

“IT DOES SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE STOCKHOLM SYNDROME”: EXPLORING  
IDENTITY, RESISTANCE, AND EMOTIONAL LABOR IN THE LIVES OF CHURCH  
CAMP STAFFERS

by

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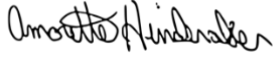
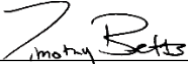
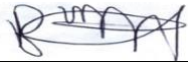



**BOB SCHIEFFER**  
COLLEGE of COMMUNICATION

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## ABSTRACT

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The expectation set by Christian organizations is that employees will respond with and communicate kindness, tenderheartedness, joy, and forgiveness, as opposed to malice, wrath, and anger, as aligns with their religious ideology (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Ephesians 4:31-32). Though sound theology, the practical application of these principles are often more challenging. Failure to comply with these expectations led employees with faith identities to feel as though they are defying both their organizational mandate and their deeply ingrained faith identity. The goal of this qualitative study was to further enhance the communicative understanding of identity relating to the intersection of faith and work role expectations. Using 26 semi structured interviews with individuals employed as church camp staffers across 11 Christian organizations in the United States, I explored the dialectic between the faith identity and role expectations they experience. Results yielded two theoretical and two practical implications discussed in greater detail below. In the end, acceptance and extending grace, for staffers and the Christian organization alike, goes a long way.

## INTRODUCTION

Church camp staffers are called to serve others for a purpose they perceive to be bigger than themselves. Within a faith job, the intersection where an individual's faith shares beliefs with an organization where they are earning wages, exists a pressure to maintain an appearance of conformity to their religious organization, exemplifying both faith and organizational values (Rush & Garner, 2022). The expectation set by Christian organization is that in all situations employees will respond with and communicate kindness, tenderheartedness, joy, and forgiveness, as opposed to malice, wrath, and anger, as aligns with their religious ideology (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Ephesians 4:31-32). While this may be sound theology, the practical application of these principals is often more challenging. Failure to comply with these expectations leads employees with strong faith identities to feel as though they are defying both their organizational mandate and their deeply ingrained faith identity (Hinderaker, 2014). This tension augmented by the connection between personal faith and role expectation of camp staffers creates a unique communicative contextual backdrop for examining performative enactments of both resistance and emotional labor. The emotional labor is intensified by the need to mask resistant behaviors (Hochschild, 1983).

When faith identity, personal posture of an individual, intersects with religious organizational identity, the faith positionality the position preaches, a unique tension may result. Ashforth (2012) studied how a person's occupation can impact identity on a personal and social level. The personal interest appears higher for employees when their personal faith identity is involved (McNamee, 2011). Faith identities are all consuming, totalistic, and a facet of themselves that bleeds into every other area of their life (Hinderaker, 2014). Ashforth and Johnson (2014) use the term nested identity to describe the multifaceted intersection of an

individual's identities, where these tensions lie. By highlighting the intersection between a person's job and their faith identity, Christian organizations have an increased level of power over their workers. Any act against the Christian organization, or the failure to complete a task, is portrayed as not just letting down the organization but their personal faith as well. Christian organizations position the faith identity of its workers in a way that increases the leverage an organization has on its members' behaviors, decisions, and actions. My research highlights an individual's faith identity as a cross-cutting element of their nested identity. With faith as the lens in which they see the world, employees are likely to engage in reaction management through emotional labor and acts of resistance to protect what they perceive to be central to their core identity—their faith. These acts of resistance can be openly expressed or hidden repressed rebellious acts to experiences members encounter (Mumby, 2005). At times reaction management requires substantial emotional labor, which is intensified by the perceived desire to covertly mask resistant behaviors.

Emotional labor in a church camp setting is often a result of the expectation put on staffers to do more than just provide care for the people they are serving. Previously, communication scholars have used religious identification and emotional labor to identify specific jobs that would suit an individual who practices faith and how these careers can help manage how workers engage in emotional labor (Byrne et al., 2011). Church camp staffers must work long hours in the name of their religious faith—all with a joyful disposition (Rush & Garner, 2022). These workers engage in emotional labor through communicative interactions with the people they serve (campers and adults), their leaders or management, and fellow staffers. When staffers feel the need to maintain an appearance of conformity, it requires substantial emotional labor; this intensifies the need to mask the resistant behavior they wish to enact in contrast to the

emotive dissonance they are experiencing (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). I will examine how organizations that are tied and situated in faith cross-cut identities create tension between the church and self and make church camp staffers feel the need to perform and manage their emotions through the enactment of resistance. The key to the sensemaking that takes place among these church camp staffers is the communal communication that takes place among employees. My data allowed me to further explore how religious identification and emotional labor are impacted when Christian organizations use embodied culture norms, such as peer pressure and guilt, as manipulative strategies to elicit unreasonable additional labor standards from employees. These workers are aware of the emotional toll of the position but readily comply because they believe in the higher purpose of their job and the message, they are communicating to those they are serving. This highlights the tension actors create with the interplay of faith identity and work identity as shaping the lives of actors by their lived experience within their organizations (Albert & Whetten, 1985), and the enactment of resistance when their faith and work identity are polarizing.

Using nested identities as an overarching paradigm, I will examine the friction between faith and employment position identities in the context of short term church camp staff employment in this qualitative study. More specifically, I will look at how participants engage in emotional labor and enact resistance in response to perceived tensions between their faith and employment based identities in their roles as church camp staffers. In addition, my work may provide additional insight for how to better cultivate constructive and supportive interpersonal communication in short term employment positions, while also allowing for new insight on how emotional labor and resistance function as a sensemaking device for church camp staffers and employees working other short term positions. I will begin by first reviewing the literature on

identity, resistance, and emotional labor, before sharing my methods for collecting and analyzing data and the results yielded from the data. I will then conclude by discussing the theoretical and practical communication implications. The overall goal of my work is to further enhance the communicative understanding of identity as it relates to the intersection of faith and work role expectations.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Identity

Identity is more than the brief summary of a person; it is seen as an expression of an individual, or an organization's, growth and complexity (Albert et al., 1985). Kuhn defines identity as "the conception of the self reflexively and discursively understood by the self" (2006, p. 1340). Identity is relationally focused (Scott, 2007) which helps the actor conceptualize who they are in the world in relation to their role and their relationships with others. Social identity theory, articulated by Henri Tajfel (Tajfel et al., 1979), details identity as the expression of an actor's self-concept built from their experiences with others that creates boundaries of operation and group memberships (Scott, 2007). This has been previously studied in the context of online avatars (Martey & Consalvo, 2011), counseling (Smith, 2014), and families (Cook & Douglas, 1998). Simply, a person creates an understanding as to who they are as they interact with others with the hope of fitting in and better understanding the world around them (Scott, 2007). The identities of church camp staffers are made up of their personal faith beliefs and reified in the communities they surround themselves with.

Identity is also constituted in workplaces. Social identity describes an individual's identification in society beyond their basic roles in their organization (Ashforth, 2012). Research on organizational identity related to short term workspaces includes gig work (Cropanzano et al., 2023; Wu & Huang, 2024) and volunteering (Gill, 2023; Grube & Piliavin, 2000). Short term employment is work that has a beginning and end date that does not exceed four consecutive months; an example being at a summer church camp. Working as a church camp staffer offers a unique area of study because their job is tied to their faith identity directly not just influenced by it. More work is needed to better understand what happens when someone's faith identity and

work identity do not just impact one another but are completely interwoven in a totalistic way (Hinderaker, 2014).

### **Faith Identities**

For those who subscribe to faith beliefs, their values and theological groundings help guide them in decision making and are passed down by fellow believers and their faith's specific teachings. Regardless of which facets of faith an individual subscribes to, the social construction of religions and organizational practices impacts how important and salient a member believes their faith to be in relation to their self-identity and how they perceive themselves (Berger & Luckman, 1991). Previously, communication scholars have defined the most influential and significant types of group membership as totalistic (Hinderaker, 2014). Simply, a person's values, practices, rituals, and relationships become the primary role in a person's life that extends into every other area of their existence (Hinderaker, 2014). In the context of church camp staffers working for a Christian organization, resistance and identity performance complicate organizational identification.

The faith identity is totalistic and value based because faith is all encompassing. According to other communication scholars, faith is a more important standard of identity than organizational values (Byrne et al., 2011; Hinderaker, 2014). Where deep faith values have been associated with faith identities by previous researchers (Hinderaker, 2014), the performance of self in a space that expects the actor to perform in line with the expectations of their Christian organizations creates a tension when it does not directly align with their other identities or that of their peers. Totalistic organizations require member loyalty. This is a great descriptor for Christian organizations that have high standards and expectations from their members to behave and respond in a specific manner. These expectations are reified and enforced by both leaders in

these totalistic organizations and the community of individuals that make them up. (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018). Previously, communication scholars have examined totalistic behavior in the context of religious exit (Hinderaker, 2014; Hinderaker & O’Conner, 2015) and rigid rules in organizational structure (Howe & Hinderaker, 2018). Faith identity—fixed and central to an individual—is impacted and how identity is reordered when the work they are doing and are paid for is intertwined with their faith identity.

### **Nested Identities**

Faith identity, particularly in Christian organizations, might be best understood as being nested—simultaneously encompassing many identities that overlap and influence one another. According to Ashforth and Johnson (2001), “certain identities are nested or embedded within others (p. 32)” like stackable Russian nesting dolls which are similar in design but differ in size. These identities are not independent of one another but see how some identities are nested within others (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). The identities of a church camp staffer, mainly emerging adults, can include a multitude of dimensions including but not limited to their faith denomination, job title, sexuality, and political affiliation. If a religious organization limits the direction of conversations surrounding topics in the workplace, an individual experiences a tension if their personal views do not align with those of the organization or they feel their speech is restricted (Hinderaker, 2014). This tension has been observed in the ways Baptist mothers converse with their children during sex talks (Kassler & Hinderaker, 2023). My study examines the choices spurred by the tension that actors who are part of an organization must make to: a) comply, revisit, and reorder their identities, or b) enact resistance to manage and protect facets of the different dimensions of their nested identities.

Nested identities are categorized as lower order identities, more exclusive, and higher order identities, more inclusive (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Specific role identities are lower order, meaning there are less individuals with the same specific job title and tasks. The higher order identities, more common than lower order identities, include individuals employed at the same organization, their positions, and tasks they are asked to complete (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). Structurally speaking, nested identities are classified and able to be evaluated in three criteria: inclusive/exclusive, abstract/concrete, and distal/proximal. High order identities are categorized as more inclusive, abstract, and distal, while lower order identities are more exclusive, relatively concrete, and proximal (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). Revisiting the metaphor of a nesting doll, the smaller items are central to the core and constitute an individual's lower order identities. Kassler and Hinderaker (2023) used nested identities to examine the identity performance of Baptist mothers delivering the sex talk to their children. These mothers were identified as "Baptist, maternal, spousal, feminine," (Kassler & Hinderaker, 2023, p. 1001) depending on the interactional context. However, each identity could not be approached unless through a "lens of faith" (Kassler & Hinderaker, 2023, p. 1001). Here we see how the totalistic belief in their faith acts as one of these mothers' many nested identities; faith identity is a central part of who they are and how they ultimately see and make sense of the world.

Foundationally there are instances where a cross-cut occurs across identities in either a formal or informal way. According to Ashforth and Johnson (2001), formal cross-cutting may include "committees, task forces, [and] union locals" while informal cross-cutting may include "friendship cliques, common interest social groups... family ties, [and] demographic clusters" (p. 41). Formal identities are more notably linked to the ideals of an individual's organization, while

informal identities are more commonly selected by the individual (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). It is not uncommon for an individual to experience a conflict within their different nested identities and cross-cutting identities (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Meisenbach & Kramer, 2014). The faith identities of church camp staffers are the cross-cut, whereas their work identities are categorized as higher order identities (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). While these conflicts may heighten the anxiety individuals can experience when their identities are incongruous, these identity conflicts can reveal to an actor what aspects of their identity they deem more salient (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001). An actor realizes what parts of themselves they deem more significant than others when there are conflicts among the many facets of their identity.

### **Resistance and Identity**

Resistance is treated as a communicative act by communication scholars (Mumby et al., 2017). Christian organizations frame acts of resistance as a mechanism of punishable disobedience. It was interpreted as an individual's expressed rebellion, either direct or indirect, expectations set forth to them by their organization (Duncan, et al., 2021). The performance of a faith identity is complicated when resistance is enacted. Acts of resistance can be mapped across four planes: individual, collective, hidden, or public (Mumby et al., 2017).

Across these planes, the four Is—individual infrapolitics, collective infrapolitics, insubordination, and insurrection—were identified to represent resistance as a process across mediums (Mumby et al. 2017). Scott (1990) originally coined the term infrapolitics, disguised resistance, when researching peasant protests in Southeast Asia. Individual infrapolitics include hidden forms of micro resistance (e.g. character assassination or feigned ignorance), while collective infrapolitics are understood as being hidden forms of macro resistance (e.g. anonymously discrediting your job online or throwing weed seeds over a fence into the yard of

an annoying neighbor). Mumby et al. (2017) identified insubordination as public forms of micro resistance (e.g. whistleblowing) and insurrection as public forms of macro resistance (e.g. establishing a new independent local government). These boundaries were permeable and switch between being hidden or public and individual or collective in nature (Mumby et al., 2017). Across these dimensions exists a tension of autonomy and resistance. These tensions were found to create a space for dialectical resistance and power structures to be reified in acts of resistance.

### **Dialectical Resistance: The Tension Between Resistance and Control**

Mumby (2005) theorized resistance as enacted between an innate dialectic between control and resistance. According to Mumby, “studying the dialectic of control and resistance is precisely about understanding how this indeterminacy is subject to various and competing efforts to reshape it” (2005, p. 25). He detailed how some acts of resistance play into control; they are coproduced. These acts of resistance were also context specific—deemed an act of resistance to reclaim power in one instance or a way to surrender power in another (Mumby 2005).

