will involve interviewing OFWB clergy about their experience with role stress and its effects. These interviews will take place via Zoom, last between 45–60 minutes, and will be structured around a particular series of questions.

As licensed and ordained clergy of the OFWB denomination, your input will be a valuable addition to this study, the phenomenon of role stress among rural clergy, and research in the OFWB denomination. If you are willing to be interviewed, I ask that you click on the link below and fill out a concise survey. In just a few days, I will be contacting willing participants to arrange a time and date for interviews.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/82JMHQQ

In the meantime, I covet your prayers and support!

Thank you,

Dustin R. Bannister

Appendix B: Interview Guide and Interview Questions

Date: _____

Participant: _____

Location of Interview: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Interview Introduction

As we begin this interview, I would like to take a moment to say thank you for your willingness to participate in this important study. As you have heard, this study focused on understanding the experience of role stress and its emotional consequences within the population of OFWB clergy. As a clergyperson within the OFWB denomination, your experience is key to helping us to understand these phenomena.

As outlined within the consent form, your participation is voluntary; you may feel free to withdraw at any point in time. Should you choose to continue, your participation, disclosures, and all data that are amassed in this process will be held with the highest confidentiality. Your name, position, and ministry will be anonymized, and all records of this interview will be kept under lock or password-protected and deleted after no more than five years. Please know that I will also be taking notes during this interview, which are called memos. This is a typical practice of this type of research, and if you would like to view these at any time, please ask, and I will gladly show you those.

Finally, all generated data from this interview will be used for this research project alone. Should any of this data prove to have usefulness outside of this project, you will be contacted and permission solicited for any other usage.

Interview Questions

1. What is your experience in ministry like?
    a. What is it like being a minister of the Original Free Will Baptist denomination?
    b. How does being a minister in a rural area affect your ministry experience?

2. What would you say is a clear definition of your role as a minister?
    a. How would you define this roll?
    b. If you are unable to provide a definitional clarity, why is that?

3. Do you ever find there to be stressors in ministry?
    a. If yes, then what are some of these?
    b. If no, then how do you suppose you avoid stressors?

4. Do you ever experience expectations that go against your role as a minister or that you feel ill-equipped to fulfill?
    a. If yes, what type of expectations?
    b. If no, then how do you maintain preparedness?

5. What happens when you're expected to fulfill a role and you cannot? (Alternate: What might happen if you're expected to fulfill a role and cannot?)
    a. Does this lead to a renegotiation of your role(s)?

6. Do these experiences ever affect you emotionally or mentally? How so?
    a. Do you ever feel burned out? In particular, like you have nothing left to give?
    b. Do you ever start to feel someone else's pain or emotions?
    c. Are there ways you might describe your emotional experience differently?

7. So, as an OFWB clergyperson, how do you define role stress?
    a. Do you see role stress linked to emotional consequences? How so?
    b. Do you see role stress as the product of anything (experience, policy, expectations, etc.) in particular?

Appendix C: Original Free Will Baptist Clergy Role Stress Interview Questionnaire

1. Status as an OFWB clergyperson
    a. Ordained
    b. Licensed
    c. Neither Ordained or Licensed
2. My gender is
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Prefer not to answer
3. My age is
    a. 18–30
    b. 31–50
    c. 51–70
    d. 70+
4. I have been in ministry for…
    a. 1–5 years
    b. 6–10 years
    c. 11–20 years
    d. 20+ years
5. I am willing to participate in the research into OFWB clergy role stress and its emotional consequences
    a. Yes
    b. No
6. My conference affiliation is
    a. (Blank text box)
7. Please use the space below to enter your email address. If you are recruited as a participant, the principal investigator will contact you via email
    a. (Blank text box)

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

July 24, 2020

Dustin Bannister
Department of Education
Abilene Christian University

Dear Dustin,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Original Free Will Baptist Clergy Role Stress: A Definition and Its Emotional Consequences",

(IRB# 20-098)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs