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An Exploration of the Role of Vulnerability in Ministerial Leadership: A Qualitative Examination of John 13 as Lived Experience in Contemporary Ministry

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Abstract

When leaders experience personal failures, it often causes negative repercussions across an entire organization, and Burns (1978) noted that devastating leadership failures had become increasingly common at the close of the 20th century. Leadership failures have continued to be a prominent problem, and the failures of ministry leaders are just as prevalent and devastating (Shaw, 2006). Brown (2015) concluded that vulnerability is a powerful tool for maintaining trust and integrity for leaders, followers, and entire organizational cultures. This study centered on both the role of vulnerability exemplified by Jesus in John 13 and the lived experiences of Christian ministry leaders. The study was conducted using a two-phase approach, including a socio-rhetorical analysis of Scripture, as described by Robbins (1996a, 1996b) and Henson et al. (2020). An analysis of John 13 yielded nine core themes: disregarding hierarchy, challenging honor and shame codes, recognizing ongoing sanctification, addressing refusal, practicing mutual confession, loving one another, loving through betrayal, growing understanding, and setting an example. The second phase included interviews with 12 Christian ministry leaders based on the nine themes from the Scripture analysis. The findings of the study revealed that Christian ministry leaders view each of the themes from the exegetical analysis of John 13 as informative to the role of vulnerability in ministry today. Findings from the interviews resulted in the development of 30 categories of observations divided into perceptions, practices, and effects. The interviewed leaders perceived that vulnerability is vital and that practice is risky, but the effects are positive when entrusted to God.

Keywords: vulnerability, ministry, leadership, socio-rhetorical, John 13

Dedication

First, I dedicate this work to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus provided humanity with the most vulnerable moment in human history when he came to us as God, yet limited himself to live and then die in our place. I am simply a sinner saved by grace and now privileged to follow his example of loving God and loving others until I go to be with him or he returns to meet us all.

Second, I lovingly dedicate this work to my wife, Charla. She encouraged me from the beginning and remained my cheerleader for the endless hours of reading and writing. Thank you for always reminding me that it was for a season and that we would be able to have days of celebration later.

Third, I dedicate this work to my children, their spouses, and my grandchildren. You all understood when I sometimes had to miss an event. You have all given me the inspiration to finish this work, and I am prayerful to make a difference for the families of other ministers.

I also dedicate this work to two churches: Meadowbrook Church, where I began my doctoral journey, and New Song Christian Fellowship, where I completed the work. I am thankful for all of my friends and colleagues at both churches that encouraged, inspired, and even volunteered themselves as subjects for the many projects as I prepared for this work.

Last, I dedicate this work to all of the men and women who dare to embrace Christian ministry leadership and risk vulnerability at the cost of negative public opinion, but with the hope that God will use your story to change the lives of others.

Acknowledgments

I cannot find the words to capture my gratitude for all that Jesus has done, and without whom vulnerability is pointless. I acknowledge that I remain in need of the intercession and advocacy of Jesus on my behalf as I openly practice vulnerability in my own life and continually embrace the grace extended by God the Father.

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I want to give special recognition to Dr. Joshua Henson for going above and beyond as my Ph.D. chair. You have been an amazing advocate beyond academics and have given me opportunities to publish two different works to date. I would not have known about socio-rhetorical analysis and certainly would not have attempted it without your input. I am better for having met you. Dr. Bethany Peters, for your help in understanding phenomenological study as a methodology. Dr. Jenny Carter, for all of your hard work in solidifying this degree program. I acknowledge Southeastern University for seeing the value in organizational leadership in a world that desperately needs quality leaders that have not forgotten biblical values.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

The world has become increasingly aware of leadership failures, and there is vast research centering on this problem, as well as myriad opinions on its solution. Movies, books, and media outlets are continually publicizing disastrous leadership scandals (Posner & Kouzes, 1993). Caza and Jackson (2016) recognized that there is a rising global crisis in leadership that has created a longing for leaders that are more genuine. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) raised concerns about the ethical practices of leaders and noted that there is a growing need for leaders that authentically confide in others as a tactic to slow or avoid moral failures. Christian ministry leaders are not exempt from these failures, and the healthy expression of vulnerability may be one way to help address or prevent this concern (Shaw, 2006). Not only are relationships between individuals affected by vulnerability sharing, but trust levels, specifically between leaders and followers, fluctuate based on the willingness of both parties to share openly with each other (Brown, 2018; Bunker, 1997; Byrd & Thornton, 2019; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Ito & Bligh, 2016).

The findings of a psychological study of vulnerability and leadership relationships by Brunning (2018) revealed that there is an inherent struggle between power and vulnerability; however, a healthy balance between these two is necessary for success in an organization. Several researchers have identified the value of leadership development in the local church, yet there is a lack of investigation into the specific ideas or values (such as vulnerability) that this process develops (Beh, 2012). Vulnerability studies have increased over the last decade and have moved from being a tangential leadership discussion to a more centralized concern. Brown (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2018) has authored several research articles and books advocating that vulnerability is an essential part of all healthy relationships.

Concerning a leader's motivation to express vulnerability, Ito and Bligh (2016) noted that leaders may exhibit vulnerability to establish connections with their followers and thus create the perception of psychological safety, and this vulnerability contributes to balanced organizational relationships. In an interview with Schawbel (2017), Brown suggested that a willingness to practice vulnerability comes from a spiritual understanding of one's true belonging and is a necessary

ingredient for authentic relationships and paramount in effective organizational leadership. Brown spoke of the value of vulnerability in religious beliefs during this interview, but without distinguishing Christianity from spirituality (Schawbel, 2017). Kim (2017) investigated the power of vulnerability specifically related to "Christian soul care," and although the context of the study was vulnerability in Christianity, the research was not concerned with leadership. Nell (2015) studied vulnerability in theological leadership and recognized that sermons acknowledging the ministers' personal struggles proved to be valuable for creating a feeling of inclusion for the listeners, but this research was centered mostly on the leadership of vulnerable people groups (e.g., those with less access to resources, education, or health benefits) as opposed to leaders sharing vulnerabilities. Each of these studies considered a combination of leadership, church settings, or general vulnerability, but none was specific to the role of vulnerability in leadership for a Christian organization or in a ministry setting.

Christian ministers grapple with many of the same issues that challenge other leaders in our rapidly evolving society. Although many social institutions have deemed religion to be less important, there remains a strong interest in the role of faith and spirituality (Henson et al., 2020). Christianity relies on the Holy Bible as the most significant source for guidance, and the influence of Scripture is paramount to the study of Christian leadership. Researchers have increasingly examined biblical leadership concepts through exegeting Scripture (Bocarnea et al., 2018; Chen, 2021; Clarke, 2006; Hanchell, 2011; Henson et al., 2020; Kalaluhi, 2016; Robinson & Wall, 2012; Serrano, 2018; Smit, 2018). The authors of these studies used exegetical analysis to explore leadership, but they did not focus on the role of vulnerability.

There are many passages that pertain to leadership in the Bible, but the words and actions of Jesus, as recorded in John 13, capture Jesus practicing vulnerability as a leader. The chapter includes a story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet and explaining that they should do the same for one another. The Johannine community was heavily influenced by an honor-shame culture, and foot-washing was one of the most vulnerable actions of the time (Borchert, 2002).

Cooreman-Guittin (2021) explored foot-washing in the Johannine community as an expression of both vulnerability and power, but the study was not aimed at the role of ministry leaders. Mathew (2018) also examined the role of foot-washing in the Gospel of John and identified vulnerability as a theme, but this study was not concerned with ministry leadership. Multiple commentaries, books, and articles have identified themes in John 13, but no scholars have examined the role of vulnerability in ministry leadership through the lens of John 13. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role of vulnerability in leadership according to perceptions of Christian ministers and to compare these perceptions with the vulnerability demonstrated by Jesus in John 13.

Statement of the Problem

When organizational leaders encounter personal struggles and failures, it can be devastating to an entire institution, and Christian ministry leaders are not exempt from such problems (Briggs, 2014; Thomas & Sutton, 2008). Leaders who practice vulnerability may lower the possibility of failure, and this includes leaders in Christian ministry (Shaw, 2006). The problem investigated in this study pertained to the role of vulnerability in leadership according to the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders and how these perceptions align with the biblical account of the vulnerable example from Jesus recorded in John chapter 13. The problem included leadership struggles and failures, the role of vulnerability to address leadership struggles, perceptions of vulnerability according to Christian leaders, and a study of practiced leadership vulnerability from Scripture.

Burns (1978) advanced the idea that leadership failures can be connected to an individual moral or ethical crisis, and entire organizations often suffer the consequences. Several leadership theories, in addition to Burns's work, integrated discussion of such leadership downfalls. Theories that have cited a concern for moral and ethical leadership problems include transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass, 1988; Bass & Riggio, 2006), authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Caza & Jackson, 2016), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970; Sendjaya et al., 2008), spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), and ethical leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). Although leadership failures have received

substantial attention, and the moral and ethical collapses of prominent leaders continue to occur, there remains a need for research that investigates the causes of such failures and possible means of prevention (Latta & Clottey, 2020).

Personal struggles and failures also affect ministry leaders. In addition to moral and ethical concerns, burnout is a problem that affects ministry leadership. According to Maslach et al. (1997), burnout stems from negative influences in the work environment, including depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, and a reduced feeling of accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Ministers have acknowledged burnout as a primary reason for exiting the field and leaving the vocational ministry (Francis et al., 2009; Hoge & Wenger, 2005). A study by the Barna Group (2021) found that the rate of pastors that have considered leaving ministry rose from 29% in January 2021 to 38% in October 2021, and 46% of the pastors under the age of 45 indicated that they are considering quitting full-time ministry. Ex-pastors have cited burnout as one of the most common contributing factors (Doolittle, 2007). Maloney (1988) investigated the mental health of clergy and determined that burnout was a detrimental influence on the well-being of ministry leaders.

Because of the public nature of ministry leadership and the expectations associated with those in clergy positions, these leaders often attempt to hide their feelings of burnout and attempt to address the problem without external help (Charlton et al., 2009). Family members of minsters are more likely than the minsters themselves to identify when they see detrimental changes in the minister, such as fatigue, discouragement, and withdrawal that may be associated with burnout (Miner, 2007). Burnout is connected with both physical and mental fatigue and often leads to depression, even in the ministers that are often called upon to help people with such problems (Chenelle & Rothmann, 2010). Because pastors and ministry leaders are frequently the first people called, it can be detrimental to many people in the greater community when these leaders suffer a personal crisis (Weaver et al., 1997). Pastors and ministers suffer adverse effects from the strains caused by burnout and the subsequent attempts to hide the situation. Ministry failure remains a topic that needs to be investigated, and there are limited studies

that address underlying causes of ministry failures in such areas as fatigue and burnout (Chandler, 2010; Hall, 1997). Scholars must investigate possible solutions or support mechanisms for ministers that have experienced—or may still be in the process of—failure, and Nienaber et al. (2015) suggested that the willingness of leaders to practice vulnerability is a key component that requires further study.

Vulnerability studies have increased over the last decade and have moved from being a tangential leadership discussion to a more centralized concern. Brown (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2018) authored several research articles and books advocating that vulnerability is an essential part of all healthy relationships. Not only are relationships between individuals affected by vulnerability, but trust levels, specifically between leaders and followers, fluctuate based on the willingness of both parties to share openly (Brown, 2018). In a psychological study of vulnerability and leadership relationships by Brunning (2018), the investigator concluded that there is an intrinsic tension between power and vulnerability, yet a proper equilibrium between these two is essential for success in an organization. This struggle between power and vulnerability creates risk for leaders, and the leaders that choose to share vulnerabilities demonstrate higher loyalty to the group or organization, thus establishing organizational trust (De Cremer et al., 2009). Lopez (2018) suggested that future researchers might investigate how leaders who risk vulnerability affect the greater organization.

Concerning leadership motivation for vulnerability, Ito and Bligh (2016) noted that leaders may express vulnerability to establish relationships with their coworkers and create an atmosphere of psychological safety, and this vulnerability contributes to organizational balance. Brown expressed in an interview with Schawbel (2017) that a voluntary sharing of vulnerability is derived from a spiritual awareness of a person's true identity and is an essential ingredient for authentic relationships and vital in effective organizational leadership, but Brown spoke of the value of vulnerability in spiritual terms without distinguishing Christianity from any other religions. Kim (2017) investigated the role of vulnerability and the connection to "Christian soul care," and although the subject of the study was vulnerability in Christian relationships, this research did not include leadership

concerns.

Nell (2015) studied vulnerability in theological leadership, and the study recognized that sermons acknowledging the minister's personal struggles proved to be valuable for creating a feeling of inclusion for the listeners, but the research was centered mostly on the leadership of vulnerable people groups (e.g., the homeless) as opposed to leaders sharing personal vulnerabilities. Several researchers have identified the value of leadership development in the local church, yet there is a lack of investigation into the specific ideas or values (e.g., vulnerability) that this process develops (Beh, 2012). Each of these studies considered a combination of leadership, church settings, or general vulnerability, but none was specific to the role of vulnerability in leadership for a Christian organization or church setting, and none of the aforementioned studies included an exegetical analysis of Scripture.

The Holy Bible is considered one of the most influential books in history and is a vital tool for any study that endeavors to investigate individuals that hold a Christian worldview (Henson et al., 2020). Christianity has long influenced the world and provided direction to every branch of society (Moynagh, 2017). Bray (2000) noted that the use of the Bible to offer guidance for general society is now debated, yet in the Christian context, Scripture remains a primary source of information. The task of properly interpreting and applying biblical passages is an in-depth process that requires substantial time and effort (Klein et al., 2017). Exploring the nature of vulnerability for Christian ministry leaders is aided by a better understanding of Scripture, yet few scholars have employed exegetical analysis of the Bible to examine vulnerability, and fewer still have considered vulnerability in leadership.

The context of the problem related to the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership begins with understanding the greater problem of leadership failure. Leadership struggles and failures affect entire organizations, and Christian ministry leaders are just as susceptible to struggles and failures (Briggs, 2014). The willingness or reticence of a Christian ministry leader to practice vulnerability may have a direct effect on that leader's success or failure (Shaw, 2006). Jesus practiced vulnerability with his disciples, and John 13 offers an example of His instructions

for mutual vulnerability between leaders and followers (Mathew, 2018). Christian ministry leaders may or may not recognize that Jesus encouraged vulnerability, and these leaders may or may not value vulnerability as an asset to leadership.

Purpose of the Research

This research was a phenomenological exploration of contemporary Christian leaders' views on the role of vulnerability based on research questions derived from a socio-rhetorical exegetical analysis of John chapter 13. In the exegetical portion, I examined the actions of Jesus according to the Johannine account, and socio-rhetorical analysis is an effective method to help establish a biblical example (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). The phenomenological study followed the exegetical portion; here, I utilized the methods described by Creswell (2013). The goal of this study was to investigate the connection between the willingness of Christian ministry leaders to practice vulnerability and their perceptions of personal success or failure as leaders. The research addressed the areas identified in the problem, including the nature of leadership struggles and failures, the role of vulnerability to address leadership struggles, the greater organizational impact from leaders that risk vulnerability, perceptions of vulnerability according to Christian leaders, and a study of practiced leadership vulnerability as evidenced in Scripture.

Bunker (1997) suggested that ongoing discussions with leaders are necessary to maintain an understanding of the role and value of leadership vulnerability. There are several problems that previous scholars have examined concerning leadership vulnerability that remain in need of further investigation (Brown, 2018; Byrd & Thornton, 2019; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Ito & Bligh, 2016; Stott, 2014). Through this study, I addressed several questions that may expand the understanding of leadership vulnerability. I explored whether ministry leaders perceive a connection between a leader's willingness or reticence to practice vulnerability and their susceptibility to leadership failure. Brunning (2018) emphasized that understanding the role of vulnerability in leadership continues to emerge but successful leaders often share vulnerabilities. It was unclear, however, whether there is a perceived role for vulnerability between leaders and followers

that may help alleviate leadership struggles and failures. Elkington (2013) examined the connection between ministry failure rates and adversity and suggested that there should be more investigation concerning how ministers confide in others. There may be a prevailing perception of the role of vulnerability for leaders that are involved in Christian ministry. Mathew (2018) noted that John 13 displays Jesus practicing vulnerability as an example to His disciples, resulting in the question of whether the example of an exhibited vulnerability that Jesus demonstrated in John 13 informs and persuades Christian ministry leaders today, or whether Christian ministry leaders perceives the expression of vulnerability as a weakness.

The purpose of this study was to examine the practice of vulnerability by Christian ministry leaders to determine any supposed associations between ministry success and failure with a leader's willingness to practice vulnerability. In addition to the exploration of the perceived role of vulnerability, I investigated the vulnerability example of Jesus in John 13 and compares His example with common Christian ministry practices. I considered Christian ministry leadership and vulnerability from a wide, general problem to a more specific focus that is appropriate for a qualitative study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Patton, 2002).

The study consisted of the following aspects. It included an exploration to determine whether there is a perceived connection between Christian ministry leadership failure and a leader's willingness or a lack of willingness to express vulnerability. I investigated the ways in which Christian ministry leaders practice or avoid vulnerability with followers. I considered the perceived impact on the greater organization when Christian ministry leaders are willing to risk sharing vulnerabilities. This study contained an examination of the expression of leadership vulnerability in Scripture through a socio-rhetorical exegetical analysis of John 13 and the story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet using methods described by Henson et al. (2020) and Robbins (1996a). The research also included a phenomenological study of Christian ministry leaders and their perceptions concerning leadership vulnerability in the context of questions derived from the analysis of John 13.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to identify themes recorded in John chapter 13 and compare them with the lived experiences of contemporary Christian ministry leaders regarding the role of vulnerability in their leadership. In qualitative research, questions are open-ended and point to one specific item (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) and serve as the guiding influence for exploration (Patton, 2002). The research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: In what ways did Jesus demonstrate vulnerability with His disciples in John Chapter 13?

RQ2: How do Christian ministry leaders in the United States perceive vulnerability?

RQ3: In what ways, if any, do Christian ministry leaders practice vulnerability?

RQ4: What are the perceived effects of vulnerability, or the lack thereof, on Christian ministry leaders?

RQ5: How do the experiences of Christian ministry leaders compare with the biblical principles demonstrated in John Chapter 13?

Significance of the Research

In this study, I explored the espoused values of Scripture compared to the lived experience of Christian ministry leaders and extends the literature on vulnerability and qualitative study of Christian ministry leaders. The study of Scripture is of the utmost importance for guiding Christian leadership practices (Ajayi, 2018). The current examination of Christian ministry leaders included a socio-rhetorical analysis of Scripture with an emphasis on Jesus' actions that demonstrated and encouraged people to willingly practice vulnerability with each other. This study also included interviews with Christian ministry leaders to determine their perceptions concerning the value of expressed vulnerability within their ministries.

The findings of this research provide several potential benefits. I investigated the role of vulnerability that was exhibited in the account of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples in John 13. Van der Watt (2017) explained that the

Johannine foot-washing story includes an example of intense love that warrants more attention from the Christian community. The examination of this pericope helps to illuminate the role of vulnerability according to Scripture and the actions of Jesus in the upper room more specifically. Second, I explored the relationship between a Christian ministry leader's willingness to practice vulnerability and the factors (such as burnout and negative public opinion) that may contribute to ministry failure or success. Understanding practices such as shared vulnerability may help alleviate or even stop the burnout process (Chandler, 2010; Doolittle, 2010).

Additionally, the findings of this study may help to reveal some perceived tendencies or trends that may be present in Christian ministry leadership vulnerability practices. A phenomenological study of lived experience may help to better understand the dynamics of how people act toward each other and the impact of each party in the relationship (Hlava & Elfers, 2014). The interview portion of this study provided more information about how Christian ministry leaders practice or fail to practice vulnerability with others. The qualitative investigation also helped to provide a better understanding of how the interviewed leaders perceive the value of vulnerability in their Christian ministry context. Finally, I explored the relationship between Christian ministry leaders' perceptions of vulnerability and the vulnerable actions exemplified by Jesus in John 13.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study was to exegete the example of shared vulnerability by Jesus in John 13 through socio-rhetorical analysis, as well as compare this biblical example with the perceived value of vulnerability according to Christian ministry leaders. This exploration considered the role of vulnerability in leadership generally and in Christian ministry leadership specifically. I explored leaders' willingness to share vulnerabilities and the perceived effects of vulnerability on the leader, their relationships, and the organization that they lead. I also examined perceived failures in Christian ministry leadership and the possible connections to a leader's willingness to share vulnerabilities.

In this study, examined works that considered vulnerability as it relates to organizational leadership. Leadership theories have been shifting away from the perception that strong leaders must have dominating personalities toward an understanding that great leadership includes open disclosures in the communication process (Jemsek, 2008). One of the most important results of vulnerability for leadership is the establishment of trust because leadership is strengthened when it is relational, and the understanding of quality leadership begins with an examination of this human interaction (Brown, 2018). Leaders that are willing to practice disclosure with followers create reciprocity and establish solid lines of communication that improve the overall perception of their ability to lead (Ito & Bligh, 2016). Leaders' relationships with their followers can be improved through the sharing of personal stories and vulnerable interactions (Brown, 2018).

Vulnerable conversations strengthen both the one sharing the information and the person or persons that receive the information (Brown, 2015). Individuals that are willing to risk private information will disarm the tension of the unknown, will establish trust with those with whom they are open, and will create relationships that endure more difficult circumstances (Brown, 2010). Vulnerability has been described as relational transparency and is an important aspect in the study of authentic leader relationships (Gardner et al., 2005). The acknowledgment of personal pain and the sharing of the experience with another person has proven to be an effective method for individuals to process the shame that can otherwise compound emotional wounds, and this type of vulnerability can help repair or strengthen relationships (Brown, 2007).

On an organizational level, leadership development is aided when conversations between leaders and followers are more open, and vulnerability has proven to be an effective facet for organizational training purposes (Wulffers, 2017). The open sharing of personal stories with people across an organization has been shown to create a better environment for trusting relationships among all peers within the group especially when navigating difficult situations that affect the entire institution (Bunker, 1997). Vulnerability between leaders and followers affects the entire organizational culture, and there is a greater benefit for not only those that are

willing to share with each other, but for the comradery that permeates the culture of the institution (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003).

In this study, I considered the growing trend of perceived failure in North American ministers. Pastors are leaving churches at a higher rate, divorcing more often, discouraged in their roles, working excessive hours, and report that ministry has harmed their families (Briggs, 2014). Hoge and Wenger (2005) discovered that the trust between people, pastors, and churches has steadily decreased since the 1960s. Bunker (1997) determined that leaders who practiced shared vulnerabilities were less likely to lose trust and more likely to recover trust after difficult circumstances. Doolittle (2010) identified that clergy who shared their stories with both mentors and mentees were more likely to cope with the strains of ministry that lead to burnout and ministry failure. Christian ministers sometimes avoid being vulnerable because society perceives it as shameful (Vliet & Jessica, 2008). Kim (2017) concluded that Jesus emulated vulnerability and that Christian ministers who have the courage to be vulnerable are Christlike, and their actions will strengthen relationships and encourage both the minister and those they lead.

Methodology

The methodology for this research was executed in a two-phase approach combining a socio-rhetorical exegetical analysis of Scripture and a phenomenological investigation utilizing interviews of Christian ministry leaders. The results of these examinations enhance the understanding of the biblical example of vulnerability demonstrated by Jesus in John 13 and the perceived role of vulnerability in leadership according to the interviewed Christian ministry leaders.

Exegetical Analysis Phase

This study was based on the biased understanding that the Bible is the Word of God and that the words written by human authors are inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the true author of the Bible, and the ones that penned the pages are divinely inspired, and the written words hold the authority of God as a message from God in heaven (Murphy, 1885). Peterson (2006) noted that readers do not merely read the words, but are transformed by the message that comes from God's

Spirit. The Scripture examined in this analysis is from the *English Standard Version* (*ESV*). The ESV was translated to capture both the originally intended wording as well as the personal style of the individual authors as an essentially literal work (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This study utilized the ESV to examine the pericope with the intent to capture elements that are true to the original words as well as the intended meaning.

I conducted socio-rhetorical analysis (SRA) as described by Robbins (1996a) and further developed by Henson et al. (2020). The socio-rhetorical analysis provides insight for understanding a biblical perspective of the practice of vulnerability and specifically the actions and encouragement of Jesus that support the expression of vulnerability in John 13. Socio-rhetorical literary criticism focuses on the beliefs, values, and presumptions that are present in the communication from the text to the reader (Robbins, 1996a). This type of analysis compares the ways that people live with the way they express life through language by considering both language and social sciences, including sociology, anthropology, language, rhetoric, discourse, and interpretation (Robbins, 1996a).

SRA is a scientific approach to understanding Scripture meaning and takes other exegetical approaches into consideration (Henson et al., 2020). Grammatical-historical interpretation considers words, sentences, paragraphs, and the context of entire books to ascertain meaning. By utilizing original languages to gain an understanding of the subtleties of word meanings and semantics, a grammatical analysis provides a roadmap of the textual meaning (Osborne, 2010). Grammatical-historical analysis has been the primary acceptable scientific interpretation method since the mid-1800s (Mickelsen, 1987). A study of the oldest text in the original language is ideal for this type of examination, and this study made some references to original languages, but SRA does not require examination in original languages. SRA recognizes that modern translations such as the ESV have been heavily scrutinized for the original meaning and provide an ample text from which further scientific examination can be done (Henson et al., 2020). In this study, I considered some original language to add to the SRA interpretation.

Within a socio-rhetorical analysis, there are several approaches to ascertaining the meaning of the text, including the analysis of social and cultural texture. The analysis of social and cultural texture considers the context of the text in relationship to the culture and world that is presented by the text (Robbins, 1996a). Examination of the social and cultural texture of a text includes specific social topics, common and social topics, and final categories. Exploration of these topics and categories may yield a better understanding of the world, social group interactions, and assumptions that the people in the textual world hold (Robbins, 1996a). The analysis of social and cultural texture provides understanding for researchers to help clarify the social group of a person, the cultural group to which they belong, and the ways in which a person interacts with people outside of the group (Henson et al., 2020).

Phenomenological Analysis Phase

The second phase of this study utilized qualitative research incorporating interviews followed by in-depth coding and content analysis to provide a better understanding of Christian ministry leaders' perspectives on the role of vulnerability in leadership. The nature of qualitative research emerges throughout the process, and although the research plan is directed and specified, some phases were adjusted as I compiled the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Inductive and deductive analysis are both necessary for qualitative studies beginning with the inductive process to observe and collect the necessary data (Padgett, 2016). Socio-rhetorical analysis of the text in John 13 yielded inductive themes from which I crafted the interview questions, and the interview portion of this study incorporated a deductive process. I compiled new data that the interview process supplied and applied an inductive process to identify common themes between the biblical pericope and the perceptions of the Christian ministry leaders.

For the methodology of the interview portion of this research, I applied a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology seeks the essence, meaning, and structure of the lived experience of a phenomenon that is common to a person or group of people (Patton, 2002). The nature of the interviews was semistructured with an interview protocol that included open-ended questions followed by

additional probing to gain in-depth responses (Padgett, 2016). Interviews such as these are often deep and even emotional for the interviewee and often prove challenging for the interviewer to gather statements that are true, complete, and clear (Padgett, 2016). The participants in this study were Christian ministry leaders from different geographical locations and included senior pastors, staff pastors, and parachurch leaders. The inclusion of different locations and leadership positions helped to improve the likelihood that the findings involved varied perspectives within the small sample size, as Creswell (2013) suggested. The sample represented three subsets of Christian ministry leaders, including four senior pastors, four staff pastors, and four Christian parachurch leaders, for a total of 12 varied perspectives. Creswell and Creswell (2017) recommended a sample size of three to 10 individuals to accomplish phenomenological research, and this study incorporated three different Christian ministry leadership roles. Interviewing four leaders from each of the three categories allowed the study to meet the suggested total number and maintained a balance between the three different categories interviewed. Although the total number exceeded ten, I felt it best to have at least four representatives from each category to give each category ample representation.

The interviews were conducted both in person and via online video utilizing Zoom online software. The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, with some follow-up communication to clarify the recorded audio as needed. I incorporated Otter online software to transcribe all of the interviews, and I conducted independent reviews of each audio file to ensure that the transcriptions matched the original conversations. By scrubbing the data for errors and omissions, I provided a clear transcript that I then examined for common themes using coding as described by Saldaña and Omasta (2018). I used multiple coding passes, including *in vivo*, process coding, and values coding, to capture both the most repeated themes and the values, attitudes, and beliefs that may be common in the interviewees' lived experiences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

Although interviews are conducted primarily for data collection, the process does not require the researcher to avoid emotional conversation and empathy if necessary (Patton, 2002). Understanding the phenomenon may require the

interviewer to ask questions that get below the surface of an individual's identity concepts and probe for underlying issues that address deeper root causes (Padgett, 2016). Researchers may conduct qualitative in-depth interviews to yield salient and informative results (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Creswell and Creswell (2017) determined that there are eight characteristics to help conduct a qualitative interview: natural settings, the researcher as the key instrument, multiple data sources, data analysis that is both inductive and deductive, participant's meaning, emergent design, and holistic account. Chapter Three provides additional information about this interview process and the overall methodology.

Scope and Limitations

In this study, I explored the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the value of vulnerability. The qualitative investigation incorporated interviews with Christian ministry leaders from both parachurch and church settings. This study included the opinions of leaders from various backgrounds and denominations and focuses on differences of opinion that may be derived from theological distinctions. This study was limited by the number of Christian ministry leaders that can be practically included. While I sought to recruit a sample that would be representative of various backgrounds and roles, I did not focus on specific roles such as senior pastors, student pastors, parachurch leaders, etc. Additionally, this study included churches and ministries of various sizes but may not have included enough variation to determine whether there are distinctions in perceptions based on ministry size.

The exegetical analysis of John 13 provides biblical context for vulnerability, but there are many other passages of Scripture that may inform the biblical understanding of vulnerability. This study was limited to the Johannine account and the actions of Jesus in John 13. Other accounts of the actions of Jesus or various Scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments may have provided further insight concerning the biblical practice of vulnerability. The exegetical analysis in this research was focused on socio-rhetorical methodology, but I did not focus heavily on original languages in the exegetical portion. While I did consider

the practice of foot-washing during the time of the Johannine writing, I did not consider the implications for the practice of foot-washing for modern churches and ministries.

Definition of Terms

There are two key subjects in this study that may be defined in various ways by researchers and may hold alternate meanings in different contexts. Vulnerability and Christian ministry leaders are both terms in this research that require definition. Brown (2015) offered that vulnerability includes uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure and emphasized that vulnerability is not weakness. Ito and Bligh (2016) also noted that vulnerability is not weakness and defined vulnerability as a "subjective perception of uncertainty, risk, and insecurity" (p. 67). In this study, I incorporated a view of vulnerability that is a combination of these two observations and defined vulnerability as a subjective perception of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. Christian ministry leaders in this study include leaders that are both protestant Christian church employees and protestant Christian para-church employees. The professional protestant Christian ministers in this study also have a responsibility to lead others in their organizations, which may include additional professionals or ministry volunteers.

Summary

I conducted this study with a two-phase approach, beginning with an exegetical analysis of John 13 and the vulnerable actions of Jesus in the upper room, and then qualitative interviews with Christian ministry leaders in the second phase. I performed socio-rhetorical analysis as described by Robbins (1996a) and Henson et al. (2020) to exegete John 13 and the Johannine account of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. The demonstration of foot-washing by Jesus exemplifies the willing vulnerability of a leader expressed toward those that follow (Mathew, 2018). The findings of the exegetical analysis, along with the review of literature on leadership vulnerability, provided the basis for interview questions posed to the Christian ministry leaders. In the interview phase of this study, I utilized a phenomenological exploration as outlined by Creswell (2013) to determine the

lived experiences of Christian ministry leaders. The interviewees' responses to the questions yielded common themes among the leaders concerning their perceived understanding of the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry. I used the results of the interviews and compared them to the lesson from Jesus in the Johannine writing to determine similarities and differences between the lessons of the pericope and the perceived role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership.

Leadership failure may produce dire consequences—not only for the leader, but for the coworkers and the organization that the leader represents (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). Christian ministry leaders are not immune to failure, and the consequences of ministers that fall are not only detrimental to the leader and the organization but can be damaging to the greater community of Christian followers (Kim, 2017). Christian ministry leaders that are willing to express their vulnerabilities may be better equipped to alleviate or contend with the difficulties that lead to personal failures (Doolittle, 2007). In this study, I explored the perceived role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leaders compared to the role of vulnerability exemplified by Jesus in John 13.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The goal of this study was to determine the perceived value of vulnerability according to Christian ministry leaders, including their views concerning vulnerability exemplified by Jesus in the Bible and their willingness to practice vulnerability as leaders. The review of literature covers the concept of vulnerability first, then considers works that cover Christian ministry leadership, and concludes with leadership studies that utilized the Gospel of John. The review of the literature concerning vulnerability for this study includes works that considered the practice of vulnerability in relationships, vulnerability in organizations, and vulnerability of leaders. There are studies in this review of literature that cover more than one of these aspects and overlap, but this literature review separates the works into the area that best fits their primary thesis.

Vulnerability

The concept of vulnerability has been examined by various researchers and authors in many fields of study, but it has gained attention more recently as a primary point of focus in works of psychology such as Brunning's (2018) study and the compiled observations from Cooreman-Guittin and Maican (2021). The most notable studies of vulnerability that have been both peer-reviewed and repackaged for popular consumption are the works of Brown (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2015, 2018). While an agreed definition has not been solidified, there have been some common observations that have shaped the majority of studies. The concept of vulnerability is a key component of this study and literature from previous studies covered vulnerability in general.

Brunning (2018) noted that the word vulnerability was derived from the Latin root word *vulnus*, which is most often translated as "a wound." The concept of vulnerability includes the possibility of harm, and a person willing to be vulnerable is willing to risk some level of perceived personal negative outcomes. Brunning determined that vulnerability is based on a person's willingness to trust something of value to another person. The research by Brunning was compiled from 10 countries over 10 months and included findings from four workshops directed at

understanding the relationship between power and vulnerability. In this work, Brunning recalled the cautionary tale of Achilles in Greek mythology as a metaphor for vulnerability even in those that are seemingly invulnerable. Brunning found that there is a paradox between power and vulnerability, and the interplay between the two makes them inseparable when dealing with human relationships. All people have vulnerabilities, and the willingness of a leader to risk their own vulnerabilities can provide an influential example and thus increase trust and ultimately establish greater power (Brunning, 2018). In this study, I explored the idea of vulnerability as both risk and power according to the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders.

Cooreman-Guittin and Maican (2021) expounded on the relationship between power and vulnerability as keynote speakers at a conference in Bologna, Italy, that focused on power and religion. Cooreman-Guittin and Maican compiled observations of religion and power by other researchers and determined that vulnerability is one of the most important elements that connects power and religion. Both researchers previously explored vulnerability in the disabled community but concluded that being vulnerable is a function that is common to all of humanity (Cooreman-Guittin & Maican, 2021). In one of the first works that explored how Christian churches cope with the vulnerability of disabled people, Reynolds (2008) recognized that the Christian story is about brokenness for all individuals, and vulnerability helps lead people back to wholeness. Maican (2021) offered an alternate view that vulnerability can be essential in disability theology, but being vulnerable can lead to selfish behavior depending on a person's interpretation of vulnerability. Cooreman-Guittin (2021) expanded the study of vulnerability in disabled people to recognize that all of humanity and not just disabled people are simultaneously created in the image of God and yet flawed and dependent on one another. Cooreman-Guittin noted that Jesus demonstrated vulnerability for all people many times, and his washing of the disciples' feet in John 13 exemplified vulnerability. These previous studies considered Christianity and vulnerability but did not focus on Christian ministry leaders. This study examined both the positive and negative views of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of vulnerability.