For example, writing personal letters on company time might be considered an act of resistance in a more formal bureaucratic organization but not when the company is more relaxed and laissez faire in nature (Mumby et al., 2017). Deetz (1992) studied the relational tension between employees and the work they produce in an organization. According to Deetz (1992), employees have been socialized to believe that their value in the context of an organization is uniquely defined by their ability to produce work products. Deetz (1992) makes the argument that value in the workplace should no longer be defined by production. There is instead inherent value of individuals apart from the work they produce. Deetz (1992) believed that communication is the best way to understand this connection between organizations and power. Power, according to Mumby (2005), is reified in acts of resistance.

For Mumby (2005), resistance is enacted in a dialectic between control and resistance—distinctly different from other communication scholars' versions of resistance that treated resistance as a directly enacted opposition to control. For Mumby, organizational members are in a constant process of keeping the opposites in play and in tension with one another. Employees felt the tension between the desire to conform and the desire to resist. When employees do not voice their opinions and simply comply, they were reifying the notion that their leaders have dominion over their decision making (Mumby, 2005). Tension in an individual's opinions and actions can ensue when group members feel powerless regarding decision making.

The tension of an individual's opinions and actions is exacerbated when they, operating under a set of rules, feel that the rules and expectations do not apply to others the same way they apply to themselves. Banerjee (2008) highlighted this tension and called it a state of exception—a suspense of law that only applies to select individuals. These state of exception situations are often fertile breeding grounds for performative acts of resistance by employees, as individuals are always, already, resisting.

Identity performance for the sake of fitting in might require actors to resist. The core of a faith identity leans towards conformity (Kassler & Hinderaker, 2023). Duncan et al. (2021) examined worker's resistance when they were given additional tasks outside of their job description by their managers to further develop research on group identity formation. They theorized that elements that impacted how positive or negative these employees responded in their acceptance or rejection of these tasks included the relational strength with their employer, expressed reasoning for the task, and the legitimacy of the task. They identified manipulation, complementing, outright refusal, and negotiation as a few ways employees enacted resistance against these additional requests. These acts of resistance include a variety of ranges and touch

on different aspects of an employee's identity (Duncan et. al, 2021). Front stage and backstage behaviors are one of many ways individuals use acts of resistance to shelter and/or reveal aspects about their identity to others and conceptualize their own identity (Goffman, 1959).

### **Front Stage and Backstage Behaviors Impact on Group Formation**

As the titles suggest from the theatrical metaphor, front stage behaviors assume the actor is being watched by others, whereas backstage behaviors occur behind the scenes when they are no longer in front of the public eye (Goffman, 1959). While church camp staffers spend much of their job in front of others, there are moments where they operate behind the scenes. Within these moments out of the public eye, these employees can drop any “fraudulent” “mask” they might have in place used to align their actions and behaviors with those of their Christian organization (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p. 96). Goffman (1959) identified front stage behaviors as the impression management an individual undergoes to appear a certain way, an example would be the exchanging of routine scripts with others as they walk from one location to another.

Backstage behaviors are those that foster a space for individuals to be a more authentic version of themselves, an example being a third-grade teacher cursing in the privacy of their own home rather than the halls of the elementary school they are employed at. The performance of front and backstage behaviors is inherently linked to identity performance; individuals conceptualize who they are through interactions with others and by the decisions they make regarding personal performance (Scott, 2007). Tracy (2000) used front stage and backstage behaviors as a lens to describe her lived experience working on a cruise ship. She experienced both “front-stage duties” and “backstage stage griping” from her participants (Tracy, 2000, p. 101). Her research questions target who set the tone regarding the behavioral expectations. The idea that “Hollywood instantly created the expectations many passengers still hold about cruise

ships” emphasizes that tone is not always set by the actor, and that power is not always in their hands (Tracy, 2000, p. 105).

Whether spoken acts or unspoken acts, resistance has an impact on identity formation, including that of group identity (Mumby, 2005). Zanin and Bisel’s (2020) study on sports in group and out group membership in football players examined how the identification process, which aims to create a space for members of an organization to better identify with the group, can be used to resist organizational ideologies. It was through an act of resistance, specifically the act of not owning up to or divulging the identity of a team member who stole a container of cream cheese, that created a source of unity and belonging among the team. This collective resistance, which led to the entire group being punished, was defined in the study as concertive resistance—an “example of organizational resistance and group level control within one collective action” (Zanin & Bisel, 2020, p. 240). Through this form of resistance, the team was able to develop a deeper understanding of the group’s identity. They propose that when the emphasis transitioned from these athletes thinking of the self to thinking about the group, value was placed on group belonging and community building. This created an overlap in how team members experienced identification regarding the formation of their team identity, and how they viewed the group (Zanin & Bisel, 2020).

Acts of resistance have the power to strengthen perceived group identities and categorize in groups and out groups (Zanin & Bisel, 2020). Mumby (2005) theorizes resistance as the competing tension between complying and resisting that creates a space for members to engage in emotional labor. Simply, emotional labor can act as a form of self-preservation and a way for individuals to enact resistance.

## **Emotional Labor and How it Redefines Identity and Moderates Resistance**

Acts of resistance that conflict with identity can create an emotional situation where an actor must make an effort to manage their emotions. For church camp staffers, the weight of managing their own emotions and the emotions of others can create an emotional strain.

Emotional labor was first coined by Hochschild and is defined as “the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (1983, p. 7). She first documented that “this kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7).

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) referred to it as “displaying the appropriate emotion,” (p. 90).

In her initial research on the topic, Hochschild looked at how flight attendants were expected and encouraged to put their passengers' emotions above their own, even in the event of an air emergency (1983). This type of impression management has inspired research including that in the context of beauty salons (Hanson, 2019), teaching efficacy (Xie et al., 2022), and healthcare providers (Kinman & Leggetter, 2016). In this sense, the individual is seen as an actor on a stage performing a part for the audience—their peers, managers, and/or people they serve (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Grandey (2000) theorized that emotional labor was determined by the social environment around workers and controlled by the actor. Morris and Feldman (1996) reimagined emotional labor as “the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal interaction” (p. 987). This updated definition shifted the emphasis to the organization having an opinion on the emotional display of their workers and introduces a space for future research to look at the impact organizational expectation has on identity performance.

From a social constructionist perspective, the world is cocreated by the interactions people have and how they make sense of those interactions (Berger & Luckman, 1991; Murphy,

1998). Power is socially constructed, as are organizations (Berger & Luckman, 1991). Thus, individuals' others perceive as power holders in organizations are given control through "practices of gestures, actions, and discourses" in everyday interactions (Murphy, 1998, p. 503). Employees can reclaim the power lost to them through the reified belief that power is only attainable to a select few through outwardly managing their emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Murphy, 1998). Through faking, suppressing, or enhancing the emotions an employee was feeling they were able to engage in what Hochschild (2012) calls surface acting and deep acting; two of the foundational elements of emotional labor. A third element, spontaneous (also known as genuine) emotion, was later identified and studied by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993).

### **Surface Acting, Deep Acting, and Genuine Emotion**

There are moments when individuals must portray a variety of genuine and disingenuous emotions to complete the job their organization expects of them. These members do this by engaging in the three constructs of emotional labor: surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotion. First, surface acting is seen in actors as a way of faking their emotional display by masking, or suppressing, their emotions to deceive others (Grandey 2015; Hochschild, 1983; Hur, et al., 2015). For example, Hochschild's study on flight attendants reported that regardless of how they were feeling when the plane was experiencing turbulence they put on a smile and portrayed a calm demeanor for their passengers, even though internally they were experiencing terror (1983). In this example we see that masking their true emotions was a way to keep their passengers from experiencing panic. While hiding their negative emotions on the job and replacing them with what is deemed more desirable by society is common, employees also

experience situations where they change their attitude and believe the emotions they are experiencing; this process is known as deep acting (Hochschild, 1983).

Second, deep acting focuses more on the inward feelings of the individual (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). It was found to require effort in order for an actor to change and internalize the emotion they wished to display (Hur et al., 2015). When an actor chose to alter their emotions, they were more likely to appear genuine to those they are serving. An individual must appear genuine to others when the tips they earn are crucial to their livelihood (Grandey, 2000). Deep acting is fundamentally different from the third concept of emotional labor that Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) refer to as spontaneous emotion.

Finally, Ashforth and Humphrey refer to genuine, or spontaneous, emotion as a way of individuals expressing their unadulterated emotion (1993). They highlight how individuals have the innate ability to experience real emotion in the process of understanding the experiences in the workplace and in life, and do not only outwardly fake their emotions or internally work to alter their emotions. Employees commonly use surface acting to enact what others perceive to be a compliance self while secretly resisting through what Murphy (1998) calls hidden transcripts.

### **Hidden Transcripts**

Researchers have drawn close parallels between emotional labor and resistance. Hidden transcripts are acts of resistance enacted through revealing, concealing, and intentionally framing information (Murphy, 1998). Similar to Murphy's concept of hidden transcripts, Tracy (2000) treats "backstage behaviors" as a form of enacted resistance. Simply, the decisions an actor makes when they are not in front of others is one way for them to express their genuine emotions and behavior and resist against the rules they do not agree to but comply with under the employment of an organization (Tracy, 2000).

Hidden transcripts, identified by Scott (1990), and studied further by Murphy (1998) examining the interaction between flight attendants' internal thoughts and incongruent outward expressions to passengers, provide actors with an avenue to more deeply express or guard their opinions and behaviors in the workplace. Through social practices, passed down from seasoned peers on the job, employees have covertly resisted managerial control and reclaimed agency through acts such as gestures, facial expressions, altered vocalics, and speech acts (Murphy, 1998).

Hidden transcripts have been found to give people the impression of control through interactions, myths, stories, and rituals with others through behaviors (Murphy, 1998). These are closely related to the aforementioned individual infrapolitics (Mumby et al., 2017). Employees have been observed participating in the sharing of hidden transcripts when they are transitioning from the socialization stage into the metamorphosis stage in the organizational assimilation process (Mumby, 2005).

Hidden transcripts are a form of resistance where emotional rules dictate choice behavior (Murphy, 1998). Tracy reported that "although hidden transcripts did little to change the emotional labor control patterns" of her participants, "they provided [them] with an impression of control over [those they were serving] (2000, p. 114)." Hidden transcripts are a form of dissent that focus on reclaiming power. Through these seemingly small acts of resistance, workers can take back control and more easily make sense of the world around them and the work they are setting out to accomplish (Murphy, 1998). It is in conversations with those around them that individuals are able to communally sensemake and discern if the resistance is warranted or not.

## **Communal Sensemaking as Social Support**

Distressing situations lead to the expression and display of emotion (Lazarus, 2006). It is during these emotional situations that coping, individually or communally, is used as a sensemaking device (Lazarus, 2006). Weick described sensemaking as “the making of sense” (1995, p. 4). As such, individuals sensemake to make sense of the world around them and the emotions they experience (Vangelesti, 2009).

Individuals often seek social support from those around them when processing their emotions and experiences (Vangelesti, 2009). Lazarus (2006) suggested that coping is an important part of emotionally processing. He observed that person-centered communication is important to using emotion as a sensemaking device for coping. Xu (2018) found that crisis, defined as intense difficulty, is one determinant of community building. When emotional situations arise, communal coping aims to act as a communicative emotional relief (Boren, 2013).

Communal coping, first introduced by Lyons et al. (1998), conceptualized problems as “our” problem vs the former ideology of “my” problem (p. 583). This helped reframe support as something that can be received and shared with others outside of the one experiencing the problem or stressor. Boren (2013) found that graduate students turn to their peers for social support since they are the individuals who understand the specifics of their positional hardship. This communal coping acts as a communal sensemaking tool for individuals to better process their emotions.

## **Communicatively Advancing Identity, Resistance, and Emotional Labor**

Where previous communication scholars have examined resistance and identity management, this study’s faith based and short term context make it different by examining how

faith jobs use higher order identity as a mechanism of control. The tension in the self, their faith identity, and their work identity impact both how they enact resistance and how they manage their emotions in the workplace since faith is the cross-cut of their nested identity. Previous scholarship has focused on how employees engage in emotional labor as a sensemaking tool (Grandey et al., 2015; Tracy, 2000). This study looks at the connection when the organization an individual works for is intertwined heavily with their faith identity. The management of their emotions can impact the way these employees choose to enact resistance.

It is unclear how dependent acts of resistance function in a totalistic short term Christian organization. When acts of resistance cause conflict within an individual's nested identities, an increased level of emotive dissonance may arise forcing actors to make decisions about the emotional management tactics they will employ in the given situation to reclaim agency. With all of this in mind, I sought to address the following two research questions:

**RQ1:** How do church camp staffers enact resistance in their Christian organizations?

**RQ2:** How do church camp staffers manage their emotions while performing their faith identities?

## **METHODS**

### **Study Design and Framing**

My study focuses on the experiences of church camp staffers through semi structured interviews to get a better understanding of how these workers conceptualize their identities, enact resistance, and engage in emotional labor. These interviews allowed participants to comment on their lived experiences in an unhindered manner as the primary form of data collection (Tracy, 2020). A semi structured format allowed space for participants to guide the conversation. I was able to document nonverbal cues (including tone, rate of speech, and facial expression) I noticed during the interviews that would have been missed had this study been conducted using a survey method. These interviews created a space for participants to comment or pass on questions. This helped emergent themes to develop from participant's lived experiences.

### **Researcher Positionality Statement**

I acknowledge that my prior employment at two different Christian organizations that operate church camps has shaped how I observed and discerned my participant's experiences. When applicable, I disclosed to my participants that my interest in the subject matter was sparked by my own previous experiences working as a church camp staffer. I believe this caused my participants to feel a sense of connectivity which could lead them to being more open and comfortable sharing their personal lived experiences with me. For example, when asked about rules, participants referenced how it was easy to change the rules to better serve their campers (i.e. if a game was boring then they veered from the manual and made a new one up). These experiences were shared with a comfortability that came from talking to someone who understands the environment; an example of communal sensemaking (which I will discuss in

greater detail in my results and discussion). Prior experience in the field also allowed me to create a more detailed list of questions for the semi structured interviews that encompass areas of the job other scholars might not have the foresight to ask participants about. For example, I knew to ask about fronting in front of campers, adults, and staff as different questions to better understand how front stage and backstage behaviors are displayed by church camp staffers. This prior knowledge has helped me to better understand my participants' experiences.