Vulnerability in Relationships

To gain a better understanding of the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership, this review of literature includes works that examined the role of vulnerability in the broader sense of relationships. An exploration of the dynamics of vulnerability in individual human connections helps to provide a basis for understanding vulnerability in leaders, organizations, and Christian ministry.

Brown (2015) identified that vulnerability occurs in relationships between people that are willing to risk emotional exposure, face insecurities, and engage in a conversation that may feel like victory or defeat, but in reality, vulnerability has traits of both victory and defeat. In a study of teachers and students, Glanz (2002) agreed with observations from (J. Henry, 1973) that a sense of vulnerability can cause individuals to shut down. Glanz (2002) suggested that although vulnerability may create a fear of exposure, proper vulnerability without shame can be transformative and build trust between parties. The findings of Brown's (2006) previous studies helped demonstrate that vulnerability is often perceived to be related to shame, yet Brown (2015) recognized that it is erroneous to categorize vulnerability with weakness and thus avoid it. Utilizing hundreds of interviews with women, Brown (2007) selected a grounded theory approach to develop Shame Resilience Theory (SRT) to better understand the nature of shame in women. From the work on SRT and subsequent study of what it takes to live wholeheartedly, Brown (2010) recognized that vulnerability is an important aspect of all relationships. “Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experiences” (Brown, 2015, p. 19). This study explored Christian ministry leaders’ understanding of the role of vulnerability, including the perception of vulnerability as weakness.

Nienaber et al. (2015) recognized that vulnerability had been studied under the larger concept of trust, but there was a lack of study on the role that vulnerability plays in relationships, specifically as it pertains to relationships between leaders and followers. The methodology for the study utilized a systematic literature search and coding of 49 previous studies concerning relationship trust that included the concept of vulnerability. Nienaber et al. found that individuals may

express ostensibly a willingness to be vulnerable at different levels than they actually practice vulnerability. France (2019) observed a phenomenon in educators that there is simultaneously a growing acknowledgment that vulnerability is an effective aid for teachers, yet there is a standard practice of invulnerability as a tool to maintain control and consistency in the classroom. Noam and Fischer (2013) also investigated the role of vulnerability in the development of close relationships and noted that relationships grow closer when individuals risk vulnerability even after previous negative experiences. Negative experiences tend to close relationships between people, lower trust, and subdue vulnerability, yet individuals who practice vulnerability can restore relationships (Noam & Fischer, 2013). In this study, I explored whether Christian ministry leaders indicate that they embrace the concept of being vulnerable and whether they perceive differences between their conception of vulnerability versus their practice of vulnerability in their own leadership.

Vulnerability and Leaders

Brown (2018) developed a work on leadership drawing from several previous studies, including a grounded theory that yielded the shame resilience theory (SRT). The study combined data from Brown's (2007) grounded theory research with observations from interviews with organizational leaders. Brown (2018) described leaders as those that seek potential in both processes and people and have the courage to cultivate that potential. The biggest factor for the courage to lead well is the willingness of a leader to wrestle with their own vulnerability (Brown, 2018). This does not mean that leaders must divulge deep secrets and emotional issues to their followers, but it does mean that they must have the courage to deal with problems when they surface and then exhibit enough bravery to admit their own failures (Brown, 2018). Being vulnerable means that leaders are willing to discuss their mistakes and are willing to investigate various ways to rectify problems with followers when necessary (Brown, 2018). Vulnerability involves not only bravery to disclose personal flaws to others, but a willingness to grapple with one's mistakes and then find the courage to practice self-compassion also (Brown, 2018). This study explored Christian ministry leaders' perceptions of vulnerability, including the role that vulnerability might play in self-care.

Ito and Bligh (2016) investigated relationships with charismatic leadership and considered vulnerability that exposed leaders to the possibility of hurt in the areas they categorized as physical, emotional, and spiritual. They determined that leaders who are willing to risk hurt and practice vulnerability in relationships create psychological safety that leads to emotional security for their followers (Ito & Bligh, 2016). These authors considered several previous works on charismatic leadership and various studies that investigated the nature of vulnerability. Bligh and Ito (2015) recognized that vulnerability is sometimes identified with weak leadership, but leaders who admitted their failures invited an atmosphere of trust and enhanced communication. A study by Fletcher (1994) considered the role of feminine psychology in leadership and determined that vulnerability may help to enhance resilience and can be viewed as a strength rather than a weakness not only for women or minorities but for all people. The study by Fletcher (1994) noted that women were more likely to risk vulnerability in their communication, but vulnerability from leaders to followers proved to enhance trust levels. Bligh and Riggio (2012) also concurred that it is the sharing of information and the willing risk of vulnerable interactions that helps even the strongest leaders to establish trust with those whom they lead. The findings of each of these studies revealed that vulnerability in leaders can be perceived as a negative, but their investigations indicated that vulnerability is more likely to improve communication and trust. This study examines if Christian ministry leaders perceive vulnerability as a tool to improve communication.

Fries-Britt and Kelly (2005) utilized a scholarly personal narrative combined with a case study of two African American professors in a setting that was a predominately White institution to explore the dynamics of their relationship development. They determined in this study that sharing vulnerable moments was vital in relationships between leaders and followers and is especially helpful in relationships between people from different classes, cultures, or races (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005). In a later study, Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) expanded an examination of literature and utilized observations from their own professional practices to consider the role of authenticity, transparency, and vulnerability in

mentoring relationships. Natural barriers of power exist between leaders and followers and can be compounded by cultural differences, but observations from Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) demonstrated that vulnerable mentors humanized their leadership experiences and resulted in a positive influence on their mentees. This study considered the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning cultural differences such as gender and race and the possible effect on vulnerability.

Bunker (1997) explored the power of vulnerability in leadership by combining observations from a case study with four years of phenomenological observations gleaned from interviews with organizational leaders. This study expanded on the conclusions from a previous case study by Bunker (1994) that included 9 years of research concerning how leaders coped with managerial stress at AT&T. Bunker (1997) suggested that most leaders are willing to admit that vulnerability is a helpful tool, yet they are not as prone to let down their guard and comfortably engage in vulnerability with others. The study from Bunker also expounded on the observations from Posner and Kouzes (1993), who noted credibility comes through relationships, and leaders build trust through vulnerable actions within these relationships. Although the work from Posner and Kouzes concerned leader credibility, they determined that relationship building is essential and vulnerability is a contributing factor. The conclusion of Bunker's (1997) study is that "vulnerability emerges as the core competency that lies at the heart of helping leaders understand and respond to the needs of others" (p. 134). This study examined whether Christian ministry leaders perceive that leaders should build relationships with followers through vulnerability.

Byrd and Thornton (2019) explored the relationship between vulnerability, humility, and authentic leadership. The study was based on compiled observations from several decades of collaboration with business leaders and a review of data from previous studies by Luthy and Byrd (2014) and Byrd et al. (2015). The study also utilized a life-stories approach to exploring the writings of Thomas Merton. Byrd and Thornton (2019) determined that vulnerability is the most important foundational component of humility because it operates in relationships as a linkage between them. This observation is consistent with a study of trust formation in

military leadership by Fletcher and Kaufer (2003), who identified vulnerability as a part of the human condition that promotes mutual dependency allowing both parties an opportunity to simultaneously contribute and grow. This study explored the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of vulnerability in trust and mutual dependency.

Gardner et al. (2005) compiled multiple studies in an examination of Authentic leadership and noted that vulnerability is a trait that is associated with authentic leadership. Part five of the work edited by Gardner et al. (2005) considered how organizations develop resiliency in the face of adverse changes, and a study by Youssef and Luthans (2005) determined that vulnerability is a vital part of organizational development that also helps to affect organizational culture. Resiliency is the bounce-back that happens in an organization after a perceived failure in leadership, often due to a breakdown in personal risk factors (Fraser et al., 2004; Youssef & Luthans, 2005). These individual-level risk factors are the places that individuals are vulnerable and include items such as stress (C. Smith & Carlson, 1997), drug and alcohol use (Sandau-Beckler et al., 2002), unemployment, low education, health risks (Collins, 2001), burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), and traumatic events (Qouta et al., 2001). Following an incident of perceived failure in these risk-factor areas, Richardson (2002) as well as Ryff and Singer (2003) concluded that resilient people gained a heightened awareness of their faults and an increased willingness to be vulnerable to others. This study investigated whether Christian ministry leaders perceive a connection between vulnerability and resiliency following an apparent failure.

Jemsek (2008) interviewed over 85 people with disabilities that participated in or graduated from a leadership program in Victoria, New South Wales. The goal of the study was to determine the perspective of people with disabilities concerning leadership and what we can learn from those that are in physically vulnerable conditions and their perspectives on how to embrace vulnerability. Jemsek (2008) noted that there is a shifting understanding of leadership away from heroic individuals with charismatic and sometimes dominating personalities toward leaders with more collaborative and acclimating skills. Heifetz (1998) suggested

that a new shift in leadership is toward adaptive leaders that can determine the essential values that affect multiple stakeholders within an organization and can then apply these values in a way that benefits the institution. This growing idea of mutuality does not negate the role of the leader, but rather changes the focus to include more input from followers (Burns, 1978). Jemsek (2008) noted that heroic models are not broad enough to address recent problems such as climate change, racial unrest, and terrorism that are now affecting organizations on a larger scale. The significance of a shift in leadership is that collaboration increases interdependence and thus opens leaders and followers to mutual vulnerability (Jemsek, 2008). Jemsek further asserted that although vulnerability is seen as a weakness by some, there is a growing understanding that leaders who practice vulnerability are willing to face negative stigmas and create a new story that transcends perceived limitations and invites self-transformation. Vulnerability is a willingness to risk perceived weakness with the goal of achieving both self-transformation and interdependence through collaboration (Jemsek, 2008). This study included an examination of whether Christian ministry leaders perceive a relationship between vulnerability, interdependence, and self-transformation.

Bell (2005) observed that CEOs that are willing to risk vulnerability are perceived by others as courageous, authentic, relational, and trustworthy. Bell examined the motivational speech of a CEO that practiced vulnerable communication and then considered several opinions from other leaders concerning how vulnerability affected leadership: “Leader vulnerability starts with the confidence to deliver hard honesty – especially assertive acknowledgment when one has fallen short of what was expected” (Bell, 2005, p. 20). Observations of vulnerable leaders included that they own their mistakes, they thrive on truth, they do not focus on rank, they value emotion, and they are involved. Bell concluded that the greatest asset that vulnerable leaders possess is the ability to express passion: “As leaders publicly connect with their true selves, they issue an implied invitation for followers to do likewise” (Bell, 2005, p. 23). This study investigated whether Christian ministry leaders perceive vulnerability as a way to inspire passion.

Lopez (2018) conducted a study to examine the relationship between courage, vulnerability, other-centered calling, and leadership differentiation. The scope of this study covered 296 leaders that self-identified that they were responsible for overseeing both the development and work of others. Using an online development tool as a measure, data were collected over a year and included a mix that was slightly more male, mostly Caucasian, and 41% from a church setting. The primary findings demonstrated that vulnerability and courage were positively related, but the rate of a positive relationship between vulnerability and courage was significantly affected by an other-centered calling (Lopez, 2018). The leaders in the study that reported to be other-centered were more likely to be vulnerable than those that did not, and leaders that identified themselves as courageous also had a higher rate of vulnerability. Although both courage and calling made a difference in vulnerability, it was the combination that was most notable. Lopez concluded that the most significant finding in this study indicated that an other-centered call, when joined with courage, was the primary factor for leaders that demonstrated vulnerability with their followers. This study examined whether Christian ministry leaders perceive a relationship between courage, call, and vulnerability.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) conducted a study of how leaders communicate their vulnerabilities and the resulting implications on trust levels with their followers. Their study included 41 leaders that consented to record their conversations with their followers and then agreed to allow the researchers to transcribe and code the transcripts for data. Some of the leaders in the study left the study early or did not finish the assignment, but 27 leaders, including nine males and 18 females, did complete the project and provide the necessary information. Additionally, each leader in the study was asked to complete a questionnaire that identified their present work concerns. Leaders in the study were asked to address the concerns that they identified in the questionnaire by identifying the people that should be addressed, scheduling a meeting, and then recording the meeting. The data that were later examined included both the conversation that the leaders scheduled and a follow-up conversation between the leaders and the researchers

concerning any revelations that the leader gained in the process. Meyer and Rowan concluded that leaders build trust in their followers when they risk vulnerability, but leaders that do not already practice vulnerability with their followers do not easily begin sharing even if they acknowledge that vulnerability is effective. Vulnerability in leadership relationships was widely accepted as a concept that the leaders were verbally agreeable to recognize, but the practice of being vulnerable was affected by the level of relationship that the leader had already established. Meyer and Rowan suggested that leaders and policymakers that want to create trusting atmospheres need to foster conditions that encourage vulnerability between coworkers by focusing on collaborative efforts and decreasing punitive responses. In this study, I examined whether Christian ministry leaders perceive a connection between vulnerability, collaboration, and trust.

Seijts and MacMillan (2018) observed the role of vulnerability in leadership by reviewing literature and compiling information from their personal experiences. The study noted that the demands of academic prowess and resumes filled with personal accolades are increasingly necessary for individuals to qualify for prestigious university admittance and, subsequently, the workforce. The highest-level leaders may be able to attain preferred positions without having faced academic or vocational failures, but this may actually serve as a detriment. Facing adversity and understanding one's limitations can prove to be very helpful for leaders, and leaders that do not have or acknowledge weaknesses may be ill-prepared when unanticipated problems arise. Seijts and MacMillan suggested that leadership training should encourage students to discover and acknowledge their weaknesses and practice vulnerability regularly. The findings of their study also revealed that leaders that cannot articulate moments of failure and the lessons that they learned in those moments may not have a healthy understanding of themselves. These authors concluded that "success often raises expectations for more success. And when this happens, dread of failure increases with the stakes of the game, making it harder for people to show vulnerability" (Seijts & MacMillan, 2018, p. 67). Acknowledging vulnerabilities such as personal failures and weaknesses is often avoided on job resumes and academic applications, and this practice has

trained individuals to avoid vulnerability. This study explored the opinions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of vulnerability in leadership development.

Ibarra (2017) conducted a case study of a CEO in South India and compared observations with a review of literature on authentic leadership. Ibarra noted that vulnerability is one of the most important factors for leadership development and trust-building. Ibarra suggested that the lack of vulnerable exchanges between leaders and employees creates an atmosphere of distrust and subconscious aversion to clear lines of communication. While many leaders desire to project an image of success, a constant state of projecting success leaves little room for followers to relate themselves to the leader and thus decays trust levels over time. Ibarra noted that leaders that are willing to share their pain with others are able to tap into empathy and sympathy that can improve relationship connections. Ibarra concluded that bosses who risk vulnerability with their staff create a closeness by creating a familiarity with a shared human condition, and the benefits outweigh the risks of avoiding vulnerable exchanges. In this study, I investigated the opinions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the balance of risk and benefits that vulnerability may create.

Hodgson (2022) examined the perception of vulnerability by leaders in outdoor education by conducting interviews with leaders from four different organizations. The interview subjects ranged in experience from 2 years to over 10 years as outdoor educators in settings that included at-risk youth, school groups, and corporate programs. The study included various questions leading each subject to describe their view of the role of vulnerability in their education process. Each of the subjects considered that vulnerability can be both a weakness and a strength depending on the context or setting. Hodgson concluded that vulnerability for leaders in outdoor education is uncomfortable for both the leader and the followers when it occurs involuntarily, but voluntary vulnerability and conscious disclosure requires careful assessment of the situation as well as courage from the leader. When utilized correctly, a leader's vulnerability with a group may be a valuable resource to both the leader and the group (Hodgson, 2022). This study examined

whether Christian ministry leaders perceive context as a factor in vulnerability between leaders and their followers.

Vulnerability and Organizations

Mayer and Gavin (2005) investigated organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) based on trust levels between employees and managers. These scholars conducted a qualitative analysis utilizing a survey of 333 employees in a Midwestern U.S. manufacturing plant. Employees responded to surveys that measured their trust levels first concerning plant managers and then senior management teams. In addition, the employee's supervisors were also asked to complete a survey rating the employees. Mayer and Gavin determined that trust levels in an organization are directly related to the willingness of individuals to be vulnerable to another person. The study from Mayer and Gavin included observations from a previous study by Mayer et al. (1995) that determined vulnerability to another party includes an understanding that the other party cannot be controlled or even monitored by the one practicing vulnerability. Mayer et al. noted that trust levels fluctuated in the organization based on the subsequent actions following vulnerable encounters between employees and managers, and trust was gained or lost depending on these subsequent actions. Rousseau et al. (1998) investigated trust across various disciplines including sociology, economics, and psychology, and agreed with Mayer and Gavin's (2005) observations that vulnerability is the key element to trust in organizational relationships. Mayer and Gavin identified that there are both active and passive reactions that may destroy trust following vulnerable encounters, including divulging information and shunning, and these types of actions can create negative ramifications across the organization. Mayer and Gavin concluded that employees that perceive vulnerability in their organization as a safe practice are more likely to have higher trust levels and focus their attention on the work that needs to be done. These findings that connected higher organizational trust to higher organizational performance were consistent with conclusions from Davis et al. (2000) and Schoorman et al. (2016). In this study, I explored the perceptions of Christian

ministry leaders concerning the possible connection of vulnerability, trust, and organizational performance.

Jemsek (2008) interviewed over 85 people with disabilities that participated in or graduated from a leadership program in Victoria, New South Wales. The goal of the study was to determine the perspective of people with disabilities concerning vulnerability in leadership. Jemsek noted that there is a shifting understanding of leadership away from heroic individuals with charismatic and sometimes dominating personalities toward leaders with more collaborative and acclimating skills. Heifetz (1998) suggested that a new shift in leadership is toward adaptive leaders that can determine the essential values that affect multiple stakeholders within an organization and can then apply these values in a way that benefits the institution. This growing idea of mutuality does not negate the role of the leader but rather changes the focus to include more input from followers (Burns, 1978). Jemsek (2008) noted that heroic models are not broad enough to address recent problems such as climate change, racial unrest, and terrorism that are now affecting organizations on a larger scale. The significance of a shift in leadership is that collaboration increases interdependence, and thus opens leaders and followers to mutual vulnerability (Jemsek, 2008). Jemsek further asserted that although vulnerability is seen as a weakness by some, there is a growing understanding that leaders who practice vulnerability are willing to face negative stigmas and create a new story that transcends perceived limitations and invites cooperation across the organization. Vulnerability is a willingness to risk perceived weakness with the goal of achieving interdependence through collaboration (Jemsek, 2008). In the current study, I examined whether Christian ministry leaders perceive a relationship between vulnerability and interdependence in an organization.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) investigated a life-stories approach as a means of developing trust between authentic leaders and their followers, and they observed that leaders that share personal stories develop authenticity and increase trust levels. The study built on findings of an earlier study from Shamir and Lapidot-Raz (2003). Shamir and Lapidot-Raz conducted a mixed-methods study of organizational trust between leaders and their collective teams. This study included

two parts. In the first part, the authors used a quantitative sampling of data from the initial formation of the group and compared it with a second sampling after several months of team interaction and ample exposure to the group leader. The comparative analysis of the data sets examined cadets' first impressions of their leader with their perceptions after the group had time to form. The second part of the study involved interviews to compile qualitative data that reflected any changes in cadet perceptions after team formation and the subsequent dismissal of several fellow cadets from the program. Shamir and Lapidot-Raz concluded that trust levels of the cadets with their leader were directly related to the vulnerability that the leader practiced, and the trust level of cadets with each other increased through shared experience. Additionally, a leader's willingness to be vulnerable with the team increased as the team formed closer relationships (Shamir & Lapidot-Raz, 2003). This study examined whether Christian ministry leaders perceive an increase in trust and a willingness to be vulnerable with those with whom they have shared life experiences.

A study by Wulffers (2017) explored authentic leadership development (ALD) and included a discussion about the role of vulnerability as a healthy aid to support authentic interactions within an organization. The study reviewed the literature concerning authentic leadership development and included observations from multiple case studies where ALD programs were implemented. Previous studies from Cooper et al. (2005) and Chan (2005) noted that ALD candidates should already possess a sense of willing vulnerability and relational transparency prior to candidacy in an ALD program. Wulffers (2017) suggested that an introductory meeting is an appropriate time for coaches and clients to investigate if there is trust between the parties, and vulnerability is the primary indicator that each person feels safe and the coaching relationship is a fit. Wulffers suggested that leaders should set an example of vulnerability by going first and creating a precedent for the team. When leaders are willing to model vulnerability, it helps to reverse two team dysfunctions that Lencioni (2002) identified as the absence of trust and the fear of conflict. Several teams that implemented ALD programs demonstrated that an established atmosphere of vulnerability allowed them to

engage in healthy conflict concerning important decisions that directly affected organizational success (Wulffers, 2017). This study investigated the perception of Christian ministry leaders concerning the value or detriment of modeling vulnerability as a leader.

Tschannen-Moran (2014) conducted case studies of three schools in an effort to discover the role of trust-building related to successful organizational leadership. Tschannen-Moran examined the literature that provided descriptions of trust and then developed a definition of trust based on observations from previous studies: "Trust is one's willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent" (Mishra, 1996; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998, 2000). Tschannen-Moran (2014) suggested that vulnerability is important across the entire organization but may operate at different levels depending on the nature of interdependence. Vulnerability is necessary to build trust within an organization, and leaders may demonstrate a willingness to demonstrate vulnerability with followers, yet the level of vulnerability may vary depending on the nature of the relationship. Tschannen-Moran noted that vulnerability is expressed differently between an individual and their physician, their spouse, an intimate friend, a business partner, or their boss. Vulnerability builds trust in relationships, but it is also varied by those relationships. When one is willing to express vulnerability beyond the perceived level of the relationship, then the relationship may grow closer, and leaders can set a precedent for their entire organization by expressing vulnerability beyond expectations (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This study examined whether Christian ministry leaders perceive a connection between vulnerable leadership and organizational trust.

Christian Ministry Leadership

There are only a few studies concerning the role of vulnerability by Christian ministry leaders, yet some scholars have examined Christian leadership and discuss the role of vulnerability. Elkington (2013) conducted an investigation of how pastors grapple with adversity and noted that leadership in the 21st century has presented many challenges to leaders in general and ministry leaders are not exempt

from these challenges. Elkington reviewed literature spanning the previous 12 years to consider the challenges that Christian pastors faced, the reasons that many left the ministry, and possible ways to help pastors that face adversity. This author utilized Osmer's (2011) heuristic to identify possible causes of adversity among church pastors with a four-question approach: what contributes to pastors leaving ministry? Is there a systemic cause that has contributed to pastors leaving ministry? Is adversity a component across leadership in general and ministry by extension? Are there changes that need to be made to sustain ministers in the face of adversity? In a previous study of workplace diversity by Stoner and Gilligan (2002), the scholars concluded that all people face adversity, but resilient leaders can learn to navigate themselves and their followers through difficult situations resulting in positive growth. Elkington (2013) suggested that Christian leaders can grow through adversity when they demonstrate resiliency, and this can be learned over time through relationships with other people. The studies from Elkington and Stoner and Gilligan (2002) were also consistent with observations from Brown's (2006) examination of resiliency and the same author's subsequent study of leadership that concluded vulnerability is a key trait in resilient leaders. Elkington (2013) suggested that there is a need for future studies concerning what helps Christian leaders to be resilient. This study helps fill a gap in the literature by exploring the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning a possible relationship between vulnerability, adversity, and resiliency.

Shaw (2006) reviewed the literature concerning Christian leadership and concluded that there is no consensus on how to define Christian leadership, but vulnerable authority is a primary component for leaders that desire to emulate the leadership of Jesus. Shaw's observation of a lack of a shared understanding and consensual definition of leadership was consistent with the exhaustive leadership study by Bass (2008) that referenced thousands of works expanding the idea of leadership rather than narrowing it. Shaw noted that many Christian leadership studies have approached biblical leadership eisegetically by taking popular leadership ideas and then finding Scripture to support them (Batten et al., 2001; Beausay, 2009; Briner, 2005; Jones, 2002; Manz, 2011). Shaw (2006) proposed that

a more accurate way to determine Christian leadership principles is to examine biblical characters such as Moses and David and determine the values that they used to lead others. Several works have endeavored to identify scriptural leadership values by first exegeting biblical stories (Anderson, 2008; Ford, 1993; Gangel, 1997; Richards & Hoeldtke, 1980; Steele, 1986). This study examined Christian leadership principles using exegetical research of biblical text and compares the findings of the text with the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders.

Shaw (2006) also noted that Christian leaders are susceptible to giving undue attention to maintaining the image of both the institution that they lead and their own social appearance. Budde (2007) recognized that Christian leaders have increasingly grown accustomed to fearing worldly criticism and are less likely to risk personal security even though Scripture maintains that God is our supply. In a study of Christian ministry across cultures, Lingenfelter and Mayers (2003) noted that many societies value honor and tend to see vulnerability as potentially shaming. The combination of a desire to maintain an image, a fear of criticism, and a belief that being vulnerable may be dishonorable has contributed to Christian leaders' hesitancy to practice vulnerability (Shaw, 2006). This study examined the perception of Christian ministry leaders concerning the relationship between vulnerability and public image.

Huizing (2011) proposed that Christian ministry leadership should be developed out of a theology of leadership informed by Scripture, governed by God, centered on Christ, and subjected to the gifts of the Holy Spirit that empower all believers. Additionally, this theology of leadership should be informed by both historical and scriptural contexts to advance both practical leadership as well as ecclesiology. For Huizing, Christianity follows the teachings of Jesus, has been more centered on followership, and has not historically endeavored to develop a theology of leadership. This author reviewed literature that included both church leadership and leadership theology as well as multiple studies on leadership in general. Huizing noted that some studies endeavored to reconcile a theology of leadership with the growing studies of organizational leadership, but leadership in the church should not rely on general leadership principles. Leadership that is

Christian is influenced first by the nature and actions of Jesus and this understanding should inform leadership as opposed to leadership principles informing leaders that are Christian. Huizing concluded that it is imperative for the teachings of Christ to permeate all facets of life, and leadership should be an extension of a life guided by Jesus: "Christians are able to draw from the history of the church and its leaders. Combined, these are a treasure trove of leadership case studies" (Huizing, 2011, p.73). This study examined Christian ministry leaders' perceptions of the way that Jesus led compared to modern leadership principles.

Kinnison (2010) conducted an examination of the shepherd metaphor throughout Scripture and contrasted the biblical text with observations from several modern church leadership models. In this study, Kinnison noted that the view of church leaders in the west is that they are professional leaders of the church. There are additional studies of church leadership that have also concluded that the church in North America is increasingly run as a business with the senior leader as the professional head (Drane, 2002; Guder, 1998; Ogden, 2003). Kinnison (2010) concluded that the biblical image of church leadership is consistent with that of a shepherd, yet modern Christian leadership has moved towards a more corporate model. The biblical shepherd motif places Jesus as the ultimate shepherd, but church leaders take on a role that is empowered by the shepherd to guide others; however, church leaders also lead from within the flock and not over them. Christian leaders, according to Kinnison, are also sheep under the good shepherd with a primary role of guiding others to the shepherd, and this model requires that Christian leaders move humbly not out front but among others. This study involved the opinions of Christian ministry leaders concerning leaders that come alongside followers as opposed to ruling over them.

Kessler and Kretzschmar (2015) reviewed the literature concerning the relationship between leadership and Christianity across multiple disciplines and suggested that Christian leadership is a trans-disciplinary field of study. These scholars observed that there are two primary approaches to defining Christian leadership. One way to approach a study of Christian leadership is to consider leaders that are Christian and leading in Christian organizations such as churches or

non-profits, yet Christian leadership may refer to leadership that is Christian in nature yet operating in a secular environment. Kessler and Kretzschmar contended that while both approaches are valid, they do not necessarily require the same attention from various academic fields. Christian leadership, referring to Christian leaders in Christian institutions, may be best understood as a subset of practical theology, theological ethics, or missiology. Leadership that is Christian in nature, but that can be applied to secular organizations, is more dynamic and requires examination across fields, including both sacred and secular research. An interdisciplinary study of Christian ministry may include disciplines such as business management, organizational leadership, and psychology, in addition to church history, biblical studies, and theology. One's understanding of Christian leadership informs both the study and practice of leadership (Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). This study explored the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of Christians as leaders in both the church and secular society.

Smith and Hansen (2015) investigated the idea of Christian ministry leadership in the context of vulnerability by observing their own experiences as pastors, comparing their observations with other studies, and examining Scripture. In this study, Smith and Hansen concluded that leadership in Christianity requires sharing experiences by admitting struggles and risking the exposure of vulnerability. Smith and Hansen's vulnerable leadership in this study contrasted willingness to share past trouble that has been resolved with present tensions and troubles that make one truly vulnerable. Smith and Hansen suggested that vulnerable leadership happens when people are willing to share their stories while they are unfolding, and this willingness is what makes one sacrificial, trustworthy, and ultimately influential. Being vulnerable with others is the key to demonstrating good news in a world that is facing the same problems that Christian leaders face, and sharing life stories is stronger than sharing advice and instructions. It is easier for people to see good news lived out in a leader's life than it is for people to apply platitudes and instructions (Smith & Hansen, 2015). This study investigated

whether Christian ministry leaders perceive the sharing of unresolved problems as part of vulnerability.

Howell (2003) investigated the biblical theology of leadership through examination of Scripture with an emphasis on the Pauline letters. Howell identified three motifs of training that Jesus used in His leadership of the disciples, including harvest through sacrifice, righteousness through freedom, and greatness through servanthood. Howell coded themes in the Pauline letters, mined the data, and organized results into two themes: Pauline characteristics to influence people and Pauline criteria for church leaders. The act of service was observed by Howell as the primary driving force revealed in the study. The three priorities of biblical leadership, according to Howell, are the character of the leader, leadership motives, and the agenda that leaders establish: "Biblical leadership is taking the initiative to influence people to grow in holiness and to passionately promote the extension of God's kingdom in the world" (Howell, 2003, p. 3). Howell observed that the image of Jesus as a servant leader is evident in the writings of Paul but may be best captured in John 13:13–17 as Jesus models leadership through service as the great Servant. Howell suggested that the actions of Jesus demonstrated leadership characteristics, including the abandonment of personal agendas and a motive to love others. The current study examined the opinions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the example of Jesus as a servant leader and the possible connections to vulnerability.

Magezi (2015) noted that vulnerability in leadership is a necessary component for African church leaders that seek to be biblical servant leaders. The study by Magezi reviewed the literature concerning African leadership, explored the historical development of African kingship, and compared the findings with biblical kingship and servant leadership. Magezi suggested that Christian leadership in African churches had been heavily influenced by kingdom principles from both culture and the Bible, but the biblical form of kingdom leadership also contains a sense of vulnerability. Magezi showed that Jesus came as a king that also serves and was willing to demonstrate power by risking vulnerability. Magezi also recognized that the actions of Jesus in John 13 were not a demonstration of weakness, but

rather power and strength when he demonstrated his love by washing his disciples' feet. Jesus embodied the image of God, who is at the same time a powerful king and a vulnerable servant as an example to his disciples and ultimately for all who have followed. Magezi concluded that African church leaders may have gleaned understanding from their exposure to kingdom principles through culture, but biblical kingship includes a balance of power and vulnerability that all church leaders should seek to emulate. This study explored Christian ministry leaders' opinions concerning the balance of power and vulnerability in leadership.

Dyer (2017) studied the role of vulnerability practices in mission agencies and explored Scripture with specific attention given to missions, sending, and cultural considerations. Dyer identified a fault in the perspective of Westerners that assume needs based on the lack of or accumulation of material possessions. The mindset of many Westerners that want to help individuals in need is to discover any physical need and to fill the void, yet the greater need is often relationships. Dyer noted that Western missionaries that assume a relationship based on needs and fulfillment will often discover difficulty in building relationships. People often desire a relationship before receiving material help because the offer of material help may come with strings attached. Dyer suggested that building relationships with people requires mutual footing and that often comes in the form of practicing vulnerability. Dyer observed that Jesus exemplified vulnerability in opposition to self-protection and thus created a path of trust that overcomes cultural concerns. Jesus frequently pushed cultural boundaries and risked societal rejection with the goal of strengthening relationships and inviting others to follow him. Dyer concluded that vulnerability on the part of the missionary is to love as Jesus loved, and that means risking personal agendas so that others may gain not only material needs but true friendship from another person that also needs Jesus (Dyer, 2017). This study examines the perspective of Christian ministry leaders concerning the relationship between vulnerability and Christian missions.

Beebe (2007) recognized that clergy, like all leaders, will go through periods of conflict and even burnout and sought to examine the possible ways that Christian ministry leaders may handle such periods of conflict. Beebe utilized a quantitative

investigation of clergy opinions by surveying 343 clergy members concerning the role of self-regulation, conflict management, and tenure. Beebe concluded that clergy members are less likely to experience turnover when they practice a collaborative style of conflict management. Additionally, clergy that experience higher levels of differentiation of self and role are also more likely to handle conflict and avoid burnout. Beebe noted that there is a need for more study concerning the role of collaboration and differentiation of self in ministry environments. This study considered vulnerability as a means of inviting collaboration and examines the opinions of Christian ministry leaders concerning collaboration.

Chandler (2010) noted that many Christian ministry leaders battle depression, loneliness, and burnout. Because of the nature of congregations, ministry leaders regularly encounter some of the most difficult problems of the human condition, yet the Christian leader must cope with both the needs presented to them and their own needs. Chandler noted that Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership model suggested that no leader is perfect and should not be expected to maintain a sense of perfection. Chandler (2010) suggested that an important way for ministry leaders to navigate contention is for them to employ an honest reverence that is willing to admit faults and extend grace to both oneself and the congregant. In addition to practicing honesty with self and others, Chandler encouraged clergy to participate in self-assessment inventories and tools to regularly audit any changes. One of the most important practices for maintaining ministry leadership is discovering and confronting the things that may be robbing time, challenging emotional stability, or creating unhealthy habits. This study did not mention vulnerability specifically as a means of confronting depression, burnout, and loneliness, but it did speak of several vulnerability concepts. The current researcher explores the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of honest reverence between clergy and congregations.

Leadership in the Book of John

Sosler (2017) studied leadership in the Gospel of John by examining the text and reviewing literature that explored the thematic leadership principles and themes

of John. Sosler observed two primary themes in the book, including a heavy emphasis on love and then a repeated prominence of the idea of feeding the flock. In John 21, Jesus asked Peter three times whether Peter loved him and then asked Peter each time to feed or care for the sheep. Sosler noted the exchange between Peter and Jesus in John 21 with emphasis on both love and caring for others (like a flock of sheep). The theme of love is also prominent in John 13, when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, told them to follow his example of love, and then commanded them to love one another. Sosler observed that both tending sheep as a shepherd and washing feet as a servant are regular acts of everyday life at the time of Jesus' example. The leadership of Jesus in the Gospel of John is foremost about love—specifically, a sacrificial type of love that can be witnessed in the actions of a shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep or a servant that is willing to wash the feet of a guest (Sosler, 2017).

Gunter (2016) also noted that shepherd leadership is prominent in the Gospel of John. In the study, Gunter examined John 10 and compared the description of the good shepherd in this pericope with the Old Testament passage describing bad shepherds in Ezekiel 34. The central message of John is first love, but specifically as it is expressed in the image of the shepherd (Gunter, 2016). The idea that biblical leadership is modeled in the imagery of shepherding is also consistent with observations by Laniak and Carson (2006), who noted that biblical shepherding is a deep loyalty that places the care of the sheep above the care and safety of the shepherds themselves. Gunter (2016) also observed that the actions of Jesus in John 13 are not as a domineering leader but rather as one that is willing to demonstrate a heart of service by washing feet. The idea of a suffering servant as one that is willing to demonstrate love by self-sacrifice is on full display throughout John's gospel and in harmony with the message of love throughout the rest of Scripture (Tidball, 2009). Gunter (2016) concluded that there are many voices describing pastoral leadership today, but the imagery of the good shepherd and sacrificial love in the book of John must remain a central truth for today. This study explored the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the relationship between vulnerability and sacrificial love.

Adiprasetya (2018) proposed that Christian leadership is rooted in friendship. In a study of the book of John, Adiprasetya examined each of the times that Jesus emphasized love and compared leadership by friends (philiarchy) with both servant leadership (doularchy) and master leadership (kyriarchy). Adiprasetya observed that Jesus stated in John 15:15 that he regarded them as friends and no longer as servants. Although the concept of servant leadership was first credited to Greenleaf (1970), it has also been recognized as a concept that Jesus taught during his earthly ministry. Adiprasetya (2018) proposed that the idea of doularchy has been considered by many the antidote to the problem of kyriarchy that was encountered by Jesus in the New Testament, yet both types of leadership operate similarly. Adiprasetya contended that attempts to lead as a servant often appear similar to efforts to lead as masters, except the nomenclature is revised to allow kyriarchy to be disguised as doularchy. Churches use the terms serve, service, and serving to mean different things, and leaders that operate as masters may simply redirect vocabulary to maintain high levels of control. Adiprasetya suggested that friendship is a truer picture of Christian leadership because friendship rooted in agape love is sacrificial such as when Jesus washed his disciples' feet in John 13. Leaders that serve out of love are willing to risk vulnerability, unlike those that might simply use the terminology. Three observations of a friendship type of love in Scripture include helping each other in everyday matters, imitating the shepherding nature of Christ, and loving one another as vulnerable servants like Jesus (Adiprasetya, 2018). This study investigated whether Christian ministry leaders perceive interconnectedness between love, service, and vulnerability in leadership.

Crider (2018) examined the book of John and compared observations from studies concerning the power of narrative in leadership. Crider observed that John used a narrative approach to persuade individuals by linking valuable spiritual lessons to people through the power of a story. The power of telling a story is not limited to verbal communication, and the writings of John helped to capture the biblical metanarrative and effectively transfer lessons across barriers such as culture, context, time, and age. Crider noted that modern organizations require

leaders that can elucidate purpose and vision, yet the greater message of Christianity is a timeless narrative that moves from creation in Genesis to future hope not yet realized in Revelation. The message of John is the fourth gospel account, yet it is not written in a similar manner as the other three accounts of the life of Jesus. Crider suggested that John incorporates a metaphorical approach as a leader-writer with the purpose of building an abstract ladder as described by Clark (2008). Crider (2018) explained that the narrative approach of John is to first place the reader on a lower step of understanding by introducing a story or parable and then revealing more abstract thoughts via the dialogue between Jesus and the disciples. Not only does each story have the advancement of concepts like rungs on a ladder, but each story builds on the next as well. Crider noted that John both ascends and descends the ladder through connected stories so that the reader may encounter Jesus along the way, and it is this example that leaders today can incorporate as well. John was able to connect the stories of how he encountered Jesus, and Christian leaders can do the same by sharing their personal encounters with God through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Crider, 2018). Although sharing personal stories may feel risky to Christian leaders, the vulnerable nature of sharing helps to connect an audience to the gospel. This study explored Christian ministry leaders' opinions concerning the effectiveness of shared personal stories as a tool for relating the gospel message.

Sierra (2021) described the leadership of Jesus in the book of John as condescending. Sierra explained that the definition of condescending is related to a willingness to stoop down in an attitude of grace, and Jesus both demonstrated and suggested condescending. The idea of condescending, according to Sierra, includes intelligent vulnerability as well as sharing stories and incorporating creative allegories. Sierra recognized that John 13:1–20 is one of several instances in the book of John that exemplifies Jesus as a condescending leader. This author noted the menial nature of foot-washing and the action that required Jesus to physically stoop low in the process. Sierra contended that Jesus' leadership in John regularly challenges the perception of leadership through higher position strength and instead demonstrates leadership from a position of perceived weakness. In addition to

leading from a place of vulnerability, this scholar suggested that Jesus' condescension in the book of John also included a commendation for leaders to identify with the story by sharing with and learning from each other. Although this study was not focused on vulnerability in leadership, it did include vulnerability as a strength in leadership and the example of Jesus washing feet in John 13. The study also mentioned that Christian leaders may learn from the example of Jesus, but it did not include any observations from Christian leaders concerning the role of vulnerability. The current study examined the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the nature of Jesus' leadership in the book of John.

A study of John 13:1–20 and the leadership example of Jesus was conducted by Kanagaraj (2004), who concluded that the text conveys servant leadership through the foot-washing story. Kanagaraj focused on Jesus as a servant leader that exhibited love as the supreme leadership principle through his demonstration of humility, simplicity, and self-sacrifice. Although the study does not mention the vulnerable nature of Jesus or the demonstration of vulnerability, Kanagaraj suggested that the leadership of Jesus was contrary to the popular belief that leaders assert authority through the demonstration of power. "The paradoxical combination of leadership and lowliness is envisaged in the foot-washing of Jesus, which points forward to his shameful death on the cross" (Kanagaraj, 2004, p. 19). Although the terminology of vulnerability was not used, the study included observations of shame related to both the act of foot-washing and the death of Jesus on the cross. Observations by Kanagaraj aligned with Brown's (2007) study of shame and resilience that suggested that vulnerability is a powerful tool to aid resilience and combat feelings of shame. The study by Kanagaraj (2004) concluded that Jesus used the foot-washing lesson to point toward the coming crucifixion and the sacrifice of Jesus. Additionally, Kanagaraj suggested that the lesson of Jesus was to lead others to action by also practicing sacrificial love: "Any leadership that is not rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus will lead to self-glory, insecurity, and authoritarianism" (Kanagaraj, 2004, p. 24).

Summary

In this review of the literature, I considered works that addressed the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of vulnerability in leadership and included studies concerning vulnerability, vulnerability in relationships, vulnerability in leadership, vulnerability in organizations, Christian leadership, and leadership in the book of John. Vulnerability contains a balance between both risk and power (Brown, 2015; Brunning, 2018). Although it has become more popular for leaders to recognize the power of vulnerability, it is more difficult for leaders to practice vulnerability than to perceive its value (Nienaber et al., 2015). Vulnerability is not only courage to reveal one's faults to others, but a willingness to examine personal failures and then offer forgiveness for not only others but oneself (Brown, 2018). Mayer and Gavin (2005) noted that trust levels due to the practice of vulnerability not only impact personal relationships but often permeate the culture of an entire organization. Shaw (2006) noted that Christian ministry leaders face problems with undue expectations from followers to not fail, and this added pressure may cause Christian leaders to be less likely to practice vulnerability. Huizing (2011) proposed that Christian ministry leaders should be informed by the Bible, focused on Jesus, ruled by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and not focused on pleasing humanity. The example of Jesus' leadership in the book of John exemplifies God's vulnerable love throughout the life of Jesus (Kanagaraj, 2004). This study included both an exegetical analysis of the foot-washing example by Jesus in John 13 and a phenomenological study of the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning vulnerability in leadership. Literature related to this study is vast in the area of leadership, yet narrow when combining Christian ministry leaders' opinions and observations from the example of Jesus in John 13.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

In this study, I explored the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning vulnerability. As a study of vulnerability in Christian leadership, I conducted an analysis of John 13 to compare with the opinions of interviewees to glean any common or opposing thoughts and practices between Christian leaders and the biblical text. This study included an exegetical analysis of Scripture using socio-rhetorical analysis as described by Robbins (1996a) and Henson et al. (2020). My examination of leadership principles gleaned from the exegetical analysis of John 13 yielded information that I used to formulate research questions. I utilized the research questions developed from the exegetical themes to interview Christian ministry leaders and explore their perceptions of the role of vulnerability in leadership (see Appendix B).

Research Orientation

This study was an exploration of the perceived role of vulnerability in leadership according to Christian ministry leaders. I compared the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders with an exegetical study of John 13. Examination of the Bible is appropriate for studies that are applicable to Christianity because the Bible is esteemed as accurate and authoritative for guidance in Christian living (Brand et al., 2015). This study included a biased belief that the Bible, although penned by human authors, contains the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. Biblical authorship is ultimately from God's authority through the Holy Spirit, and the many human authors were divinely inspired, and the words they conveyed hold the authority of God as a message from our Father in heaven (Murphy, 1885). Henson et al. (2020) promoted the exploration of Scripture in research for both its historical authority and transforming power. The words contained in the writings of the Bible are not merely an informative message, but a transformative communication delivered through humanity by divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Peterson, 2006).

The Scripture references utilized in this study are primarily taken from the *English Standard Version* (*ESV*). The *ESV* was translated to emphasize both the

personal style of the individual authors as well as the context of the originally intended wording to convey an essentially literal work (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This study explored the Scripture utilizing the *ESV* in an effort to comprehend the intended meaning of the text for both the original audience and the timeless readers that encounter God's Word.

Exegetical Analysis Phase

In this study, I utilized a socio-rhetorical exegetical analysis of John chapter 13 to help establish a biblical perspective of vulnerability in leadership. An exegetical analysis is a scientific or systematic approach to examining and interpreting Scripture (Henson et al., 2020). The origin of the word *exegesis* is Greek, and the root connotes "to draw out;" thus, exegetical analysis attempts to draw out the meaning of the text, as opposed to *eisegesis* meaning "read into" (Osborne, 2010, p. 57). Researchers approach exegetical analysis in several ways, but socio-rhetorical analysis (SRA) focuses on the details of the text to explore both the original intent of the passage and the viable modern applications (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a).

Socio-Rhetorical Analysis

SRA also incorporates linguistic examination to explore word meanings by observing details such as sentence structure and social context (Cotterall & Turner, 1989). A socio-rhetorical analysis is an appropriate method for analyzing Scripture because it addresses complex challenges such as authorship narrated by one person, written by another, yet inspired directly by God (Henson et al., 2020). Socio-rhetorical analysis in this study is completed in five categories of texture as identified by Henson et al. (2020), which are inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture. The *English Standard Version* of the Holy Bible was used to conduct this research. The exegetical examination of Scripture yielded several primary themes, and these themes informed my development of the interview questions for the phenomenological phase of the study.

Textures

Examination of Scripture using socio-rhetorical analysis is accomplished by considering several various points of reference that Robbins (1996a) described as textures. Robbins identified five different textures that provide a multilayered perspective for biblical interpretation, beginning with inner texture as the first layer. Inner texture examination includes word repetitions, the selection of words, the beginning and end of sentences, storytelling, and the aesthetics of the story (Robbins, 1996a). Intertexture is the second layer and includes an examination of common language usage, the social values of the greater community, contextual beliefs, social roles, and other factors that the author incorporates to convey a textual relationship to the external world.

Inner Texture. Inner texture analysis in the SRA procedure includes an examination of the parts, structure, and primary message of the Scripture for identification of the prevailing themes and supporting structure of the pericope (Henson et al., 2020). Within inner textual analysis are filters that help to more precisely examine a passage, including textual units, repetitive patterns, progressive patterns, opening-middle-closing patterns, argumentative patterns, and sensory-aesthetic patterns (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a, 1996b). In this study, I considered these five filters of inner texture for the exegetical analysis of John 13:1–20.

Intertexture. The second category of texture identified by both Henson et al. (2020) and Robbins (1996a) is intertexture. There are both external and internal influences on every Scripture; while inner texture considers what is internal, external influence is the subject of intertexture. It is not just the external influence, but rather the way that the author of the pericope expresses the relationship of the text to the outside world (Robbins, 1996a). There are five filters that help to give deeper meaning to intertexture, including four identified by Robbins (1996a): oral-scribal intertexture, cultural intertexture, social intertexture, and historical intertexture. Henson et al. (2020) proposed an additional fifth filter for intertexture, termed *reciprocal intertexture*.

Social Cultural Texture. Hermeneutical analysis of Scripture necessitates a study of the historical-cultural and contextual backgrounds of a pericope for the purpose of establishing accurate interpretation (Virkler & Ayayo, 2007). The examination of social and cultural texture delivers different information than the exploration of both intertexture and inner texture. Robbins (1996a) noted that the examination of social and cultural intertexture is a part of the intertexture filter process, but it focuses on institutions, relationships, codes, or social roles, while social and cultural texture reflects on the people that existed in the Scripture context.

Ideological Texture. Not all interpretive texture is about the material itself because the understanding and interpretation of a text are subjected to the biases and context of the reader; this is called *ideological texture* (Robbins, 1996a). Henson et al. (2020) identified ideological texture as the process whereby the reader examines their own worldview to alleviate eisegesis and anachronism when applying interpretation to the pericope. After determining such factors as original authorship and audience, ideological texture examines the reader concerning individual location, group relationships, modes of intellectual discourse, and the culmination of these ideas or spheres of ideology (Robbins, 1996a).

Sacred Texture. Henson et al. (2020) posited that within SRA is a textural analysis that deals specifically with matters related to divinity. Sacred texture examination seeks to discover the meaning of Scripture according to the divine intent of the inspiration of God beyond both the writer and the reader (Duvall & Hays, 2012). Written materials have interpretive qualities that are both intended and inferred by those that pen them and the audience that read them, but the voice of God in Scripture should not be confused with any human voices that may influence it (Robbins, 1996a). Within sacred textures are eight filters identified by Henson et al. (2020): deity, holy person, spirit being, divine history, human redemption, religious community, human commitment, and ethics.

John 13

Although there are many passages of Scripture that have been examined for a better understanding of Christian ministry leadership, the book of John recounts

many principles and teachings that Jesus shared. Within the book of John are also many chapters that speak about leadership or exemplify what Jesus did in situations that required leadership. A pivotal moment in the life and teaching of Jesus the story of Jesus washing the disciple's feet in the upper room.

John 13:1–20. This study considers John 13:1–20 as the primary passage for the examination of leadership vulnerability as demonstrated in the life of Jesus. This passage contains an account of the last teaching of Jesus with his original 12 disciples in the evening before his arrest. The book of John conveys the story of the life of Jesus through the recording of several events with corresponding lessons. In this pericope, John recounted the events surrounding the Lord's supper and included details about Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Washing feet was a familiar process and common action during the time that the Johannine account was written, and this study centered on the various implications and lessons from this event with particular attention given to vulnerability in leadership. The purpose of this study was an exegetical analysis of John 13:1–20 through socio-rhetorical analysis to determine themes related to the role of vulnerability in leadership. The exegetical analysis of John 13:1–20 included an examination of the passage's background with questions concerning authorship, audience, cultural context, date, location, purpose, and details specific to the pericope.

Authorship. The author of the book of John does not specifically identify himself as the Apostle John, but there is a long-held belief in Christian communities that the author in question is the apostle that followed Jesus during his earthly ministry (Brown & Moloney, 2017; Filson, 1966; Henry, 1991). Early historical authors that attributed this writing to the Apostle John included Irenaeus and Polycarp (Burge, 2009). Writings that date back as early as the second century made mention that the Apostle John was the author of the writing (Kysar, 1992). Within the Gospel account are verses that indicate the author was an eye-witness, including 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory;" 19:35: "He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth;" and 21:24: "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things" (*ESV*,

2001/2016). The pericope examined for this study was limited to the witness of only the 12 disciples with Jesus in the upper room, and John was present as a witness there (Milne, 2020). A first-person account would be consistent with the author being John the Apostle. In verse 21:24, the author expounded, "This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things" and referred back to the 21:20 connection to "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Carpenter and McCown (1992) suggested that the Apostle John's authorship is supported in the text and in tradition, but Johannine authorship cannot definitively be attributed to John the Apostle of Jesus. Other possible authors of the Gospel of John have been suggested, including Lazarus, a different follower of Jesus named John, an unknown disciple, or even a group of contributors in the Johannine tradition (Guthrie, 1990). Various theories of authorship have contended that accrediting the book of John to the Apostle John is not definitive and an alternate writer should be considered, yet this line of thinking does not offer proof for someone else but simply denies attribution to the Apostle John (Pfeiffer & Harrison, 1962). Considering the lack of support for a different author, there is no compelling reason to pursue a different writer other than the historical and traditional understanding that it was John the Apostle, the brother of James and son of Zebedee (Barclay, 1975).

Date and Location. John is considered by most to have been written later than the three synoptic Gospel accounts, yet there does not appear to be any direct reference in the Johannine account of the Synoptics and thus John may not have regarded them (Michaels, 2010). The date of writing for John was at one time conceded by many scholars to be in the second century, yet the discoveries of Papyrus 46 and the Egerton Papyrus two are later findings that moved many to disregard a second-century timeline (Burge, 2009). Kysar (1992) noted that discoveries in Egypt indicated that the book of John was readily available and widely distributed in the second century, and all recent scholars have placed the date no later than AD 100–110. The most common dates ascribed to the writing have moved from the second century to a time before the end of the first century, and several scholars place the writing well before AD 100 and therefore easily

within the life of the Apostle John (Robinson, 1985). Some scholars have suggested that John must have been written before the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem because there is no allusion to the event and no mention of the other Gospel accounts (Milne, 2020; Whitacre, 2010). Authorship before AD 70 is accepted by some scholars, but most place the writing between 80–100 because of indications of reworking. Early church tradition placed John in the region of Ephesus after AD 80 and the combination of the Apostle John as the author with the location likely in Ephesus further suggests a date after AD 80 and before the end of the first century (Burge, 2018; Kruse, 2017).

The location of the Johannine writings was most likely in one of two regions, according to Burge (2009): either Asia Minor or Syria. The Syrian region theory gained popularity because of the links of the book to Ignatius of Antioch and the Odes of Solomon (Burge, 2018). Church history and early traditions associated with the writings of Irenaeus point to Ephesus in the region of Asia Minor as a strong possibility for the location of the writing (Eusebius & Maier, 2007).

Audience and Cultural Context. There are some scholars that have conjectured that the book of John may have originally been penned in Hebrew or Aramaic for the Jewish audience, yet all discovered manuscripts of the Gospel are in the Greek language (Filson, 1966). The idea that the message was for a Jewish audience is not diminished by Greek writing because the principal language of the time was Greek, and even the Jewish people communicated in Greek as their primary language (Filson, 1966). Chapter 9 in John includes a story of synagogue expulsion that indicates an apparent contention between the Jewish people and Christian believers, according to Brodie (1993), yet other areas in the Johannine account encourage these two groups to set aside differences and converge for the greater cause of Christ. The audience of the book of John was not likely a Greek-speaking Jewish audience or Gentile Greeks, but rather a gathering of Greek-speaking people from both Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus that were living n the Hellenistic culture (Barclay, 1975).

Purpose. Like the other three Gospel accounts of Jesus, John intends to share the story of Jesus and redemption that is possible only through believing and

following Jesus. John 20:31 explains, "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). While the other three Gospel accounts focus attention on the works that Jesus performed, John differs by concentrating on the life and influence of Jesus instead (Zodhiates et al., 2008). John considers both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus, and this dual focus may have been a direct argument against the rise of the Docetics, who claimed that Jesus was God himself and only pretended to be human (Filson, 1966). Another theory of the first century was the Gnostic heresy that claimed Jesus was an emanation of God that was separated from God but still not completely human either (Barclay, 1975). The emphasis in John on both the humanity and divinity of Jesus may have been to counter both Docetism and Gnosticism. In the opening of the book, John indicates that Jesus is the *logos* or Word of God, and this construct begins the message with a convergence of God as both the divine speaker and the spoken, expressed communication to humanity (Bruce, 1994). Burge (2009) noted that the Jesus of John is introduced from the beginning as the Word of God to humanity and that the message is redemption made possible by the one that is both God and man.

Phenomenological Research Phase

The second part of the study incorporated interviews to determine the lived experiences of the Christian ministry leaders. This phenomenological study was an exploration of the shared experience that the interviewed individuals live as Christian ministry leaders, and I specifically concentrated on their understanding of vulnerability in relation to leadership. A phenomenological study is appropriate for the study of common lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenon in an experience is according to the person that encounters it, and the interview experience aids in the discovery of the interviewee's perception (Moustakas, 1994). In a phenomenological study, participants may perceive a shared experience differently, and an exploration considers both converging and diverging perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). Although this study included an exploration of the common involvement of the participants in a similar Christian ministry leadership environment, it was not a study of the same shared

environments and was therefore not purely phenomenological. Each participant individually underwent moments of both being vulnerable and having people express vulnerability towards them, but the context of lived experience was not the same. This study was a summary of perspectives of the common leadership experiences with an understanding that the moments of vulnerability were individualized.

The analysis of data collected from an interview process of a phenomenological study follows a different approach depending on the type of phenomenology (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Within the category of phenomenological research are subcategories of hermeneutical phenomenology as described by (Creswell & Poth, 2017) or transcendental phenomenology as suggested by (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell and Poth (2017) noted that a transcendental phenomenology is similar to a hermeneutical approach and necessitates that the researcher eliminates biases, compiles data, and then categorizes the findings into prevailing or common themes. Moustakas (1994) described the idea of *epoche* as a way to diminish or eliminate research bias by having the interviewer set aside presupposed outcomes prior to the interview and to adopt an open and receptive posture. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) similarly suggested that hermeneutical phenomenology requires the researcher to identify their own a priori ideas and remove them from the process. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) stressed that the researcher should aim to eliminate bias, but this does not mean that the researcher cannot prioritize the experiences to address the primary research questions. In this study, I followed the hermeneutical phenomenological approach by identifying and eliminating researcher bias.

In-Depth Interviewing

In-depth interviewing is one of the most vital steps in phenomenological research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). It is through the interview process that the seven components of a phenomenological study can be gathered, including an exploration of a shared phenomenon with individuals, a discussion of ideas among the participants, bracketing the researcher's preconceptions or possible bias, data collection via the interviews, analysis of data for common themes, and discussion of

overall and individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In-depth interviews are the means of gathering the necessary data, and the researcher must guide the participants with skillfully crafted interview questions (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Even well-crafted interview questions may not be clearly understood by interviewees; thus, clarifying questions from a skilled researcher may be necessary to ascertain the nuances of the phenomenon of a shared experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018).

Dialogue Style

Padgett (2016) suggested that there are essentially four situations for qualitative interviewing: accounts of events and experience, participant's self-reflection, indirect information sources, and discursive or dialogic events. A discussion or dialogue style of an interview creates an opportunity for interviewees to further elaborate on a question and thus provide more details about lived experiences without prompting from the researcher (Padgett, 2016). In this study, I utilized dialogue as a means of gleaning unprompted conversation. I developed questions that are informed by socio-rhetorical analysis of Scripture, and this procedure guided the interviewee towards the provision of useful data without compromising opinions. Discovery of the perceptions of individual personal experiences is vital to the phenomenological experience, according to Moustakas (1994), so the use of questions in this study directed interviewees towards subject matter gleaned from the exegetical research without leading or compromising their answers. Hattingh (2019) noted that the outcome of using questions derived from an exegetical examination of Scripture is data from the interviewees that will yield more common subject matter and thus a better comparative analysis.

Participants and Sampling

I utilized purposive sampling, as described by Moustakas (1994) and Terrell (2015), as a way for qualitative researchers to intentionally examine specific, small sample sizes. The participants were Christian ministry leaders from different geographical locations within the United States, including senior pastors, staff pastors, and parachurch leaders. Different locations and leadership positions may

have improved the likelihood that the findings involved varied perspectives within the small sample size, as suggested by Creswell (2013). The research incorporated three subsets of Christian ministry leaders, including four senior pastors, four staff pastors, and four Christian parachurch leaders.

Each of the ministry leaders that I interviewed in this sampling was a leader that I engaged with previously. I chose these individuals because they fit the criteria and they were each more likely to participate because of our established relationships. After obtaining IRB approval, I contacted each of the participants by a personal phone call and a formal follow-up email, including a written invitation with an explanation of the study (see Appendix A). I directed each of them to offer any concerns and ask questions about the interview. I initially provided each participant with my email and phone number as a way to reply.

Data Collection

To understand the perceptions of the role of vulnerability according to each of these Christian ministry leaders, I conducted semistructured interviews with them beginning in June of 2022. I conducted two of the interviews live and remainder via virtual meetings utilizing online software. I recorded each interview with two forms, including one audio and one video device, to ensure proper capture. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and began with an exploration of the participant's understanding of the subject matter and progressed with clarifying questions to gain deeper descriptions, as suggested by Curato (2012). I also recorded my observations of the interview participants that were not expressed verbally as a way of providing additional clarity (Richards & Morse, 2012). I provided follow-up contact with each participant to share my progress, review their answers, and ask whether there are any additional thoughts that they would like to add to their previous interview answers.

Data Analysis

During the online or in-person interview process, I captured audio recordings by both computer and iPhone software to ensure the collection of the content. I chose Otter online transcription software to create reviewable, written

copies of each interview. After automated transcription, I compared each of the audio recordings to the written material to guarantee that the dictation matched the original dialogue. I then incorporated data scrubbing for omissions and errors to further provide a clear transcript for the examination of common themes via coding suggested by Saldaña and Omasta (2018). Coding passes included process, values, and *in vivo* coding to identify the repeated or common themes as well as the mutual actions, values, attitudes, and beliefs that may be evident in the interviewee's lived experiences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

The interview portion of this study was informed by the exegetical analysis phase, and I created interview questions that were based on the themes from John 13. Creswell and Creswell (2017) described this process in a qualitative study as predetermined coding. Observed themes from the exegetical study informed the phenomenological research, and thus common themes occur between the two. Heaton (2005) suggested that codes traditionally emerge after interviews and transcription, but conducting exegetical research before the interviews allows the deducted themes to be used as a codebook to discover inductive themes from the interviews. Moustakas (1994) suggested that data analysis can first be organized into keywords and phrases listed first by broader categories and then narrowed into themes. I used Microsoft Excel software to list each group of codes and then searched, sorted, and colored them to identify emerging themes. Following the findings from the socio-rhetorical analysis in Chapter 4, I compared these themes to the exegetical findings and then further discussed the relationship between them in Chapter 5.

Summary

This study was a two-part analysis with a converging purpose. In the first phase, my goal was to identify the role of vulnerability in leadership as exemplified by Jesus in John 13. The final lesson of Jesus with his original 12 disciples included a profound physical demonstration accompanied by a "new command" from the Messiah. The foot-washing that Jesus performed was consistent with his actions and teachings that exhibited vulnerability from a position of authority and strength. I examined the pericope through socio-rhetorical analysis as described by Henson et

al. (2020) to determine each of the prominent themes from the text and then used the themes to develop interview questions for Christian ministry leaders. The SRA examination of John 13 included five categories of textural study described by Henson et al. (2020) including inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture. The textural analysis process aided the identification of themes to inform questions for the interview portion of the study.

In the second part of this study, I applied the themes from the exegetical analysis of John 13 to a phenomenological interview process of Christian ministry leaders to categorize shared experiences into common themes as described by (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The purpose of the phenomenological portion of this study was to determine the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of vulnerability in leadership and to compare their perceptions with the findings from the biblical exegesis. The interviews yielded data that I coded for common themes to describe shared experiences, as Saldaña and Omasta suggested. The common themes from the interviews helped describe the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning vulnerability in leadership. In the final portion of the study, I compared the exegetical findings with the phenomenological findings.

Chapter 4 – Findings

This study of John 13:1–20 is an exegetical analysis utilizing a socio-rhetorical approach as explained by Henson et al. (2020) and Robbins (1996a). John 13:1–20 contains the Johannine account of Jesus washing the feet of his original 12 disciples and the last lesson that Jesus shared with them before Judas departed. It is significant that John's Gospel is the only one of the four that records this act and lesson from Jesus (Bruce, 1994; Bultmann, 2014; Carson, 1991). The primary concerns for this study were how Jesus used this lesson to lead his disciples and the way that Jesus demonstrated vulnerability as a leader.

Exegetical Analysis

Exegetical analysis of Scripture is a process by which researchers may better understand the meaning of Scripture. There are many different ways to approach interpretation and understanding of biblical text (Vyhmeister & Robertson, 2020). The exegetical analysis of Scripture is a scientific approach for determining the interpretation of a text via exploration of original meanings for modern societal application (Henson et al., 2020). The proper framework for determining the meaning of a text requires both a study of the historical context and wrestling with the impact of the Scripture on our lives today (Klein et al., 2017). *Exegesis* comes from the Greek word *exēgeomai* and carries the idea of leadership; its root connotation implies "to pull out" meaning from a text (Osborne, 2010). Determining the original intent of a text is termed *hermeneutics* from the Greek "to interpret" and can be used interchangeably with exegesis, although exegesis and context are both vital for proper hermeneutical interpretation (Klein et al., 2017; Osborne, 2010). A socio-rhetorical analysis is an exegetical approach that incorporates an examination of multiple textures to determine the many influences of the original context and then an application for readers today (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). In this study, I utilized socio-rhetorical analysis to explore the many textures of the pericope.

John 13:1–20

The Gospel of John is one of four accounts of the life of Jesus, yet the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are considered *synoptic* or from a similar perspective, while John includes additional details and rich thematic content (Carson, 1991). The book of John contains pronounced references to the Old Testament throughout and is evidenced in the first few verses that hearken back to Genesis and creation (Tenney & Silva, 2009). The construction of John is often a discourse from Jesus following a physical encounter, and while the other Gospel accounts record miracles as a sign of power, John accompanies each miracle with a teaching moment (Nelson, 2013). What may seem like departures from the other accounts are better understood as John's interpretation of the events, rather than an invention of details (Keener, 2016). With almost 100 uses of the word *believe*, John emphasizes that Jesus is the messiah, and most scholars have agreed that this is the major purpose of the Johannine writing (Carson, 1991; Kruse, 2017; Mohler, 2021).

Background of John 13

There are many opinions and studies of the structure of the Gospel of John, but there is a majority consensus among commentators that there is a major division in the book between chapters 12 and 13 (Bultmann, 2014; Thomas, 1991). An alternate opinion of the major division is to include chapter 12 as the beginning of the second half of the book or to make the change in John 12:12, when Jesus enters Jerusalem for the triumphal entry (Hindson & Mitchell, 2010). One of the most notable features of change in the book is that Jesus begins recognizing that his "hour" had come (Thomas, 1991). Although the first 12 chapters focus more heavily on the signs and miracles that Jesus performed, chapter 13, and those following, focus more on bringing glory to God as well as the glorification of Jesus. The division between the first and second half of the book is sometimes referred to as "The Book of Signs" and "The Book of Glory" (Brown, 1995). The first half of the book is about signs performed before larger crowds and then lessons of both acceptance and rejection, but the second half of the book is Jesus with his small band of believing disciples and centers on the idea of glory (Bultmann, 2014).

The final portion of chapter 12 can be considered a summarizing epilogue of all that happened in the previous 11 chapters and the public ministry of Jesus (Thomas, 1991). The lessons and miracles that Jesus performed throughout his public ministry were coming to a close in chapter 12, and the outcry of the Jewish officials against the teachings of Jesus resulted in either rejection or shallow acceptance by the people (Talbert & Thomas, 1993). Schnackenburg (1992) theorized that John 12:37–43 closes the signs and miracles portion of the book in the same way that John 20:30 brings the entire Gospel account to a conclusion.

Following the summarization language near the end of John 12, the beginning of John 13 declares that Jesus was aware that His hour had come and this combination suggests a clear transition (Staley, 1988). Schnackenburg (1980) concluded that the transition in John 13:1 is clear even from an outsider's perspective and John 13 definitively marks a new beginning. Brown (1970) determined that 13:1 is the introductory expression that inaugurates the second half of the book also known as the book of glory. Talbert and Thomas (1993) noted that a second section of John clearly commences at 13:1 as the narrative of the passion week begins. The change from chapter 12 to chapter 13 is a transition from the public ministry of Jesus to a time that is more private and intimate, and the placement of the foot-washing story in the second half of John indicates a more intimate meaning (Talbert & Thomas, 1993). The location of the foot-washing narrative at the beginning of the second half of the book attaches it to the passion week, the crucifixion story, the implications for the disciples, and the ultimate glory of God in the person of Jesus (Talbert & Thomas, 1993).

Inner Texture

The examination of layers within SRA that explores the parts, structure, and message of a text is called inner textual analysis, and this type of investigation helps to reveal the anatomy underneath the Scripture (Henson et al., 2020). There are six varied layers in inner texture: textual units, repetitive patterns, progressive patterns, opening-middle-closing patterns, argumentative patterns, and sensory-aesthetic patterns (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a, 1996b). The application of these six

layers in the exegetical analysis of John 13 provides a better understanding of the structure of the pericope (May & Henson, 2022).

Textual Units. It is important to note that the early Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of John did not possess chapter breaks or verse numbers, and the punctuation from modern English translations was also added later and not part of the original flow (Henson et al., 2020). Original Greek language did, however, have a natural pace that included both pauses and transitions, which we now identify as textual units (Henson et al., 2020). Henson et al. (2020) noted that one cannot assume that the breaks and headings added by modern translations are consistent with the originally intended flow, yet they do often coincide. A benefit of beginning an exegetical analysis with the examination of textual units is that original thematic intent becomes more evident (Henson et al., 2020). Mlakuzhyil (1987) identified three distinct breaks in the textual flow of John 13:1–20, including an introduction (1–5), a dialogue portion (6–11), and the main discourse (12–20).

Culpepper (1983) suggested that the first five verses of John comprise the most splendid introduction that includes the characters, themes, actions, elements, and indicators that build the rest of the chapter. John 13:6–11 is a dialogue between Jesus and Peter in which Peter speaks several thoughts that the other disciples and the Johannine reader might also be wondering (Thomas, 1991). Verse 12 provides a clear break from the dialogue to the discourse portion of the pericope as Jesus states, “Do you understand what I have done for you?” (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The question from Jesus alerted both the disciples in the room and the Johannine reader that an explanation was necessary and yet forthcoming (Schnackenburg, 1992).

Table 1

Textual Units of John 13:1–20

Scripture	Passage Introduction	Element
John 13:1–5	“Now before the Feast of the Passover”	Introduction
John 13:6–11	“He came to Simon Peter”	Dialogue

John 13:12–20	"When he had washed their feet and resumed his place"	Discourse

Repetitive Patterns. The culture in the time of the Johannine writing did not have access to the advanced communication and storage options of modern society, so it was very important for oral tradition to employ repetitive patterns as mnemonic devices to aid memorization (Henson et al., 2020; Loubser, 2005). Repeating words and phrases was not only helpful for recall, but also for clarifying and solidifying issues related to theology, and a study of these patterns often provides important exegetical insight (Henson et al., 2020). John 13:1–20 contains several repetitive patterns, but two repetitions appear most significant in the foot-washing narrative: an emphasis on love and time specific terminology (Culpepper, 1983).

John 13:1 begins with a description of the time and includes two references to the word *love*: " Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The theme of love carries throughout chapter 13 and culminates with an emphatic command from Jesus in verses 34–35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The repetition of time-specific terminology is important throughout the chapter but is emphasized by Jesus in verse 19: "I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I am he" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Notice that this verse occurs near the close of the foot-washing narrative, and Jesus uses the temporal descriptions of now, before, and when.