### **Data Collection and Participants**

I used semi structured interviews in my study to analyze how individuals in short term summer church camp positions engage in emotional labor and resistance in the workplace (see Appendix A for the list of questions that guided the interviews). Eligible participants included those who had previous experience or are currently employed as a summer camp church staffer and were between the ages of 18 and 65. Following IRB approval, participants (N=26) were recruited by word of mouth, online advertisement, and snowball sampling. Participants were contacted via email and interviews were scheduled for Zoom (N=24) or in person (N=2) meetings. Participants were randomly assigned a number, and their organizations remain anonymous to comply with IRB protocol.

Participants include 18 females and 8 males. 13 participants held leadership positions within their organization. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 48 years old. The number of summers participants spent working for their organization ranged from 1 to 8 years. A total of 11 organizations that employ summer church camp staffers are represented in this study.

Data was collected over the course of seven month(s) in the fall of 2024 and spring of 2025. A semi structured interview methodology allowed for a consistent interview question protocol among participants and created a space for follow-up questioning and free flow

conversation guided by the participant (Tracy, 2020). Interviews ranged from 36 minutes to 116 minutes, with a total of 1,664 minutes of interview data. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed with an AI transcription service yielding 546 pages of single-spaced 12-point Times New Roman front transcription for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

I used Tracy's (2020) iterative approach of analyzing data involving primary and secondary coding. In the primary cycle, I open read the data to discover initial emerging connecting themes. I considered emergent themes using a lens of identity, resistance, and emotional labor when collapsing primary cycle coding themes into a scheme. This is consistent with Tracy's (2020) iterative approach. A coding scheme of first level codes was developed through the impressions in the initial read through which allowed room for these codes to be expanded and collapsed through the data analysis process (Tracy, 2020). A code book was created from these impressions to detail the code definitions.

For the second cycle coding, I constructed the data that was disrupted during the open coding sequence (Tracy, 2020). Each code I created in the primary coding cycle was examined and combined to create more cohesive themes in which to code. I used the new interpretive concepts to individually code every line of data in the scheme in the interview transcriptions after second level codes were completed. I engaged in member checks to ensure participants are represented accurately after completing the codebook in the second coding cycle. Each of my participants' names and places of employment are excluded. Participants were assigned numbers from a random number generator and the names of their organizations are dropped to comply with IRB protocol.

## RESULTS

I examined resistance and emotional labor to answer my two research questions. My results shed light on how Christian organizations use different power tactics to elicit control of their employees, church camp staffers, by using faith as a mechanism for control. These temporary positions have a start and an end date which is a signifier to the staffer how long their employment will last. The expectations set by these Christian organizations were not clearly detailed during the hiring process. This led to my participants experiencing a violation of their perceived expectations, participants feeling the need to defy expectations, and led to uncertainty when they were expected to handle a situation they did not feel properly equipped for. This uncertainty led staffers to enact resistance as a sensemaking device.

Participants made sense of their past experiences by framing their stories and behaviors in a positive light, a coping strategy and example of their use of hidden transcript. Participants discussed how they managed their emotions on the job through the framing of front stage and backstage behaviors. Staffers choose when to surface act and when to deep act if they did not find their genuine emotion appropriate by their Christian organization's standards.

A large deciding factor in the decision to surface or deep act is situational to how they perceive the actions align with their totalistic faith identities. These faith identities acted as a sensemaking tool to justify their actions and how they were treated by their Christian organizations. In the end, these staffers are aware that they work under extreme conditions for little pay. In light of the emotional manipulation and violation of their expectations they have framed working in these positions as "a privilege that is worth all the tears," as described by Participant 3, a first-year staffer set to return for a second summer in a leadership position within

his organization. As detailed by Participant 7, who has worked six summers for her Christian organization with four of them in a leadership position:

...[it's] the, like, balance between, like, know I want to be here, but like, I'm frustrated, and I wish I wasn't frustrated because I want to be here, and I signed up for this, and I shouldn't feel frustrated because it's an honor and a gift to be able to do this, but I'm frustrated.

How the individual frames the narrative is key to dialectic they feel emotionally when they think of the job, and the communal sensemaking that takes place among church camp staffers. Communal sensemaking began once the actor discerned where to enact and where to refrain from resisting. Participants must also discern if their decision was in direct opposition to their faith identity they heavily align themselves with. The dialectic of comply or defy is something that shapes how these church camp staffers emotionally process their experiences.

Results below are organized around the research questions: how do church camp staffers enact resistance in their Christian organizations (RQ1) and how do church camp staffers manage their emotions while performing their faith identities (RQ2)? Thematic coding of my data yielded 12 themes: temporal identity, romantic relationships, platonic relationships, perfect camp staffer, faith identity, control mechanisms, punishment, acts of resistance, managing emotions, surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotion. These themes were collapsed into categories and subcategories that, taken together, paint a picture of resistance and emotional labor in this setting.

### **Resistance: "I'm a rule follower to the t... but also..."**

Codes surrounding resistance were collapsed into a thematic schema that is organized by control measures (gamification, paternalistic language, guilt, and gatekeeping information),

reconceptualizing time, relational manipulation, and direct and indirect acts of resistance to answer the RQ: how do church camp staffers manage their emotions while performing their faith identities? Resistance was enacted by church camp staffers to reclaim power in situations they felt their Christian organizations were exercising what they perceive to be unnecessary control over them. “It does sometimes feel like Stockholm syndrome,” commented Participant 7, as if the position sparked a psychological response from the treatment she received on the job.

It is first important I lay a foundation for the treatment these employees receive to better report on the acts of resistance they enact in their Christian organizations (RQ1). Resistance by challenging the rules was up to the interpretation of the staffer with fifteen participants saying they did not break the rules moments before detailing specific ways they have resisted said rules while on the job.

When asked about the extent of following the rules, Participant 1, an individual who spent six summers with four in a leadership position with his organization, commented, “I’m very much a rule follower... but I would like to say I also like to bend [the rules] just a little bit.” Regarding the rigid schedule provided by Participant 1’s organization, he explained the importance of staffers going to breakfast when they start the day, so they were eating alongside their campers. In the same breath, however, he recalled how, “we [spent] time with God first and then we went to breakfast.” His reasoning for this deviance from the schedule was to give his staffers a break from the campers before spending the rest of the day with them. Here acts of resistance, even seemingly small choices about how to start the day, acted as a way participants reclaimed personal action in their decision making.

Participants viewed rules as vital to the execution of camp and something that could be changed situationally. For example, Participant 1 remarked that “tweaking the schedule” was one

way he helped provide agency to his staffers. Participant 12, who worked eight years as a church camp staffer between two Christian organizations, talked about how he currently guests as a pastor during the summer. “I’m a rule follower to the t... but also I set the expectation.” As I will discuss throughout my results, staffers in leadership positions felt responsible for their staffers and themselves and used expectations as a way to justify acts of resistance against their Christian organization.

One expectation that could not be “tweaked” or “bent” was that staffers had a distinguished faith identity. This totalistic faith identity, the cross-cut of their nested identity, acted as the lens for how they viewed their world. Each participant self-identified as a practitioner of faith in their respective interviews. The faith identity impacts how they view rules. Since part of their faith mandate is to follow the rules, the act—and thoughts—of resistance are in direct opposition of their calling and purpose while on the job. The rules are established by their Christian organizations and thus perceived as an extension of their faith through the high order of their organizational identity. The faith element of church camp staffers is a nonnegotiable to the Christian organizations they work for.

As detailed by Participant 3, “follow the Christian standing,” is a standard for this employment type. He continued by talking about how this looks like discomfort at times. “You’re missing the point if you’re just getting into a rhythm of comfortability. Like, the Lord doesn’t call you to that and so what are you doing to kind of grow and stretch yourself?” This idea reified by their cross-cut faith identity alludes that the goal of the position of church camp staffer is to grow and encourage the growth of others.

When asked if she remembered if it were a job she was working, Participant 10 responded, “boy did I. Every time I went to the paycheck, I was like, ‘I made \$1.80 an hour this

week. Wow, great.” Here there is some, even if not directly voiced, animosity towards the pay they are receiving from this job. Participant 10 is clearly frustrated that her hard work is not being rewarded with monetary gain. She did, however, extend her thanks to “the Lord’s presence” for being reward enough for the physical, emotional, and spiritual labor she expels while on the clock. Commenting further on the Lord’s presence, Participant 10 emphasized that “I was reminded that my home, the only constant in this entire two months, is the Lord’s presence. And so, in the least Sunday school answer way possible, that was home.” Her time on the clock, as she details in her wage breakdown above, is inferred to mean the entirety of the time she is at camp. Sensemaking for her looked like leaning on “the Lord’s presence” since she saw no separation from her church camp identity.

The perception of this being a “job” relates to their perception of rules and the decision to enact resistance. For example, Participant 9, who is preparing to serve a second summer for her Christian organization, recalled knowing it was a job because “there was stuff that we had to do. It didn't feel, like, just like my job at home. It was not something that I had to do, but it was something that I got to do instead,” insinuating how unique of an experience this job is compared to the position she held at home. Participant 9 held a sense of gratitude for her organization throughout her interview, despite detailing several mentally and physically exhausting situations brought upon her directly by her position. With this type of disposition, there is no room to resist without feeling a weight of religious related guilt, discussed further in the next section.

Consequently, Christian organizations used guilt, gamification, paternalistic language, and the gatekeeping of information as control measures to hold power over their staffers. These control mechanisms made it challenging for staffers to emotionally process decisions regarding resistance.

### **Control Measures: “the culture is being fun,”**

Control measures were used by these organizations to create uniformity among the camps they run by controlling church camp staffers’ behaviors. This section oversees how themes such as gamification, paternalistic language, guilt, and gatekeeping made the act of resistance a taboo subject among the dialogue between church camp staffers. The word resistance is not commonly used by participants in our interviews since it is seen as a direct defiance to their totalistic faith identity. Participants did engage in resistance when the control measures became an opposition for their faith.

### ***Gamification***

This sub theme looked at how everyday elements of church camp staffers' jobs were made into games to elicit more participation from them. Christian organizations use game mechanisms to increase the engagement of their staffers with the heavy expectations that they place on their employees. For example, control was reified in the gamification of staffer names. Participants 3, 8, 9, 13, 21, 25 referred to themselves and their fellow staffers as being “Coach *first name*” to evoke a level of respect from the campers they are responsible for taking care of. This also impacted their behavior around campers. As a coach, they felt the responsibility that their actions align with that of a coach: correcting, teaching, and encouraging their campers.

Participants 6, 16, and 17 disclosed that their Christian organization assign camp nicknames to each staffer. This nickname was the name they went by with and without campers. Participant 16 described how, “we had camp names so that was a fun aspect. But imagine if my name is a trigger for a child, um, because they were bullied by someone with that name.” Here she provided a logical explanation for why they do not use their real names at camp. The rationale for the nicknames provided by Participants 6, 16, and 17 were all different. These

nicknames were given to new staffers by returning members of the organization. They put the staffer on a stage in front of the giant crowd of staffers, new and old, and asked them a series of personal self-disclosure questions. Within those three to four answers their forever camp name was birthed. What a joy it is to let strangers pick out your camp name that shapes your entire camp identity within your religious organization.

Speaking in depth about these nicknames, Participant 17 said the camp names were because they were easier for their campers to remember than their personal names. Participant 6 said they used camp nicknames because it was easier for their fellow staffers to remember their camp nicknames than their personal names. “A buddy of mine, his camp name was Mumbo, I honestly don’t remember his real name... there was another guy I was really good friends with...I don’t remember his last name, but his camp name was Millenium Falcano,” reflected Participant 6. Within the practice of using nicknames at camp, staffers lost a piece of themselves and a connectivity element with their fellow staffers. Names are important and assigned to things that have value. There is power in a name (Bossman, 2016). Participant 17 mentioned that she got her camp nickname because,

I liked folk music and I played a bunch of sports. And so, it's really easy for your camp name to be part of who you are. Or like if your camp name is just stupid, it's easy to, like, forget it. And so, but for me, I think that was like, all of my team viewed me a, like, someone who liked sports and was athletic, and someone who liked music.

Participant 17 did not mind the identification until she suffered a knee injury and could no longer participate in outdoor activities. This impacted both her relationships with her fellow staffers by inadvertently not fulfilling half of the camp staffer identity her teammates associated

with her and created a difficulty in her identification with her organization. When she no longer fit the parameters of the nickname game set forth by her organization, fulfilling the nickname assigned to her, Participant 17 felt disconnected from her organization and her team.

“There was like, uh, guilt around me being injured,” recalled Participant 17. This lack of identity caused her to reevaluate her identity within the Christian organization and around two of the things she held dear—her music choice and her love of sports. She was no longer reaping the benefits of the gamification of nicknames but felt penalized by them.

Identification is important for and to organizations. The staffers at this specific camp created space for their organization to evoke more control over them by neglecting to use their personal names as public identifiers. What seemed like fun and games, these “silly goofy camp names,” as Participant 16 called them, can lead to self-esteem issues if the employee is unable to recognize that their camp nickname is not the singular defining factor of their self-image.

### ***Paternalistic Language***

This sub theme is dangerous to employees as it painted the organization as a large family. This insinuated that you give and receive from the family and that the organization has your best interest at heart. For example, Participant 5, who worked for three summers and two in a leadership position, detailed how his organization was “one big happy family” with how they engaged with one another. This was dangerous to participants because the role expectations on them can be heavy, and the reward can be small. Any oppositions to this were met as the staffer in question feeling disrespectful to the Christian organization who provides for them.

Many tough situations on the job were created in part by the use of paternalistic language reified by expectations of these Christian organizations. One Christian organization originally hit hard during the COVID-19 pandemic found themselves with a flow of cash. This money led to

the running joke in Participant 13's organization that, "Papa [Organization Name, redacted for confidentiality]" was able to provide better equipment and resources than in previous years with "the money free flowing." This type of paternalistic language insinuated that participants could turn to their leadership for financial support to do their job well. The family dynamic made the act of resisting a more personal and harder decision. It made the thought of resisting against the "family" who was provided for them seem disrespectful and ungrateful. The bare minimum effort of the Christian organization was framed as the saving grace to the staffers who believed in the power that their "family" could provide them.

The framing of employment as a family environment was common for referring to staffers just as much as it was leadership. For example, Participant 13, who worked three summers with two being in positions of leadership, called himself his team's "fun uncle" since he had an input on small scale decisions but did not have to be the disciplinary figure or final decision maker. Here he used paternalistic language to describe how his role in the family was important but took the blame off of himself if his team did not like the decision ultimately made by the camp director. In his role as assistant director, he might have been the one person others came to when they need to vent. This removed any sort of blame or push-back off of himself to remain on his staffers' good side.

Participant 6 was grateful that his head leader of his camp, affectionately referred to as "Pops" by everyone in his organization, took care of everyone so well. This term alluded to a laid back and casual father figure. However, traditional paternalistic fathers are authoritative and somewhat intrusive. Thus, acts of resistance are not readily enacted by staffers against someone in this position. The control mechanism of pitting a staffer against their father figure if they disobey the rules was viewed as a great act of resistance by the Christian organizations who

rallies around serving a loving Father. This resistance was not permitted by the organization and was framed as a dishonor to their employees' personal faith identities. Paternalism limits the autonomy of the individual and reinforces power dynamics. This created a power structure where employees looked for provision from these individuals.

### ***Guilt***

The guilt experienced by my participants is twofold. They felt guilty that they were not good enough in their role and expressed guilt from not being good enough in their faith. Each of these was wielded by their Christian organization to keep staffers' behaviors aligned with the organization's expectations. These Christian organizations used biblical text and the standard teachings they expect of their staffers to share with their campers as a way to emotionally manipulate their staffers. They did so by framing resistance as an unforgivable act.

My participants expressed how they felt guilt when "bending" the rigid rules. Participants experienced this guilt even when the rules they were breaking aimed to better the Christian organization as a whole. "I would break bedtime because I felt I would better serve a church in my assistant director role," recalled Participant 4. "I would better serve a church by getting it done than getting my rest," she said, talking about the additional hours she would put in when everyone else was asleep. When faced with this guilt she recalled how it led her to experience extreme sadness, she doubted her abilities. When these emotions about her response were to turn to the Lord. "God can handle your sad. He can handle anything that you give him as long as you're honest, just be honest and he's got it," she recalled with confidence during our interview. This shows how her totalistic faith and belief in the gospel (see Appendix B) was something that grounded her.

Participants (N=9) in leadership positions “felt the responsibility or duty to oversee” each element of camp, as described by Participant 2. There were two layers of leadership identified in my data among ten of the eleven Christian organizations represented in my study. The first layer was more on a corporate level and consisted of individuals who were not on site during the camp day. These members planned camp year-round and made the large impactful decisions. The second layer included leaders who appeared similarly to middle management. These second layer leaders both kept camp programming happening and did not have a say in what it looked like. They were the individuals who were on site with their staffers during the camp week and helped oversee the mundane of everyday. Their leadership lasted the length of their summer before expiring. These second layer leaders were also tasked by their organizations to take on additional responsibilities before the summer began for little to no additional pay. These second layer camp leaders play a part in approving behavior or disapproving aiding in the categorization of what constitutes resistance in these positions. They were the moderators for what a staffer could get in trouble for and what those at camp could get away with.

Second layer leaders felt responsible for providing a perfect camp experience. Though the camp week had a beginning and an end week to week, leaders felt the pressure from their organization to be constantly present and working towards the next thing. As detailed by

Participant 1:

I felt guilty sometimes because I was like there's still things to be done. So, I need to not be going back to [my room for a break] or whatever. I need to tell the people how to do this or fix things because people would... just never seem to get [their] job [right]. No matter how many times we showed [them]. And so, I did a lot of covering for [them] and reteaching for [them].

There was a limit to the amount of “reteaching” an individuals could do before experiencing frustration. Participants in second layer leadership positions expressed the need to relinquish control to their staffers in hopes their staffers performance better. Perceived control took the form of emotional intelligence, which was given to staffers by their secondary leaders at camp.

Guilt also came in the form of punishment during the camp week. Participant 17 recalled how:

...instead of [their] counselor or senior counselor, whoever it was punishing [them], instead of making [the staffer], like, run laps or whatever, [the staffer] had to stand and watch as [the leader] ran laps. And so that was like what you had to do. That was your punishment. However, many minutes late, you had to like run your certain number of laps. But instead of you running, it would be your senior counselor... And it's like... you know, like Jesus sacrifices for us and to take the burden for us.

At the time this punishment rocked her. “It makes you feel more bad that something that, you know, you were late... some people cried,” continued Participant 17. Religious guilt, brought on directly by the Christian organization, was one of many control mechanisms wielded by organizations in my data. The act of seeing someone punished for something she did was a scene directly pulled from her bible. It is the key element of the gospel these church camp staffers share with their campers which also grounds them in their line of work (see Appendix B). When this example was taken out of context and used as an emotional manipulation tactic, resistance against it was perceived by participants as acts against their own faith. Participants felt that resisting their Christian organization was equivalent to resisting the Lord.

Participant 8, who worked seven summers for a Christian organization with five of them in a leadership capacity, defined the gospel as a pillar of the Christian message she and her teammates were responsible for sharing. The gospel (see Appendix B for more details), shared by Participant 8 in “Romans 5:8” highlighted how ““God demonstrates His own love toward us in this, that He died for us...’ Like that's really why He did it.” My participant felt her Christian organization weaponized this message against her when they force her to watch as her leaders ran laps in her stead. Her organization took the central message she felt protective over and use it to elicit additional control over her.

Participant 16, of the same organization as Participant 17, felt similar guilt during the summer watching her own leaders run. Retrospectively she had different thoughts about the punishment. She recognized how harmful this behavior was to her and her fellow staffers after being removed from her organization for a few years. This punishment does not impact or influence her day-to-day life today. At the time, however, it had the ability to change how she perceived her actions and behaviors towards others.

Guilt is a weapon used by Christian organization to elicit an emotional control over their employees. By leveraging the expense of their leaders, these staffers felt a moral responsibility to follow the rules to avoid their leader’s experiencing punishment.

### ***Gatekeeping Information***

Gatekeeping is withholding or limiting information from those who are unaware of its existence. Christian organizations in my study used this ideological control as a direct control mechanism by monitoring and withholding the access to knowledge. Redacting information or limiting what was shared with staffers controlled what their employees had access to while under the employment of their Christian organization. This practice implied that the Christian

organization was warranted to define what information was prevalent and what was a distraction from the faith message their camp set out to share. Christian organizations created psychological barriers their employees had to hurdle to justify the enactment of resistance through the gatekeeping of information.

Participant 23, who worked three summers at a sleep away camp, talked about how her organization limited information from campers and staffers alike if they deemed it “a distraction from the gospel.” Her camp is technology free. The only form of communication they had access to included physical mail or printed emails. There was a staff of individuals, referred to as the office crew, who were responsible for both reading over and delivering the emails and mail the camp received. This was a practice instilled by the Christian organization to ensure the recipient did not receive any “distracting components” in the messages that could disrupt camp. If something was found in a message “we would have to censor and redact” the information with a black marker before delivering the note accordingly. This censorship was a direct control mechanism from this Christian organization because it controlled the information that their staffers had access to. It was denying them the chance of deciding what information they were, or should be, privy to. The practice of being technologically unbound reified the idea that power and control was free to be wielded by these Christian organizations. There was nothing these staffers could do to change these rules as this was the one organization in my study where first layer leaders were involved in day-to-do camp activities. The gatekeeping of information was another way to conceptualize who had power within this Christian organization. Unfortunately for them, it was not the staffers.

To ensure that both staffers and campers remained technologically free, the organization had a ban on camper’s cell phones and took the cell phones of staffers for six of the seven days

of the week. The employees would have no way of knowing if a world event happened unless the information was disclosed by their Christian organization. When asked if they often receive news headlines, she commented, “for the most part it’s a ‘no’ unless it is something super serious.” This was problematic because the individuals gauging what constitutes “super serious” are the “50-65-year-old leaders” of this Christian organization.

For example, Participant 23 recalled being troubled how her Christian organization treated President Trump’s assassination attempt. “So, in the small picture, they were like, it might not be, like, ethical to pull every single email from the whole week about this assassination attempt because we work with 12 or 18-year-olds.” Thus, the leadership at camp told campers:

...something pretty vague, like, ‘hey, just letting you know there was, like, an incident, something like that. Like, there was an incident involving President Trump. He’s okay. Just wanted to let you guys know.’ And they just, like, left it at that knowing that probably the next day, all these kids are going to get emails, and it would spread around.

Their motivation for delivering this news was to escape backlash they felt they would have received if they chose to keep quiet. Their gatekeeping was of selfish intent. This Christian organization wanted to provide what they told these camper’s churches and parents. Participant 23 recalled how they were told they were honoring the claim that they were “deliver[ing] [the] gospel presentations,” but it is at the expense of the campers and staffers' knowledge that this occurs. The same thing happened the summer prior when the submarine accident occurred while attempting a dive to visit the Titanic wreckage. Participant 23 did not find out there was even an accident until after it occurred due to an unorthodox conversation with one of her camper’s parents early in the morning as they came to pick up their child early.

I'm just hearing about this, like, tragedy at like 6 a.m. in the morning from, like, this parent. And I'm, like, sleep deprived because it's 6 a.m. And I've never met this parent before and they're telling us, like, their kid and me about this tragedy and I'm like, 'oh, I'm sorry if my reaction is, like, not what you're expecting.' Like, this caught me really off guard even though it had probably happened a couple days earlier. So yeah.

The significance with these stories is the harmful gatekeeping tactics that organizations hold over the employees. Knowledge is power and the only one with a means to gain knowledge in these specific situations is the Christian organization.

### **Reconceptualizing Time: “we never knew what day it was”**

This theme encompasses how staffers viewed time and what these staffers were expected to do with their twenty-four hours they had in a given day. The conceptualization of time was important to staffers. Another key factor includes the expectations placed upon these participants pre-summer, before they were paid. This theme ultimately looked at how the temporary nature of their job was emphasized by Christian organizations to ensure they maximize the labor their staffers toil physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. This fleeting position should have remained temporary. However, this temporary identity of church camp staffers followed them outside of their Christian organization employment and into their everyday lives back home.

Growth is a challenge to achieve in such a short window of employment. Each of the participants in my study are temporary employees because they were contracted to serve less than three months within their Christian organization. This small window of employment time led to the creation of an unclear expectation from the Christian organization for what constitutes time on and time off work. Time works differently at camp. “We never knew what day it was,”

commented Participant 1. Within this lax chronological structure existed a space for emotional manipulation from the Christian organizations. Here the faith of their employees was used to elicit additional labor for no additional monetary gain. This idea of additional labor acted as a catalyst for the desire participants had to choose to enact resistance.

Participants conceptualized working for the organization in terms of years, though they were only paid for three months or less while under employment of their Christian organization (N=13). Before the summer, and subsequently the job, began there were periods of learning what team you were on, where you would be stationed, and interacting with their teammates. It also alludes to the fact that while these summer positions only span from six weeks to three months, they feel as though they extend longer. This also suggested that the impact they felt from this position extended beyond the time they were employed as summer camp staffers.

The months before the summer were also important for the health of a camp team. The expectation set by seven of the Christian organizations in my study was that their staffers should build bonds with their teammates before the summer begins. It is important to note that this communication is expected, they are not paid for this relational building time. During the “off season,” as referred to by Participant 7, there was still work to be done. The idea that contacts need to be made with their teammates before the summer and position began is the first step of organizational identity began to take shape in the lives of these staffers.

As detailed by Participant 1, “I would focus on the relationship aspects of, like, meeting people, building friendships, learning skills, growing as a professional as well as a person,” during the months before the actual job began. Encouraging others to invest their time into strangers before their job even begins was one way Christian organizations manipulated their

employees' interpersonal relationships and have them begin the work months before their first initial paycheck.

### **Relational Manipulation: “camp romance is against the rules”**

Organizational control could look like strict protocols, gatekeeping information, or setting unrealistic and unclear expectations. A common theme among participants was how these Christian organizations had relational clauses in their onboarding documents. Eighteen participants mentioned that both romantic relationships and close exclusive platonic friendships with others was against the rules since it went against team unity. Six participants specifically mentioned there not being a rule against relationship building at camp.

Three participants commented that leaders in their organization tried to play matchmaker for people on their teams. “Our director for like the entire summer was trying to set up me and [this] other guy,” recalled Participant 17, who worked one full and one-half summer for her Christian organization. “And so it was, like, doubly embarrassing and really uncomfortable for me because I didn't really like the guy.” Here secondary leaders played a major role in relationship building within the team. It is challenging to ignore someone’s advances in a culture that emphasizes saving face. It becomes more difficult when your job makes you “lip sync to a Disney song” with your male counterpart that your leaders were trying to set you up with.

Another way these Christian organizations aimed to control their employees' relational habits was by reifying the affirmation or refutation of relationships by pairing it with what constitutes a good faith centered staffer. Participant 4, entering her fourth summer working for her Christian organization with this being her second summer in a leadership capacity, discussed at length relationships at camp saying, “it’s about who you’re serving... but they’re not there for the right reasons and I think that doesn’t make a good staffer.” Here she was specifically

highlighting the type of staffer who chose to break the rules of her ministry in pursuit of a romantic relationship at camp. She added, “I’m like, okay, does it need to be spelled out? Camp romance is against the rules.” Here we see that the organizations had control over both staff behaviors and the interpersonal relationships they develop under their employment.

Not everyone agrees with the relationship rules at camp. Participant 26, who worked four summers for her Christian organization justified camp relationships by stating, “we were meant to have harmony within ourselves, within our relationships, within, within creation and with God,” insinuating that anything outside of that means you are not reaching your full potential within the position. Here are two examples of staffers who have bought into their organization's beliefs, even though they are polarizing ideas.