Beyond the repetitive patterns of love and time, there are notable mentions (seven of the 20 verses contain nine mentions) of words related to understanding or knowledge. Washing and water are also common in the narrative, with a combination of 14 references. Feet are central to chapter 13 of John and are included nine times in the pericope. Feet and cleansing are the central terms for

foot-washing, and verse 10 captures the words of Jesus concerning both feet and washing: "Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Table 2

Repetitive Patterns in John 13:1–20

Verse	Time	Characters	Actions	Objects
1	before Passover	Jesus	loved /loved	His own in the world
	to the end			
2	During supper	Devil, Judas	betray	
3		Jesus to Father	going back	
4		Jesus	laid down	outer garment
			tied around	towel
5	Then		washed	feet
6		Peter to Jesus	do you wash	my feet
7	not now but after	Jesus		
8	never	Peter	wash	my feet
		Jesus	if don't wash	you (Peter)
9		Peter to Jesus	wash	hands and head
10		clean (people)	only wash	feet
11		not all	are clean	
12	When he had	he (Jesus)	resumed	place
			understand	
13		you (disciples)	call	teacher/Lord
14		you	wash	one another's feet
15		I (Jesus)	do	example
16		one who sent	sent	messenger
		master	sent	servant
17		you	know	these things
18		he who ate	lifted his heel	

19	now, before when it does	you	believe	
20		one I send	receives	me (Jesus)

Progressive Patterns. Identifying progressive patterns through the discussion's structure aids repetitive patterns in revealing the primary thematic elements within a passage (Henson et al., 2020). Connection, development, chiasm, and encapsulation are the four primary progressive patterns that are identifiable in the exegetical process (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Connection is an identifiable pattern created by the author of the passage to attach various images, ideas, or themes (Henson et al., 2020). Robbins (1996a) suggested that progressive patterns called development happen when the theme shifts within the development of a passage. Ancient Roman and Greek literature often developed a mid-sentence resolution as opposed to the familiar final resolve of Western thought, and this practice of middle emphasis is called the chiastic method (Henson et al., 2020). Encapsulation also places a point of emphasis in the center of a discussion but also incorporates repeating patterns before and after the central thought as a way of capturing the central element (Henson et al., 2020).

Zorrilla (1995) observed that verses 1–5 offer an overview to the pericope, yet both verses 6–10 and verses 12–20 can be considered comparable parallels of the same understanding to provide an emphatic point of similarity. Contrast verse 7: "afterward you will understand" with verse 12: "Do you understand" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Consider verse 8: "If I do not wash you" and verse 14: "you also ought to wash" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Compare verse 10: "not every one of you" with verse 18: "I am not speaking of all of you" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Observe verse 11: "he knew who" in relation to verse 18: "I know who I have chosen" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Zorrilla (1995) perceived that all of chapter 13 of John may be considered a chiastic construction, with the centralized focus occurring in verses 18–20 and verse 19 carrying a summary statement: "I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Zorrilla (1995) also noted that chapter 13 commences with a discussion of love and resolves

with repeated emphasis, and examples of the love of Jesus are recorded in verses 12–17 and again in verses 21–26. The central theme for this chiasm is captured in the words of verse 20: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The construction of this chiasm captures the lesson from Jesus coming from God the Father to the disciples and then applied to all who will follow Jesus' example of love. There is also a possible chiasm in the foot-washing narrative encapsulated in John 13:1–20 (see Figure 1). Notice that the theme in this chiastic structure points to a central emphasis on verse 10 and the explanation from Jesus that those that have had a bath are clean, yet washing feet remains necessary.

Figure 1

Chiasm in John 13:1–20

1 "the hour had come to depart this world to the Father"
2 "the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas"
3 "knowing the Father had given all things into his hands"
4 "taking a towel, tied it around his waist"
5 "began to wash his disciples' feet"
6 "Lord, do you wash my feet?"
7 "you do not understand?"
8 "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me
10 "The one who has bathed does not need to wash
except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not
every one of you."
11 "Not all of you are clean"
12 "do you understand?"
13 "You call me teacher and Lord"
14 "I have…washed your feet"
16 "a servant is not greater than his master"
17 "If you know these things"
18 "he who ate bread has lifted his heel against me"
20 "whoever receives me receives the one who sent me"

Notice in the chiasm that there is a movement towards the middle thought that bathing and being clean is imperative, but foot-washing remains a need that

they have (see Figure 1). Likewise, the movement away from the central thought contains very similar parallels for each mention from 1–10 and the back out from 10–20 (see Figure 1).

Opening-Middle-Closing Patterns. Communication in a narrative form typically follows a pattern that provides an opening, a middle, and a closing. Henson et al. (2020) noted that this opening-middle-closing pattern (OMC) may not always occur in a linear progression. Within a text unit, there is a plot or flow that occurs with consideration of OMC patterns in conjunction with the aforementioned patterns of progression and repetition (Robbins, 1996b). Love occurs as an opening theme in John 13 at the beginning of the passage and is then repeated in verses 34 and 35 as a closing pattern (Barnes, 1972). Within OMC, there is typically a plot that moves from a place of shalom to shalom shattered, followed by shalom sought and ending in shalom restored (Allender, 2005). OMC pattern in John 13 occurs with the theme of love that is present at the beginning of the pericope in John 1 and then emphasized as a command in verses 34–35. The peace or shalom that comes from love, in the beginning, is broken by the radical act of Jesus washing his disciples' feet and emphasized by the protest of Peter. Jesus emphasizes his actions as an example of love and restores peace. The actions of the foot-washing narrative are also bracketed on each side by Jesus taking off his outer garment and then later "put on his outer garments and resumed his place" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Table 3

Open-Middle-Closing of John 13:1–35

Section	Passage	Pattern
Opening	John 13:1	having loved his own
Bracket 1	John 13:3	Jesus came from God
Bracket 2	John 13:4	rose and laid aside his outer garment
Middle	John 13:5–11	Jesus washes feet / Peter protests
Bracket 2	John 13:12	put on garment / returned to his place
Bracket 1	John 13:20	receives the one who sent me
Closing	John 13:34–35	love one another

Argumentative Patterns. Robbins (1996b) posited that authors often created arguments within a text that represented both sides for the purpose of exposing a contrary opinion and then offering a rebuttal. Henson et al. (2020) suggested that these argumentative patterns added by a writer are a device that first exposes a fallacious idea so that the author can then present a truthful counterpoint. Henson et al. noted that once a theme is identified within a text, then an argumentative pattern becomes more evident and may be included within the examples, historical notes, analogous language, etc. In the foot-washing example of John 13, Peter insisted that Jesus should not wash his feet. This section of John 13 is critical to the reader as a way to address the radical nature of what Jesus was doing, and an argumentative pattern reveals the expected human reaction (via Peter's refusal) to this lowly act of Jesus, followed by a rebuttal from Jesus to Peter (Blum, 1983). Consider the counter from Jesus to Peter in John 13:8: "If I do not wash you, then you have no share with me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Although Jesus argued with Peter concerning his need for his feet to be washed, Jesus also argued with Peter concerning his desire to be fully bathed: "Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus offered another counterargument to Peter by stating in verse 10: "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). John previously alerted the reader in verse 2 that "the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This revelation about Judas resurfaces in verse 11 after Jesus and Peter engage in their argument, and verse 10 applies the argumentative pattern to the situation with Judas and his betrayal (MacArthur, 2020). The act of foot-washing was necessary, but bathing was not needed for those that were clean; however, Judas was singled out in verse 11: "For he knew who was to betray him; that is why he said, 'Not all of you are clean'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Sensory-Aesthetic Patterns. Sensory-aesthetic patterns are the last filter of inner textual analysis. Human senses such as touch, smell, sight, thinking, emotions, and hearing as well as complex concepts such as humor, intuition, imagination, and

reason are all sensory-aesthetic idioms that an author may utilize in a text (Robbins, 1996a, 1996b). Connections in the layer of sensory-aesthetic patterns occur in three zones, including emotion-fused thought, self-expressive speech, or purposeful action (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Expressions of human senses within a text do not necessarily indicate the use of sensory-aesthetic layering, but deeper meanings beyond the natural senses may be the intention of the author (Henson et al., 2020). A familiar smell in a story may be linked to a specific memory as an expression of an emotion-fused thought, or an expression related to communication, or the physical mouth and ears may be tied to self-expressive speech (Henson et al., 2020). Henson et al. noted that any physical representation such as arms, legs, and feet are often used for the zone of purposeful action.

John 13:5 describes how Jesus washed the feet of the disciples: "Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Attached to this action was Jesus' explanation in verse 14 that the disciples should follow his example and perform the same actions with one another, and in verse 34, Jesus commands them to love one another. Blum (1983) suggested that the action of washing feet that Jesus exemplified was equated directly to the command to love one another and thus related his touch with the emotion of love as a purposeful action. The act of washing feet and expression of love in the passage also contained a deeper meaning that was evident in Peter's aversion to the action and direct challenge to Jesus. The culture of the time included codes of shame and honor and would have opposed the idea of a leader washing feet as an act of love (Domeris, 1993). Jolliffe (1997) and Voorwinde (2005) suggested that the honor and shame culture would have evoked a strong feeling of vulnerability in Peter for both himself and for the leader (Jesus) whom he was following. Jesus not only exemplified love when he washed his disciples' feet, but he performed an action that was also controversial and vulnerable.

Summary of Data: Inner Texture Analysis. The beginning of John 13 stands in contrast to the ending of John 12 and gives a clear indication that there is both a definitive ending summary in chapter 12 and a new narrative commencement

in chapter 13 (Voorwinde, 2005). The new narrative section begins, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart…" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). An evident change occurs in Chapter 13, as the text shifts from an emphasis on signs and lessons in the first 12 chapters to a narrative focused on the passion week of Jesus (Dodd, 1968). Brown (1970) also recognized that John 13 begins a new section of the Johannine Gospel and termed the latter half of the book as "The Book of Glory." Voorwinde (2005) adopted the observations of both Brown and Dodd and described John 13 and following as the "Book of Glory/Passion" (2005, p. 74), and many later works have alluded to the emphasis of the chapters following 13 as being centered on the passion of Jesus and the Glory of the Lord. In addition to the salutation of chapter 12, John 13:21 offered, "After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit…" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This verse further emphasizes the changes that were occurring even within the emotions of Jesus as the event of the crucifixion was approaching (Talbert & Thomas, 1993).

Repetitive patterns in John 13 include a primary emphasis on words related to temporal events (Culpepper, 1983). Words that can be translated as *wash*, *clean*, *bathe*, and *bath* are present throughout chapter 13, and a dozen occurrences of these similar words occur between verse 5 and verse 15 (Zodhiates et al., 2008). In the same 10 verses in the middle of the foot-washing narrative are eight uses of words related to feet. A repetition also occurs as a parallel mention at the beginning of the foot-washing narrative and in the concluding verse 20. Jesus described that he would be leaving and going back to the Father in the first part of the pericope as another clear indication of change and a launch of the passion narrative (Brown & Moloney, 2017; Culpepper, 1983). The declaration of Jesus' departure back to the Father in verse 1 was emphasized again in verse 3 and then paralleled in verse 20: "whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Progressive patterns are also identifiable in John 13, and this includes the aforementioned uses of time-specific language such as *after*, *when*, *during*, *before*, *already*, *then*, etc. are incorporated by John to clarify the sequence of the events. Blum (1983) noted that John 13 parallels the command of Jesus to love one another with his exemplary action of washing feet and instruction that they should do the

same. In verse 15, Jesus encourages, "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you," and he later pronounces in verse 34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Barnes (1972) noted that the overall theme of love was heavily emphasized throughout the book of John, but it is significant that the command from Jesus in verse 34 adds that they should "love one another," and he repeats it twice. Blum (1983) concluded that the idea of mutual love from the command of Jesus is mirrored in the instruction to wash one another's feet in verse 14, and this is also like the Johannine instruction in I John 1:7–9 that explains the need to practice mutual confession.

The most notable argumentative pattern in the foot-washing narrative was the debate between Jesus and Peter. Peter's refusal to allow Jesus to wash his feet was met with a stern rebuttal from Jesus that Peter would have no part with Jesus unless Peter allowed Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus then offered additional clarification to Peter in verse 7: "Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus addressed Peter directly, but it served as a lesson to the greater audience, and the revelation of understanding is noted again by Jesus in verse 12: "Do you understand what I have done for you?" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This inquiry from Jesus preempted an equating of foot-washing with the later command that they should love one another (Wenham et al., 1994).

Application: Inner Texture Analysis. A significant leadership principle from the inner textual analysis of John 13 is the observation from Blum (1983) that foot-washing expresses both reciprocal love as well as mutual confession. After Jesus performed the act of washing his disciples' feet, he then gave two separate instructions that they should follow his example. In John 13:16 Jesus explained, "Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The examination of inner texture was consistent with the observation from Wenham et al. (1994) that the theme of reciprocal love and mutual confession is carried throughout John 13. In addition to the theme of loving one another, Borchert (2002) recognized that the

foot-washing was not only about loving humility but also challenging the shame and honor codes of the culture, and this example is important for leaders today. A discussion of shame and honor codes is more common to intertexture analysis as opposed to inner texture, yet the theme of mutual love that inner texture revealed is connected to the avoidance of shame within human relationships. Brown (2007) suggested that a leader that is willing to challenge social codes of shame and honor will develop shame resiliency, and this process is accomplished through leaders who practice vulnerability.

Jesus pronounced in John 13:10 that "those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean" (*ESV*, 2001,2016). Avolio (2011) suggested that followers' perceptions of their leaders' authenticity, trustworthiness, and transparency increase when supervisors are willing to risk vulnerability as a leadership practice. After the foot-washing, Jesus declares, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (*ESV*, 2001, 2016). Several studies have revealed that trust levels between people are increased when both parties are willing to practice vulnerability, according to Nienaber et al. (2015). The value of vulnerability in leadership is consistent with both leadership studies and the theme of love that the inner texture analysis of the Johannine account of the foot-washing revealed.

Intertexture

Another helpful tool within the socio-rhetorical analysis process that is similar to inner texture is intertexture, and both are valuable for exegesis of Scripture. Inner textual analysis deals mainly with items that are internal to a passage of Scripture, while intertexture considers subject matter that provides external influence and how that influence may shape or interact with the text (Henson et al., 2020). The world that surrounds the text is a primary concern for intertextual examination and the way an author treats the cultural context of external influence is significant to interpretation (Robbins, 1996a). Robbins's (1996a, 1996b) original SRA method identified four filters within the intertextual analysis portion of the examination: oral-scribal intertexture, cultural intertexture,

social intertexture, and historical intertexture. Henson et al. (2020) proposed another filter for intertexture called reciprocal intertexture for a total of five.

Oral-Scribal Intertexture. For hundreds of years, the teachings of the Bible were passed down primarily through oral tradition; these teachings spanned thousands of historical years and included many different authors and contributors before it was canonized into the 66 books that are now recognized by the majority of Christian believers. Scripture expanded through the years incorporating new writings with varied contexts, including both external texts and new oral traditions, and oral-scribal intertextual analysis is the process that examines the text in the context of these external influences (Henson et al., 2020). Henson et al. noted three forms of oral-scribal intertexture: recitation, recontextualization, and reconfiguration. Two of the forms of oral-scribal intertexture (recitation and recontextualization) rely on both oral traditions as well as written text, but while recitation includes attribution of sources, recontextualization does not include source attribution (Henson et al., 2020). The third form in oral-scribal intertexture is a reconfiguration and takes place when a referenced event is foreshadowed, outshone, or replaced (Robbins, 1996a). Jesus states in John 13:18, "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Recitation occurs in this passage from the pericope and is a reference to Psalm 41:9: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Cultural Intertexture. Cultural intertexture is about the knowledge of the people from an inside perspective and is present in a text as either "reference or allusion and echo" (Robbins, 1996a, p. 58). Cultural intertexture concentrates on the cultural examination of people through values, codes, patterns, scripts, systems, and configurations (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). A reference in cultural intertexture refers to a person or tradition that the audience would have a working understanding or familiarity (Robbins, 1996a). Like reference, allusion also relies on audience awareness, but allusion does not require any particular recitation of the tradition (Robbins, 1996a). Echo is also predisposed to tradition, but any

connections to tradition are subtly evoked concepts that are more disputable than allusion or reference (Robbins, 1996a).

The foot-washing narrative in John contains a noteworthy example of cultural intertexture associated with prior both prior traditions and Old Testament references. John 13:10 incorporates a cultural reference linking the practice of foot-washing with Genesis 18:4: "Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Baugh et al. (2002) noted that the culture practiced ritualistic washings that sometimes incorporated a full bath signifying cleansing, but the washing of one's hands and feet was a cultural practice associated with a periodic, ongoing cleansing process. Owanga-Welo (1985) explained that it was a common practice among Roman soldiers to wash their hands, feet, legs, and arms on a regular basis because of the ongoing nature of working out in the world, but they bathed once a week or longer. Keil and Delitzsch (1982) recognized that ritual cleansing practices were instituted in Exodus 29:4 and Leviticus 8:4 to represent the elimination of filthiness so that the priest may then move into the presence of a holy God. Douglas (2002) documented that ceremonies related to washing hands and feet appeared throughout the culture of the area and promoted not only ritual purity, but also personal hygiene and general cleanliness. The ritual custom of washing feet was culturally noteworthy in multiple ways, including hygiene, hospitality, ritual cleansing, and servitude (Talbert & Thomas, 1993).

Thomas (1991) noted that this foot-washing was different from other practices at the time because it occurred in the middle of the meal, it was performed by an honored person and not a servant, it was described in methodical detail, and Jesus emphasizes the extreme importance of this washing to Peter. These differences are as significant for applying a meaning, as are the cultural similarities. Segovia (1985) noted that the Johannine emphasis in the text is that Jesus was telling Peter—and, by extension, any future readers—that those who would not receive the foot-washing message would not have a part in ongoing fellowship with Jesus. What Peter did not know at the time of his refusal is that Jesus was giving

them a lesson that they would understand later, and this was a lesson tied to the effects of the cross (Thomas, 1991).

The relationship between foot-washing and the Passover meal is another question to consider concerning cultural intertexture. Cultural cleansing before the Passover meal would have been even more relevant than daily washing before eating, and there is evidence that this meeting of Jesus and his disciples was a Seder supper, but some debate this event as the meal before Passover because it occurred on a Thursday evening (Carson et al., 2018). John 18:28 includes an explanation that the Jews were concerned that they might become unclean before they ate the Passover meal: "Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the governor's headquarters. It was early morning. They themselves did not enter the governor's headquarters so that they would not be defiled, but could eat the Passover" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This text appears to indicate that the Passover meal had not yet happened, but may be explained by three possibilities: various Jewish sects recognizing different days, the awareness of Jesus of his coming betrayal and need to celebrate earlier, or the Jewish concern regarding the Passover meal may have been used as a common term to include the entirety of the Holy Week occasion (Carson et al., 2018).

Social Intertexture. Social intertexture is not just about knowledge that comes from insider perspectives of the culture but the greater and more regional knowledge of the culture (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Robbins classified social intertexture into various roles, including social roles, social institutions, social identities, and social codes. The foot-washing narrative of John contains various mentions of social roles, including disciples, teachers, masters, slaves, senders, and messengers.

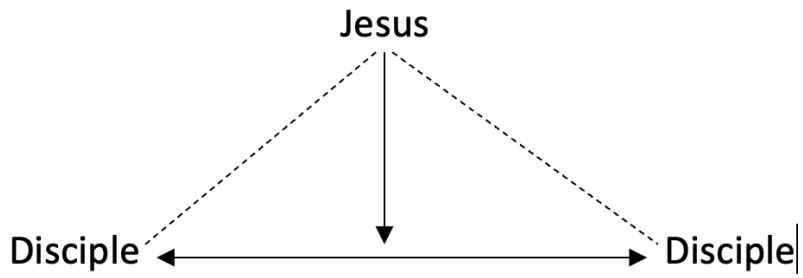
Jesus stated in John 13:16, "Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This passage expresses a social hierarchy between servants and masters, as well as messengers and senders, and Baugh et al. (2002) explained that the culture during the time of the Johannine writing was very familiar with relationship roles concerning those that controlled and those that were subservient.

Baugh et al. (2002) noted that John 13:20 expresses that messengers could carry agent authority, and this is evidence of another social intertexture of the time: "Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The influential people groups during the Johannine writing included Judeans, Romans, and Greeks, and the culture of each of these societies incorporated the idea of shame and honor as a substantial defining aspect of a person's social role in the greater community (Adkins, 1975; Malina, 2001). Jesus directed attention in the foot-washing narrative towards social relationships that normally required honor from those in the subservient positions, but then challenged the cultural norms of honor and shame and suggested that hierarchy did not equate to greatness and servanthood is not shameful or less honorable (Crook, 2009; Domeris, 1993; Neyrey, 1994). Honor and shame culture, which is very significant to this pericope, is discussed further in the section concerning honor, guilt, and rights within the texture of common social and cultural topics.

Michaels (2011) suggested that the communication of Jesus to his disciples in John 13:14 was a "triangular" sentence in which Jesus proclaimed himself Lord and teacher as a point of higher authority, but then invited the disciples to emulate his actions horizontally on a human level (p. 356). This idea can be illustrated with a triangle that places Jesus at the top with a vertical downward arrow denoting the action flows from the higher or greater one, and then a horizontal line that indicates both giving and receiving of action between the human recipients that imitate or follow the example (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Triangular Communication



Note. Adapted from Michaels (2011, p. 356).

The idea behind the triangular communication, according to Michaels (2011), is for humanity to understand that grace flows from God through Jesus so that people may both give and receive grace to each other just as they have been given grace. This triangular communication occurs again in 13:34: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Michaels (2011) noted that Jesus demonstrates a concrete action of cleansing and self-giving and then commanded them to love one another, and this combination implies mutual confession and forgiveness as well. Although authority comes from God, it transforms individuals and invites them into extending grace to each other. The instruction from Jesus is that all people need not only to be washed, but to wash each other (Michaels, 2011).

Historical Intertexture. Historical intertexture is a filter through which researchers may discern events in the text that have historical significance, and the references may occur directly or indirectly (Henson et al., 2020). The utilization of historical intertexture is valuable to help identify the time and place of a scriptural event or to help recognize any notable context of events that might be essential to the originally intended audience (Henson et al., 2020). The combination of both the meal before Passover with the act of Jesus washing their feet is significant as a cultural event, but the narrative also offers several statements that provide historical context. The opening statement of John 13 is, "It was just before the Passover Festival" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Within the pericope, it indicates that this meal of Jesus with his disciples took place during Holy Week on Thursday evening, and this timing has caused some scholars to question if this meal was meant to be a Passover seder supper or something different (Carson et al., 2018).

Reciprocal Intertexture. Each of the first four subtextures in this study that were suggested by Robbins (1996a) are textures that consider unidirectional influence, but the fifth subtexture, recognized by Henson et al. (2020), is reciprocal intertexture and is a filter that understands influence from both directions. McConville (2014) suggested that the greater canon of Scripture is both complex and dynamic, yet it is imperative to consider both the influence and influencers of a

passage within the full range of Scripture. Bauer and Traina (2011) explained that the complete message of God is not contained within singular passages recited in isolation, but is expressed fully across the greater canon, and an investigation into the interaction of meanings between various texts gives a richer and fuller understanding of God's intended Word.

In this investigation of the foot-washing text from John 13, there are several other references to washing and cleansing rituals, and washing feet appears in other biblical passages, but the action of Jesus as a vulnerable leader also occurs in other passages. Jesus directed the disciples In Matthew 20:26–28 that those who aspire to greatness must engage in willing service and emulate the actions of Jesus: "as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul expressed the loving service of Jesus and this is a clear theme in 2:5–7: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Talbert and Thomas (1993) identified that vulnerable service is also evident in the argument between the disciples concerning who was the greatest and the reply by Jesus in Luke 22:27: "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). An examination of reciprocal intertexture in the foot-washing event shows that vulnerable actions of Jesus are present as a theme in other parts of the canon.

Summary of Data: Intertexture Analysis. In an examination of the intertextural analysis of John 13:1–20, I observed various important thematic elements in the pericope. Through oral-scribal recitation subtexture analysis, I recognized that Psalm 41:9 is recited by John in the foot-washing story: "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Cultural and social consideration of the pericope helped to reveal that the culture was significantly affected by shame and honor codes in hierarchical relationships, including masters with slaves, disciples with teachers, and

messengers with those that dispatch them. Jesus regularly challenged the societal roles that expected servants, slaves, and messengers to be subservient and in a place of shame compared with the honorable elevation of those who lorded over them (Crook, 2009; Domeris, 1993; Neyrey, 1994). The way in which Jesus showed loving service to others was through his demonstration of washing feet, and Jesus then instructed the disciples that his example was something that they too should emulate for each other, whether as a leader or as a servant (Baugh et al., 2002). Carson et al. (2018) noted that John 13:1 is a historically significant verse that helps to place the timing of this event in the context of Holy Week and the Passover meal. Cooreman-Guittin (2021) recognized that the imagery of Jesus exemplifying leadership principles from a position that is readily considered lower, shameful, and vulnerable is evidenced in John 13 and across the canon of Scripture, and this revelation is consistent with reciprocal intertexture analysis of the pericope.

Application: Intertexture Analysis. The exemplary action of Jesus In John 13:1–20 utilized the practice of washing feet as a demonstration of both love and vulnerability by breaking cultural norms that differentiated higher and lower stations of society, and Jesus then encouraged reciprocal action of washing, serving, and loving one another (Cooreman-Guittin, 2021). Reciprocal actions of vulnerability that demonstrate love is similar to observations by Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) that mentors who practice vulnerability with their mentees in their place of employment will strengthen the relationship of both parties and benefit the organization. Jemsek (2008) noted that leadership theories have also been moving away from the idea that quality leaders must possess dominating dispositions and towards the awareness that great leadership embraces more vulnerable openness. John 13:16–7 indicates that Jesus exemplified leadership that did not mandate a socially-expected position of strength: “a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Honor and shame relationships were a significant part of the culture for each of the primary people groups in the time of the Johannine writings, including Jews, Greeks, and Romans (Adkins, 1975; Malina, 2001). Brown (2015) suggested that a

mutual willingness to risk vulnerability between people is vital for contesting shame culture, and leaders that encourage reciprocal vulnerability can help alleviate the negative results of hierarchical honor and shame barriers in society. Cooreman-Guittin (2021) analyzed the actions of Jesus in John 13:1–20 and determined that Jesus exemplified vulnerability by washing his disciples' feet and the vulnerability Jesus risked served to expose the negative implications of the honor and shame culture. John's account of the events in the upper room included a conversation with Peter and his discomfort with the actions of Jesus, followed by a sobering revelation from Jesus: "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The uncomfortable conversation between Jesus and Peter demonstrated that Jesus not only risked a vulnerable action but challenged the cultural norm associated with the action. Leaders that willingly express vulnerability also build repour with others, and vulnerability is effective for creating strong relationships with followers (Brown, 2018).

Social and Cultural Texture

While a sacred texture analysis attempts to understand a text from a higher vantage point and inner texture examination seeks understanding from within the text, social and cultural texture seeks to identify the perspective of the author and intended readers (Henson et al., 2020). The proper hermeneutical interpretation of Scripture necessitates an investigation of the cultural-historical context and social backgrounds that surrounded the author and the text (Virkler & Ayayo, 2007). The role of social and cultural texture analysis is to provide additional support for the interpretation of a text and contains considerations that are different from social and cultural intertexture. Social and cultural intertexture concentrates on codes, institutions, relationships, and social roles, but social and cultural texture focuses on the kind of people that were present at the time of the original writing (Robbins, 1996a). Within the consideration of social and cultural texture is a need to consider anthropological and sociological theories according to Robbins (1996b), and the social and cultural texture method contains three aspects: special social topics, common social and cultural topics, and final cultural categories. The issue of social

and cultural texture, "is not what do we see or hear but the question is what did they see or hear in the moment of writing or hearing" (Henson et al., 2020, p. 125).

Specific Social Topics. Worldviews are the subject of specific social topics, and writings that are centered on religious communication often contain discussions of various worldly perspectives (Robbins, 1996a). Henson et al. (2020) noted that specific social topics are based on the discourse in the text, are centered on ways that people respond to the world, include important spiritual issues, and the terminology comes from the discipline of sociology. The sociological classifications that were first posited by Wilson (1973) were utilized by Robbins (1996a) to recognize seven worldviews that can be used in the examination of Scripture: conversionist, revolutionist, introversionist, gnostic-manipulationist, thaumaturgical, reformist, and utopian. An examination of each of the worldviews in the context of John 13 revealed that three primary views are emphasized in the foot-washing narrative, including gnostic-manipulation, conversionist with some evidence of reformist and thaumaturgical influence. Exploring each of the opinions in this section provides context for the texture of special social topics and a platform for discussion when comparing the views of the early church with the opinions of modern readers in the section discussing ideological texture.

***Gnostic Manipulation*.** Transformation of relationships through increasing knowledge and learning as an approach to salvation is termed a Gnostic Manipulation method according to Robbins (1996a). Words related to learning in John 13:1–20 include the word *knowledge* (used five times) and the word *understanding* (appearing three times). Jesus expounded in verse 7, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus added in verse 12, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Although the audience of John's writing would have had a clear picture of all that Jesus went through on the cross, the disciples that Jesus was addressing in John 13 were not yet clearly connecting the events of the crucifixion, as evidenced in the conversation between Jesus and Peter (Bultmann, 2014). Bruce (1994) noted that a heresy of the first century that John was fighting was due to Gnostic teachings that emphasized knowledge, but denied that Jesus was both

divine and human, but John 13 presents Jesus as both human and divine and combats Gnosticism with a greater source of knowledge. Segovia (1985) suggested that the readers were already privy to the events of the cross, but John continued to express an urgency to the followers of Christ to not forget all Jesus had done and to learn from his lessons and examples before he went to the cross. A gnostic-manipulationist view is present in John 13 as a primary emphasis in both the vocabulary used and the accompanying allusions.

Conversionist. The perspective that the world is corrupted and in need of change is the conversionist worldview, and this idea is the central language of the gospel message that claims to transform individuals so that they become new people living a new way (Robbins, 1996a). The explanation of Jesus to Peter in John 13:10 demonstrates conversion when Jesus states, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus follows his explanation to Peter that he is clean and needed no bath by stating that not every one of them was clean, and then John added an explanation in verse 11: "For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Peter did not need a bath which was equated with baptism and salvation, but Judas was not clean and did not have the same status in this regard as Peter. Jesus did tell Peter that he needed his feet washed, and Field Bacon (1931) suggested that Jesus was comparing baptism with the notion of justification, adding that there is also a need for the ongoing conversion process known as sanctification, as demonstrated in the text as foot-washing. The regular practice of washing feet as a symbol of postconversion forgiveness of sin as an ongoing cleansing process appears to have become well known in the Johannine community, according to Countryman (1987). In the original works of Saint Augustine, washing of feet was recognized in the early church culture as a picture of ongoing confession and a postbaptism cleansing as a postconversion action not as salvation but as mutual accountability for sinfulness (Augustine, 2018). Thomas (1991) noted that the act of foot-washing was a way for individuals to join their beliefs together as an act of mutual recognition of the ongoing grace of Jesus for postconversion forgiveness. Initial conversion is pictured in John 13 as baptism

equated with justification, and the ongoing process of sanctification is equated to foot-washing and confession. Both of these images support a conversionist worldview in the text.

Thaumaturgical. A worldview that is primarily focused on present individual needs of comfort and relief through a salvation process that includes reassurance, healing, postgrief restoration, avoidance of pain, and eternal life after an earthly death is a thaumaturgical view (Robbins, 1996a). John 13:1–10 does not emphasize this view overtly, yet the natural result of Jesus washing feet provided comfort and promoted healthy hygiene that could be linked to healing or even avoidance of pain, and the idea of salvific restoration is also symbolized in the act of Jesus washing feet (Thomas, 1991). Historic Judaic tradition and Old Testament foot-washing rituals can be tied to a wide range of meanings. Still, the apparent result of this action is comforting relief for one's feet after traveling dusty roads and the common understanding in the culture of symbolic renewal (Keil & Delitzsch, 1982; Smith, 1899). The text of John 13 does not contain vocabulary that heavily emphasizes relief and comfort, but the action that Jesus performed would have been related to these concepts by the audience of John's message. Thaumaturgical worldview is a secondary emphasis in the passage.

Reformist. The reformist view is another worldview that thinks of the world as distorted and requiring transformation. Still, the reformist view concentrates on using justice and social systems as the change agents (Henson et al., 2020). Henson et al. (2020) suggested that when an author holds a reformist view, the text contains specific language related to the idea of change and justice, and the text of John 13 does not use vocabulary that is consistent with this idea. By informing the disciples that they should follow his example and wash the feet of one another, Jesus does imply that they may need change, and he repeats a similar request when he gives them a new command to love one another. The word *change* is not in the passage, but a change of attire is conveyed when Jesus takes off his outer garment and wraps a towel around his waist, and then later changes back into his outer garment and returns to his seat. Morris (1971) suggested that the actions of Jesus exemplified laying down authority when he removed his outer garment and taking up humble

service when he wrapped the towel around his waist. Ultimately the idea of reform through social organizations and systems is not the focus of the pericope, but there is some emphasis on the concept of reform.

Revolutionist. A future-focused worldview is known as the revolutionist view, which centers on a coming divine age that will destroy and replace this dark and evil present world (Henson et al., 2020). There are no direct mentions of future apocalypse in this section of Johannine writing. Still, the approaching death of Jesus on the cross is foreshadowed with the pericope and the first reads, Although the pericope does not speak specifically of the future destruction of the evil world, there is a foreshadowing of the death of Jesus in the first verse: "Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This verse alludes to the cross and mentions the end of Jesus' ministry to those he loved in the world (Carson et al., 2018). The revolutionist view does not appear as a primary strength of this passage.

Introversionist. The introversionist worldview is similar to the revolutionist view in that it indicates a flaw in the present world, but the way to fix the fault is centered on current action (Henson et al., 2020). An introversionist worldview encourages a departure from the debased world and often necessitates instituting purification rites and even movement to another community (Robbins, 1996a). Some language in the first verse suggests withdrawal, but it is about Jesus departing and not a suggestion for the community: "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus later explains to his disciples in verse 36 that he is going to be departing, but they could not follow at that time. The primary focus of John 13:1–20 is centered around the action of Jesus washing feet, and purification is a significant reason that foot-washing was performed. Jesus not only washed his disciples' feet, but said that they should follow his example and regularly perform this action. Brown (1995) suggested that this foot-washing ritual demonstrated by Jesus would be accompanied by an acknowledgment of sins, mutual confession, and asking forgiveness. These

cleansing actions are strong and there is some mention of departure, but the overall idea of the introversionist perspective does not appear emphatic in John 13.

***Utopian*.** Like the reformist view, the utopian view is concerned about the world's social systems; however, the answer for the utopian view is not found in reforming systems of justice, but in reconstructing them entirely through an active response by people (Robbins, 1996a). This response uses people in the world to address corrupted systems and believes that the systems are the problem in the world and not the people themselves (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). The utopian worldview considers the actions of the people as integral for a future new heaven and new earth, and the efforts of the people help to replace the old, corrupt systems and to join the promised new world (Henson et al., 2020). Although the pericope is not overly utopian in vocabulary or specific emphasis, there is an opening and closing emphasis that reflect some utopian ideas. In verse 1, John explains, "Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" and closes the pericope with, "whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). A utopian worldview is not a primary emphasis in John 13:1–20.

Common Social and Cultural Topics. There are familiar institutions and systems that every society understands as presupposed or common knowledge, and these are the common social and cultural topics that define the environment surrounding a text (Robbins, 1996b). By exploring the common social and cultural topics that give context to a Scripture, one can better understand the message that the author was speaking to the original audience. There are six subcategories of common social and cultural topics, according to Henson et al. (2020): honor, guilt, and rights culture; dyadic agreements; challenge-response (riposte); economic exchange systems; purity laws; and Old Testament laws. Four of these six categories are evident in John 13:1–20 as recurring common social and cultural topics, including dyadic agreement, challenge-response, purity codes, and honor, guilt, and rights culture.

Honor, Guilt, and Rights Cultures. A patriarchal, male-dominated culture was prevalent at the time of the Johannine writings, and within this society was an emphasis on cultural standings and social positions (Robbins, 1996a). Honor and shame codes were prevalent in society at the time John was written and could be seen in hierarchical roles such as men over women, masters over slaves, and teachers over students. People in this society were well aware of the relationship between status, honor, and shame, and they often sought ways to increase honor and avoid shame as a way of climbing the social ladder (Henson et al., 2020). Domeris (1993) emphasized that the idea of honor and shame did not only follow social positions, but was also related to degrees of wealth and was very relevant in the exchange of goods or resources. John 13:1–20 included several hierarchical associations that would have carried a sense of honor for the socially superior positions and shame for those in a lower place (Malina, 2001). Within the pericope are honorable seats of authority, including masters, teachers, and senders, and lower corresponding positions, including enslaved people, disciples, and messengers. Cooreman-Guittin (2021) noted that Jesus challenged the honor and shame culture by offering honor to the lower positions of messenger, servant, and disciple; he also exemplified this idea through his actions by taking on the lowly role of servant and washing feet. Domeris (1993) emphasized that Jesus regularly challenged the codes of honor and shame and spent time with the outcasts and rejected people of society.

Dyadic Agreement. Dyadic agreement occurs when people with limited commodities begin to barter and trade each other with favors or gifts as an unspoken social contract (Malina, 2001). Robbins (1996a) noted that these informal agreements begin a process of reciprocity in which each person continues to outgive the other so that they are in the more honorable position as giver and not as the one that owes. This reciprocal giving can occur across classes, but if the class difference is noticeable, then the exchange is viewed as a patron-client relationship and may come with significant ties and obligations (Malina, 2001). The different class levels noted by John in the pericope are challenged by Jesus for implications of honor and shame, and the idea of dyadic agreement in the form of patron-client relationships is also turned upside-down in John 13 (Henson et al., 2020). Foot-washing was an

understood patron-client relationship in which a person in the seat of authority would receive the action as a favor because of the limited means of the person in a lower position (Malina, 2001). Jesus should have been the patron, but he was the one that offered the favor and upset the reciprocal expectations of a dyadic agreement. Because the patron-client relationship also occurred between unequal status levels, the actions of Jesus placed people of different social groups on the same level, and this was a radical action that helps explain why Peter was so confounded (Henson et al., 2020). The implications of Jesus' example and instructions from John 13 is that leaders are not intended to view followers as lesser clients, but as equals that may be treated with mutual love and willing service, instead of relationships that require an ongoing need for an unequal give and take (Henson et al., 2020).

People with dyadic disposition are those that are heavily reliant on the opinions of others to inform their own self-perception (Robbins, 1996a). Modern, western thought is very different from the context of the Johannine writings, and this makes it more difficult for Western readers to grasp a cultural concept that is different if not opposite of modern individualistic thoughts (Richards & James, 2020). A collective approach to understanding life was familiar to the culture of the first century in region of the Johannine community, and the idea of family connection and the importance of family heritage was long-held for centuries even in the time of the writings of the Old Testament (Richards & James, 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Jesus regularly challenged the idea that he needed other people's opinions to help him form an opinion of himself and this was evident in John 13:8 after Peter refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet and Jesus replied, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus reiterated that he only depended on his relationship with God, the Father when he said in verse 20, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The relationship that a leader has with followers is one that should contain mutual trust, but self-perception in a Christian leader is not dependent on the opinions of others; rather, the leader should

follow the example of Jesus who exemplified a relationship with God as the only one that informs personal identity in an individual (Henson et al., 2020).

Challenge-Response. A social interaction of haggling between individuals for the purpose of gaining status inside a culture of honor and shame is called challenge-response or riposte, and it happens so that people in a lower or more shameful position can attempt to climb to a more honorable status within defined social rules (Malina, 2001; Neyrey, 1994). Malina (2001) outlined the challenge-response in three steps: a challenge through action or speaking, the perceived message from the individual and public, and the reaction of both the recipient and the public. In John 13:6–8, Peter became incredulous when Jesus came to wash Peter's feet and he instinctively prohibited Jesus from acting, but Jesus replied by telling Peter that he would "have no share with him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). There was an assumed social contract that Peter perceived that Jesus was breaking, so Peter denied that his feet should be washed until Jesus nullified the social contract and then Peter agreed effusively. The assumption by Peter and subsequent agreement was a demonstration of a challenge-response between Jesus and Peter and additionally demonstrated that Peter was not comfortable with Jesus assuming the lower and more vulnerable position (Cooreman-Guittin, 2021).

Purity Codes. Malina (2001) suggested that purity codes have to do with proper placement and time and the belief that there are protective borders or boundaries intended to keep things separated adequately into intentional spaces. The idea of purity extends to people and their actions concerning the defined boundaries (Henson et al., 2020). Those that moved beyond the designated restrictions would enter the realm of the unclean, and Israel used purity codes for each person in the culture from the high priest down to the lowly Gentiles (Robbins, 1996a). Because purity could be lost in their society by such necessary events as touching a dead body, there were also rituals for unclean people to reclaim purity status (Henson et al., 2020). Thomas (1991) noted that washing rituals were well established in the Old Testament, and the cleansing of both feet and hands was symbolic of the restoration of spiritual purity, and especially in the case of officials that were tasked with rituals related to reconciliation.

The idea of washing feet as ritual purity was performed by multiple people groups from the time including not only the Judeans, but the Romans and Greeks. This process was primarily performed by a person designated for service or simply by oneself with a bowl offered from the host (Adkins, 1975; Malina, 2001). Bultmann (2014) identified that the purity code was more starkly challenged by Jesus because he began to wash their feet during the meal and not before or as they entered the room, thus risking the mixture of an unclean action with what was most likely the Passover meal. John 13 is centered around a cleansing ritual to restore purity both physically and spiritually, and Jesus used the opportunity to again break a social code and place emphasis on the action of mutual love—not on the hierarchical system or the prospect that status governed those that were cleaning or needed to be cleaned.

Final Cultural Categories. Final cultural categories conclude the last of three classifications in the study of social and cultural texture. Centered on the way that groups or individuals self-identify, this category considers both the position and location that makes these groups or individuals distinguishable from others at the time (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). Rhetoric is integral for understanding this cultural category and oratory persuasion from the one delivering the message is not only for those inside the culture but for those external as well (Henson et al., 2020). Robbins (1996a) identified five different roles of rhetorical persuasion: dominant culture rhetoric, subculture rhetoric, counterculture rhetoric, contraculture rhetoric, and liminal rhetoric.

The Johannine audience had a culture that was influenced by Romans, Greeks, and Judeans and each of these people groups played a significant part in forming the Christian sect that was emerging at the time. Martyn (1979) and Trebilco (1991) suggested that the culture at the time of John's writings carried a sense of animosity between the growing Christian believers and the Jews that shared the same region. Hare (1967) contended that the accounts of Jewish people persecuting Christ-followers in the first century have been overly embellished by various anti-Semite proponents and the tension between the two groups is not a significant point of emphasis by John. Kobel (2011) suggested that the Johannine

community may have experienced contentious moments with the Jewish people, but the concern was not ongoing and did not become a definitive problem. As a new people group forms and breaks away from one culture to become a new one, the transition group is known as a liminal culture (Robbins, 1996a). Liminal rhetoric often contains themes of fear or chaos because of the nature of cultural transition (Henson et al., 2020). Wilson (1967) noted that the view of Christianity in the first century is commonly identified as a culture that was transitioning from Judaism and thus in a liminal stage. Harland (2003) suggested that Christianity is erroneously identified as a sect that emerged from Judaism because it was founded from the beginning with many independent thoughts and the significant influence of both the Roman and Greek cultures also helped define the early church. The first-century Johannine community was formed around the influence of three other cultures in the same civic setting, but each of the four also existed independently (Harland, 2003).

Words related to dominant positions that appear in John 13:1–20 include *Father*, *God*, *Lord*, *teacher*, and *master*. Dominant culture rhetoric may appear in a text as either an allusion or direct statement that provides clues about the presupposed values, attitudes, and norms of the culture (Robbins, 1996a). Jesus made mention of these three dominant positions in the pericope, but then juxtaposed them against their lower counterpoints and then demonstrated role reversal in each instance and thus countered the expected dominant cultural rhetoric of the time. Peter represented the voice of the culture in John 13:8 when he protested, "You shall never wash my feet" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). While Peter's initial reaction to Jesus demonstrated his understanding of dominant roles and his disdain for allowing one in authority to take a subservient role, Peter quickly changed his mind and encouraged, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The shift in Peter's rhetoric moved away from the idea of dominance and towards a position of contraculture when he later exclaimed in verse 37 that he was ready to lay down his life as a revolutionary act. Peter battled between opposing voices of rhetoric within John 13 until the closing of the text in which Jesus explained that Peter would deny him three times; this battle within Peter was

consistent with the opposing views of Christianity with the other cultures at that time (Thomas, 1991).

Ideological Texture

Readers are not all the same and the study of ideological texture considers the way that people may view a passage throughout history as their own perceptions or biases may change how the text is interpreted (Henson et al., 2020). Two specific ways through which an individual may add to or change the meaning of a text are eisegesis and anachronism and ideological texture analysis helps the reader examine these possible errors (Henson et al., 2020). Some of the individual bias areas considered in the examination of ideological texture include locations, modes of intellectual discourse, group relationships, and the culmination of these concepts or spheres of ideology (Robbins, 1996a). Henson et al. (2020) noted that the method of examination of a text for social-cultural relationships as described by Robbins (1996a) can be used to determine individual context also.

Richards and James (2020) and Malina (2001) identified that modern readers in Western society are primarily an individualist society and do not carry or even understand the concepts of biblical perspectives from a more collective culture. When John shared the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet in John 13, it was profound defiance against the prevailing culture of honor and shame. While Jesus and the disciples were Jewish in heritage, they were also strongly subjected to the cultural influences of Rome and Greece, and all three of these people groups held a strong sense of shame and honor (Malina, 2001). In addition to the differences between the three converging cultures of the first century, the message of the text may also be affected by another triumvirate of social perspectives. An examination of ideological texture is concerned about modern readers, yet there is also a need to consider possible differences or changes in culture from the time that Jesus performed the actions in the upper room and the time that John penned and delivered the writing. The event of the foot-washing was prior to the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, yet the audience of John would have been long aware of many occurrences that took place after the upper room encounter (Thomas, 1991). The understanding of the disciples on the night Jesus spoke with them in John 13

was being challenged to transition culturally from Judaism to the radical ideas that Jesus promoted, and their context at the time was Jewish and perhaps thought themselves a subculture of Judaism. The culture by the time that John wrote the fourth gospel was already transitioning from one that was liminal into one that was more countercultural; thus, the audience would have had a clear separation from traditional Judaism (Wilson, 1967). Modern readers in the United States are primarily a Christian subculture of North America that has long held a dominant role in the society; however, there is a movement toward a post-Christian era that would begin a transition for Christians from a dominant position to one that is liminal and losing influence (Henson et al., 2020).

Ideological texture analysis revisits the observations of social-cultural context and challenges the reader to identify their own social and cultural environment as individual location (Robbins, 1996a). North American church culture at the dawn of the 21st century contains elements of influence from reformists, gnostic- manipulation, and the utopian worldview (Henson et al., 2020). The emphasis of John 13:1–20 at the time of the writing mentioned knowledge multiple times, and gnostic-manipulation is about providing knowledge. The passage also points to conversion and sanctification as particularly important elements, and there are some lesser indications of a gnostic-manipulation view and some traces of thaumaturgical influence. The audience of John was several years removed from the events of the foot-washing, and the Christian movement was more defined and moving away from being thought of as a sect or subculture of Judaism into being an independent countercultural (Wilson, 1967). The transitioning early church was likely in a liminal stage during the Johannine writings and the influence of honor and shame remained a powerful influence, but John captured a moment from Jesus' teaching in John 13 that directly challenged this long-held perception. Harland (2003) suggested that John's writings were in agreement with gnostic manipulation because of the strained relationship between the expanding Christian movement and the existing Jewish community.

Within the exploration of ideological texture is a consideration of the relationships the readers have with various groups, and these groups may include

gangs, cliques, troops, action sets, factions, corporate teams, and historical traditions (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). The disciples under Jesus at the time of the events of the upper room may be considered a troop that also has characteristics of an action set. Henson et al. (2020) defined a troop as a way of referring to what is sometimes called a gang; both of these groups have a singular leader that determines the values for everyone in the group. An action set is also applicable to Jesus and the disciples because this designation, according to Henson et al. (2020), refers to a group with a singular leader that defines a corporate goal for the team to achieve, and Jesus emphasized a goal that both he his followers should seek the will of the Father. External opinion from the Roman empire at the time of Jesus' public ministry would have identified the followers of Jesus as a faction, and a faction is a group that challenges a rival group for the purpose of swaying them to join (Robbins, 1996a).

Present society in North America is mainly driven by expanding corporations, and corporate groups typically demand standard norms and values to meet and maintain expectations. The modern culture in North America is mainly corporate. Henson et al. (2020) noted that corporate groups are formed around norms and values that help define expectations, and corporate systems are designed to include many individual perspectives as long as they do not clash with the more significant stated goals. The contemporary perspective also embraces historical tradition, and historic tradition groups are focused on the alignment of a particular theological tradition (Henson et al., 2020). Groups that emphasize historical tradition are even prone to adding their theological bias to an interpretation, at the cost of missing the intended meaning of the original text (Henson et al., 2020). Theological bias was prevalent at the time that the disciples followed Jesus as well as today, and this individual bent toward historic tradition created confusion for the original audience and today (Henson et al., 2020). There were areas of agreement and disagreement in all three audiences of John 13 over time, including the time of the event, the time of the Johannine writing, and the time of the modern reader. Social cultural examination of each culture over time provides a better understanding of the biases that each audience may hold and where these opinions

may diverge or converge. Gaining an understanding of these three perspectives helps the reader better ascertain the deeper messages in the text.

Summary of Data: Social and Cultural Texture and Ideological Texture. Analytical data from this section reflect observations from social and cultural texture and ideological texture. The analysis of social and cultural texture included data from specific social topics, common cultural and social topics, and final cultural categories. Observations concerning specific social topics indicated that John 13:1–20 was mostly centered on the view of gnostic manipulation. The terminology of the pericope included multiple uses of words related to the idea of knowledge, including understand, knowing, and know. A secondary view in the text centered on conversion with emphasis purposefully focused on the act of repeated cleansing by foot-washing as a direct correlation with the ongoing process of sanctification. The imagery from the act of washing feet represents the ongoing need for confession, repentance from sin, and forgiveness of others as a reflection of sanctification; this is following the initial justification of a believer and the act of baptism represented in John 13 as taking a bath (Countryman, 1987). Other possible views noted in John 13 included reformist and thaumaturgical, yet the references to both of these were more indirect and less pronounced.

Common social and cultural topics noted in an analysis of John 13:1–20 included challenge-response, purity codes, dyadic agreement, and honor, guilt, and rights culture. The Johannine audience would have been strongly influenced by honor, guilt, and rights, and Jesus directly challenged the culture of honor and shame within the text by breaking the rules that hierarchical positions deserved more honor and low positions such as servants should carry shame (Cooreman-Guittin, 2021). Dyadic agreements emphasize a patron-client association, and this type of hierarchical relationship was confronted by Jesus when he (although Lord) lowered himself both physically and socially to clean his followers' feet (Malina, 2001). Peter challenged Jesus and exclaimed that he would not allow his feet to be washed, but Jesus responded that Peter would have no part; this exchange demonstrated the actions of challenge-response. The culture during the time of Jesus and the later Johannine audience would have been very familiar with purity

codes, and this was a vital theme that Jesus both taught and demonstrated in John 13. Both Adkins (1975) and Malina (2001) noted that when Jesus as both teacher and Lord performed a common ritual of lowly service that was familiar to Judeans, Romans, and Greeks alike, and this action confounded the cultural conceptions and demonstrated that leaders could influence followers from a humble or even shameful position.

Observations from the analysis of final cultural categories suggested that the early emerging church sprang from a subculture of Judaism and then moved into a liminal culture that was breaking away from Jewish culture and then finally a more counterculture (Wilson, 1967). Mutual civic centers at the time of the writing existed for the three cultures of Jewish, Roman, and Greek influence (Harland, 2003). Both the shock of Peter concerning the act of Jesus as Lord and the vocabulary of the pericope describing the foot-washing indicate that dominant cultural rhetoric was prevalent at the time of the event. The lesson from Jesus following Peter's refusal and the change of Peter's understanding moved the thought process in the text towards a contracultural or even revolutionary cultural stance. Considering the message of John 13:1–20 as a whole, there is a message of mutual care and love in the midst of cultural battles that emphasize either conformity or radical revolution, and in this intersection of these responses lies the possibility of reform. With these cultural distinctions of the Johannine community fighting for recognition, Jesus lowered himself and demonstrated an act of mutual love that disregarded status and then commanded that we love in the same way.

An analysis of ideological texture in John 13:1–20 comprised another observation of social textures, but now focused on the perceptions and biases of the modern reader. The social and cultural context that is consistent with this study is 21st century North America. Malina (2001) recognized a significant variance of understanding between the people of the first century and a contemporary western audience concerning the concepts and practices of honor and shame. Comparing the cultures that surrounded both those that were in the story of the upper room, those that were part of the later Johannine audience, and contemporary audiences also revealed that a sense of transition exist at different levels for each. At the time of

Jesus and his disciples, Christianity was beginning to emerge from being a Jewish subculture, but the transition was much further along by the time of John's writing, and the culture was then either liminal if not already countercultural. A reader of John in the 21st century North American culture is in a context that has long enjoyed an established dominance of Christianity as a primary influence, yet there is significant movement towards a post-Christian culture, and we may already be in a transition towards a liminal cultural setting with Christianity under additional scrutiny (Henson et al., 2020).

An individual location examination indicated that John 13:1–20 emphasized gnostic manipulation, and a focus on knowledge was prevalent. Additionally, the text includes foot-washing as an allusion to sanctification and the process of ongoing cleansing in the conversion process (Cooreman-Guittin, 2021). There are also some indications of culture influenced by the reformist view, as well as some traces of elements related to the thaumaturgical view. By the time of John's writing, the culture was shifting away from outsider opinion that it was an extension of Judaism to be seen more as a group that was countercultural (Wilson, 1967). Harland (2003) suggested that the early church that was in the process of formation would have been accepting of gnostic-manipulation, and Henson et al. (2020) noted that North American culture at the dawn of the second millennium also shows signs of embracing gnostic-manipulation, as well as reformist and utopian views. Henson et al. also identified that the Judeans and Romans would have perceived Jesus and his band of disciples as a faction, while a study of group relationships may categorize them as a troop with some features of an action group. The contemporary North American culture is mostly corporate in nature, yet historical tradition also plays a role in shaping the ethos (Henson et al., 2020).

Application: Social and Cultural Texture and Ideological Texture. An analysis of John 13:1–20 utilizing both social and cultural texture as well as ideological texture produced observations that helped clarify the function and application of vulnerability in leadership. Gnostic manipulation was a primary view revealed by examination of the pericope, as evidenced when Jesus told his disciples that they needed to gain a new understanding. The knowledge that Jesus offered

was crafted as a challenge to the cultural understanding of shame and honor that was prevalent at the time. Jemsek (2008) noted that there is a common—but erroneous—perception that practicing vulnerability with others is a sign of weakness, yet Brown (2015) concluded that while vulnerability often includes risk, emotional exposure, and uncertainty, vulnerability is not weakness but rather powerful for those that are brave enough to embrace it. Ito and Bligh (2016) agreed that vulnerability is not weakness, describing vulnerability as having elements of uncertainty, insecurity, and risk within one's subjective perception.

In John 13, Jesus first demonstrated foot-washing and then instructed his disciples to do the same with each other, and he reiterated that they should be willing to both wash and be washed and they should also love and be loved. The application of this teaching, according to Countryman (1987), is that the followers of Jesus should confess and hear the confessions of others as a willing practice of vulnerability. Nelson (2013) also identified foot-washing as a picture of the ongoing process of confession that is necessary after a salvation experience, because people continue to soil their feet with sinful behavior even after they have been baptized. Brown (2018) suggested that leaders can transform the culture of an organization by demonstrating vulnerability and encouraging others to do the same, and organizations that practice vulnerability across leadership lines become places where people trust one another and mutual trust benefits both individuals and companies as a whole. Fries-Britt and Snider (2015) examined the effects of vulnerable exchanges between mentors and mentees, determining that the work environment improves and the entire company benefits in a culture that embraces vulnerability.

Neyrey (1994) recognized that the Johannine community and the surrounding Mediterranean culture saw honor and shame as the normative way to differentiate individuals within a class system that viewed higher positions honorable and the serving class more shameful, but Jesus turned the shame and honor codes upside-down and demonstrated that leaders can practice honor from a lower or more vulnerable position despite cultural perceptions. Bell (2005) identified that leaders that practice vulnerability without fear of being rejected are

perceived as risk-takers by their followers and this results in both trust and confidence across the organization. Fletcher (1994) observed that organizational culture improved when leaders and followers engaged in candid conversations and a sense of comradery was evident in workplaces that practiced vulnerable communication. The example of washing feet in John 13 was a lesson through which Jesus demonstrated leadership from a vulnerable position, as well as a powerful tool for him to challenge the prominent cultural perception of hierarchical honor and shame.

Sacred Texture

Henson et al. (2020) explained that sacred texture is an examination within a socio-rhetorical analysis that considers references and allusions to divinity within the explored text. Duvall and Hays (2012) suggested that sacred text analysis focuses on discovering the divinely inspired meaning that God intended for the pericope and not the interpreted thoughts of the reader or the intention of the original writer. Robbins (1996a) emphasized that a sacred exploration of a biblical passage seeks to determine the relationship between humanity and divinity, and correct interpretation has long relied on this relationship as a central issue. Within a sacred texture exploration are eight categories: spirit being, divine history, deity, holy person, human redemption, religious community, human commitment, and ethics (Henson et al., 2020).

Deity. The category of deity is all about reference to God and may appear in a text as a direct mention or an indirect referral, or it may simply be a revelation about God or a discussion of his nature. John 13:1–3 includes direct references to God the Father and Jesus. Jesus, God and the Father are mentioned several times in the first three verses: “Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father,” and “Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God” (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The pericope opened by supplying information to the reader that Jesus came from the Father and from God and would be returning to God. The passage also reveals that Jesus was already cognizant of the Father’s plan, which included Jesus having divine authority. Verse 20 reflects a similar sentiment as the opening

passage like a bookend to the pericope and a foreshadowing of the commission that would later extend to his followers: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Thomas (1991) suggested that a divine message in this lesson is that Jesus' disciples—and, ultimately, the followers of Jesus—should perceive that God the Father is the ultimate sender and believers are sent as he was sent.

Holy Person. Christology is the study of Christ or the Messiah as both God and man, and as the Messiah, Jesus embodied a perfect model for humanity as the perfect holy person (Robbins, 1996a). Jesus exemplified holiness for all of humanity throughout all of time by living a sinless life, and although he was God, Jesus limited himself to arrive and exist with the limitations of human flesh (Grudem, 1994). Jesus is the perfect example of holy living, but there are many other examples in Scripture, including those that represented some aspects of holiness, and some stories depict people that are an antitype or opposite example of holiness (Henson et al., 2020). John 13:1–20 relates an example that carefully and purposefully depicts Jesus as an exemplar of holy action that followers may emulate. Jesus specifically expounded in verses 14 and 15: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus was undoubtedly providing an example with a clear teaching moment about how to treat one another, and this had implications for his disciples at the time and those that would later hear. Jesus provided further teaching about knowing and practicing holiness in verse 17: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Jesus provided a positive action with words of encouragement as teaching moment, but the image of a holy person can also come in the form of a person that opposes a holy person in the story. Peter represents an antagonist to Jesus in the midst of the pericope when he challenges the action of Jesus in verse 8: "You shall never wash my feet" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus retorts by explaining to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The dialogue between Peter and Jesus happened as a debate concerning something Peter

perceived as a wrong action, but Jesus clarified as holy. Peter ultimately yielded and even enthusiastically received Jesus' act of washing feet, and this foot-washing represented a way for unholy people to have repeated washing as a picture of the ongoing sanctification process (Zorrilla, 1995).

Spirit Being. Any beings that have the nature of a spirit—whether they be divine or evil—fit in this category, including demons, spirits, angels, the Holy Spirit, devils, or other references to the cosmic battle concerning such beings (Robbins, 1996a). The Holy Spirit, angels, and demons make up the three crucial groups in this category (Henson et al., 2020). John 13:1,3,33 indicated that Jesus would soon be returning to heaven after he departed from this world. A specific reference to the devil appears in verse 2: "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Hein (1971) noted that the influence of Judas by the devil progresses from verse 2 to verse 27 and that the idea of betrayal was placed into Judas' heart by the devil in verse 2, but the devil entered Judas in verse 27.

Divine History and Eschatology. Divine history and eschatology are sacred texture concerning the ultimate purposes of God as they are worked out in humanity over time including the foreshadowing of events prior to them happening (Robbins, 1996a). John 13:1–20 can be connected to events prior to Jesus washing the disciples' feet and it also foreshadows events that come later. The beginning of the text mentions Passover and states that Jesus, "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The dual purpose of the actions of Jesus in John 13 is to point back to the unspotted lamb that was necessary for sacrifice at the original Passover event in the Exodus and to project forward to the events of the cross and the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus.

An apparent reference in the chapter about the future events of the crucifixion is evident in the statement from Jesus in verse 19: "I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus made this declaration just after he hearkened back to an Old Testament passage in verse 18: "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has

lifted his heel against me'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Psalm 41:9 is the Scripture that Jesus referenced as being fulfilled, and the passage concerned a Psalm from David that described how David was betrayed by one of his friends (Stanley, 2009). The connections in John 13 are clear between both past fulfillments and future projections and this makes the event of the foot-washing act as a bridge in Scripture between the Old Testament references to both the sacrificial system and a coming Messiah and the New Testament conclusion of Jesus as both the Messiah and ultimate sacrifice.

Human Redemption. Scripture contains rituals, practices, and events that act as bridges between humanity and God for the purpose of redeeming people from the destructive nature of evil (Robbins, 1996a). Henson et al. (2020) noted that the Passover feast was an annual redemptive human event that the Jewish people observed, and John 13:1 specifically mentions that the foot-washing encounter took place in the context of the Feast of Passover. Carson (1991) observed that the Johannine gospel includes two references to Jesus saying his disciples were clean, and the parallels between John 13:10 and 15:3 connect the act of washing feet with the picture of pruning vines and both instances juxtapose ongoing sanctification with the justifying redemption through Jesus. In the final lesson that Jesus teaches his original 12 disciples, Jesus expressed that those who have bathed or been baptized are redeemed already by faith in Jesus; however, there is also a need for people to love one another, and this is expressed by the act of washing feet as a picture of ongoing redemption or sanctification (Weiss, 1979).

Human Commitment. An examination of the texture of human commitment considers the ways that people in a text express their dedication to God including their practices and responses to the divine as an example to others (Robbins, 1996a). Henson et al. (2020) noted that responses of human commitment in a text may be directed towards God specifically or between each other as a way of honoring God. In the foot-washing narrative, Jesus first exemplified human commitment and then commanded his disciples to emulate his example and practice the same action between them. John 13:15 shows this commitment: "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (*ESV*,

2001/2016). The context of the verse followed the Johannine understanding that Jesus was sent from God as the perfect example of humanity, and the followers of Jesus could reflect the same human commitment by becoming examples to others (Waldstein, 1990). The human commitment that Jesus exemplified was a willingness to both wash feet and receive washing, or perhaps a vulnerable agreement to both confess shortcomings and forgive others (Cooreman-Guittin, 2021). The pericope also includes a disparity of commitment in the dialogue between Peter and Jesus in verse 8: "Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus responded to him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This event between Peter and Jesus showed that human commitment to God and others meant that followers of Jesus need to practice loving one another by mutually confessing to others and trusting God for the process of redemption in the midst of our vulnerability (Cooreman-Guittin, 2021).

Religious Community. Religious community is a texture that explores the people in the text and their involvement with a greater body of mutual believers, including how they interact, gather and worship together (Henson et al., 2020; Robbins, 1996a). John 13 contains a description from Jesus of how the disciples should treat one another in verse 20 as Jesus exhorted them: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). After Jesus gave an example for his disciples, he then indicated that his lesson applied to anyone that would willing take this message to others. John connected the exhortation of Jesus to follow his example of washing one another in verse 14 with the "new commandment" to love one another in verse 34 and an emphatic reiteration in verse 35: "By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). John recorded how Jesus emphatically exhorted the disciples—and, ultimately, the greater believing community—to act the way that he acted, and this meant that they needed each other and must love one another in the greater religious community (Mathew, 2018).

Ethics. The texture concerning ethics examines the way that people are committed to God through appropriate responses and instructions as a way of

fulfilling the will of God (Robbins, 1996a). Henson et al. (2020) noted that ethical responses are not merely actions that people think are good, but responses based on a person's belief concerning God's divine will. John 13:17 conveys direct instructions from Jesus about how followers can do the will of God: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The context of this instruction from Jesus followed his demonstration of how to care for others through willingly washing each other's feet. In verse 10, Jesus contrasted this picture of mutual dependence for cleansing dirty feet after walking in the world with a full bath, and John explained in verse 11 that all were clean except Judas the betrayer. Countryman (1987) noted that belief in Jesus was like a bath, but loving one another is an ongoing action that Jesus demonstrated followers are to do the same.

One of the central themes surrounding the time leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus is the focus on the role of Judas as the one that betrays Jesus. Betrayal is in direct contrast to the right actions that would have been expected and the opposite of an ethical expectation. Mathew (2018) noted that John, Mark, and Matthew all include a description of Judas as the betrayer, and the prediction by Jesus that Judas would betray him in John 13:21 is very similar to Mark 14:18, Matthew 26:21, and Luke 22:41. The image of Judas eating with Jesus is mirrored in Mark 14:18: "And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The idea that the betrayer is a close friend adds to the pain of the betrayal, and the dire nature of the act is reflected in the reference to Psalm 41:9 (Stanley, 2009). Mathew (2018) observed that the idea of Judas as the betrayer is mentioned in verses 2,11, and 18, and the idea that betrayal is the center of the chiasm and thus a primary focus is a distinct possibility. Michaels (2011) observed that the idea of betrayal is an important concept leading to the crucifixion, yet the disciples are quite shocked when Jesus mentions betrayal and are afraid that they themselves may be the betrayer. John explained in verses 27 through 30 that the disciples did not hear or understand that it was Judas that Jesus was talking about, and they did not even suspect him: "Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was

telling him, 'Buy what we need for the feast,' or that he should give something to the poor" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

Summary of Data: Sacred Texture. An examination of sacred texture in John 13:1–20 gave clarity concerning each of the eight subcategories, including deity, holy person, spirit being, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community, and ethics. Within the examined text are multiple references to Deity, including Jesus, Father, God, Master, Teacher, and Lord. The passage that God the Father sent Jesus to demonstrate love and service to not only the 12 disciples and the greater community of the time, but for all followers that would come later. Jesus and Peter are both included in the discussion of holy person action, with Jesus representing the example and Peter as the inquisitor. As the one sent by God, Jesus demonstrates holy action and declares holy direction, but Peter is included in the narrative as a negative demonstration of human response to the redefined holy act of foot-washing by Jesus. References of Spirit being from the pericope include a description of Jesus ready to depart the world after coming from the Father, and references to the devil influencing Judas in verse 2 and later in verse 27.

The Passover meal is an important part of the text revealed through the analysis of John 13 using the texture of divine history and eschatology. The act of foot-washing by Jesus is first connected to the Passover as a past event, but foot-washing also projects the coming events of the crucifixion and resurrection. Within the pericope is a direct reference to Psalm 41:9 and a story of how David was betrayed by one of his friends, and the betrayal of David is referenced against the actions of Judas in John 13 as a picture of both unfaithfulness and disobedience. The idea of human redemption appears in John 13 with the inclusion of Passover because the celebration of Passover was predicated on God's redemptive act in the story of the Exodus (Henson et al., 2020). A redemptive picture permeates John 13 by first the mention of Passover, then the foot-washing as a redemptive action and both of these events combine to point to the sacrificial love of Jesus and his command to love one another (Carson, 1991).

Jesus exemplified commitment in John 13, first to God the Father and then to people; this demonstrated proper human commitment for his disciples to emulate (Waldstein, 1990). Examination of the religious community showed that the Johannine account was not only for those with Jesus during his teaching but also for those that would come after them in the greater community of believers. After Jesus performed an act of vulnerable love for his disciples, he invited the community by explaining, "whoever receives the one I send receives me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Demonstration and action are an important part of ethics, and the pericope included instructions from Jesus for the disciples and other followers to follow him by performing the same actions of washing and loving one another. Maintaining a relationship through the right actions was part of the ethical message that John recorded, and acting like Jesus was a way for disciples to keep their relationship with God and to remain clean (Countryman, 1987).

Application: Sacred Texture. Additional applications of vulnerability in leadership and comparative analysis of John 13:1–20 are evidenced by a review of sacred textures. The Johannine account of the upper room began with an explanation that Jesus was from God, and an examination of deity revealed that Jesus came as an exemplar for humanity and thus showed the ultimate vulnerability by limiting his deity and appearing as a man. The hands of Jesus were pictured in the message as performing the lowly act of washing feet, yet his hands were connected to divine action in verse 3: "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Bunker (1997) suggested that followers see vulnerable leaders as trustworthy, yet leaders often will not practice vulnerability out a of a sense of emotional protection, so leadership development should consider ways to help leaders balance healthy vulnerability with followers. The example that Jesus gave in John 13 was a leadership development moment for the disciples in the area of ethical practice and human commitment, and this lesson extended beyond the ones in the upper room to all that would follow later in the community of believers. After Jesus gave his lesson to his disciples, he then added in verse 20 that it was for "whoever receives me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The foot-washing example by Jesus demonstrated vulnerability as he took a place of service,

but Jesus also explained that the disciples should both wash and be washed and later love and be loved, and this mutual willingness between higher and lower positions exemplified vulnerability for leaders and followers alike (Cooreman-Guittin, 2021).

Brown 2018 noted that creating trust is vital for leaders that desire to open communication channels with followers, and vulnerability is a way for leaders to establish trust and create a more relational atmosphere across an organization. John recorded that Jesus came from God as deity and was also an example for humanity, and the lesson extended beyond the disciples to whoever would believe and follow his vulnerable example in the greater community. Divine history and eschatology analysis showed that there was a direct reference from the Old Testament concerning a betrayal between friends, and this deep betrayal was something that would take place between Judas and Jesus (Stanley, 2009). Jesus gave the ultimate example of vulnerability in leadership when he washed the feet of the one that would betray him.

John 13 contains an example of historical foreshadowing Jesus washed his disciples' feet and explained that they would not understand in verse 19: “I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he” (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The full lesson would not be realized until a later time, and they were not yet aware of the coming crucifixion of Jesus and the way that each of them would distance from Jesus. The lesson of vulnerability in the face of pain was present in the foreshadowing that Jesus spoke, and the ramifications of this lesson stretch to all followers. Brown (2007) found that the honest communication of personal suffering and an acknowledgment with others that a person is facing a difficulty has shown to be an effective method for alleviating the accompanying shame that often comes with such stressful situations. John included references to Judas, the influence of the devil, and the harsh betrayal that followed, yet Jesus washed his feet knowing this. Brown (2015) emphasized, “Loving someone who may or may not love us back…who may be loyal to the day they die or betray us tomorrow—that’s vulnerability” (p. 36).

Conclusion

My socio-rhetorical analysis of John 13:1–20 yielded several themes related to the primary goal of this study to understand the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership. Textual analysis for this study considered five primary categories of texture and several subtextures that helped to reveal the most prominent themes in the pericope that are also relevant for this study. The research questions for this study include the following:

RQ1: In what ways did Jesus demonstrate vulnerability with His disciples in John Chapter 13?