Looking past romantic relationships to platonic ones at camp, Participant 10, who worked one year at her camp, thought her ministry’s rule about “no close friendship on a team” was “dumb” because “if I get along with these people that just makes sense, I would obviously spend more time with these people.” She mentioned hiding the closeness of these relationships from her leadership team to avoid punishment. Interestingly, she recognized “on the backside of it,” after the summer, that she “may have led people to be excluded... But in the moment, I was like, that’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard of.” Here the covert resistance exists in the form of a series of secret friendships. There was also significance in the self-reflection Participant 10 demonstrated here. Retrospectively she recognized that there was a purpose behind the rules set by her organization. She also recognized how she was not in a place to receive that justification during the summer when she felt the weight of her repressed interpersonal relationships.

**Direct Acts of Resistance: “our contract never told, specifically, that a staffer couldn’t...”**

My staffers were not perfect, contrary to the expectation of their Christian organizations. They discerned when and where the best resistance tactics existed to employ Resistance techniques included both blatant and concealed resistance. Examples of resistance included defying rules, rewriting rules, and ignoring rules. There were moments that these staffers resisted orders from both the faceless first layer leaders and also the second layer leaders they spent each day at camp with. Their relationships with each of these styles of leaders looked different. They had stronger interpersonal relationships with their second layer leaders they served with on their respective teams than they did with the nameless first layer Christian organizational leaders. While they experienced more guilt from resisting their second layer leaders, they could overlook it if the act served their personal agenda. For example, some participants used acts of resistance more as a way to serve others (their campers or fellow staffers) than to reclaim personal agency (N=8). This type of rationale and justification made choosing resistance less of a disrespectful act in the eyes of these staffers. It did not, however, completely alleviate the feeling of disrespect as the religious guilt burden loomed heavily over them.

Considering both written and/or spoken rules, participants found ways to resist them. Participant 14, the camp director (second layer leader) at the time who worked a total of ten summers, described a secret celebratory job well done prom her team threw towards the end of their employment one summer. Her Christian organization was one of the ministries that explicitly stated it was against the rules to develop romantic feelings or participate in anything their religious text would deem as sinful. Seeing an opportunity to secretly orchestrate a prom for her ten female and ten male staffers in celebration of their hard work, she recalled how:

We went to Goodwill and picked out prom outfits and everybody had a date.

Like, we drew, like we had ten males and ten females. So, we just drew names out of a hat to determine who our dates to the prom were.

Participant 14, the camp director in charge of organizing camp, broke the no relationship rules instilled by her Christian organization here to provide entertainment and satisfaction among her staffers. Some participants in secondary layer leadership positions described the decision to break the rules for the benefit of their staffers by looking at the wording of their camp contracts (N=6). For example, in two separate summers Participant 15, who had worked six years for her ministry with five of them being in a secondary layer leadership role, took her staffers to get piercings and tattoos. After the initial summer she was verbally told by the leaders of her organization they did not appreciate this behavior. After the second summer where she took a second round of staffers to get piercings and tattoos her response was:

Our contract never told, specifically, that a staffer couldn't get a tattoo or a piercing during the summer... To me, it was no big deal because my thoughts were I'm a grown adult. I'm a legal age. I paid for this with my own money... Uh, but my bosses have already told that they might not receive it well because they might see it as, 'oh, that was your contract.' But I don't remember that [being in] my contract anywhere.

Here the rules were seen as a vague suggestion if they could make them fit their personal agenda. For example, Participant 20 regularly ate meals in the auditorium where the bulk of his work took place as a member of the production crew on his team. The rule set by the members of first layer leadership for his organization stated staffers should “[not] have food in the booth.” He made the choice to resist since “it was really hard to get to breakfast sometimes, having to be [in

the auditorium] an hour beforehand to set up and make sure nothing went wrong.” Here the resistance was a form of self-preservation by the staffer. Other times, it was to meet personal expectations and standards.

Participant 1 recalled that in his early years with his organization there was an expectation to wear nicer clothes during their nightly worship services. While the new standard his organization has is to wear what you want to worship, including athletic style shorts, he thought it would be more beneficial to have a distinction and sought out counsel from higher leaders in the Christian organization. His response to the indifference he received from his leaders on the matter was “to support whatever [they] say, as long as it is not athletic shorts. Or, you know, I was like, as long as there's a distinction between [the morning] and worship.” Here resistance was enacted by the camp director against the Christian organization’s standards to meet their personal expectation, self-serving the staffer in charge.

There are also instances where staffers resisted against their Christian organizations by defying the orders of their camp directors and leadership team made up of fellow short term employed individuals with a higher title than them. Participant 18, who worked a total of three years for his Christian organization, recalled a time where he and a female staffer “went to Subway during lunch” when they were supposed to be eating alongside and engaging with campers in conversation. Instead, they “had a whole conversation that, like, was almost like a double date in a sense.” Though he put on a confident facade in the restaurant he was fearful of getting caught and receiving punishment.

When asked what type of discipline existed at his camp, Participant 18 explained there was a wheel you would spin. Participant 15 described it in greater detail as “a very unhealthy... Wheel of Doom” that she felt was “very intimidating as a 19-year-old.” The wheel included

“super random” punishments such as “take a lap or go clean out the golf cart that leadership, you know, put a bunch of trash in, or set up [our outdoor space] by yourself, or like grace.” Unlike Participant 15 who feared the wheel, Participant 24 felt “the idea of the wheel of punishment sounds really, like, dramatic.” She worked four years for her Christian organization and recalled how, “I know it’s wild, but when I’m at camp I’m, like, for the wheel, which is crazy.” Her justification was because “there has to be some accountability or else people just do whatever they want.” Participant 18 recalled having:

...the worst mindset towards spinning the wheel. It was just a made up thing in my brain. I’m like, there’s nothing that’s going to make me actually, to spin the wheel and do the punishment. Like, there’s, there’s nothing they can say. Like, they can fire me.

Resisting the disciplinary actions proposed by their leaders was one way participants expressed reclaiming lost agency when they were facing punishment. When an individual did not feel the punishment would impact them or had any merit then their desire to resist increased. The element keeping these church camp staffers from resisting every rule they dislike was the inner battle waging between their faith identities and their personal humanity, which will be detailed further in a following section.

There were also moments where participants talked about resisting rules for the betterment of the people they were serving. Participant 1 recalled manipulating situations and resisting the organizational rules to elicit a positive reaction from the churches:

I would try to just, like, find easy ways to make people feel special. Maybe extending their pool time or giving them something that really wasn't extra.

But making it feel like it was extra or so originally saying no to something can then change in my mind. It makes people feel great all the time.

This is both an example of not only defying the rules the organization has about the amount of people allowed in a pool and defying the expectations of the churches to elevate their experience. This type of beguile kept churches happy and control in his hands.

Participants who were secondary layer leaders described both her staffers and fellow leaders resisting their commands. Participant 2, who worked three summers and was a camp director her last summer, recalled how her own fellow leaders would “skip their quiet time and go to Dunkin' Donuts every day” during her last summer.

The frustration of this sentiment was twofold. First, Participant 2 wanted a united front within her leadership team and was not receiving that since one member chose to evade morning responsibilities in lieu of better breakfast than that of the college university cafeteria. Second, this was the time in the day that was designated for time spent independently in the bible. The choice to engage in alternative morning activities made Participant 2 feel as though her team was not taking their faith as seriously as they should. This was challenging for her who commented how, “you don't get along with everybody in life. But you have to figure it out when you are the person in charge.” The bounds of leadership caused participants to resist in the form of hidden transcripts situationally.

**Emotional Labor: “it's going to be, like, the most spiritual warfare type of journey that you've ever been on, because you're not going to be able to emotionally regulate”**

This section is organized around the emotional management of others, communal sensemaking, performing front stage behaviors, and presenting the self in backstage behaviors and answers the research question: how do church camp staffers manage their emotions while

performing their faith identities (RQ2)? Hidden transcripts acted as a form of enacted resistance and a sensemaking tool for church camp staffers to conceptualize the emotions they felt within their temporary church camp staffer positions, which provided an answer to RQ2. The challenges staffers faced regarding emotional regulation was the lack of space to process personal emotions, managing the emotions of others, and deciding the best way to present themselves during everyday interactions. This paired with the weight of responsibility for their camper's well-being was emotionally taxing for participants. When talking about personal emotional regulation, Participant 1 remarked how:

I guess I would distract myself more so than dealing with any stressors that we had. And then on a travel team, when you're traveling, it was, for me, I would drive a lot so that I could internalize then and I didn't have to engage in conversations because everybody else would be talking... Or I would drive the truck with one person, so I only had one person that I had to engage with.

Here he commented how emotionally challenging it was to engage with fellow staffers outside of the camp schedule. Having spent energy during the week performing to provide excellent camp it was easier to not have to talk to others while driving the truck with their camp supplies. The "mental gymnastics" of calculating travel details to ensure they maximize their time on the road was a better alternative to conversation. This contravened the mandate to build relationships that each of the eleven Christian organizations in my study were reported by participants to prioritize above all else.

It is emotionally exhausting to perform in front of others for the entirety of the workday. This is especially true for church camp staffers whose job they perceive to be all day every day

for the entirety of the summer. They were reminded by their cross-cut faith identity that that is not very Christian like of them to feel the impulse to resist.

Emotional regulation was often exercised by my participants when the welfare of their campers was challenged. If something happened regarding their campers' safety, they had to find ways to emotionally regulate in the presence of others. For example, Participant 9 detailed two situations of injured and lost children. She described how the first little girl, "basically just fell, like, in my arms... she, like, said that she felt really dizzy and stuff," so she had to act quickly to "get her cooled off, get some water and stuff" since she was "almost passing out." Without skipping a beat, she began commenting on a situation with a lost young boy camper, "you just, like, stop everything until you find them." When asked how she responded emotionally during these situations she described being overwhelmed and how she felt her body wanting to shut down. "But there's no room to shut down though," she responded adamantly. The quick dismissal of the idea of emotionally processing was reflected in eight participant's interviews—they perceived their emotions as being secondary to the primary job at hand.

Participant 4 remarked how "camp is not about the individual." She continued by voicing how "the demand is high, but that's because the reward is great after all that labor." When bought into the idea that their job has a higher purpose than serving the self, they were able to justify the control measures they experienced from their Christian organization and the ways they were treated by adults and campers at camp.

While this explains how they experience emotions, avoidance is not the same as managing emotions (RQ2). "When [your Christian organization] tell[s] you at training week [how hard it is emotionally] you don't believe them," Participant 10 disclosed. "[When they say] it's going to be, like, the most spiritual warfare type of journey that you've ever been on, because

you're not going to be able to emotionally regulate, they mean that.” Thus, personal emotional regulation is hard to find, unless you heed the advice of participants and “hide in the bathroom,” as Participant 7 would describe it (N=9). Considering the emotions church camp staffers experienced and the emotions they managed for others, participants reverted to communal coping, front stage behaviors, and backstage behaviors to help manage their emotions.

**The Emotional Impact of Managing the Emotions of Others: “yeah, I try to anticipate their emotions.”**

The responsibility to manage the emotions of others adds to the emotional labor church camp staffers experience. Outside of managing their own emotions, participants reported that they had to “anticipate” the emotions of fellow staffers, campers, adult leaders, site contacts, bands, and pastors. This might have looked like fronting to save face around others or shielding negative emotions to ensure the feelings of others were not hurt. This is especially pertinent, and challenging, for team members who were in secondary layer leadership position.

When asked about working alongside a staff of young adults for three months and the toll it takes to remain civil and happy as the director of the team, Participant 1 remarked how there were “lots of questions being asked all the time. Even if you answer them 80 times, you put it in writing, put it on the screen, always questions.” Participant 1 admitted to bribing his staffers to help keep them happy. “How can I make you feel better? Here's a sonic drink. Feel good? See you tomorrow.” He also commented on the emotional situations staffers face while on the job, because their personhood does not cease at camp:

And a lot of times you find that people are, their inner traumas are exposed usually throughout the summer at some point, whether that somebody says something that's offensive to their childhood, or they have to learn something

hard about themselves, that they never really come to terms with before, or they just kind of question themselves because their body and their mental has been put to the test in a way that they've never experienced before. And so, working through that, encouraging people to say, like, 'I want to foster you as a person and build you up.' But at the same time, this job is actively tearing you down because you're tired and you don't have enough time to deal with the things that are happening that you're taking in at the rate that they are happening. And then I'm like, 'okay, go to bed. All right, we're going to do it again tomorrow. Great, good, and nice.

Here secondary layer leaders were tasked with managing the emotions of their staffers so they could prioritize the position they agreed to do. This took an emotional toll on the secondary layer leaders. Through acts of encouragement these leaders affirmed their staffers that the work they were doing is good. Even if they felt like tired, they could be tired and do the job. The push towards productivity here from leaders made it challenging for the staffer to emotionally process. Secondary layer leaders were tasked with keeping their team focused regardless of what emotions people were feeling. According to Participant 1 the trick is to "muscle through [it] for the time being, and then you can deal with it later. Later being where you can get a moment" which he said happens "in August" after the job came to an end. Therefore, it was an understanding that there was no room to emotionally process while at camp.

Participants revealed that some individuals on teams got closer due to the nature of their positions on the job. When secondary leaders worked closely together, they developed a stronger friendship than they did with their staffers who they saw on a fleeting passing basis. However, just because you are close with someone does not mean that is a green light to "burden others" as

described by Participant 1, with their emotions. For example, Participant 1, mentioned how he was careful disclosing personal information around his fellow leaders. “Like, yes [Staffer name and I] became friends because we work so close together, but she is also not my emotional support person and she's also working through a lot of things that she brought into camp,” remarked Participant 1.

Participants recalled feeling discomfort at times during close proximity to others that caused them to mask their emotions and surface act. This happened situationally. Consequently, if they could not find it within themselves to emotionally regulate, church camp staffers looked elsewhere for emotional regulation.