RQ2: How do Christian ministry leaders in the United States perceive vulnerability?

RQ3: In what ways, if any, do Christian ministry leaders practice vulnerability?

RQ4: What are the perceived effects of vulnerability, or the lack thereof, on Christian ministry leaders?

RQ5: How do the experiences of Christian ministry leaders compare with the biblical principles demonstrated in John Chapter 13?

The question concerning the ways that Jesus demonstrated vulnerability with his disciples is the question that this exegetical analysis primarily addressed. Data from the socio-rhetorical analysis and the literature review of various aspects of vulnerability both help to inform the study and serve as two resources for formulating the interview questions for the phenomenological portion of this study. Nine themes relevant to this study were revealed by examination of John 13 with each of the five textures and subtextures, including disregarding hierarchy, challenging honor and shame codes, recognizing ongoing sanctification, addressing refusal, practicing mutual confession, loving one another, loving through betrayal, growing understanding, and setting an example. Each of these nine themes informs the interview questions for the phenomenological study.

Interview Questions

One of the purposes of this study was to examine the themes related to leadership vulnerability in foot-washing compared to the lived-out experiences of

Christian ministry leaders. RQ5 asked, "How do the experiences of Christian ministry leaders compare with the biblical principles demonstrated in John Chapter 13?" In this study, I conducted a phenomenological exploration of Christian ministry leaders' opinions concerning the role of vulnerability in leadership through the process of interviewing each of the ministry leaders and then comparing their perceptions with the themes from the exegetical analysis of John 13. Saldaña and Omasta (2018) recognized that an appropriate way to discover the common meaning of shared experiences is a qualitative approach utilizing interviews to determine the mutual phenomenology. Each of the interviewed Christian leaders provided data that I then examined for any common perceptions concerning the role of vulnerability in leadership (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The themes from the exegetical portion of this study informed the development of questions for the phenomenological interview portion. The first question helped to qualify the interviewee's perception of their role and to create a basis for the study.

Question 1: How would you describe your role as a ministry leader?

Vulnerability is a primary component of this study, and I identified in the review of the literature that there is no consensus regarding the definition of vulnerability. I derived the definition of vulnerability for this study from a combination of insights from two previous studies. First, Brown (2015) proposed that vulnerability includes risk, uncertainty, and emotional exposure and noted that risk should not be equated with weakness. Ito and Bligh (2016) emphasized that vulnerability is a practice that strengthens relationships and added that it contains a "subjective perception of uncertainty, risk, and insecurity" (p. 67). For this study, the definition of vulnerability was as follows: a subjective perception of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure. For clarity of understanding, I first asked the leaders to describe ways they have practiced vulnerability and then offered my definition to each interviewee and asked them if they perceived vulnerability differently.

Question 2: In what ways, if any, do you practice vulnerability in ministry?

Question 3: How would you define vulnerability?

Following these introductory questions, the remainder of the questions were derived from the themes that were revealed from the review of the literature and the exegetical study of John 13:1–20.

Disregarding Hierarchy. Jesus was not concerned with established status levels of leadership or Hierarchical systems that the culture practiced. Baugh et al. (2002) explained that the culture during the time that Jesus taught his disciples and the time of the Johannine writing both regularly practiced hierarchical honor systems, and the idea of someone from a lower status washing the feet of one above would have been an unwanted action from both parties. Jesus expressed in John 13:16, "Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This statement from Jesus may have been acceptable in the eyes of the disciples because it kept the order, but John 13:20 offered a challenge to the idea of positional authority as Jesus declared, "Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This statement from Jesus demonstrated that an agent or messenger carries the same authority as the one that sends them (Baugh et al., 2002). Because Jesus came as an agent of God, his authority was the of the highest level, and Jesus is recognized in the passage as Lord, teacher, and master. In verse 14, Jesus instructed them, "So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet as well" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

In a review of the literature, Shaw (2006) suggested that Christian leaders are prone to focusing too heavily on creating and maintaining a public image, and social status is often tied to the value of their role. The growing popularity of social media is also now creating an atmosphere for Christian leaders that may cause them to fear vulnerability with persons in a lower station (Budde, 2007). Shaw (2006) concluded that there is not a consensus for the leadership methods of Jesus among academic studies, but there is a common theme of vulnerable authority that is apparent in the leadership style of Jesus. Jesus practiced vulnerability without regard for status or hierarchical stations and encouraged his followers to do the same.

Question 4: How do you perceive the relationship, if any, between vulnerability and status?

Question 5: Do you think that your own status or position is affected by the practice of vulnerability, and can you explain why or why not?

Challenging Honor and Shame Codes. Jesus challenged the social codes of the time that were considered honorable and shameful within the culture. The three most prominent people groups during the time of the Johannine writing were the Romans, the Judeans, and the Greeks, each of which was heavily influenced by the concept of shame and honor for shaping society (Adkins, 1975; Malina, 2001). Jesus expressed disregard for social structure concerning shame and honor when he took the position of a slave and began to wash the disciples' feet, and this demonstration was a direct challenge to the cultural norm that attached a person's identity to actions that would be more or less honorable and therefore more or less great (Crook, 2009; Domeris, 1993; Neyrey, 1994).

Early research from Brown (2006) helped establish that people often equate vulnerability with being shamed, but Brown (2015) suggested that the perception of vulnerability as being shameful and weak is far from true and vulnerability is instead a powerful tool. "The paradoxical combination of leadership and lowliness is envisaged in the foot-washing of Jesus, which points forward to his shameful death on the cross" (Kanagaraj, 2004, p. 19). Kanagaraj recognized that Jesus led in a way that was opposite of the expected authority and power structure attached to honor and shame, instead demonstrating authority from a position that would have been associated with weakness. Brown (2007) investigated the concepts of shame and resilience and concluded that vulnerability is a vital way for leaders to work through feelings of shame and to increase resilience. Jesus demonstrated that vulnerability is not equated with shame, and findings from the review of the literature confirmed that vulnerability can combat feelings of shame.

Question 6: How have you witnessed shame affecting vulnerability in yourself and others?

Recognizing Ongoing Sanctification. Jesus addressed Peter in John 13:10 as follows: "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but

is completely clean (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The act of foot-washing juxtaposed to a bath was a picture of sanctification in comparison with justification. Bacon (1931) concluded that Jesus used the foot-washing example to compare a bath with washing feet, and the bath (alluding to baptism) was a picture of justification, but foot-washing demonstrated sanctification. Countryman (1987) noted that foot-washing in the Johannine community was a consistent practice commonly identified with an ongoing need to forgive and be forgiven of sins even after conversion. Early works of Saint Augustine noted that the act of washing feet was viewed in the early church as being symbolic of the continued need for confession after baptism; this action was not about salvation, but rather a way for people to have accountability for their postconversion sins (Augustine, 2018). Jesus not only provided grace for salvation, but grace for sins after baptism, and Jesus washed feet as a demonstration that forgiveness is available for sins after conversion. Everyone requires this ongoing cleansing as a picture of continued grace in the sanctification process, according to Thomas (1991). Jesus demonstrated that foot-washing was necessary even for those that were already clean, and this signified that the followers of Jesus need initial justification and ongoing sanctification.

Question 7: How would you describe the relationship, if any, between vulnerability, justification, and sanctification?

Practicing Mutual Confession. Jesus compared bathing (or being baptized) with receiving justification and thus being clean. Jesus then compared foot-washing with imagery for sanctification and the need for an ongoing process of cleansing. An initial action of baptism is accompanied by public profession and declaration that Jesus is Lord, and the image of this bath is connected to that profession. The need for a continual action of foot-washing is akin to the ongoing need for the followers of Jesus to confess sins to each other. Jesus offered a new commandment for his disciples to love one another in John 13:34, and Blum (1983) suggested that the command mirrors Jesus' words in verse 14 for them to wash one another, which is also parallel to the instruction in I John 1:7–9 to confess sins mutually. Wenham et al. (1994) observed that a theme of mutual confession was apparent in John 13, and an inner texture study revealed the same conclusion. Michaels (2011) identified

that Jesus demonstrated love for his disciples by washing their feet and then commanded them to love, and the actions of love that he showed them pointed toward a need for ongoing forgiveness and mutual confession. Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) studied trust formation in the military, concluding that vulnerable exchanges are necessary to create a dependency between people, and mutual confession promotes trust and strengthens relationships, even when there is a difference in rank. Dyer (2017) noted that the love Jesus showed meant that he was risking any personal agenda and status for the sake of others, and his example of love was not one that promoted material needs, but true concern for the well-being of the person being washed. Michaels (2011) explained that all people need to embrace both washing and being washed, and this means extending and receiving grace through both confessing and listening to the confession of others. The grace that we extend to each other when we share our stories with each other is not merely human to human but originates with the grace given at the cross by Jesus (Michaels, 2011). Confession of faults and the need for forgiveness is common to all people, and Jesus demonstrated that we need to embrace the vulnerability of confession with one another.

Question 8: In what ways, if any, do you practice vulnerable confession in your ministry?

Addressing Refusal. A vital section of the foot-washing narrative centers on the dialogue between Jesus and Peter and Peter refusing to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Blum (1983) noted that Jesus told his disciples to follow his example of washing one another and then gave them a command to love one another; this equated the active event of washing feet with the active emotion of loving. The difficulty of this example is that it would have remained foreign to the disciples as demonstrated by Peter's initial refusal. Peter objected not only against his feet being washed but against the idea of his teacher and Lord taking a vulnerable position of service (Jolliffe, 1997; Voorwinde, 2005). Domeris (1993) observed that the cultural codes of honor and shame at the time of Jesus' action would not have accepted the idea of a leader washing a servant's feet, even as an act of love.

Vliet and Jessica (2008) noted that Christian ministers may have difficulty practicing vulnerability with followers because of the negative connotation of shame that some people attach to it, and this connotation may cause refusal by either party. Glanz (2002) observed interactions between students and teachers that practiced vulnerability and agreed with the conclusions of Henry (1973) that a sense of vulnerability often shuts people down because of a fear of exposure or exposing another. Glanz (2002) suggested that vulnerability may create a sense of exposure, but when expressed without shaming, it is powerful for building trust between people and for both parties' benefit. Brown (2015) determined that vulnerability avoidance is detrimental to relationships and both leaders and followers grow when they are willing to take the risk.

Question 9: When is it appropriate, if at all, for a Christian ministry leader to refuse being vulnerable?

Loving One Another. Jesus demonstrated the act of washing feet and then told the disciples to do this for one another. He later repeated a similar instruction when he spoke about love and commanded them to love one another in verse 34. Van der Watt (2017) stressed that the washing of feet by Jesus in John 13 was a radical act of love that is not fully understood by the modern Christian community. Much of what Jesus taught in John's account included images of shepherding and even a shepherd willing to lay down his life, and Sosler (2017) emphasized that this sacrificial love was the same love emphasized when Jesus shockingly assumed a low position and washed feet. Cooreman-Guittin (2021) suggested that Jesus took on the role of servant as a radical example of love that was demonstrated by vulnerability, and Jesus then instructed the disciples to follow his lead to both love and be loved without regard for positions of authority. The love that Jesus demonstrated in John 13 stepped beyond the expected norms and crossed established lines. Then, Jesus commanded that all who follow him should do the same and embrace the vulnerable nature of true love.

Question 10: Do you feel that you are able to both give and receive love in your role as a minister and if so, can you give examples of each?

Loving Through Betrayal. Jesus demonstrated the greatest love when he willingly washed the feet of Judas although it was already in Judas's heart to betray him. There are multiple mentions of Judas and his role of betrayer in John 13 beginning with verse 2, "The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" (ESV, 2001/2016). Jesus and Peter argued about the need of the disciples to have their feet washed, but Jesus explained that only one was not clean, and John included an explanation in verse 11: "For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, 'Not all of you are clean'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The concept of betrayal in John 13 came through Judas, but was evoked by the devil in verse 2: "During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). According to Hein (1971), the devil as the influencer of Judas's betrayal grows throughout John 13 and an idea of betrayal was placed into Judas's heart in verse 2, but the devil fully entered Judas in verse 27. Jesus explained to the disciples in verse 19: "I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus gave this revelation after he said, "But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me'" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This Scripture in verse 18 was a reference to Psalm 41:9 concerning a deep betrayal of David by one of his friends (Stanley, 2009). The betrayal of Jesus was one of the central themes of John 13, and although John made it clear that Judas already had betrayal in his heart, Jesus still washed his feet with the rest of the disciples. "Loving someone who may or may not love us back… who may be loyal to the day they die or betray us tomorrow—that's vulnerability" (Brown, 2015, p. 36). The picture of vulnerability from John 13 is one that not only disregards status, but even includes people that may hurt us most deeply.

Question 11: Can you describe a time, if any, that you have witnessed someone practicing vulnerability in the context of betrayal?

Growing Understanding. Jesus explained to the disciples that they would not yet fully understand, but they would later. In an examination of repetitive patterns, seven verses in John 13:1–20 included nine different words related to knowledge or understanding. The word *understanding* is in the pericope three

times, while *knowledge* is used five times. Consider verse 7, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus later asked in verse 12: "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The disciples' understanding was not clear at the time of the event, but understanding was clear by the time of the Johannine writing, and this question from Jesus to the disciples was specifically used to connect the foot-washing example to the later crucifixion (Bultmann, 2014). Segovia (1985) also noted that the Johannine audience would have already been clear about the events of the cross, but the idea of understanding and knowledge is emphasized by John so that the readers would continue to make the connection and seek more understanding of what Jesus exemplified.

The review of texture concerning world views revealed that gnostic-manipulation may have been a high concern for John's writing, as evidenced by both the allusions and word choices in the Scripture. The idea that relationships can be established and transformed by increasing understanding and knowledge is the goal of gnostic-manipulation (Robbins, 1996a). A better understanding of both oneself and others may be achieved by those that are willing to risk vulnerability, and this stems from spiritual awareness that every person has a place of true belonging (Brown, 2015). The understanding gained from vulnerable interactions is a key component of both authentic relationships and organizational effectiveness (Brown, 2015). Gaining understanding was an emphasis in John 13, and vulnerability is a tool for leaders to gain an understanding of both themselves and those whom they lead.

> *Question 12: Can you describe some ways, if any, that vulnerable encounters have affected your growth of understanding or another person's growth of understanding?*

Setting an Example. Jesus not only gave an example to the disciples, but he then explained to them that he gave them an example. He indicated that they should not only follow his lead, but should themselves be examples for others. Brown (1995) noted that the example of washing feet demonstrated that all are sinful, each person needs to confess, and all need to extend forgiveness, and Jesus followed his

example by declaring that his followers should do the same. Countryman (1987) suggested that the lesson that Jesus gave exemplified overt vulnerability through both washing and being washed or loving and being loved. Kanagaraj (2004) explored the leadership of Jesus, noting that example that he set by washing feet was integral for his message that his disciples should love and serve each other. Nelson (2013) recognized that the exemplary action of Jesus in John 13 was necessary for the ongoing process of discipleship, because everyone continues to walk in a sinful world resulting in soiled feet and a need for mutual confession.

A review of the literature revealed that vulnerable sharing between leaders and followers is effective for improving and maintaining a culture of trust that can span an entire organization, and followers are more likely to practice vulnerability when they see it modeled by leaders (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015). Brown (2018) observed that organizations that embrace vulnerability without regard to positions or status are likely to have a culture of trust, and leaders that desire a trusting culture can change an organization by being the ones that model vulnerability for others. The relationship between a leader and their followers is best when there is trust between them, but the leadership example of Jesus centers first on discovering personal identity through a relationship with God (Henson et al., 2020). The example of Jesus emphasized that being vulnerable does not negate one's identity even if the opinions of people are contrary, and leaders may follow Jesus's example by being informed by Scripture, directed by the Father, helped by the Spirit, and remaining uninfluenced by human opinion (Huizing, 2011). Kanagaraj (2004) concluded that leadership in John is most identified by the vulnerable love that Jesus practiced. Jesus demonstrated radical leadership vulnerability in John 13 and then proclaimed that we should follow his example. Christian leadership requires being Christlike and then includes both practicing and exemplifying vulnerability in relationships.

Question 13: Can you think of a time that you have seen a vulnerable leader set an example that others followed?

Findings of Phenomenological Analysis

I audio-recorded the interviews with 12 Christian ministry leaders and then transcribed them into text using otter.ai software. I scrubbed each of the interviews for transcription errors using the otter.ai online tools. I conducted four coding passes of the transcripts to identify the commonalities and differences of opinions. The first coding pass was *in vivo* to determine the personal word usage of each minister. On the second pass, I identified words ending with "ing" to distinguish actions using process coding. I then searched each of the transcripts for attitudes, values, and beliefs to code the values of each ministry leader. I then made a final pass comparing the themes from the exegetical research with the interview answers to yield a codebook organized into interview segments.

I finalized the coding process by compiling the identified codes into major clarifying categories for discussion. The codes and categories are included in the discussion of findings from the interview portion of this study. Each clarifying category helps to identify the perceptions, practices, and effects of vulnerability in leadership according to the Christian ministry leaders and thus helps to answer RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 that ask about perceptions, practices, and effects. The themes for the interview questions were derived from the exegetical analysis portion of this study and informed by the themes from a review of the literature. The findings of this study include a discussion of the clarifying categories I derived from the coding passes in the interview portion and how they help to answer RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 concerning the perceptions, practices, and effects of vulnerability in leadership.

Ministry Leader Demographics

This study included interviews with 12 Christian ministry leaders in the United States, including four senior pastors, four staff ministers, and four parachurch ministry leaders. The sample included a total of nine males and three females with four male senior pastors, two of each gender staff pastors, and one female with three male parachurch ministry leaders. Ages ranged from 30s to 60s, with two senior pastors in their 40s, one in their 30s, and one over 60 years old. Staff pastors interviewed included one in their 30s, one in their 40s, and two in their 50s. Parachurch leaders included one in their 40s, one in their 50s, and two over 60

years old. Churches of the senior pastors ranged in size from 100 to over 1000. Staff pastor churches ranged in size from 500 to over 20,000, with one being a single campus, two with two campuses, and one that had multiple campuses. The parachurch ministry leaders served in organizations that ranged in annual income of over 10 million dollars and 10 employees to income of over 60 million annually with dozens of employees.

One senior pastor was in the Southern Baptist Convention. One pastor grew up Lutheran but pastored a reformed church. Two senior pastors were nondenominational, with one educated Baptist and the other Charismatic. The staff pastors each served in nondenominational churches with varied backgrounds including one Nazarene, one Charismatic, and two Southern Baptists. The parachurch ministers worked across denominations with two working primarily with charismatic churches and two working predominantly with reformed churches. Church backgrounds of the parachurch leaders included two Baptists, one Reformed Fundamentalist, and one Charismatic.

Table 4

Ministry Leader Demographics

Participant Number	Age Range	Ministry role	Gender	Affiliations Background, current
1	60s	Sr. Pastor	M	Charismatic, Non-denom.
2	40s	Sr. Pastor	M	Southern Baptist
3	50s	Parachurch	M	Charismatic, Non-denom.
4	30s	Staff Pastor	F	Charismatic, Non-denom.
5	40s	Parachurch	F	Pentecostal, Non-denom.
6	50s	Staff Pastor	F	Baptist, Non-denom.
7	50s	Staff Pastor	M	Nazarene, Non-denom.
8	40s	Staff Pastor	M	Baptist, Non-denom.
9	40s	Sr. Pastor	M	Baptist, Non-denom.
10	60s	Parachurch	M	Fundamentalist, Non-denom.
11	60s	Parachurch	M	Reformed, Non-denom.
12	30s	Sr. Pastor	M	Lutheran, Reformed

Interview Observations

The nine themes from the exegetical analysis phase of this study included disregarding hierarchy, challenging honor and shame codes, recognizing ongoing sanctification, practicing mutual confession, addressing refusal, loving one another, loving through betrayal, growing understanding, and setting an example. The interview questions based on these themes were posed to 12 Christian ministry leaders to determine their common lived experiences (see Appendix B). Codes from the interview transcripts yielded data for comparative analysis between the exegetical themes and the lived experiences of the interviewees. Questions 3 through 13 were directed toward specific themes, and Questions 2 and 14 helped to further clarify vulnerability practices, perceptions, and effects related to RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4. The first question was directed toward identifying demographics for the study. The results of the remaining interview questions follow.

Opening Question. After the demographic question, I continued the interview process by asking each participant Interview Question 3: "In what ways, if any, do you practice vulnerability in ministry?" Through Research Question 3, I sought to learn more about how Christian ministry leaders practice vulnerability. RQ3 asked, "In what ways, if any, do Christian ministry leaders practice vulnerability?" This second interview question focused on RQ3. I asked this question prior to giving them my working definition of vulnerability. I found in each of the interview questions an overlap of answers concerning perceptions (RQ2), practices (RQ3), and effects (RQ4). Although some of the questions were intended to address perceptions, practices, or effects, I found that the interviewees often spoke about each of these as overlapping concepts. Although my intention was to discover practices in Question 2, the interviewees also talked about perceived obstacles. The clarifying categories helped to connect the codes with the research questions, and I added more about this to the discussion at the end of this chapter. I also further considered perceptions, practices, and effects of vulnerability under a discussion of the research questions in Chapter 5.

There were four codes that were most notable with Interview Question 2, including that they practiced vulnerability with a special group of people (9), they

had one person with whom they were most vulnerable (9), and they found it difficult to find safe people (6). Another common response to this preliminary question concerned practicing vulnerability with staff members (7). Of the seven people that mentioned vulnerability with staff, some of them specifically cautioned against being too vulnerable with staff (4), but others mentioned that they were very open with staff members or those on their team (3). See Table 5 for an illustration of the codes, categories, and the number of minsters that mentioned each code.

Five ministry leaders mentioned that their level of vulnerability was dependent on how well they knew a person or group. P6 cautioned against having too much vulnerability with subordinate staff:

> If someone is working for you, you do have to have a distance between what you know and what they know for them to honor your place. You can go have lunch with them, you can do all the social things, but the connection between your personal relationship and them has got to be set apart. Because if you don't, there will not be an honoring of your role as a leader, and the knowledge about you will supersede your place of authority.

P3 spoke about specific ways that they practiced vulnerability with each other as a staff. This staff worked hard to create a culture of vulnerability, but they had recently had a difficult situation and were in the process of adding new boundaries:

> We visit every week and walk through it. It's time-consuming but we're building something. You're building trust and continuity, and there are going to be failures along the way. There's going to be broken trust. I think God starts with trust, and we practice vulnerability. But I am starting to do the boundary thing of managing.

Networks, groups, and individual sharing were all mentioned as ways that the interviewed Christian ministry leaders practiced vulnerability, and several of the interviewees talked about having multiple people and places where they were able to practice vulnerability. P9 spoke about practicing vulnerability in different ways:

> I have a variety of networks and relationships that I'm in. One of my favorite ones that helps me is one I meet with once a month. I meet with a pastor and a counselor, and we do life together. But there's always a component where

> we talk through these kinds of things, places where you got it right, places where you got it wrong, and where you blew it. And we practice a certain level of validation and mutual confession together. And I think that's important.

Table 5

Codes for the Opening Question

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
	One-on-one	9	Close circle needed
Preliminary	In a group	9	Close circle needed
Thoughts	With staff	7	Close circle needed
	Hard to find people	6	No one to talk to
	Cautious with staff	4	No one to talk to

Disregarding Hierarchy. Two questions in the interview phase concerned the theme of disregarding hierarchy. Question 4 asked, "How do you perceive the relationship, if any, between vulnerability and status?" Question 5 asked, "Do you think that your own status or position is affected by the practice of vulnerability, and can you explain why or why not?" These two questions yielded six observations that were most commonly shared among the 12 Christian ministry leaders. The common shared experiences included that vulnerability is harder in higher positions (8), vulnerability may affect perceptions of competency (6), age affects willingness (5), perceived risk and safety make a difference (8), organizational culture is a factor (5), and roles make a difference (8). These shared opinions are highlighted in Table 6 concerning the role of hierarchy related to vulnerability. All 12 pastors answered Interview Question 5 as affirmative and then outlined various reasons why their role in ministry was affected by vulnerability.

Nine of the Christian ministry leaders indicated that vulnerability becomes harder for those in higher positions. P4 stated, "Especially in ministry, I feel like the relationship is like, the higher up you are, it can kind of be perceived that the less vulnerable you can be, or the less open you can be about your life." Six of the people interviewed suggested that being vulnerable may negatively influence

perceptions of competence. P11 shared, "A church leader needs personal trust, at least as much as he or she needs professional credibility. They're both important. People need to feel like they trust the kind of person. So, I guess it's the character and competence." Five of the interviewees specifically mentioned that age was a factor in vulnerability. P9 expressed,

> I think the dynamic of age makes a difference. When I was young, like, I didn't care, like that's kind of a medicine. everyone expected that. you know I was like 20 and I don't know nothing. But later you've got a lot more riding on it. like you're the lead pastor of the church, or you're whatever, you got a lot of years built into it. And so I think, later, as you go along, you've got more to lose. And I think that's a factor too.

The dynamics of risk and safety were mentioned by eight of the interviewed leaders. P3 conveyed,

> I think you're talking about a risky business depending on wherever you are. And so, if we put it in, in the role of ministry, to be vulnerable, it's pretty risky. Because what you say, "It's not *can and will* be used against you," but "*will* be used against you at some point." I think everyone comes to that.

Six leaders mentioned that organizational culture was a factor. P8 stated, "If the culture creates a status where vulnerability is not required, then people may or may not accept you based upon your role, not necessarily upon you as an individual." Eight interviews included a discussion about the relationship between hierarchy and vulnerability as being dependent on the roles of the individuals. P7 shared, "This role now is completely different. You know, I would say, I've never probably felt more isolated in 30 years of ministry than I have in this role. So, yeah, it was definitely different in different roles for sure."

Table 6

Codes for the Theme of Disregarding Hierarchy

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
	Higher is harder	8	Rank effects sharing
	Risk and Safety	8	Rank effects sharing

Status and vulnerability	Role dependent	8	Rank effects sharing
	View of competency	5	Competency questioned
	Age matters	5	Maturity status
	Organizational culture	6	Varies with culture

Honor and Shame. The second theme from the exegetical analysis phase of the study was honor and shame. Question 6 addressed this theme: "How have you witnessed shame affecting vulnerability in yourself and others?" There were five common descriptions of honor and shame that were mentioned most by the 12 interviewed Christian ministry leaders: shame causes hiding and protection (7), shame influences people to keep quiet (5), shame and honor are heart issues (6), honor and shame are related to other people's perceptions (6), and several indicated they were raised with shame (5). Table 7 illustrates the codes, categories, and the number of ministers that mentioned each code. The observation that shame causes people to protect themselves and hide was common to seven of the 12 participants. For example, P1 said,

> I think that when we have that deep root of shame, for whatever reason, we build protective devices. And I think we feel more vulnerable because of the shame that we deal with. And it makes us less likely to deal with that, you know, vulnerability makes us less likely to get help for it, for those feelings.

The second common observation was shared by five of the 12 leaders. They each identified that shame causes people to keep quiet, and society can often encourage individuals to not share. P6 stated,

> I tend to try to answer you know, what I believe that they will be able to receive rather than what I always you know, flow out of. I go bullet points, you know, and so that it's not perceived as a weakness. Now, if you talk too much, that's a weakness.

A third shared description of honor and shame was that it is a matter of the heart. Some mentioned that people can alleviate shame by remembering they are created in God's image and returning their hearts to this truth. Six of the interviewees mentioned that the heart is a key issue in dealing with shame and honor. P4 noted,

> I've learned, too, that it's all about the position of my heart of like, okay, I still love and respect our leadership team, but it is my job to bring this up. It is my job to maybe make a blind spot known. But always keeping, I don't know, I think the heart is what mainly has to come across.

The role of other people's perceptions related to shame and honor was a common subject shared by six of the leaders. P11 observed that leaders often desire to create a culture of healthy honor and shame, yet the opinions of their followers are often more influential:

> I started to wonder, does that occur a lot, by second and third-hand intel, rather than by intentional public communication? We appreciate that the honor that a leader wants is probably going to be driven by gossip, more than it's going to be a part of a communication strategy.

Five of the 12 Christian ministry leaders divulged that they were raised with the concept of shame as a method of learning and shame negatively affected their outlook as an adult. P5 shared,

> We were all raised, where, if you messed up you were told, "Shame on you." And so, what we're actually speaking over our kids or had spoken on us is when we messed up, we should have shame put on us as a corrective tool. And that's just, that's nowhere in God's kingdom.

Table 7

Codes for the Theme of Honor and Shame

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
	Protection and hiding	7	Shame causes reticence
How shame	Keep quiet	5	Shame causes reticence
effects	Heart issue	6	Concerns over integrity
vulnerability	People's perceptions	6	Concerns over integrity
	Raised with shame	5	Concerns over integrity

Sanctification. The third theme derived from the exegetical analysis of John 13 was that vulnerability is related to ongoing sanctification. The interview question that addressed sanctification was Question 7: "How would you describe the

relationship, if any, between vulnerability, justification, and sanctification?" Coding from the interview transcripts yielded five observations that were the most common among the 12 subjects. The five common codes concerning the theme of sanctification were as follows: it is an ongoing process (9), forgiveness is closely related (7), it requires being humble (6), it is a work of God (8), and we are the image of God (5). Table 8 illustrates the codes, categories, and the number of minsters that shared each code. Nine of the interviewees mentioned that sanctification requires vulnerability as part of an ongoing process. P9 stated,

> Concerning sanctification, I would say that we're in a process we're on a journey that begins at salvation, and continues on until glorification, which in my theology happens on the other side of death. I think in the meantime, we are all working towards that and are so in need of just the love of Christ

Another common code related to the relationship of vulnerability and sanctification that was expressed by the ministry leaders appeared in six transcripts. These leaders identified forgiveness as an integral part of vulnerability in the sanctification process. P12 expressed,

> The process of walking with Jesus is one of saying, "I don't have what it takes, but Jesus does." The process of being sanctified is the process of going, "I didn't repent of my sins, which means I've done something wrong." That means they're declaring they've done something wrong. And then it's asking for forgiveness.

Seven of the 12 people interviewed mentioned that vulnerability is an important part of sanctification and requires one to be continually humbled and broken. P2 stated,

> Once we do become a true believer, as we grow in our image of Christ, every time we do sin, to me, it causes us to go back to what he did for us. And so we have to be vulnerable and admit that we can't do it on our own, and then come to Jesus. We're going to sin every day, but then we just come and humbly ask for forgiveness and try not to do it again.

Another common observation from eight of the interviews was a declaration that God is the one that does the work of sanctification and not the person being sanctified. P6 offered this thought:

> A lot of times we kind of intertwine sanctification with an act of service so that you are being sanctified through serving other people. Yes, that is the joy. But that is not giving you the understanding of what Jesus actually did for you, nor the confidence in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit is sent to do.

Five of the Christian ministry leaders responded to the questions about sanctification by recognizing that all people are created in the image of God. This group mentioned identity with God's image as an important part of sanctification and vulnerability as a way for individuals to return to that image. P10 explained,

> I think that the more that I can open my heart and open myself up, to be honest with the Lord and with other people. I'm going to become more who I really am. That's going to open up my eyes and my thoughts and my spirit to realize not only who God made me to be, but what God made me to be, and move more into his image rather than this image that I've created.

Table 8

Codes for the Theme of Sanctification

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
Relationship	Ongoing process	9	Steps to the process
between	Ask forgiveness	6	Steps to the process
vulnerability and	God does the work	8	Steps to the process
Sanctification	Humbled and broken	7	It humbles us
	Image of God	5	God designed us

Mutual Confession. The next question gleaned from the exegetical analysis concerned mutual confession. The inquiry posed to the ministry leaders regarding confession was Interview Question 8, which asked, "In what ways, if any, do you practice vulnerable confession in your ministry?" The answers to this question from the 12 leaders yielded six codes from shared life experiences. The codes included

confession involves shared struggles (8), one on one confession is more intimate, (8) confessional community is effective (7), confession happens first in families (6), it both requires and builds trust (6), and confession is between people but towards God (5). Table 9 illustrates each of the codes related to mutual confession with the total number that mentioned the code and the corresponding categories.

The first common coded opinion from the question of mutual confession and vulnerability concerned sharing common struggles. Eight of the interviewees mentioned that everyone struggles or has problems and we each benefit when we confess to each other. P5 explained,

> As long as you can process it, now you get to make the choice to deal with it. We have to have that level of vulnerability to where we can call each other out on our stuff when we need it, because we all need it at one time, none of us are ever going to have arrived.

The second common shared opinion concerning confession is that it is most intimate and effective in one-on-one situations. Eight of the 12 interviews contained a mention of the value of one-on-one confession. P6 shared,

> I've found that people will open up one on one and say “Hey, I'm having a hard time with this.” And then we can address that. And then I in my own self try to try to kind of say, “Oh, yes, I've had problems with that, and this is what I did.” So, I think it becomes interactive.

Although several leaders expressed that one-on-one situations were most effective, they also noted that confession is important within a community or group of believers. Seven of the leaders mentioned that they practiced confession with a community of individuals. P10 spoke about a group of trusted peers:

> I have a community of trusted brothers I have built into my life, my wife and I together over the last 30 years, these concentric circles of relationships, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. Now we've got grandkids now in a spiritual sense. And so we do intentionally practice confession in a proactive way with them.

Several of the ministry leaders mentioned that they prioritized confession within their own family. Six of the leaders spoke of confession with their spouses and children. P5 said,

> One thing I have learned with vulnerability is, I think you should be as vulnerable as you can. But to not overshare certain things that should be reserved for my husband. There are certain levels of vulnerability that only my husband and I should share about things like there's things that are just between us and should be resolved just between us.

Trust was a common theme under several of the themes, but six of the interviewees included trust in the discussion of mutual confession as something that was needed for vulnerable confession and something that could also be further developed through confession. P12 explained how trust is gained or lost in group confession:

> Tuesday mornings are just confession, repentance, and prayer for one another. And when I have found when we're not doing that consistently with those guys, we lose some relational equity with them in, I think, when relational equity is lost, trust is lost also.

The next common experience that was shared from the interviewed leaders was that although confession happens between people, God is the ultimate recipient of confession; in addition, individuals need to confess to others, but also hear from the Lord. Five of the leaders mentioned this dynamic, and P4 shared a story of her personal confession:

> So sometimes, she'll have like a ministry moment with me. But other times, I've noticed, she's like, “I want you to go talk to the Lord about this and tell me what he says, I want you to go on a walk for clarity, and put your phone down for an hour.” She'll give me specific things to do rather than just giving me the answer, whereas I feel like sometimes my boss will be like, “You need to see it this way.”

Table 9

Codes for the Theme of Mutual Confession

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories

	We all struggle	8	In this together
Practicing	One-on-one settings	8	Where we confess
mutual	We need community	7	Where we confess
confession	Confession is to God	5	Where we confess
	Family is a priority	6	Share with family
	Trust is given and built	6	Trust is an outcome

Addressing Refusal. The exegetical analysis of John 13 yielded a theme of addressing a refusal to be vulnerable. Both leaders and followers may experience a time that they are not willing to be vulnerable. Question 9 in the interviews addressed the theme of refusal: "When is it appropriate (if at all) for a Christian ministry leader to refuse being vulnerable?" Responses to this question produced five codes that reflected the most common responses from the ministry leaders. The five common codes for the theme of refusing vulnerability were the following: when it may harm others (9), when I do not know the person or group well enough (7), when motivation is not clear (9), when it is gossip (6), or when someone is demanding (5). See Table 10 for an illustration of the codes, categories, and number of ministers that expressed each of the codes.

The first common code concerning refusal of vulnerability was centered on concern for other people and the possibility of harm. Nine of the interviews included concern for others. P3 recalled a time that they refused to be vulnerable:

> My refusal came out of the Honor Code of, you're demanding something, and then you're going to go beat another person up. I'm not going to weaponize you to go do something, you've never even been involved in this relationship. And now because there's been exchange of money, you feel like you're privy to the inside information. You haven't earned it, built it, or exhibited it ever. So why would I do that?

The second code that emerged from my analysis from the interview transcripts was that the ministry leaders may refuse to be vulnerable when they do not know the audience well enough. Seven interviews included references to the depth of relationships. P6 shared,

> If the people who get that information are really not the anointed ones to be, close to you and carry it tightly, guard it and honor it. Then guess what, it just becomes stuff. It just becomes information, and they'll pass it right along. And things that you've opened up to people in moments in time where you were like, Oh, I wish that didn't do that. Usually, that's the part that bites you.

Nine of the Christian ministry leaders mentioned that it was ok to refuse vulnerability if wrong motivation was involved. P4 mentioned several ways that an individual might express vulnerability with a false motive:

> Motivation matters. I feel like it can, especially with small groups or prayer groups that can easily be like a pity party, or just like, we're all you know, the church does suck in that way. it can just be a bashing thing really easily. Or, Pastor P4 has been dealing with it, it's ok if we are dealing with it and it gives them a pass.

Gossip was mentioned in six of the interviews as a reason to not be vulnerable. Several of the leaders expressed a concern that vulnerability can be used by some as a tool for spreading stories in an unhealthy manner. P1 addressed gossip:

> When it is gossip. You need permission from them to be able to share it. And yeah, I've seen that go south quite a few times. It's just more of a personal thing. Being careful not to include others, and not just your family, but even other relationships. You're aware of other people's situations, and being careful not to be the decider of their vulnerability.

Five of the ministry leaders said that it was appropriate to refuse vulnerability when it was demanded by other people. P9 indicated,

> I would say anytime that people are coming in with agendas, and demanding any sort of level of vulnerability, that their intentions may not be the best or holy. I would enter into that with caution. I have seen different church members demanding this or that or the other, and in ways that are just sometimes inappropriate and with the intention to harm.

Table 10

Codes for the Theme of Refusing Vulnerability

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
	Concern for others	9	How well you know others
Refusing	Relationship level	7	How well you know others
vulnerability	Underlying motivation	9	How well you know others
	If it is gossip	6	Damaging incentives
	When it is demanded	5	Damaging incentives

Loving One Another. The next theme derived from the exegetical phase of the study concerned the connection of love and vulnerability. Question 10 in the interview focused on the theme of love: "Do you feel that you are able to both give and receive love in your role as a minister and if so, can you give examples of each?" Four codes emerged as the most common codes derived from the answers to this interview question concerning love, including the following: vulnerable love is hard to share and receive (9), love is often experienced in a crisis (9), true love is spiritual (6), and embarrassment and rejection block acts of love (8). Table 11 illustrates the codes, categories, and number of ministers that mentioned each code.

The first common code expressed by nine of the Christian ministry leaders was an indication that vulnerable love can be difficult to both share and receive. P7, P8, and P11 each described that receiving love was more difficult, but P9 said that it is equally hard to do both. P2 explained that he was originally wary of receiving love, but that he learned that accepting love was not always attached to another person's agenda. P7 stated, "I think it's a lot of times easier to give than to receive. I think people have a presupposed idea of what could happen. And so, it's harder for them to always weigh what that's going to mean."

Nine of the 12 interviewees expressed that the greatest acts of vulnerable love occur in times of crisis and shared pain. P9 recounted a time when a colleague was vulnerable about a personal crisis and it changed the atmosphere from a focus on tasks to one of care and love:

> She talked about being a single mom and some challenges she faced going to college, there were some tears, and all of a sudden, like that, that whole moment changed. Suddenly we went from a group of students just doing business as usual to a family caring for one another and I think that's the power that we all have but we don't know it and that's the power of vulnerability.

Six of the Christian ministry leaders emphasized that true love is empowered by the leading of the Holy Spirit or relationship with God. The ability to for them to be vulnerable as an act of love was expressed by several leaders as something that God did through them. P4 shared,

> I felt like the Holy Spirit told me, "I really want you to share about that." But more than that, he was like, "I want you to address it when you share." So, I don't know how to describe it. I remember sharing and even though I was not wanting, like, something released in my life broke off of me.

Feelings of rejection and embarrassment were listed by eight of the leaders as something that holds people back from receiving love vulnerably. These feelings were expressed in conjunction with both their observations of others as well as their personal experiences. P1 explained how being loved by others created vulnerable moments for his family:

> We've had needs in our different situations throughout the years in ministry. You know, needing to ask people for help in different things, whether it be financial or maybe it was just way out of my depth of being able to do it myself. So sometimes it's an embarrassment, I've had to ask for help in situations in my life.

Table 11

Codes for the Theme of Loving One-another

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
	Hard to share	9	Receiving love is difficult
Giving and	Embarrassment	8	Receiving love is difficult
receiving love	Mostly in crisis	9	We need to share our pain

Led by the Spirit	6	Trust God for the outcome

Betrayal. The theme of betrayal from the exegetical analysis of John 13 concerned the ability of Jesus to show love and vulnerability in the midst of betrayal. In the phenomenological portion of the study, Interview Question 11 asked, "Can you describe a time, if any, that you have witnessed someone practicing vulnerability in the context of betrayal?" The interviews yielded four codes that were most commonly shared among the Christian ministry leaders. The four codes from their common experiences included betrayal is common in ministry (6), leaving can be done with honor (6), forgiveness does not require renewed trust (7), and loving through betrayal requires God's help (6). Table 12 illustrates each of these codes, categories, and the number of ministers that mentioned each code.

The first common code concerned the common nature of betrayal. P2 stated, "Everyone is eventually going to go through it. I personally haven't been betrayed, but I know it's coming eventually. I'm just hoping I can be like Jesus and forgive." P6 also mentioned the common nature of betrayal: "I think we've all been betrayed. And I think we've witnessed that more and more in the church." Six of the 12 Christian ministry leaders mentioned that betrayal is common, especially in ministry. A second code for the theme of betrayal concerned times of transition or leaving a relationship. P8 spoke about a time that a ministry colleague left their position in the context of ridicule from the leaders. P8 recounted,

> I witnessed that person give honor back, even through their departure. I watched them honor leadership. And as they honored, it baffled leadership. Because they could not understand how somebody could honor them in the midst of how they (the leaders) had treated them.

The third common observation that the ministry leaders shared yielded a code concerning the role of forgiveness and trust. Seven interviewees spoke about the need to forgive a person that betrays, but the relationship did not have to return to the previous place of trust. P6 explained,

> Love and trust are two different things. And that's where I feel like we have to have an understanding of those two words, I can love somebody and not

> trust them. Do I trust Jesus with that? Do I trust everybody else? No, not always. But I trust Jesus and Jesus knows what's best for me.

Six of the Christian ministry leaders expressed that loving someone that has betrayed requires the help of God. It is not a natural human response to return love after being harmed, but it can be accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit. P1 spoke about how his mother was able to love with God's help:

> My Mother was the greatest example of that kind of love. My Dad was a PTSD war vet, who periodically released his internal pain upon her with raging verbal abuse. The Grace on her to gently navigate through those episodes was without a doubt supernatural.

Table 12

Codes for the Theme of Betrayal

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
	Common in ministry	6	Church hurt is common
Vulnerability	Leave with honor	6	God helps us move on
when betrayed	Forgive not forget	7	God helps us move on
	Only with God's help	4	God helps us move on

Gaining Understanding. The next theme that was revealed from the exegetical study of John 13 concerned growing in understanding. Question 12 in the interview addressed this theme: "Can you describe some ways, if any, that vulnerable encounters have affected your growth of understanding or another person's growth of understanding?" The coded transcripts from the interview answers produced four codes that were most common in the shared experiences of the 12 ministry leaders. The four common codes included: listening is important (7), learning happens in hard places (7), growth takes risk (8), and sharing fosters understanding (6). Table 13 further illustrates these four codes, the number of ministers that mentioned each code, and the corresponding categories.

Seven of the ministers indicated the opinion that listening is an important aspect of growing knowledge through vulnerability. Several of the ministers in this

category explained that genuine interest was demonstrated through a leader that practices listening. P6 expressed,

> I think people understand more when they know you can relate. I think listening to people is very important. Because when you do that, that creates a little bit of a trust that, "Hey, they're interested in me and in the vulnerability of who I am."

Another common answer for the question about growing understanding concerned how we grow when we experience pain. Seven of the 12 ministers shared the opinion that people learn in the hard places. P2 illustrated this code by saying,

> God doesn't keep you on the mountaintop all the time. You've got to get down to the valley and that's where you grow. And so by being vulnerable I've grown in my life and had that in my own life, and I've seen other people grow through that as well.

Growing in understanding does not come without taking some risks. Eight of the Christian ministry leaders expressed some indication that a person may experience growth of understanding if they are willing to take the risk of being vulnerable. P10 stated it this way:

> There have been plenty of times when vulnerability bit me in the tail. It was used as a weapon against me later. You go, "Okay, I have to do that again. I have to risk that again, with another person if I want to grow." Which then gives you growth.

Six of the interviewees indicated that shared stories between individuals are vital for parties to trust and understand one another. Sharing fosters understanding is the common code, and P12 explained the value of sharing as follows:

> I think a lot of discipleship for us is to get our men to just process their sin and weaknesses and being vulnerable is the way we share it first every time. I think it's how we probably disciple and grow our men the most is by showing and demonstrating first for them to follow.

Table 13

Codes for the Theme of Growing in Understanding

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
Vulnerability and the growth of understanding	listening	7	Listen and share to grow
	Sharing helps	6	Listen and share to grow
	Hard places	7	We learn in difficult places
	Risk involved	8	We learn in difficult places

Setting an Example. The final theme from the exegetical study of John 13 concerned setting an example. Interview Question 13 reflected this theme: "Can you think of a time that you have seen a vulnerable leader set an example that others followed?" The nature of the question concerning setting examples led the interviewees to recall examples. There were several similar experiences that the Christian ministry leaders recounted, and the codes from the interview transcripts yielded four codes that were used most often. The codes for setting an example were as follows: examples of leaders sharing deeply personal stories (6), examples of leaders not fearing public perceptions (6), examples of leaders apologizing (4), and examples of leaders that invited feedback (5). Table 14 illustrates the codes, the number of ministers that mention the codes, and the corresponding categories.

Six of the 12 Christian ministry leaders shared examples of leaders that demonstrated vulnerability by sharing deeply personal stories. P2 recalled a time that a deep story set a positive tone:

> As the leader of the group, I had to model what that looked like. And so I told a deeply personal story, not to comfort me or anything like that. But to show the group, as your friend, you can be open. And things that are hurtful in your past can be used for good. it was a deeply moving moment, not only in my life but in others.

Six Christian ministry leaders talked about times when leaders willingly risked the ramifications of public perceptions. P5 shared a story of a ministry couple that was vulnerable in spite of the possible perception:

> They shared from the pulpit. And I know the thoughts had to be coming, "Oh, God, what are they going to think when they hear?" But what it allowed was for all these women to come in and begin to talk to them. And for that to be a very open conversation in our church, where people didn't judge because you just don't know the situation.

Four of the interviewees remembered stories of leaders who willingly apologized when difficult circumstances occurred. Each of the stories included examples of how the apologies helped the culture and affected them personally. P4 told a story about leadership apology:

> The leader that was talking to us didn't hire that guy. But he was like, "I'm so sorry that you guys are experiencing this, especially because y'all are all young in ministry." I just remember thinking that good leaders are willing to apologize for something even if they didn't necessarily do the wrong.

Five of the interviewed leaders spoke about the impact of leaders that invited feedback from their followers. As P9 explained,

> You need somebody who holds the knife that really could hurt you. You just want to be careful about who's hand you give it. If there's no knife, then you're not really being vulnerable. I think sometimes, particularly in the Christian leadership world, we dabble inside of that. We'll talk about some things and be transparent, but we won't go so far as being vulnerable.

Table 14

Codes for the Theme of Setting an Example

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
Setting an	Stories matter	6	Share personal stories
Example	Not fearing perceptions	6	Fear of people inhibits
Through	Apologizing	4	Own your part
vulnerability	Inviting Feedback	5	Own your part

Additional Thoughts. Interview Question 14 asked, "Do you have anything you would like to add to this discussion about the role of vulnerability in leadership?" This question allowed additional thoughts that might further inform an

understanding of the lived experiences of the Christian ministry leaders. Much of the closing conversation spoke primarily to Research Questions 2 and 4. RQ2 asked, "How do Christian ministry leaders in the United States perceive vulnerability?" RQ4 asked, "What are the perceived effects of vulnerability, or the lack thereof, on Christian ministry leaders?" Three codes were most common among the final answers: leadership failure is a problem (6), some value vulnerability more than they practice it (8), and vulnerability helps all parties involved (9). Table 15 further illustrates the theme, codes, total number of ministers that mentioned the code, and categories.

Six of the interviewed ministry leaders expressed concern about the state of the church and ministry leaders. P6 noted, "Sometimes the world forgives you easier than the church forgives you." P6 also opined that a fear of judgment sometimes holds people back from coming to the church. P7 talked about the damage that happens when leaders fall. P1 gave a strong opinion concerning the state of the church in America and the need for vulnerability:

> In the contemporary church in America, I think that we're seeing the devastation that comes from a lack of vulnerability. Pastors and leaders and ministry leaders are just falling right and left. If leaders had confidence in a way to be able to process their stuff, and I know it's out there, but it's not accessed. We're desperate for it to happen. People are leaving churches in droves because they feel there's a lot of hypocrisy and the trust level in leaders is terribly low, understandably. I think that working on solutions for it should be right up there with sharing the Gospel.

Eight of the interviewees expressed that many people value the idea of vulnerability more than they practice it. P9 said, "Many people love the idea of it. They'll walk out of the room and talk about how vulnerable they were. And then if you're in the room, you're like, 'What? I don't think that's what happened there.'" Some of the ministers identified this tendency in themselves as well as others. P12 related that vulnerability is not natural and is something that is a fight for him, but it is also worth it.

Nine of the Christian ministry leaders identified that vulnerability results in benefits for all parties involved. P7 spoke about the way God uses vulnerability between people to build relationships:

> God always uses anything that you've gone through and then you can be vulnerable which breaks down walls because everybody's going through something. When I'm vulnerable with other people, then I usually get vulnerability back.

P6 shared that vulnerability helps both people that are facing trouble and those that are trying to heal from past pain:

> Vulnerability can grab somebody and keep them from going there. And it can actually help people who have been there come through it. It can encourage them. That's why I love it when people tell their own stories because that is a part of being vulnerable. To the world saying, "This is where I was, but now I'm okay and healed from it."

Table 15

Codes for the Summary Question

Question	Codes	Mentioned	Categories
Additional thoughts	Leadership Failure	6	Failing leaders hurts all
	All parties are helped	4	Vulnerability Helps all
	Concept vs Practice	6	Valued but not practiced well

I identified categories under each question in the phenomenological phase of this study. Each of these categories with the associated codes from each theme can be related to each of the research questions. Interviewees gave answers that overlapped across the themes related to perceptions of vulnerability (RQ2), practices of vulnerability (RQ3), and effects of vulnerability (RQ4). Table 16 illustrates the categories, corresponding themes, associated perceptions (RQ2), practices (RQ3), and effects (RQ4). By associating categories with research questions, I clarified how each category could be used in a discussion of RQs across the various themes.

Table 16

Questions, Categories, and Associated Research Questions

Question/Theme	Categories	Associated RQs
Preliminary	Close circle needed	Practices
	No one to talk to	Perceptions
Hierarchy	Rank affects sharing	Perceptions
	Competency questioned	Effects
	Maturity status	Perceptions
	Varies with culture	Effects
Honor and shame	Shame causes reticence	Effects
	Concerns over integrity	Perceptions
Sanctification	Steps to the process	Practices
	It humbles us	Effects
	God designed us	Perceptions
Confession	In this together	Perceptions
	Where we confess	Practices
	Share with family	Practices
	Trust is an outcome	Effects
Refusal	Damaging incentives	Effects
	How well you know them	Perceptions
Loving one-another	Receiving love is difficult	Perceptions
	We need to share our pain	Practices
	Trust God for the outcome	Effects
Betrayal	Church hurt is common	Perceptions
	God helps us move on	Practices
Growing understanding	We learn in difficult places	Practices
	Listen and share to grow	Practices
Setting an example	Share personal stories	Practices
	Fear of people inhibits	Perceptions

Question/Theme	Categories	Associated RQs
Additional thoughts	Own your part	Effects
	Failing leaders hurt all	Effects
	Vulnerability helps all	Effects
	Valued but not practiced well	Practices

Summary of Findings

I conducted this study in two phases, beginning with an exegetical analysis of the Jesus washing his disciple's feet in John 13:1–20. Utilizing socio-rhetorical analysis, I evaluated the Scripture through the examination of textural analysis. The process of exegeting John 13:1–20 through various textures yielded nine themes related to the actions of Jesus as a vulnerable leader. The nine themes related to the role of vulnerability in leadership based on the exegetical phase included disregarding hierarchy, challenging honor and shame codes, recognizing ongoing sanctification, practicing mutual confession, addressing refusal, loving one another, loving through betrayal, growing understanding, and setting an example. RQ1 asked, "In what ways did Jesus demonstrate vulnerability with His disciples in John Chapter 13?" Through the exegetical phase of this study, I addressed RQ1 and successfully identified the ways that Jesus exemplified leadership vulnerability in his relationship with his disciples.

I used these nine themes concerning leadership vulnerability in conjunction with observations from a review of the literature to create interview questions for the phenomenological phase. In the phenomenological phase, I interviewed 12 Christian ministry leaders to determine common experiences related to the exegetical themes. The interview participants included four senior pastors, four staff pastors, and four para-church ministry leaders. All of the ministry leaders were located in the United States. In this phase of the study, I addressed RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4. RQ2 asked, "How do Christian ministry leaders in the United States perceive vulnerability?" RQ3 questioned, "In what ways, if any, do Christian ministry leaders practice vulnerability?" RQ4 inquired, "What are the perceived effects of

vulnerability, or the lack thereof, on Christian ministry leaders?" I identified categories for each of the codes that correspond with RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4.

I identified categories under each thematic question including the following: (a) the preliminary question included a close circle is needed, and no one to talk to; (b) hierarchy included rank effects sharing, competency questioned, maturity status, and varies with culture; (c) honor and shame included shame causes reticence, and concerns over integrity; (d) sanctification included steps to the process, it humbles us, and God designed us; (e) confession included in this together, where we confess, share with family, and trust in an outcome; (f) refusal included damaging incentives, and how well you know them; (g) loving one-another included receiving love is difficult, we need to share our pain, and trust God for the outcome; (h) betrayal included church hurt is common, and God helps us move on; (i) growing understanding included we learn in difficult places, and listen and share to grow; (j) setting an example included share personal stories, fear of people inhibits, and own your part; and (k) the additional thoughts question included failing leaders hurt all, vulnerability helps all, and valued but not practiced well. I discuss each of these identified themes in the next chapter. I also utilize the comparative table of categories and associated research questions (Table 16) to guide the discussion of RQs.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

My primary goal in conducting this study was to examine the role of vulnerability in leadership through a two-phase approach utilizing exegetical analysis and phenomenological research. From an exegetical analysis of John 13:1–20, I determined nine primary themes: disregarding hierarchy, challenging honor and shame codes, recognizing ongoing sanctification, practicing mutual confession, addressing refusal, loving one another, loving through betrayal, growing understanding, and setting an example. In the phenomenological phase of the study, I created research questions addressing these nine themes and explored the lived experiences of 12 Christian ministry leaders in the United States.

The exegetical phase of this study addressed RQ1: "In what ways did Jesus demonstrate vulnerability with His disciples in John Chapter 13?" I address the remainder of the research questions in this chapter. RQ5 concerns the comparison of the findings of the exegetical study with the opinions of Christian ministry leaders. In this chapter, I answer RQ5 by discussing RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4 concerning the perceptions of the interviewed Christian ministry leaders with comparisons to the findings from the exegetical study through which I addressed RQ1.

Answers to the Research Questions

In this chapter, I consider the five research questions concerning the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership by comparing the findings from the examination of Scripture with the findings from a phenomenological exploration of the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders. The research questions focused on understanding the role of vulnerability in ministry by first examining (through socio-rhetorical analysis) the example that Jesus taught in John 13. The second phase of this research involved interviews with 12 Christian ministry leaders to determine their common perceptions from lived experiences. The five research questions that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1: In what ways did Jesus demonstrate vulnerability with His disciples in John Chapter 13?

RQ2: How do Christian ministry leaders in the United States perceive vulnerability?

RQ3: In what ways, if any, do Christian ministry leaders practice vulnerability?

RQ4: What are the perceived effects of vulnerability, or the lack thereof, on Christian ministry leaders?

RQ5: How do the experiences of Christian ministry leaders compare with the biblical principles demonstrated in John Chapter 13?

Vulnerability in Scripture

RQ1 focused on the leadership vulnerability that Jesus demonstrated in John 13 by washing his disciples' feet. The findings from an exegetical analysis yielded nine themes. Using socio-rhetorical analysis, I examined how Jesus demonstrated and taught the value of vulnerability to his disciples in his final lesson with all 12 of his original disciples. The nine themes that I recognized in the exegetical phase included disregarding hierarchy, challenging honor and shame codes, recognizing ongoing sanctification, practicing mutual confession, addressing refusal, loving one another, loving through betrayal, growing understanding, and setting an example.

Concerning hierarchy, Jesus practiced vulnerability without regard for status or hierarchical stations and encouraged his followers to do the same (Shaw, 2006). This was demonstrated by Jesus in verse John 13:14: "So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet as well" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Concerning honor and shame, Jesus took a position of a slave to wash his disciples' feet (Crook, 2009; Domeris, 1993; Neyrey, 1994). Regarding ongoing sanctification, Thomas (1991) noted that foot-washing was how people maintained cleanliness and ongoing cleansing at the time of Jesus and this action of Jesus exemplified continued grace in the sanctification process. According to Michaels (2011), practicing mutual confession is pictured by Jesus's teaching to both wash and be washed, and this was a demonstration of receiving grace through both confessing and hearing the confessions of others. Concerning refusal of vulnerability, Jolliffe (1997) observed that Peter's refusal to be washed was directed towards the vulnerable position of Jesus, yet Jesus insisted that it was necessary.

Regarding love, Van der Watt (2017) emphasized that foot-washing in John 13 was foremost a radical act of love. Loving through betrayal was demonstrated by Jesus in John 13:11: "For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, 'Not all of you are clean'" (ESV, 2001/2016). Jesus knew about Judas's betrayal, yet washed him with the others. Growth of understanding was a major theme of John 13:1–20 containing nine uses of words related to knowledge. Regarding the theme of setting an example, Nelson (2013) suggested that Jesus explained that he was giving the disciples an example, but that example is timeless for all who follow Jesus.

I utilized the nine themes from the exegetical phase of the study to inform the interview questions for the phenomenological phase. The subjects of the next three research questions deal with perceptions of vulnerability (RQ2), practices of vulnerability (RQ3), and effects of vulnerability (RQ4). The findings from the phenomenological phase of the study in Chapter 4 answered the next three research questions.

Perceptions of Vulnerability

RQ2 focused on the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders in the United States concerning vulnerability. RQ2 was answered in the phenomenological phase. The Christian ministry leaders expressed various perceptions of the role of vulnerability across each of the themes. Many of the ministry leaders' opinions overlapped and intersected across the themes, but I identified 10 categories that corresponded with their perceptions. I used these categories to inform this discussion. Several ministers expressed that vulnerability is difficult for most people because they have few or no people with whom they can converse. In a discussion of status, they expressed that both rank and age are factors; specifically, both getting older and being in higher authority may cause one to be less willing to practice vulnerability. These expressions from the interviewed leaders are consistent with Shaw's (2006) findings that Christian ministry leaders may focus too much on public opinion and status when considering vulnerability. Some expressed concern about negative perceptions concerning levels of competency and the view that too much vulnerability may cause some people to question a leader's

competence. P11 shared that "both character and competency are important," but indicated that being vulnerable may raise a person's opinion of your character while simultaneously lowering their opinion of your character.

Another common opinion was that we all have problems, but our common difficulties and hurts can actually bring us together when we practice vulnerability. Concerns about the perceptions of other people were also evident in some of the categories. Some of the interviewees cautioned that refusal of vulnerability may hinge on how well people know each other and fear of people inhibits vulnerability. Henry (1973) noted that fear of exposure often shuts people down. Some of the ministry leaders also bemoaned that church hurt is too common, and P1 talked about teaching vulnerability as "one of the highest priorities" to help people alleviate this perception. The idea that vulnerability is necessary for ministry was universally expressed, but with the understanding that being vulnerable is not natural and receiving love is often difficult. P4 mentioned that the idea of being vulnerable sometimes made them feel sick, P5 said it is very risky, P8 said they never enjoy the process, but each of them concluded that their initial reticence was overcome by their faith in God and past experiences of how it changed both themselves and others. P12 maintained that vulnerability was something that was necessary at home, with staff, with colleagues, and from the pulpit at various times.

The perceived obstacles to vulnerability included feelings such as fear, shame, and exposure, but the ministers recognized that vulnerability improved relationships, increased trust, and created a sense of safety. The benefits were worth the risks and made a difference for the leaders, the followers, and the entire ministry. These opinions are consistent with Brown's (2015) conclusion that vulnerability is a difficult but effective method for developing both individual and organizational relationships. The interviewed leaders also expressed genuine concern for other people and a desire to see them change as a reason that ministers should practice vulnerability. While perceptions of vulnerability included some cautions, each Christian leader expressed a desire to see more people willing to take the risk. P1 said that encouraging vulnerability in ministry is right next to a person's initial salvation and that people should continue to be vulnerable through actions

such as confession and forgiveness. Vulnerability is a valuable tool for maintaining a sense of trust and safety between individuals and across an organization, and leaders that desire to create trust and safety benefit themselves, those they lead, and their institution.

Practices of Vulnerability

RQ3 asked, "In what ways, if any, do Christian ministry leaders practice vulnerability?" I addressed RQ3 in the phenomenological phase and identified 10 categories of ministry practices across each of the interview questions that addressed the nine exegetical themes. Several of the ministry leaders spoke about how they practiced vulnerability both within their ministries and personally. Most of them identified a small circle of intimate friends as an important aspect, but one-on-one meetings were also highly effective for the majority of them, and many expressed that they had one or two that they trusted the most. Several of the interviewees also expressed that they shared many of their deepest vulnerabilities with their closest family members or spouse, yet some chose to protect their families from the burden of too much information. P12 said, "Confession is to my family first" and indicated that the value of vulnerability was something that he was still learning along with his wife and children. Vulnerability to a larger community was also encouraged, but several mentioned that intimate details were less appropriate when groups get larger.

Interviewees also noted that sharing pain and struggles is necessary and we need to share if we want to grow. Several mentioned that sharing personal stories from the pulpit or platform is an effective way to connect, but these stories should be more reserved. P7 indicated that there is a growing trend with celebrity pastors to share stories that make them appear more vulnerable, yet some ministers use stories inappropriately for manipulation. We should not only share personal stories of vulnerable moments, but we should also engage in listening to the stories of others, and both parties benefit when both are open with each other. Stoner and Gilligan (2002) expressed that leaders can share vulnerabilities with others in difficult times and navigate both parties to a successful outcome. Many of the leaders identified that it is in the most challenging places and during our deepest hurts that

vulnerability makes the most significant difference. Several noted that vulnerability in the process of sanctification includes confessing brokenness, asking for and receiving forgiveness, and then trusting God to do the actual work. Budde (2007) noted that Christian ministry leaders may stop vulnerability if they fear people and do not constantly remember that God is in control. Several identified that moving on from betrayal was only possible with help from God. Multiple ministry leaders also expressed that vulnerability is a popular concept that is gaining more attention, but fewer practice vulnerability than those that claim to be vulnerable. This opinion is supported by the conclusions from Nienaber et al. (2015) that individuals may express a willingness to be vulnerable at different levels than they actually practice vulnerability.

Not all of the interviewees practiced vulnerability the same. P2 mentioned that they had only one person that gave them a sense of complete safety, but that person was no longer geographically close to them. Pause was related to past hurt for this individual, but the desire to find new confidants remained. This leader expressed obstacles to finding vulnerable colleagues, including a lack of denominational emphasis, a lack of teaching in seminary on how and where to find help, and a fear of rejection based on past observations. Several of the leaders practiced vulnerability with full knowledge of the obstacles but with different levels of caution based on the size of the audience, how well they knew the people, and if the information may harm others. While vulnerability is beneficial between two people, in groups, and with large audiences, the appropriate amount of vulnerability is not the same. Jesus offered foot-washing to only his 12 disciples—not as a teaching to the masses, but he was most vulnerable when he died on the cross as a message for the world to see. The nature of what Jesus did in the upper room was intimate and included individual moments, but the message has carried beyond the ears of those that heard it that day. Leaders need vulnerable moments with individuals, small groups, and even sometimes to the masses, but the timing and nature of the message must always be met with some additional advice from Jesus found at the end of John 12 just before the foot-washing story:

> For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.

Christian ministry leaders face a dilemma of how much they should say, when they should say it, and with whom they should be vulnerable. Jesus demonstrated vulnerability with his disciples and encouraged the same. An important factor is the guidance of the Holy Spirit to navigate each of these perceived obstacles.

Effects of Vulnerability

RQ4 asked, "What are the perceived effects of vulnerability, or the lack thereof, on Christian ministry leaders?" The interview process revealed the perceived views of Christian ministry leaders concerning the effects of leadership vulnerability. Each of the interviewees shared thoughts about the benefits and the burdens that vulnerability affords. There were opinions about the positive and negative impacts of vulnerability across the various themes, and I identified 10 categories that spoke to these perceived effects. Concerning hierarchy, some of the leaders expressed that other people may see a minister as less capable if they share too much information. Some of the ministers also noted that vulnerability from a leader can change the entire culture of a ministry, and the effects of a vulnerable culture are healing. P8 expressed that the opposite is also true and a leader that does not model vulnerability creates a culture that does not value vulnerability and the people are more likely to withhold trust. Mayer and Gavin (2005) determined that trust levels in organizational culture are heavily affected by vulnerability, and the leader of the organization sets the tone.

Concerning honor and shame, multiple interviewees noted that shame causes reticence which may include withdrawal, hiding, and silence. P10 expressed a concern that shame causes many people in ministry to close others off. In the discussion of ongoing sanctification, most leaders talked about how the process humbles people. P2 noted that the outcome of vulnerability in sanctification is ultimately a great benefit, but cited that getting there can be difficult. Vulnerability in mutual confession leads to mutual trust according to the majority of the

interviewed leaders. This opinion is consistent with the observations of Noam and Fischer (2013) that relationships become closed when individuals are not open with each other, but vulnerability restores trust. Refusing vulnerability may lead individuals to resort to gossip and hearsay according to several interviewees. Loving each other has many benefits according to the majority of the interviews, but one of the most significant benefits is bringing glory to God and receiving the blessing of knowing that you helped someone else and also pleased God in the process. Leaders also expressed that we must own our own part if we want to be truly vulnerable and set an example. Two related outcomes were emphasized by several ministers: when leaders fail, it hurts everyone, but when leaders are vulnerable, it can help everyone. Vulnerability improved relationships when ministers practiced vulnerability by increasing a sense of safety and trust, and when leaders demonstrated vulnerability, it modeled trust for the entire church or ministry. Wulffers (2017) noted that leaders who express vulnerability can help to develop trust in the greater organization and beyond.

Discussion of Common Themes

The final research question (RQ5) concerns a comparison of the exegetical findings with the phenomenological findings. I identified nine primary themes from the socio-rhetorical analysis of John 13. I then crafted interview questions that were informed by these themes and observations from a review of the literature. I answered RQ5 through a discussion of the nine themes with references to both the exegetical phase and the phenomenological phase. In this discussion, I also relate my observations from the findings from both phases of this research with insights from associated studies from the review of the literature.

Disregarding Hierarchy

The exegetical portion of this study revealed that Jesus challenged perceptions of authority and even turned hierarchical thinking upside-down. The words of Jesus from John 13:16 explain, “Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him” (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This statement from Jesus would have been highly oppositional to both

the culture when he made the statement and at the time of the Johannine writing (Baugh et al., 2002). Jesus also instructed in John 13:14, "So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet as well" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The idea that Jesus as a teacher would lower himself to the position of a servant or slave by washing their feet would have shocked the disciples, yet Jesus also encouraged them to follow his lead (Baugh et al., 2002). These observations regarding hierarchy led me to ask two questions in the phenomenological phase: "How do you perceive the relationship, if any, between vulnerability and status?" and "Do you think that your own status or position is affected by the practice of vulnerability, and can you explain why or why not?"

The Christian ministry leaders expressed answers regarding the effects of hierarchy on vulnerability, which I placed in four categories. Two primary perceptions from the interviews included the thoughts that both rank and maturity levels affect the willingness of leaders to engage in vulnerability. Two outcomes that the ministry leaders shared included the ideas that vulnerability may open a person to be questioned concerning their level of competency, and the practiced vulnerability level of a leader changes the level of vulnerability throughout an organization. Some Christian ministry leaders expressed that the higher a person rises in position, the more difficult it becomes to practice vulnerability. One common concern was the risk of public opinion. P3 called vulnerability "risky business" when dealing with the proposition of sharing from a position of higher authority. This observation is consistent with views from Shaw (2006) that Christian leaders are often concerned with the balance between risking public image and the possible benefits of vulnerability for both themselves and their organization. The idea of self-protection in the discussion of hierarchy spanned from individuals into the culture of the organization. P8 noted that leaders drive the culture towards being vulnerable when they exemplify vulnerability with others; this, in turn, creates trust and strengthens relationships.

Dyer (2017) suggested that building relationships often happens when leaders demonstrate vulnerability, and Jesus exemplified vulnerability in opposition to self-protection resulting in a culture of trust. Jesus challenged his disciples to

disregard hierarchical concerns and invited vulnerability between leaders and subordinates. Like the culture of the Johannine audience, today's ministry leaders still feel that status affects one's willingness to be vulnerable. The interviewed ministry leaders embraced the idea that the practice of being vulnerable is healthy both personally and for an organization, yet they also expressed that it is not easy and produced feelings of risk and fear.

Challenging Honor and Shame Codes

An exegetical analysis of John 13:1–20 yielded a theme related to honor and shame codes. Each of the prominent people groups during the time that John wrote this message practiced codes of honor and codes of shame (Adkins, 1975). Malina (2001) noted that these groups included not only Judeans but Romans and Greeks; all three cultures were heavily influenced by the idea of what was shameful and what was accepted as honorable. The actions of Jesus in John 13:5–6 caused Peter to question what Jesus was doing:

> Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" (*ESV*, 2001/2016)

Jesus challenged the social norm when he took the place of a servant, and this was in direct contrast to the existing culture that identified some actions as less honorable and more shameful (Crook, 2009; Domeris, 1993; Neyrey, 1994). Brown (2006) concluded that many people perceive vulnerability as a weakness that can result in shame. Magezi (2015) saw the actions of Jesus as a powerful and loving demonstration of love that challenged and even transformed the perception of vulnerability as weakness. Brown (2007) later determined that vulnerability is an important way for leaders to combat feelings of shame in themselves and the ones they lead.