### **Performing Front Stage Behaviors: “we’re only being nice because we have to”**

Within this theme, staffers felt the need to be the perfect example of a Christian and human being. Unfortunately for them this came at a cost as no one is perfect. Thus, these church camp staffers were forced by the Christian organizations they worked for to sell a clean, holy, and faith image to the churches they serve. The rules provided to them by their Christian organizations acted to control their behaviors and responses and encourage fronting if their behaviors and responses were counter to what the organizations was expecting. Front stage behaviors were scripted exchanges among individuals used to provide a level of comfortability for the involved parties, most of the time at the expense of the fronting church camp staffer.

My participants expressed feeling the heavy weight of expectations set by their Christian organizations (N=21). Participant 2 expressed how she felt the constant need to have a “smile on my face.” Genuine emotion did not always equate to positive emotion and a smile. Participant 21, who worked for two different camps under two different Christian organizations within three years, felt the responsibility to be the model summer camp staffer. In doing so she reported how:

...there's a note of like, fakeness. Not that I felt, but I feel like people would think I was being fake... Because, like, you aren't, like, no one wants to go to a camp and the first person they meet is like, gloomy, tired, and over it. Cause it's week seven, and it's July [so] it's 113 degrees. Like, no one wants that, even though that is how you're feeling, you know?

In this example we see how staffers felt the need to perform for the expectations of their Christian organization, their peers at camp, and themselves. My participants surface acted routinely to fit the “model staffer,” as referred to by Participant 22. Surface acting here was a coping strategy to get through a challenging situation. Participant 10 recalled being:

...proud of the way I presented myself in some points and not so proud of ways that I presented myself in other points. Because you're exhausted. Camp strips you down. After you've been smacked in the face with the water balloon for the literally 250[th] time that day, it's like, why is anyone speaking to me right now? Because it looks like it should be having fun. I can't see, I am struggling, [and] I'm being waterboarded. But I love having fun! I love it! Something about me? I love having fun. Highlight of my life.

She felt she was able to express her emotions in the instances where her genuine emotion fit the description of the “fun” she was adamant about. However, there were instances when her response, while genuine, did not fit the expectation of “smiling” so she had to front her emotion. Many times, these exchanges happened at the expense of the staffer’s comfort. For example, Participant 10 recalled an instance with an adult from a church who she and her fellow staffers coined “Creepy Jason.” When asked about the experience she mentioned how he would invite a handful of female staffers to a Waffle House. The reason they all turned down the offer was

twofold a) they had responsibilities to complete even though there were no campers around and b) they had no intention of spending any of their allotted time away from children with an adult male who was tasked with watching the aforementioned children. As Participant 10 detailed:

Like, we're not going to Waffle House with you. We're not loading up the three of us on a bus. You're 40. We're 20. We also are—I hate to say this—we're only being nice because we have to. In any other situation, I would call the police if you were talking to me. So no, I don't really want to go to a Waffle House at 11:36pm.

The commodification element of this exchange was the service that these staffers were selling. They were selling the opportunity for both campers and adults at camp to experience the gospel and “camp excellence,” as detailed by Participant 1. This took place at the expense of my participant's personal emotional regulation. These staffers were selling their comfort, as detailed by Participant 10 who commented on the inability to feel as though she could call the police regarding the Creepy Jason situation.

Common sense says you report the man you have dubbed “Creepy Jason” to the authorities. However, the kindness instilled in these staffers by their Christian organizations to serve those in front of them, child and adult alike, had them politely declining advances to help Creepy Jason save face. By putting their comfort and safety in a secondary position to the message they were delivering, these church camp staffers were navigating the position with their faith lens in the driver seat. Front facing acted to save face by reducing the comfort staffers feel.

“You put on a face, and you just run away when you have a second,” recalled Participant 2. She went on to describe a crisis situation regarding a young female camper and one of her male adult leaders. This information was uncovered the night before the camp week concluded.

She detailed how the next morning she was “on stage, doing the big ol' sendoff [with] all the staffers, and then running away and bawling outside because I didn't know what I was sending a child back into.”

This situation, which happened early in the summer, had a large impact on how she emotionally processed the remainder of the summer. As the camp director her job was to withhold that information from the team to shelter them, report it up the proper chains, and then expected to let it go. “Like, there was a point where I wasn't sleeping... And, like, I was worried I'd come home and, like, not be able to sleep very well.” This goes to show that the events of this temporary summer job do not always remain in the past or on site. The hardships they experience followed my participants home after they completed their contractual obligations for the summer.

Participant 22, who worked for different two Christian organizations for a total of four summers, described a coworker of hers who always “look[ed] happy or whatever...I just remember sitting with her outside of the chapel and her just being so, like, so distraught because she feels like there's so many expectations put on her.” Heavy expectations were shared by many participants (N=18). “[This girl] just kind of wanted to give up, like, even trying to be someone that she's not,” continued Participant 22. Here the weight of the expectations and high responsibility put on these staffers impacts how they perceive themselves in and out of their organizations.

Participant 10 described what it was like to be a different character in different people's stories, situational to the person she had engaging with and the environment they were in:

You ask the group leads in [the morning] when I'm walking through the door it seems like I've never cried a tear in my life, and I've never been tired a day

in my life. And if you ask me at about three pm when somebody said, ‘do you want to go fill the water coolers?’ ‘No.’ And then you suddenly are being described as Anger from Inside Out.

Here she described the “whiplash” she experienced when she embodied different personas around different people. When her expectations were violated, she had to put on a front in order to not look affected in the eyes of others. “And you’re like,” she continued, “that’s not me!” This example showcases what it looked like when your perception of self and how others perceive you do not align which leads to the desire to surface act your way into being liked by others. This level of self-reflection was one way participants engaged in emotional processing.

Participant 11, who worked one full summer, recalled how “especially when I was tired, like, I would have to put on, like, a camp staffer mask and be, like, ready to go.” This mask was not a true representation to how she was feeling. It was instead a way to shield her emotional psyche from “all the camp things and answer[ing] the camp questions or, um, like the Jesus questions or, ya know?” She then detailed how there is a difference in the “real world” where “I couldn’t tell you [to] go ask, you know, so and so [instead of me]” and being a “camp staffer” where “I feel like it was just, like, different expectations, um, that were required.” These expectations created the grounds for staffers to become a character to sell the message they were teaching.

Participant 19, who worked for her Christian organization a total of eight summers and held a leadership position for five of them, described the differences in performing for campers and adults. Regarding emotions around adults, “you can not necessarily turn [the emotions] off, but turn less. I didn’t feel like I had to entertain [the adults] as much as I did with the kids.” Here

we see that while it was emotionally draining to display the proper emotion around adults, it took more out of a staffer to exhibit front stage behaviors around the campers.

Three participants detailed participating in “power hour,” a morning event designated to spark amusement and joy from the campers they were serving. For this event, the staffers for this Christian organization physically ran around an auditorium while their campers, aged three to eighteen depending on the week, stared at them. The staffer’s goal was to engage the campers and get them to participate in the activities. They were not always successful. Participant 16 shared how many times their campers were uninterested. This Christian organization had been established for over 50 years and had not changed their morning routine in over 25 years. Their assumption was that campers today were the same as campers 25 years ago.

Participant 6 was employed for the Christian organization where “power hour” was a daily habitual occurrence. His specific team working for his Christian organizations served at locations where campers were dropped off and picked up at the end of the way. He described how “the amount of energy that it required to be constantly fun is a lot. The culture is being fun.” Participant 6 recalled how:

...we’re sitting there jumping around and, like, ‘Jesus please help me.’ And like [I’m] not even listening to the songs or looking at the kids anymore, just like, ‘Lord help me, Lord help me, Lord help me, I can’t do this. I’m about to fall over.’

Nothing says fun like jumping around an auditorium until you feel the need to collapse. The additional physical labor here was at the expense of the staffer. Participant 16, a part of the same organization, detailed how the emphasis was on being “hyper, um, so like jumping around... the big phrase was, like, ‘keep your eyebrows up’ because you can’t ever look angry if

your eyebrows are really high. Like, try looking like it, it just looks silly.” The control measures surrounding their personal facial expressions made it challenging for individuals to channel genuine emotion in their behaviors since it defied the expectations their leaders and the churches had for them. Front stage behaviors can thus be expressed using surface acting, deep acting, or the display of genuine emotions.

As detailed by Participant 3, “if you’re going to walk with the word of claiming that, you know, the word of God or claim that you’re a follower of Christ, I feel like presentation is really important.” Participant 3 highlighted how important self-presentation was to the job from the perception of the staffer. Self-presentation mattered both in the front stage and in backstage behaviors.

**Presentation of the Self in Backstage Behaviors: “I did get to blow up at one kid for a good reason.”**

This theme encapsulated how backstage behaviors are different from the fronting that took place front stage. Backstage behaviors acted as rehearsals that took place behind closed doors in preparation for possible events. They described how people react when no one is watching. For participants whose faith is the cross-cut of their identity (N=26) the idea of backstage behaviors as opposed to front stage behaviors did not exist. Consequently, if participants felt the desire to be somebody other than the person they present themselves as when they were in front of others then they were living in opposition to their personal faith identity. Deep acting here was reconceptualized as a vessel to get from an undesirable genuine emotion and into a more desirable emotion by surface acting. Deep acting was not the result. Deep acting became the action participants used to recognize their genuine emotions and make them more presentable for the situation.

Participants were able to display their genuine emotions, people typically perceived as negative, for the safety of their campers. For example, Participant 20, who worked two summers for his Christian organization, recalled how he proceeded when a camper displayed unsafe behaviors while he was teaching a group of campers to shoot a bow during an archery activity:

I had to make sure I didn't, like, blow up [at] the kids, which I never did. And I'm so glad... I actually, I take that back. I did blow up on one kid, but he did run in front of me while I was shooting an arrow at archery. So, I did get to blow up at one kid for a good reason.

Here we see that the genuine emotion, anger, won out and he displayed it in front of his campers. It was through this genuine display of anger and fear that the camper understood the magnitude of what could have happened during the dangerous encounter. Participant 20 concluded that story by saying how after being yelled at “[that kid] was actually probably one of the best kids in the class afterwards. So, there were definitely a lot of times where I had to balance emotions and adjust how I would handle situations.” This emotion, anger at someone else’s poor actions, would be one shared with fellow staffers in a debrief situation backstage and matches the displayed emotion. Managing their displayed emotions by pulling backstage behaviors to be displayed in the front stage was a benefit for both the staffer and the camper. Staffers displayed a spirit of authenticity in the front stage when they displayed their backstage behaviors to others.

Participants (N=23) expressed how challenging it was to emotionally regulate. A front facing job makes this challenging if you are not given or created space to regulate emotionally. The weight of being enough weighed heavily on participants. It is not easy to live up to the high

expectations set by their Christian organizations to be “model staffers,” as Participant 22’s organization calls them.

For example, Participant 2 reflected how “a lot of guilt plays into it, because it’s like, oh well, if I’m not feeling that way, then I’m not spiritually healthy enough, and God’s not helping me out, and I think that’s super damaging.” This guilt she was referring to existed when the backstage behaviors of staffers did not match what they were showing when they were front facing around others. She continued with “it’s not just a job because it’s got that built in, like, Jesus factor.” This insinuated that the religious guilt these individuals felt was not just a control mechanism to discourage acts of resistance. Religious guilt and pinpointed conviction were tactics used by these Christian organizations to emotionally manipulate their staffers.

Emotional manipulation was also shown in the ways these Christian organizations encouraged their staffers to manufacture emotional situations at camp to help spread their message. Participant 12 talked about being mindful of the music, lights, and atmosphere the camp programming produced. As an act of resistance, he would proceed carefully in his engagement with campers when he “could feel the emotion coming” during worship sessions he felt personally touching:

I would hold [my emotions] back because I knew that if my emotions were to come out, then that would cause other kids to get emotional. And I didn’t want them to make an emotional decision. And so, I had to protect my own emotions and ask the Lord to help me and give me that self-control.

The higher number of salvations on the websites of these Christian organizations meant their attendance would be higher the following summer. These organizations care about both the message they were preaching and the money they got to make with greater attendance at camp.

This sentiment by Participant 12 about shielding his emotions for the sake of his campers alluded to the fact that the decisions these staffers care about their campers making are genuine ones and not ones elicited by emotional situations.

***Communal Sensemaking: “even though you didn’t always like them, you always love them.”***

Communal sensemaking, a shared understanding among individuals in a group, helped create space for staffers to emotionally process their experiences as appropriate backstage behaviors. These workers experienced emotional labor when they managed their emotions and the emotions of others. One form of emotional support for staffers was those ties outside of their Christian organization. Participant 10 recalled how on the phone she would:

Call my mom, I'll switch [and call] my boyfriend. I'll call somebody who knows me well and knows me in situations as well, to be able to talk to me and call me down and say, ‘you're making it a bigger deal than it is,’ because I often do that.

Being able to talk with someone removed from the situation allowed for a space to process what was happening to them. That is, until the outside support was unable to provide emotional aid because they did not understand the magnitude of what these staffers were going through. Participant 8 recalled:

I remember coming home from [Camp Name redacted] one summer and I had, like, a week and a half between camp and college starting back. And I remember just going out in the morning and I would run and talk to Jesus. And there was one of these moments where I was like, God, I cannot handle being at my house anymore. And not because my family wasn't wonderful,

they were, but I think it was just this like we had been in such an intense environment with people around us that encouraged and walked alongside, and I was back at home and there was like nothing going on.

As Participant 8 expressed, the lack of support from friends and family members was not due to a lack of trying on their part. Instead, the fact that they were incomprehension of what the full job entailed made it hard for them to offer effective support. Participants voiced feeling frustrated when people outside of their camp community seemed to trivialize their emotional experiences at camp. For example, Participant 5 expressed how:

...there's a little bit of like, I mean, definitely stings. But at the same time, sure, you know, I'm not going to be like, 'actually, let me walk you through everything that I do.' I'm like, 'yeah, I do work kids camp.' It stings a little bit... This is a very poor example, but in a lot less way, it's like going to war in some ways. Like you come back, and nobody has any clue what you just did. They just nobody has any clue what you just went through. And so like, not that it's the same level... But your people understand it. They get it.

Participants compared their job to other challenges, such as “war,” to make sense of their experiences during challenging circumstances. While war is clearly a more extreme and detrimental situation, camp staffers still defaulted to these types of metaphors to explain the depth of frustration they felt when being misunderstood by their external support systems. This comparison is one way Participant 5 was able to make sense of his circumstances and a way to rationalize his experience to himself. He believed that others, outside of the communal scope of his position, would not understand so he did not bother going into detail to explain the hardships

he faced. This reified the preconceived notions those outside of the realm of church camp staffing believed about the position.

Participants experienced frustration when others did not see and appreciate the work that they completed. This frustration dissolved into acceptance when the staffer believed that “[their] people understand it,” as Participant 5 described above. The job is more bearable to participants when they were walking along with someone who understood the scope of their work.

Another example of frustration was expressed by Participant 10. She and her mother were discussing how camp was similar to the postpartum stage after birth. From her conversation she recalled:

I was talking to my mother, and she agreed with me. Camp in a one-off way is like childbirth. There at the beginning it is fine. Then it hits you and you’re like ‘I’m never doing this again.’ And then as soon as it’s over, you forget everything. And it’s like, ‘I need to go back.’ It is one hundred percent one of the most rewarding experiences I’ve ever had, while also being one of the most draining experiences I’ve ever had. I think it is the most emotionally fulfilling I’ve ever felt while being the most physically draining I’ve ever felt.

Camp staffing and childbirth too are not in the same categorically physically. Participant 10 did detail the mental similarities between the two activities. Both war (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Joel 3:9) and childbirth (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Isaiah 42) are frequent metaphors in the Bible participants teach from. These comparisons themselves provided comfort, opposite from the secular connotation of these two themes, for members who believed in the words and message they preached. For example, they believed in “putting on the full armor of God,” insinuating there was a need to prepare for a battle (*English Standard*

*Version Bible*, 2009, Ephesians 6:11). This was a striking call to action for a group who rallied around peace. These two metaphors were used and shared among members as acts of encouragement. The sharing of these metaphors and verbally processing with similar individuals in responsibility and in higher order identities allowed space for participants to receive emotional support communally.

The boldness in which Participant 10 shared her sentiments of camp and childbirth was also reflected in the way she talked about her rationale for staying at camp when she experienced different challenges. “Though every day is really hard in its own way, every day also ends with a bunch of little hands in the air singing to the Lord,” she reflected. “I just knew that had I given up before it was time to give that up, I would be so sad.” Sometimes it was grit or pride keeping them the job. Participants voiced how it often it was the full belief in the message they were teaching to others (N=8).

Participant 25 described how the emotional part “is very difficult because your support system is now your team. Because reaching out to your family is especially difficult. It's manageable, but number one, they're not gonna understand, like, the kind of work that you're doing there,” talking about who to turn to when their support system outside of camp did not understand what they were going through. She worked a total of three summers with one being in a leadership position. She returned to the job after getting married and had to leave her husband at home since he was employed at another job. Her husband was her “most important person” and even he did not understand the magnitude of her position as a church camp staffer. There is a sense of validation in communal sensemaking when you can exchange hardships with others who are going through similar things. Participant 25 sought outside support which did not provide what she needed. Participant 10 detailed how she also found that:

...emotional regulation comes in the form of spiritual leaning on the Lord and also leaning on the friends of your teammates. Even if you are crying because of them, sometimes you just have to lay there and say, 'I'm really mad right now. I need to cry. [Fellow staffer's name redacted], please don't talk, but I do need to cry in your presence. I don't [want to] hear a word from you right now. Also, I'm going to cry right here.

Staffers leaned on each other and their faith when their outside support did not meet their expectations of emotional regulation. The best support was received by those who had similar circumstances. This communal sensemaking is where staffers felt they desire to express all of their genuine emotions. These genuine emotions could have been positive or negative. This was where backstage behaviors began to take shape. Uniquely to my participants, their faith made these backstage behaviors themselves emotionally taxing to display. Backstage behaviors were in direct opposition of the idea that participants working at a church camp are someone different backstage than they are front stage.

Emotional regulation felt back on the teammates these staffers meet. "You've spent [roughly] two months with these people in this bubble. And, like, yeah, the work has been really hard, and it's been frustrating, but like, this is your team," recalled Participant 7. "And even though you didn't always like them, you always love them." This idea connects back to the paternalistic tendencies of Christian organizations and the idea of family dynamics. A family provides support much like these staffers did with one another. The act of verbally communicating with others was one positive step in suppressing the emotions they felt did not belong in either the front stage or backstage.

## Summarizing Resistance and Emotional Labor

My findings show how participants experienced a dialectic tension between their spirituality and the responsibility of their Christian organization to be a person united in mind, body, and soul.

Regarding their nested identities, there came a time where the lines here were blurred. The cross-cut faith identity was not as clear to them when they felt their treatment was not fair and in opposition to the faith values they held. The dialectic tension existed within the backstage behaviors and was mitigated by a combination of surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotion. These constructs make more sense when looked at as a process and not just an outcome. Here the responsibility to be the “model staffer” for their Christian organization was reified in the spiritual mandate under their faith identity to be a good exemplar for God.

Participant 23 painted this dialectic tension very well:

I'm just looking at the emotions that you experience and maybe different like resistant acts. If you didn't like how things were run, or it's framed an identity of just what it looks like to love Jesus and to do a job that's hard mentally and physically and how do you keep Jesus at the center of it. When it's hard and you're tired and you just want to complain you just want to gripe but you know that that's not what Jesus would do.

The desire to complain was at odds with the desire to do what Jesus would do. Here we see the battle participants felt to choose the self or live out the mandate of their totalistic faith identity. This was augmented in the ways they acted front stage and backstage. Participants felt a dialectic between comfort and guilt. They experienced comfort while exhibiting backstage

behaviors around fellow staffers through communal sensemaking. Participants felt guilty when they acted differently from the person they fronted as around others.

Participants often engaged in surface acting to hide their emotion from others to avoid discussing their emotional state with others. Surface acting here was a coping strategy to get through challenging situations and disguised how they felt about emotionally charged scenarios and punishments they experienced at camp. For example, the authorities should have been called after a grown adult continually harassed a small group of young 20-year-old girls. Yet, “Creepy Jason” got to attend every activity he wanted at the children's camp where he was a welcomed guest. He faced no penalty for his behavior and will likely never experience true backlash for such inappropriate propositions. There was a clear imbalance of the reprimanding experienced by participants and their customers.

Staffers were reprimanded for small acts, like being three minutes late. As such, they are subjected to disciplinary acts including spinning the “wheel of doom” and emotional manipulation by watching an out of context version of their faith lived out as one of their leaders ran laps that should have been assigned to them; this was a cheap imitation of the sacrifice they believed Jesus made for them on the cross. Participants still felt an element of guilt regardless of the weight they perceived the punishment had on them. This guilt existed because there was a disconnect between the resistance and the acceptance they felt about those acts of resistance. This tension led participants to face more inquiry and experience a greater degree of guilt. Their enacted resistance was modest, all things considered, so it is unusual that these staffers were plagued with such guilt about it.

In short, this tension augmented by the connection between personal faith and role expectation of camp staffers created a unique contextual backdrop for examining performative enactments of both resistance and emotional labor.

## **DISCUSSION**

The goal of this project was to further enhance the communicative understanding of identity relating to the intersection of faith and work role expectations. This study looked at the dialectic between the faith identity and the role expectations of church camp staffers by examining the different ways they enacted both resistance and emotional labor as sensemaking tools. Specifically, this study illustrated (a) how Christian organizations used control mechanisms to manage their employees; (b) ways in which church camp staffers enacted resistance against their Christian organization (RQ1); (c) how church camp staffers managed their emotions while performing their faith identities (RQ2); and (d) detailed the ways church camp staffers performed front stage and backstage behaviors. Results yielded two theoretical implications, and two practical applications discussed in greater detail below.

### **Theoretical Implications**

My findings suggest acts of resistance and emotional labor were used as manipulative strategies by Christian organizations to elicit additional labor from their employees. The fact that faith acts as the cross-cut of these worker's identities meant that it was the lens in which they view every other facet of their nested identities and the world around them. Results of this study suggested two important theoretical implications: 1) the reconceptualization of front stage and backstage behaviors and 2) a new understanding that resistance can be controlled by organizational structures and reifies totalistic identity itself.

The first theoretical implication from my study is how my results reconceptualized how communication scholars observe front stage and backstage behaviors. Results of this study suggested that in faith organizations, emotional labor may deepen identification and reify totalistic identities through the displays of front and backstage behaviors. Through acting out the

part of church camp staffer, the totalistic identity is strengthened. For my participants, the front stage was not a place of escape to perform disingenuous emotions. The front stage became a space for them to express their faith through the execution of selective emotion. It was no longer fronting. It was also a display of genuine emotion that was achieved through deep acting, or the changing of the attitude they currently held. Their faith identity prompted them to change not only the display of the emotion but the attitude they held.

This study aligns with previous scholars who found that peers have more impact on self-control mechanisms regarding emotional regulation than the managers (Tracy & Tracy, 1998). Among peers my participants perpetuated the belief that there was a need to be the “model staffer” which led to them being overtly aware of their front stage behaviors. For example, they looked to each other during “power hour” and sought strength from their fellow staffers and the Lord. My participants engaged in surface acting to fit the “model staffer” mold and enact these emotions by using deep acting as the mechanism to alter both the emotions they were displaying and the emotions they felt. For example, when young campers pass out in their arms, participants made the decision to jump into action and put their own emotions on the back burner to devote their energy to the task at hand. Ensuring the safety of their campers was their main priority. When campers got lost participants stopped everything to find them. Participants had to set their emotions to the side while doing so.

Whereas previous scholars conceptualized surface and deep acting in terms of front and backstage behaviors (Tracy, 2000), this study reconceptualized these ideas when faith is the cross-cut of an individual’s identity. Tracy’s (2000) cruise ship workers used the front stage as a space to escape the challenging emotions they were experiencing backstage when no one was around. It was a form of escapism. It was easier for her participants to fake their emotions

through surface acting than to emotionally process their hardships backstage. Front stage behaviors are conceptualized by a combination of surface acting and genuine emotion for employees whose faith lens is totalistic.

Backstage behaviors were conceptualized by my participants differently than Tracy's (2000) cruise ship employees. Her participants shied away from the backstage behaviors, where negative genuine emotion was free to be felt. They instead chose to front around others as a move to experience perceived emotional management and control. My participants instead used the backstage as an escape from the fronting and weight of responsibility they were asked to display by their Christian organizations. Backstage behaviors allowed a space for my participants to display their genuine emotions around their fellow staffers in the front stage. These genuine emotions could be perceived as either negative or positive. What matters was the sense of comradery and community they felt among those they were displaying their different emotions around.

There was not a physical space in which these staffers could emotionally process (besides the bathroom as detailed by Participant 7). Theoretically the backstage acted as a space of emotion regulation. Theologically the idea of a traditional backstage detailed by previous communication scholars *should not exist* for my participants. Previous scholars detailed that the backstage is where participants went to act differently than they did in the front stage (Tracy, 2000). The expectation for my participants to be role models for their campers and exemplars of the faith they hold keeps them from experiencing a traditional backstage. The deep acting my participants enacted to help bring the church camp image to life for the campers and churches they served was more emotionally taxing for these staffers since they were not perfect

individuals. The alternative to fronting disingenuous emotions was to admit they were not the perfect staffers expected of them. Here a dialectic ensues.

Checketts (2018) looked at the ways pastors presented themselves on social media and found that they performed for their audiences and changed their scripted behaviors when they were backstage. Backstage included off line and away from their mediated congregations. These pastors they had the ability to shed the perfect image they donned while fronting online once they closed their accounts. The mediated space and ideology were limited by range and the agency an audience had to engage with the content. For example, these online pastors could choose to switch their accounts to private or block individuals they did not want to view their content (Checketts, 2018). My participants had nowhere to hide while employed for their Christian organizations at a camp setting since they were always around each other or their campers. My participants worked a job they perceived and described to be a twenty-four seven position. This put an additional expectation on them where they had to choose to either front their emotions and exhaust more quickly or enact deep acting to display a more acceptable emotion from any genuine negative ones they held. They were choiced with living a lie or living in a continuous state of emotional exhaustion with no apparent end in sight.

In the events they exhibit backstage emotions, their faith identity alluded they should match their fronted emotions. It is no secret to them that they were being paid less than minimum wage for their labor and eating sporadic meals. At a certain point they stopped putting on a face because the fulfillment they were receiving from their job was genuine. The importance became how participants perceived how others viewed them and how they lived out their faith identities.

The second theoretical implication from my study is how resistance was controlled by the structure of these Christian organizations and reified the totalistic identity itself. Resistance was

controlled by the reified totalistic identity itself when a faith identity was involved. Put simply, the control mechanism was the faith identity. My participants felt the need to be the model camp staffer around others, the perfect example of all that was good and holy. This was reinforced by the job description set before them by their respective Christian organizations. Participants felt ridden with guilt when they felt that they violated the expectations of others. Not fitting the right mold shaped how participants viewed themselves.

Punishment tempered dissent. The Christian organizations in my study enacted punishments that deeply connected to the totalistic faith identity of their staffers. These were punishments meant to reify that identity instilled a sense of deep core identity level dread. My participants felt a stronger desire to comply with the rules when they spun the wheel of doom or watched as their leaders ran laps in their place. The specific gamification of this wheel and the guilt relating to the *sacrificial run* mimics the preaching of many religious leaders. You spun the wheel out of obligation or changed your behavior for someone else's benefit. For these Christian organizations there was no alternative behavior. Resistance here was perceived as the opposite of the submissive compliance these Christian organizations expected of their staffers. As my participants recalled, the weight of this religious guilt was heavier at camp than back at home. Thus, the reordering of the temporal church camp identity with a faith cross-cut identity was reified when the faith lens was indeed totalistic.

Previous resistance literature suggested that resistance was sequential actions, or paradoxically supportive of the very structures it sought to subvert. Juhila et al.'s (2013) work on social workers who choose to resist acknowledging their own problems is one example. Such resistance has been framed as a dialectic, a push and pull between control and resistance (Mumby, 2005). In my study, the control exerted that complicated the ability to resist was not

directly organizational. Rather, participants describe a very tempered, simple, form of resistance. For example, the order in which they ate meals or read their bible was perceived by staffers as an act of resistance if it was counter to what first layer leaders tasked them with. These staffers described both feelings of daring, and feelings of deep guilt over such actions that were not particularly strong acts of resistance.

As with Participant 15's recurring trip to the tattoo parlor, identity was reconciled and reordered to make sense of resistance acts. Simply, by redefining the rules, these staffers could enact resistance by acknowledging the rules and reframing them.

Their faith identity became the salient force that rejects resistance when Christian organizations framed membership in terms of the totalistic identity. My study highlighted the idea that these individuals were paid employees in this situation. Previous research has suggested that totalistic identities may control resistance in volunteer or church organizations (Hinderaker, 2014). This study suggested that those types of totalistic identities extended into paid employer and employee relationships.

This difference highlighted the dialectic between the control over employees by their Christian organizations and the overwhelming need to comply with the rules (part of the job description they must complete to earn their wages). This is again reinforced by their totalistic faith identities. For example, an adult man my participant coined "Creepy Jason" was able to continue to engage in conversation with the female staffers under duress. Any emotional display outside of the happy go lucky Christian female demeanor from these women would have been viewed as disrespectful towards "Creepy Jason" and in direct opposition for how Jesus would have treated him. Those outside of the Christian organization and temporal identity of a church camp staffer could see that reporting this behavior was in the best interest of these female

staffers. The Christian organization and staffers were instead tasked with serving the church and each “Creepy Jason” that mandate entails. Similarly, to Participant 7’s remark of, “it does sometimes feel like Stockholm syndrome,” participants in this position were quick to forgive, empathize with, and express sympathy towards the person or organization that withheld power from them. Obedience compressed the goal of resistance and reified the notion that unreasonable hospitality should be met even at the expense of the participant.

In short, through the framing of their front stage and backstage behaviors participants could discuss how they managed their emotions while working for Christian organizations who commonly used emotional situations to evoke control. My study reconceptualized how we as scholars viewed front stage and backstage behaviors when looked at through the lens of a faith identity. These acts of resistance were seen as inappropriate to employ by employees of Christian organizations with faith identities. My results framed the faith identity as the totalistic identity that rejected acts of resistance.

### **Practical Implication**

Results of this study suggested one practical implication for members employed by Christian organizations and for organizational leaders. Members of Christian organizations should be taught the difference between verbal co-rumination and communal coping to combat the guilt they experience from venting to sensemake communally.

When tasked with emotionally processing, individuals make the decision to manage their emotions solo or seek social support. In the seeking of social support, my participants found that their friends and family members who did not understand the magnitude and scope of their position as a church camp staffer were not the ideal support providers. My participants found their peers and teammates were the individuals they found the most comfort from. Training on

how to best receive social support should be in place for individuals employed for Christian organizations. A basic understanding of how social support is best received can help the interpersonal relationships they were managing with others outside of their organization. Relational maintenance was easier when the individual giving social support had a realistic job preview of the position they were encouraging someone else about. Participants could still feel cared for by their friends and family members outside of camp and not have them set as their initial social support under their temporary employment at their Christian organization.

This is not unlike the findings of Boren (2013) and his work conducted on graduate students experiencing emotional exhaustion and seeking social support from peers. Boren (2013) found that verbal co-ruminating helped to strengthen relationships due to shared stressors. While these relationships were categorized by verbal co-rumination, my study's faith lens and shared religious understanding was more grounding than the complaints of organizational members when communally sensemaking.

Social support networks acted as a stress buffer that aided to provide my participants with tools to emotionally process. Carr (2019) found that rumination of any form can be good and can be helpful so long as you understand the role it plays in helping you. Roeder, Garner, and Carr (2019) found that people are not good at discussing the different ruminations. Co-rumination was found to lead to more emotional exhaustion since complaining began by being cathartic and created a negative space over time (Boren, 2013). Communal coping acted as a release as it was solution seeking and did not lead to emotional exhaustion. Communal coping allows members to reshape the situation they are experiencing. This is best done within members of the same organization as each member has more of an idea of their peers' roles in the workplace and a shared sense of challenges they need to overcome. Communal coping can be used by anyone

working in a position where they serve someone else, because the ability to verbally swap similar circumstances helps alleviate the emotional burden service workers face. It helps create a space to display backstage behaviors using deep acting as the tool to achieve this.

The uniqueness of my study lies in the faith cross-cut of these participants' nested identities. Roeder, Garner, and Carr (2019) detailed verbal rumination as a relationship builder. My study looked at the faith element and how it impacted the connectivity participants felt. Communal coping was the connectivity and was more aligned with their faith ideals than simply venting and complaining. The importance was the outcome they were seeking when they verbally ruminated. One of the mandates of their faith was to live a life similar to that of Jesus in the Bible they teach from. Participants felt called to be loving, joyful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and exhibit self-control (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Galatians 5:22-23). The faith component was the driving force emphasizing the need for my participants to communally cope. Co-rumination was counter to the Christian faith participants held. Thus, members employed for Christian organizations could better emotionally process by communally communicating in a way that did not elicit punishment or have guilt befall on their employees.

### **Utility and Future Direction**

Results of this study suggested directions for future research. My study focused on resistance and managing expectations and emotions in a faith based employment organization. The importance of faith identity as a control mechanism emerged in free conversation with participants. Future research might explore the nature of assuming totalistic faith identities and the process of their maintenance by asking questions more centered around personal faith identities. My study, however, focused more on asking questions regarding expectations and managing the self and others (e.g., “Tell me about a time where you were expected to do

something at work that was new and foreign to you.”) than those relating to their personal identity. Since their faith identity is was central to the lives of my participants it was discussed without prompting and important in understanding how they enacted resistance and managed their emotions. One important note for the utility of my study’s findings pertain to the identification of a faith identity. These findings are relatively applicable to short term employment situations (e.g. internships and mentor programs) when the position has a faith identity central to the employee.

There is room to further observe the strength of an individual’s faith identity in relation to their other nested identities besides faith. There is also an element of resilience portrayed by church camp staffers that could advance how we observe coping when an individual’s faith is central to their vocation and view of the world.

### **Closing Remarks**

This study’s faith based and short term context made it different from previous scholarship that examined resistance and identity management. Specifically, faith jobs used their employees' faith (their cross-cut identity and the lens in which they perceive the rest of the world) as the mechanism of control. My findings showed that Christian organizations used gamification, paternalistic language, guilt, and gatekeeping of information over their employees as control measures. Participants enacted resistance in response to these control mechanisms. The tension in their faith identity and their work identity impacted how they enacted resistance and managed their emotions in the workplace. For example, participants were aware that they worked under extreme conditions for little pay. However, they made sense of their experiences by framing their stories and behaviors in a positive light. Participants realigned themselves with the messages they were teaching and found solace in their religious text. Their belief in this

message, and the community of believers they were working alongside, helped create space for them to emotionally regulate. These verbal reminders for one another acted as coping strategies that equated communal sensemaking to communal coping.

When they experienced an emotional situation, my participants revealed they sought support from members outside the organization they were employed under. They felt unsatisfied with the help they received from friends and family who did not understand the scope of the physical and emotional job these staffers were doing. True aid was found in peers since they were the ones who understood the magnitude of the emotional labor being experienced. Support was found to be grounded in shared experiences, reifying the idea and importance of communal sensemaking.

In short, my work highlighted the tension actors experienced with the interplay of faith identity and work identity. This tension shaped the lives of my participants when their expectations by their Christian organizations and the enactment of resistance produced polarizing results. There is no quick solution for how Christian organizations can better support their church camp staffers. In the end, acceptance and extending grace, for staffers and the Christian organization alike, goes a long way.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Basics and demographics:
  - a. How old are you?
  - b. What is your preferred sex and pronoun?
  - c. What is your race and ethnicity?
  - d. How many summers have you worked?
  - e. What titles have you held at your respective camp(s)?
2. Tell me about the camp where you worked and your role there.
  - a. What age group do you work with?
  - b. How many do you work alongside?
3. Tell me about your experiences working as a summer church camp staffer.
4. What kinds of rules or expectations do you face from your job?
  - a. Is that a handbook?
  - b. Who shared this with you?
5. Has there ever been a time when rules and expectations changed the way you responded to a situation. If yes, how?
  - a. Have you ever chosen not to follow the rules? Please tell me about that.
6. Talk to me about emotions you feel or have felt while at work.
7. Have you ever experienced an emotional situation at work? Please tell me about it.
8. How do you manage your emotions while you're at work?
  - a. At "home?"
    - i. Also, what does "home" mean to you in this setting [travel vs stationary]?

- b. Around others?
  - c. Alone?
- 9. How do you feel you project yourself to those you serve in your position?
- 10. Does your role produce any challenges? If so, how?
  - a. Tell me about a time where you were expected to do something at work that was new and foreign to you. What type of training were you provided?
  - b. How did you handle it?
- 11. Where do you go to feel the most connected to your organization?
- 12. Why do you continue to work there and/or why did you work there
  - a. Favorite part of your day?
  - b. How does this job benefit you?
- 13. Is there anything we have not gotten to talk about thus far in the interview that you feel like we should know to get a better well-rounded view of your experiences working for your organization?

## Appendix B: The Gospel

My participants fell back on the same message during the different challenges their positions provided: the gospel. They believe that God created the world, and upon reflection He saw that it was good (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Genesis 1:1). They believe in this world all things were created by Him and through Him (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Colossians 1:16-17). That also meant He created the flawed organizations my participants found themselves employed at. Because this once perfect world became an imperfect place (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Romans 5:12).

The gospel my participants turned to in their emotionally charged position says the world went from being perfect to flawed due to sin. Sin is anything that is said, done, or thought of that displeases God. It separates His creation from Him (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Isaiah 59:2). It is also a choice. Lying, pride, deceit, shame, jealousy, and anger are both not attractive characteristics and examples of sin. We would not choose these characteristics for our friends; they are what we continuously falling back into ourselves. Sin is the undesirable parts of us that we wish to hide. Regardless of who you are, where you came from, and who your family is all have sinned and “fallen short of the glory of God (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Romans 2:23).” You are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Psalm 139:14), *and* you have free will to make your own decisions. We all chose sin. This is important to the message my participants shared with the churches and campers they were tasked with ministering to. The “wages of sin is death (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Romans 6:23).” This appears both harsh and permanent. And it is both harsh and permanent. But God provided (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Ephesians 2:4).

The Lord, who created this world, called this world and His people good. And, He watched as we chose sin. He provided a solution to redeem His creation from the weight of this sin. John 3:16 reads, “for God loved the world in this way: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009). His Son, Jesus, came and lived a perfect life (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Hebrews 4:15). He was “gentle and lowly” (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Matthew 11:29). This meant He was kind, compassionate, humble, available to, and interruptible by others. The perfect life He lived was twofold: 1) to bring glory to God and 2) to remind us that we had been redeemed from the weight of our sins. Nothing we did could ever have saved us from the unsatisfaction and temporarily fulfillment the world provided. No number of good deeds, no amount of money we donated, and no nice gestures extended to others could have saved us from the emptiness and purposelessness of the world (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Ephesians 2:8-9).

God provided us His perfect Son to save us from our own brokenness (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, John 1:14). Romans 5:8 tells us, “but God demonstrate[d] His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009).” A literal death. On a wooden cross (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Matthew 27:32). Jesus’ perfect life paid the wages of sin, which was death (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Romans 5:8). When He died on that cross, crucified for sins He did not commit, He took the weight of sin with Him. If He did not choose the cross then we would not be reconciled and restored with the Lord (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

It is important to note that the gospel does not end with Jesus’ death on the cross. His body laid bound in a tomb (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Matthew 27:60), until the

third day after his death. He arose from the grave on that third day (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21)! Jesus paid the price of sin on the cross in God's eyes (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, 1 Peter 3:18). Jesus redeemed the Lord's people. These are the same people He loves. His people are now asked to "act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Micah 6:8). He does not ask them to be someone they are not. He simply wants them, broken, battered and all. He wants them because He loves them (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, 1 John 4:16). You. He wants you. He loves you not because of your gifts, abilities, and accomplishments. He loves you because "God is love" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, 1 John 4:8). His love is unconditional. You cannot and do not have to earn it. His love is sacrificial. His love is eternal. All He asks is you get to know Him. He is someone worth getting to know (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Jeremiah 31: 34).

A surrender to Jesus, admitting your sin, does not mean you have to change everything about yourself; He meets you where you are at. You will still have free will and you will still get to make your own decisions. You will make mistakes, and you will never be perfect. Jesus does not want you to be perfect (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, 2 Corinthians 12:9). A life with Jesus in it means you acknowledge that the hard things such as fear, anxiety, and pride are heavy burdens that you need help managing (Matthew 11:30). The preconceived notion is that God asks you to be something that you are not. What He asks of you is that you display the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Galatians 5:22-23). He wants you to be a kind human to yourself and to others.

The Bible teaches readers how to be kinder to others, to extend forgiveness in all circumstances, and to ask Him for favor. For example, some scripture aimed to comfort readers: “the Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you by His love (*English Standard Version*, 2009, Zephaniah 3:17).” The Bible is a call to action to receive mercy, peace, encouragement, strength, hope, and compassion.

The scripture tells us Jesus came to earth as a baby, lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose three days later from the grave, and highlights how He will come again (*English Standard Version*, 2009, John 3:36). An alternative life to one with Jesus is that of dissatisfaction and complacency (*English Standard Version*, 2009, Proverbs 1:32-33). The acceptance and grace you will receive when you He get to know Him equates to eternal life (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, John 3:16).

This is the gospel, the good news. This is the message that grounded my participants and made the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual challenges they experienced working for their Christian organizations worth it. There are no strings attached, expectations, catches, and nothing in the fine print regarding learning about Jesus. Simply, Jesus is relational and leads by example. He wants you to love Him and love others (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Matthew 22:37-40). As my participants have shared, it is worthwhile and lifechanging to love Christ and love other. This investment leads to a beautiful inheritance (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2009, Psalm 16).

# VITA

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