I recognized two prominent categories in the phenomenological phase of this study, including concerns about one's integrity and the idea that shame causes reticence. P1 spoke about how shame causes people "to build protective devices" in an effort to shield themselves from shame. The interviewed leaders also perceived

that society often encourages people to keep silent to avoid shame. This idea is consistent with Lingenfelter and Mayers's (2003) conclusions that many people value honor and tend to see vulnerability as potentially shaming. Several leaders mentioned that they were raised with the concept that being vulnerable is shameful and shows weakness. P6 said that leaders today are prone to these same ideas: "if you talk too much, that is weakness." Several concurred that shame and honor come down to what is happening in a person's heart, and a heart led by the Spirit is less likely to equate vulnerability with weakness and shame. Some of the leaders spoke about shame as a false perception of one's identity based on their mistakes. P7 and P8 mentioned that a person who is guilty of wrong should not be branded with the action; for instance, a person that steals something is not a thief, or a person that tells a lie is not a liar. Several of the leaders expressed that they desire to have a culture that embraces vulnerability, but shame is an obstacle for people when they fear public perceptions of their integrity. One way in which leaders can address shame directly is to admit to the guilt without identifying with the shame. Vulnerability embraces wrong actions, but it does not accept false identity. Jesus demonstrated that we all have problems, but it is God's desire to cleanse us from our problems, remove the shame, and restore our identity in Christ.

Kanagaraj (2004) identified that Jesus washed feet as a demonstration of lowliness that set the stage for an even more shameful death on the cross, and the lesson in John 13 helped them understand the power of vulnerability in a moment that would have been otherwise shameful. Jesus challenged his followers to not only forgo high positions for a place of servitude, but to invite actions that might be perceived as weak or shameful. The interviewed ministers recognized the challenges of shame that are present in our society and agreed that it remains difficult to practice vulnerability when honor and shame are on the line. Peter was the first to speak after Jesus had already washed several of the disciples. The interviewees also identified that the prospect of shame may cause people to keep silent or to even hide from the possibility of exposure. The leaders again expressed a desire to have a culture of vulnerability in their own organizations, but viewed shame as an obstacle.

Recognizing Ongoing Sanctification

Bacon (1931) determined that the lesson of John 13 concerning foot-washing included the idea that initial salvation or justification is equated to a bath or baptism, and the act of washing feet exemplified a need for ongoing cleansing equated with the sanctification process. In John 13:10, Jesus stated, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean (*ESV*, 2001/2016). According to the early writings of Augustine, the ongoing process of Christian living after baptism includes confession and accountability postconversion, and foot-washing was symbolic of this process (Augustine, 2018). Thomas (1991) suggested that baptism is a symbol of the cleansing grace that redeems one from sin at the point of salvation, but Jesus offered foot-washing as a reminder of the ongoing need for cleansing and a picture of ongoing grace through sanctification.

In the phenomenological phase of the study, I identified three categories under the question of sanctification. The leaders recognized that there are steps in the process, that people must remain humble, and that the real work of sanctification comes from God. In each interview, the leaders spoke about how the process of sanctification includes vulnerable acknowledgment of failures to oneself, to others, and to God through acts such as confession, forgiveness, and humility. The majority of the interviewed ministers spoke about the ongoing nature of sanctification and the ongoing need for people to remain vulnerable. Several mentioned that salvation begins with the confession of sin, but sanctification involves ongoing vulnerable confession, and this is consistent with the observations from Augustine (2018). Many also emphasized the need for people to give and receive forgiveness. Countryman (1987) identified that the Johannine community likely identified foot-washing with the ongoing need for forgiving and being forgiven. According to several interviewees, sanctification leads a person to a place of humility through vulnerability, but those that stop the process may face humiliation instead. P2 noted, "We are going to sin every day, but then we just come and humbly ask for forgiveness." The leaders also talked about sanctification as a way for people to remember their true identity as people created in the image of

God. Additionally, the interviewed leaders indicated that sanctification does not happen as a work of people, but rather as a gift from God. P6 suggested that our part is to rely on God, and we must remember that sanctification is something that "Jesus actually did for you." Vulnerability in sanctification is recognition that we all have faults, we need other people, and God is with us even when we fail, or others fail us. When we are vulnerable with each other, we are open to admitting our failures, forgiving others for their faults, and acknowledging that we all need the grace of Jesus to sanctify us.

Kinnison (2010) compared Christian leaders to sheep that are simply guiding other sheep to the good shepherd and this means that leaders are on the same journey and must remain humble as we seek Jesus together. The Christian ministry leaders identified themselves on a humble journey alongside others towards Jesus and recognized sanctification as an ongoing process. They identified that sanctification includes confession of sin and continual forgiveness. Jesus demonstrated that a bath (justification) was necessary, but foot-washing (sanctification) would maintain cleanliness along the path. The Christian leaders interviewed in this study agreed that we all must remember that our true identity is in Christ, and we must regularly return to God to remember the one that makes us clean. Sanctification is a process at work in us, but people can partner with God through vulnerable acknowledgment of problems and failures that happen on the way. Vulnerability in sanctification improves a person's view of self, grows trust in relationships, and demonstrates faith in God to accomplish the ultimate work.

Practicing Mutual Confession

Sanctification is the process by which people receive the grace of God and one of the practical actions that people practice in response to God's work. In John 13:14, Jesus instructs the disciples, "you also ought to wash one another's feet" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Blum (1983) pointed to this instruction as similar to I John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). The result of confession in I John 1:9 is that God will forgive us and cleanse us. Wenham et al. (1994) also determined that mutual confession was a strong theme in the foot-washing account

from John 13. The lesson from Jesus indicates that the many of the disciples had already had a bath but needed their feet to be washed. The accompanying action of baptism is an initial profession of faith, yet the ongoing process of sanctification is accompanied with continual confession one to another. This is consistent with James 5:16a: "Therefore, confess your sins to one another" (*ESV*, 2001/2016).

In the phenomenological phase of the is study, I posed a question about mutual confession: "In what ways, if any, do you practice vulnerable confession in your ministry?" While the previous question concerning sanctification was more philosophical, this question was more practical. The answers from the 12 Christian ministry leaders yielded answers that I placed into four categories. Two of the categories were more practical, but one was a perception and one was an effect. Several of the interviewees talked about where they practiced confession. Most of the leaders spoke about the value of confessing to their families. P5 stated that there were some confessions reserved only for their spouse. Many also spoke about a need for mutual confession in both groups and one-on-one situations, but most identified that intimate settings resulted in the most intimate sharing. Another common observation included the realization that confession may be to people, but it is ultimately received by God. Several spoke about how everyone has failures, and we are in this together. Greenleaf's (1970) servant leadership model suggested that no leader is perfect and should not be expected to maintain a sense of perfection. All 12 ministry leaders mentioned at some point that they had failed or were not perfect. Most of the leaders spoke about trust being related to confession. P12 mentioned that vulnerable confession fostered trust in both personal relationships and staff relationships.

Jesus taught in John 13:1–20 that there is another cleansing function after a bath which is needed by all. The example from Jesus was for people to voluntarily wash and be washed, and this imagery can be practically related to the confession of sin in order maintain cleanliness. Christian ministry leaders agreed that we all are in need of this continual process, and we need to find somewhere to practice confession. Jesus encouraged us to follow his example and do this for each other. Interviewees indicated that the ramifications of not sharing our failures with

someone make leaders more susceptible to failure. Briggs (2014) noted that leader failures affect entire organizations, and Christian ministry leaders are just as susceptible to struggles and failures. The interviewees spoke about confessing with families, in groups, and one-on-one, but the ultimate confession is to God, who does the cleansing. When people confess to God and to others, it is a vulnerable admittance that P4 referred to as "soul searching." Vulnerable confession works in the healing process by bringing hidden problems to the surface so that they may be dealt with appropriately. Confession requires one to speak, and the recipients of confession are the ears of the group or individual, the ears of God, and the ears of the one speaking. Each of the ministers talked about the role of vulnerability in confession as a tool for positive exposure. P4 mentioned that the vulnerability of confession usually comes with feelings of nausea due to the unknown, but it is always positive to follow through with it. When the leaders embrace vulnerability in confession, it results in the healing of personal pain, restoration of fractured relationships, and a renewed sense of pleasing God.

Addressing Refusal

John 13:8 says, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This dialogue is an interchange between Jesus and Peter, and Peter initially refuses for Jesus to wash his feet. Peter rejected the idea that Jesus was being vulnerable in this moment. Jolliffe (1997) and Voorwinde (2005) both noted that Peter was not just concerned with the vulnerable nature of the washing, but with the idea that his Lord and teacher would perform it. Jesus instructed his disciples to follow his example and to emulate the action that he showed them. This instruction was not merely that they would wash each other, but that they would willingly take on the problems that they perceived with the action. Blum (1983) explained that this was an act of love, but the disciples would have been thinking about all that his instructions entailed. It was one thing for Jesus to show them this action one time, but another for him to tell them to keep doing it for each other.

In the phenomenological phase of this study, I asked each of the interviewees, "When is it appropriate, if at all, for a Christian ministry leader to

refuse to be vulnerable?" I compiled each of their answers into two categories concerning how well people know each other and the possible damaging incentives. Several Christian ministry leaders talked about denying vulnerability when they did not know the other people well enough. Many talked about questioning the motivation of the person asking for vulnerability. One of the most common reasons for avoidance was also the possibility of information becoming gossip. As P1 said, "Being careful not to include others, and not just your family, but even other relationships." The protection of information also included concern for others. P3 expressed, "You're going to go beat another person up. I'm not going to weaponize you to go do something." Vliet and Jessica (2008) noted that ministers may associate vulnerability with harmful consequences, and this implication may cause refusal by either party.

Peter was concerned with the actions of Jesus in John 13 and the implications of what it might mean for him to allow his Lord to do such an act. This refusal was rebuffed by Jesus, and then Jesus further encouraged each of the disciples to follow his example. Christian ministry talked of reasons that they might refuse vulnerability, and it was primarily over concerns related to the outcomes. One of Peter's concerns was the way that washing feet made Jesus appear, and also the uncomfortable nature of receiving this action. Glanz (2002) and Henry (1973) both identified that refusal by either party may be due to a sense of exposure of not only the party sharing, but the party receiving. The discussion of refusal with the Christian ministry leaders also dealt with this idea of mutual concern of exposure, and the increased likelihood of refusal when the motives were not clear. All of the interviewees championed vulnerability, but they also recognized that there were circumstances when people should use caution and refuse when necessary.

Loving One Another

> In John 13:34–35, Jesus said,
>
> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (*ESV*, 2001/2016)

Jesus had already given the disciples an example to wash each other's feet accompanied by an encouragement for them to follow his example in verse 15, and the construction of this command is very similar. In both passages, Jesus emphasized the expression "for one another" as something that should be both given and received. Van der Watt (2017) expressed that Jesus washing his disciples' feet was a radical act of love that foreshadowed what he would later do on the cross. Sosler (2017) also agreed that it was shocking for Jesus to assume a low position, and his example was to both love and be loved.

In the interview portion of this study in the phenomenological phase, I asked each of the participants, "Do you feel that you are able to both give and receive love in your role as a minister, and if so, can you give examples of each?" I compiled their answers into three categories: the observations that we need to share our pain, that receiving love is difficult, and that we trust God for the outcome. Many of the leaders talked about the difficulty of both sharing and receiving love, but most concurred that receiving was harder. P7 said, "I think it's a lot of times easier to give than receive." P1 mentioned that embarrassment was an issue when having to receive love, and feelings of rejection and embarrassment were expressed by several as part of their difficulty with accepting love. A majority of the ministers felt that it was a crisis that brought most people together for vulnerable loving moments. Many of the Christian ministry leaders spoke about giving and receiving love as happening through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

There was a balance in the perceptions of the ministry leaders between understanding that God was working in them and a feeling that there could be some rejection. Budde (2007) noted that some ministers have acclimated to hearing public criticism and have become less likely to chance negative perceptions even though Scripture promises that God will be with them. Jesus gave assurances to Peter and all of the disciples that they should love one another, and he demonstrated his love in a radical way.

Loving Through Betrayal

The presence of Judas during the final teaching of Jesus with his original 12 chosen disciples added a powerful example of how deep the lesson of vulnerability

was intended. John 13:2 says, “The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him” (*ESV*, 2001/2016). This was early in the chapter, and it clearly emphasized that this betrayal was emphatic. In verse 11a, John further explained, “For he knew who was to betray him” (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Both Judas and Satan are mentioned as those that betrayed God in verse 27: “Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly” (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Hein (1971) explained the multiple mentions of the betrayal by suggesting that the devil gave the idea to Judas in verse two, but Satan fully entered Judas in verse 27. Stanley (2009) expressed that it was amazing that Jesus clearly understood that Judas would betray him, yet Jesus washed his feet along with the other 12 disciples.

In the phenomenological phase of the study, I asked the ministry leaders, “Can you describe a time, if any, that you have witnessed someone practicing vulnerability in the context of betrayal?” I categorized the answers from the participants into two categories: church hurt is common, and God helps us move on. The discussion with the leaders identified that many have been hurt and have seen other people hurt as well. Half of the leaders expressed that church hurt was a common occurrence. Several told stories of very difficult moments that they had witnessed and how deep the hurt of betrayal can be. Chandler (2010) determined that ministry leaders regularly deal with the direst circumstances and emotional needs of people, and it is difficult for them to balance helping others while coping with personal struggles. P10 spoke about both personal trials and the struggles of colleagues that had walked away from difficult situations. Many of the ministers gave examples of others that faced betrayal with grace and love. P2 expressed that everyone eventually has to deal with betrayal, but “I’m hoping I can be like Jesus and forgive.” Other interviewees shared the sentiment that getting through betrayal can only be done with God’s help.

Betrayal was a central element of John 13, and John emphasized the betrayal of Jesus by Judas in multiple verses. The miraculous nature of what Jesus showed by washing Judas’s feet while knowing that the devil had already put it in his heart is one of the most radical demonstrations of love. The Christian ministers

recognized that betrayal is an event that is too common in ministry, but they had each witnessed someone walk through betrayal well with an ability to remain vulnerable. Brown (2015) spoke of a person's ability to remain open in the context of betrayal as the strongest evidence of true vulnerability. The interviewees expressed how they were encouraged to witness the examples of others in such dire times, and they attributed the ability of someone to walk through betrayal as only possible with the help of God.

Growing Understanding

John 13:7 says, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand" (ESV, 2001/2016). John recorded how Jesus first told the disciples that they would not understand his actions at that time, but they later would. In verse 12, Jesus asks, "Do you understand what I have done to you?" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Segovia (1985) pointed out that the readers of the time that John wrote would have already known about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus; however, this emphasis was important to connect the act of Jesus with increased understanding. The Johannine audience was heavily influenced by cultural ideas of knowledge, and the Gnostics emphasized that growing understanding was important. John's writings included many mentions of knowledge and the Greek concept of *logos*. John began John 1:1 with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The idea of *logos* was the underlying meaning behind words, and Jesus was the spoken expression of God as communication of his knowledge to humanity (Bruce, 1994). Bultmann (2014) suggested that Jesus was talking about the knowledge that the disciples would gain when they would later connect the foot-washing with his later crucifixion.

In the interview portion of the study, I posed a question concerning gaining understanding through vulnerable moments: "Can you describe some ways, if any, that vulnerable encounters have affected your growth of understanding or another person's growth of understanding?" I identified two categories from the interview answers, including that we must listen and share to grow and we learn in difficult places. The majority of the interviewed Christian ministry leaders expressed that people will not grow if they are not willing to listen to each other. This perception

from the leaders included the necessity for leaders to pay attention to their followers. Ito and Bligh (2016) concluded that leaders who risk hurt and embrace vulnerability create psychological safety and emotional security for their followers. Another majority opinion was that painful situations produced the biggest opportunities for growth. P2 talked about the valleys of life as the most important places to learn. The interviewed leaders agreed that risking vulnerable moments was necessary for anyone wanting to grow. Bligh and Riggio (2012) found that risking vulnerable moments leads to growth for both leaders and those in their organizations. P10 said that vulnerability was an untapped and often untaught aspect of discipleship that may be the most important way for people to grow.

John emphasized the growth of understanding by mentioning words related to knowledge in nine different places in the first twenty verses of John 13. The audience of John was highly concerned with knowledge and understanding, and Jesus reiterated that they did not understand, but they would. The Christian ministry leaders recognized that vulnerability is risky, but leaders that are willing to take the risk are likely to grow in their own understanding and help others to grow also. Vulnerability is something that Jesus encouraged his disciples to both give and receive, and the interviewed leaders recognized that their growth often came by listening to others. When people are vulnerable, they admit that they have limitations, and this recognition is necessary for a person that wants to grow. It is necessary to identify one's own limited understanding if one wants to gain new understanding.

Setting an Example

Jesus twice explained that he was giving the disciples an example in John 13. He first explained to them in verse 14, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). He later told them in verse 34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (*ESV*, 2001/2016). Jesus intended for the disciples to learn something through his example, and it is significant that this was his last lesson with all 12 original disciples. Brown (1995) expressed that Jesus exemplified foot-washing as a way of

expressing the need for his followers to forgive and be forgiven, as well as to confess and receive confession. Kanagaraj equated Jesus's instruction to wash and be washed with his command to love and be loved, and Christians must follow both examples.

I asked an interview question in the phenomenological phase of this study related to the theme of setting an example: "Can you think of a time that you have seen a vulnerable leader set an example that others followed?" I compiled the answers from the ministry leaders into three categories: the thoughts that people should share personal stories, fear inhibits sharing, and we need to own our part. Multiple leaders noted that the best examples involved people who were willing to share deep stories. P2 remembered a youth camp: "I told a deeply personal story, not to comfort me or anything like that. But to show the group, as your friend, you can be open." Several ministry leaders gave examples of people that chose to be vulnerable in the face of public perception and at the risk of being scrutinized. Some of the interviewed leaders remembered examples of people making heartfelt apologies for themselves and sometimes on behalf of the organization. P4 shared how she learned when she was younger: "I just remember thinking that good leaders are willing to apologize." Interviewees also spoke about how leaders impacted them positively when leaders offered directions and then invited people in lower stations to offer feedback without negative repercussions.

Gunter (2016) explained that the actions of Jesus recorded in John 13 are not an illustration of a domineering leader, but rather an example of a leader that loved his followers and was willing to demonstrate how to love and be loved. The ministry leaders were inspired by others that had also demonstrated great love through vulnerable moments more than through teaching. Smith and Hansen (2015) observed that people are more likely to learn from leaders that live out good news through their own actions than to learn from leaders that offer instructions that feel like platitudes. Like Jesus, the examples that the interviewed leaders shared were about people that were well aware of the risks, yet took action anyway. For Jesus, he knew that the ultimate price was coming, but he showed a way to love and be loved. The Christian leaders agreed that the best examples of love were from

leaders that invited people into their struggles and the ones that were available to support others in times of need. There was a strong sense throughout this study that vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership is fraught with obstacles related to risk. Leaders are aware that public opinion has the power to damage a person, their family, friends, or an entire organization, and vulnerability exposes a leader to scrutiny. Vulnerability is a risk for leaders, but not being vulnerable poses a greater risk.

The risk of not being vulnerable is dire because hiding usually only works for a limited time, and the ramifications of being exposed compound the original hidden problems. Vulnerability means that a person must reveal what is hidden and deal with it, but denying vulnerability compounds problems over time until the results are volatile. The risk of finding someone to share with is something that Jesus encouraged, and this principle remains vital. Jesus also demonstrated the ultimate vulnerability by washing the feet of Judas, who would betray him. Betrayal is always a risk, but withholding vulnerability does not alleviate the prospect of betrayal, and practicing vulnerability can actually help someone recover from betrayal. The findings of this study revealed that people should consider the audience when offering vulnerability, but an audience must be found. Leaders can be vulnerable in different ways with large crowds, a circle of friends, or with a singular individual, but there are benefits at each level. The positive results of vulnerability include stronger relationships, increased trust, feelings of personal relief, and the increased awareness that God is bigger than human problems.

Implications

This study included a two-phase approach with implications from both phases. This research included an examination of Scripture as the basis for understanding the role of vulnerability in leadership. I identified John 13:1–20 and the final teaching of Jesus with his original 12 disciples as a basis for a better understanding of the role of vulnerability in leadership. The pericope includes the Johannine account of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. The phenomenological phase of the study utilized interviews of 12 Christian ministry leaders, and the findings from this research also have significant implications. In combination with a

review of the literature, there are both theoretical and practical implications related to both phases of this study.

Theoretical Implications

The exegetical phase of this study involved previous studies concerning John 13 and specifically the story of Jesus washing feet in John 13:1–20. The majority of existing researchers have not considered the method of socio-rhetorical analysis, which considers not only the perceptions of those in the story and the audience of the author, but includes contextual consideration for modern readers (Henson et al., 2020). The research that I conducted considered the perspectives of 12 active Christian ministry leaders. The phenomenological phase incorporated themes derived from the exegetical study and helped to inform a modern perspective of the nine themes from John 13:1–20. This study adds to the literature by including observations from previous studies of John 13 and leadership vulnerability compared with the findings from the interviews of Christian ministry leaders.

Baugh et al. (2002) noted that Jesus challenged the idea that higher positions should receive higher honor, and Dyer (2017) suggested that leaders build trust when they practice vulnerability without regard for people's impressions of status. The interviewed leaders who indicated that they liked the idea of being vulnerable without regarding hierarchy, but the idea of risk remains an issue that creates a more cautionary approach to vulnerability. Brown (2007) found that people often equate vulnerability with weakness, and Adkins (1975) noted that the audiences of the Johannine writings would have seen the actions of Jesus as shameful. The phenomenological findings of this study revealed that modern Christian ministry leaders may be hesitant to practice vulnerability because of the possibility of people questioning their integrity. Thomas (1991) suggested that Jesus exemplified ongoing sanctification in John 13, and Countryman (1987) identified that Jesus was also speaking about mutual confession. Kinnison (2010) suggested that it is the role of ministers to bring others to God who does the work. The interviewed leaders expressed that it was God who hears confessions, even when it is between people, and it is God who cleanses people from sin during the sanctification process.

A refusal of vulnerability was expressed by Peter in John 13, and Blum (1983) noted that this would have been perceived by the disciples as shocking because of the ongoing nature of his suggestion and what Jesus did was a radical act of love. The Christian ministers expressed concerns about negative outcomes for other people and perceptions that may damage the image of their organization. These leaders also recognized that loving people and receiving love can be difficult but is possible when remembering Jesus and relying on him for help. Brown (2015) noted that the ultimate test of vulnerability relates to the possibility of being betrayed by one that also loves the betrayed deeply. Judas betrayed Jesus in John 13 when Satan entered him, but Jesus still washed his feet. The interviewed leaders noted that betrayal is too common in ministry, but risking vulnerability is worth it if it is possible to rely on direction from the Holy Spirit. The examples from other people that had navigated betrayal with love gave the interviewed ministers hope. Jesus encouraged his disciples to follow his example of love and vulnerability. Smith and Hansen (2015) observed that people are inspired by a leader's examples more than a leader's words. The interviewed ministers expressed that vulnerability in others had given them great lessons and increased their own understanding at times, and they too desired to use vulnerability as a tool to grow both themselves and others.

Practical Implications

There are also practical implications of this research. I addressed the problem of Christian ministry failure and questioned whether vulnerability may have a role in alleviating or stopping some ministers from failing. Briggs (2014) explained that leadership failure is destructive for not only the leader but for the organization, and Christian ministry leadership failure is just as devastating. Latta and Clottey (2020) suggested that more research into the causes of leadership failure will help inform ways that failure may be prevented. Shaw (2006) recognized that vulnerability is effective for addressing leadership failure, including ministry leaders.

The interviewed ministers noted a desire to be vulnerable but difficulty identifying the right people, the right time, and the right places. This study revealed

that there is not a perfect time, place, or audience and risk is part of vulnerability. Glanz (2002) identified that people who are always searching for a perfect situation will likely shut down and may even embrace shame. The obstacles of fear and shame were common in the interviews, but there was also a sense of hope that vulnerability may be the answer. Brown (2015) suggested that vulnerability simultaneously may result in both victory and failure. The failure aspect comes from the acknowledgment and revelation of failure to another person, but bringing the problem to light allows it to be addressed. Leaders that are willing to practice vulnerability can address a feeling of shame by admitting to any wrongdoing while simultaneously accepting the love and forgiveness of God. God does not desire vulnerability to shame humanity for their actions but rather to cleanse them and remind them who they are in Christ. Leaders that embrace the grace of Jesus are able to find identity as a child of God and do not have to identify themselves with any shameful actions.

In this study, I found that Christian ministry leaders noted several ways that they have experienced vulnerability helping them in ministry. Vulnerability strengthened relationships across hierarchical boundaries, removed shame by identifying with Christ, and increased trust through mutual confession and forgiveness. Although the audience and the situation may dictate the level of vulnerability, the value of vulnerability exceeds the risk because the consequences of not being vulnerable are even direr. The participating leaders said that finding the right people and situations is not easy, but the results are worth the pursuit. The implications for this study are related to these findings.

Observations from the review of the literature can be combined with the findings from this study to suggest ways that vulnerability may be positively promoted in ministry settings. Several interviewed ministers mentioned that they experienced shaming as a tool for learning from an early age and that shame was a deterrent to vulnerability. The leaders in this study suggested that promoting vulnerability from an early age would make a difference. P10 identified vulnerability as a primary need in discipleship and suggested that churches should model vulnerability and teach about the value. Wulffers (2017) championed the

idea that vulnerability has been a proven value in leadership development. Churches can promote vulnerability by demonstrating the value to parents and offering training that encourages parenting without shaming. The interviewed leaders also noted a high value of vulnerability with families. Ministries could offer additional resources such as weekend outings or camps to bring families together for learning and practicing proper vulnerability. Some of the ministry leaders also expressed that they were not taught this in any of their ministry training. Bible colleges and Seminaries should consider increasing practical training related to vulnerability. This means that more resources addressing vulnerability and courses that teach proper vulnerability would be of high value. Leaders need to have a better understanding of when, where, and with whom they can be vulnerable. Brown (2015) noted that vulnerability is not without discrimination, and it is possible to share too much, too often, or with the wrong people. Christian ministry leaders in this study found value in vulnerability by sharing differently in different situations but finding at least one person and place where they shared deeply. P7 related that it was in professional counseling that the deepest issues came out, including some of which they were previously not aware. Finding the right place to be vulnerable and the right situation to be comfortable remain two big hurdles, but leaders that took the risk found that it was possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. They also indicated that the positive results exceeded the fears that held them back.

Each of the interviewed leaders expressed at some point that ministry was hard on both them and many times on their families. Miner (2007) noted that family members are often affected as much as ministers. P7 spoke about how difficult ministry had become and their personal battles with depression. Chenelle and Rothmann (2010) suggested that ministers are expected to carry heavy emotional loads and need ways to address the issue. Weaver et al. (1997) observed that ministers need a way to deal with struggles because entire organizations suffer when they fail. Churches and ministries should consider multiple ways to create safe places for minters to practice vulnerability. Denominations and ministry networks can help leaders to create resources, plan retreats, offer private counseling, and develop more materials. Such materials could address the tension of

how to find the right people and suggestions for how to navigate the appropriate situations.

Limitations

In this study, I explored the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the value of vulnerability in leadership. The study incorporated two phases, and there are limitations associated with both the exegetical analysis and the phenomenological phase. Concerning the phenomenological phase, this study included the opinions of leaders from various backgrounds and denominations but did not focus on the differences of opinion that may be derived from their theological distinctions. This study was also limited by the number of Christian ministry leaders that can be practically included in an interview process. The scope of this research included various backgrounds and roles, but I did not focus on specific roles such as senior pastors, student pastors, parachurch leaders, etc. The study also included churches and ministries of varied sizes, but the variations in size were not included as a distinguishing factor. This study also incorporated ministers that were both men and women and denominations that viewed the role of women in ministry differently, but there was no focus on differing perceptions between men and women. The interviews also produced results based on opinions, and while the goal was to better understand opinions, the findings reflect perceptions that may vary widely across other sectors of Christian ministry leaders. This study was also limited to ministry leaders in the United States. This study was also limited to understanding the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of ministry, but it did not address methods for ministry leaders to incorporate vulnerability.

The exegetical analysis of John 13 provided a biblical context for vulnerability, but there are many other passages of Scripture that may inform the biblical understanding of vulnerability. This study was limited to the Johannine account and the actions of Jesus in John 13. Other versions of the activities of Jesus or various Scriptures from both the Old and New Testaments may provide further insight concerning the biblical practice of vulnerability. The analysis in this study was conducted through the socio-rhetorical methodology and did not utilize

traditional exegetical analysis incorporating the use of original languages. This study also focused heavily on the practice of foot-washing during the time of the Johannine writings. Still, it did not include implications for the practice of foot-washing in modern churches and ministries.

Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of this study revealed areas that future scholars might explore. Research on the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership remains scarce. The findings of this study helped to provide some insight into perceptions. Still, there remains a great need for ways that Christian ministry leaders might learn the skills of healthy vulnerability and practical methods to apply the learned skills. In this qualitative study, I was able to delve deeper into this topic, but more comprehensive research incorporating quantitative analysis may provide more insight across a larger audience. Developing a vulnerability measurement such as a Likert scale might be a valuable tool for a broader understanding of the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership.

This study included three groups of ministry leaders, but I did not divide the perceptions according to the roles of the leaders. Future researchers may perform a comparative analysis of vulnerability according to functions. The ministers in this study indicated that vulnerability was different based on factors such as age, status, years of experience, denominations, and church size. Explorations that are specific to any or all of these areas of concern could be done. This study included men and women, but future investigators could compare and contrast views of vulnerability based on gender. More specific studies could also provide valuable insight for those concerned about a particular classification, such as vulnerability in youth ministers. I only considered churches in the United States, and future studies might be expanded to explore other parts of the world or compare vulnerability among ministries across various countries or regions.

The exegetical phase of this study was limited to vulnerability expressed in John 13:1–20. Many other Scriptures could be explored concerning the vulnerability that Jesus expressed. While this study considered Jesus washing feet, a study examining how Jesus responded when his feet were washed would add

additional insight. Although Jesus taught a lesson of vulnerability in John 13, it would be informative to consider his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane and his moment on the cross when he cried out to God. Studies of other events in the life of Jesus may also reveal instances of vulnerability. Studies that consider biblical lessons from other books of the Bible or characters would also be helpful. Paul wrote much of the New Testament, and a Pauline study concerning vulnerability would be appropriate. I explored the Johannine perspective in this study, yet there could be additional research into vulnerability according to the writings of John. Further analysis of the role of vulnerability in Scripture could also incorporate Old Testament stories and characters.

While there have been more studies concerning the role of vulnerability in leadership without concentration on ministers, there remains a need for studies that expand the dynamics of how leaders relate vulnerably. The themes of this study could inform future studies that are not limited to ministry. Wulffers (2017) indicated that vulnerability is necessary for leadership development, yet there are not many practical tools directed toward developing vulnerability. While the interviewed leaders indicated that they would like to understand vulnerability better and would like to teach it to others, they also expressed that they were not sure how to do this practically. Future researchers could focus on tools to help leaders and individuals at every level to understand the role of vulnerability not only in leadership, but in areas such as personal care.

Conclusion

Organizational leaders often face personal crises that culminate in failures that affect their own lives and often devastate the institution they lead, and Christian ministry leaders are also susceptible to such failures (Briggs, 2014; Thomas & Sutton, 2008). Shaw (2006) promoted the idea that leaders who are vulnerable are more successful at navigating such crises, and this includes Christian ministry leaders. Burns (1978) noted a rise in leadership failures near the end of the 20th century that included individual leader failures due to ethical or moral dilemmas that led to entire organizations suffering the consequences. Many theories followed

the work of Burns (1978), and although there have been many investigations into the causes of such failure, the dilemma of leadership failure continues.

Latta and Clottey (2020) suggested that there remains a great need for research that explores possible reasons for such failures and that may offer means of prevention. One of the problems that Christian ministry leaders face is burnout due to such influences as depersonalization, emotional exhaustion, feelings of reduced accomplishment, and negative environments (Maslach et al., 2001). Charlton et al. (2009) found that the public nature of ministry and the excessive expectations often leads to ministers that resort hiding and may lead to depression or burnout. Weaver et al. (1997) noted that minsters are often the first person called in a personal crisis, which creates a void in the greater community when a minister has a personal crisis. Nienaber et al. (2015) noted that vulnerability in leaders has proven to be an element that has helped leaders avoid or recover from failure, but there remains a need for more understanding of how vulnerability relates to leadership. Leadership failure is a problem for both individuals and organizations, and vulnerability has proven helpful, but there remains a need for a better understanding of the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership.

In this study, I employed a two-phase approach to determine the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning vulnerability in leadership. Because the Bible is a cornerstone of belief for the Christian community, I incorporated exegetical research of Scripture as phase one of the study. The second phase of the study was phenomenological research utilizing interviews of 12 Christian ministry leaders, including four senior pastors, four staff pastors, and four para-church ministers. The exegetical phase of the study included a socio-rhetorical analysis of John 13:1–20 that produced nine central themes. These themes included disregarding hierarchy, challenging honor and shame codes, recognizing ongoing sanctification, addressing refusal, practicing mutual confession, loving one another, loving through betrayal, growing understanding, and setting an example. These nine themes informed the questions for the interview process that explored the lived experiences of the 12 ministry leaders.

The findings from this two-phase study further the understanding of the role of vulnerability in Christian ministry leadership. Implications for this study included both theoretical and practical implications by providing a better understanding of the teaching of Jesus recorded in John 13:1–20 and by exploring the perceptions of 12 Christian ministry leaders. The two phases of this study revealed that vulnerability was emphasized heavily by Jesus as an integral function for Christian living, and this lesson is just as valid today as it was for Jesus's disciples and the Johannine community. The findings also revealed that Christian ministry leaders believe in the power of vulnerability through the direction of the Holy Spirit, but there is still much left to learn.

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Appendix A

Consent to Interview Form

You are invited to take part in a research interview to examine the perceived role of vulnerability in leadership according to Christian ministry leaders. You were chosen for this interview because you are a Christian ministry leader and will have a unique perspective that meets the criteria for this study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of the interview. This interview is being conducted by a researcher named Lance May, who is a doctoral student at Southeastern University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to gather information from nine to fifteen Christian ministry leaders concerning their perceptions of the role of vulnerability in leadership. This study is focused on examining the common lived experiences of Christian ministry leaders.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in an audio and video recorded interview, lasting approximately 45–60 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview:

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. This means that everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you want to be in the interview. No one at Southeastern University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the interview. If you decide to join the interview now, you can still change your mind later. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions that you feel are too personal.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Interview:

There is the minimal risk of psychological stress during this interview. If you feel stressed during the interview, you may stop at any time. There are no benefits to you from participating in this interview. The interviewer will benefit by obtaining information for research and the completion of a doctoral dissertation.

Compensation:

There is no compensation for participating in this interview.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this interview project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interview.

Contacts and Questions:

The interviewing researcher's name is Lance May. The researcher's doctoral chair is Dr. Joshua Henson. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at llmay@seu.edu or the doctoral chair at jdhenson@seu.edu If you want to communicate privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact Dr. Jennifer Carter, the Chair of the Southeastern University PhD/DSL programs at jlcarter@seu.edu .

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have received answers to any questions I have at this time. I am 18 years of age or older, and I consent to participate in the interview.

Printed name of participant _____

Participant's written signature _____

Researcher's written signature _____

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE:	June 4, 2022
TO:	Lance May, Joshua Henson
FROM:	SEU IRB
PROTOCOL TITLE:	An Exploration of the Role of Vulnerability in Ministerial Leadership
FUNDING SOURCE:	NONE
PROTOCOL NUMBER:	22 BE 06
APPROVAL PERIOD:	Approval Date: June 4, 2022 Expiration Date: June 3, 2023

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, An Exploration of the Role of Vulnerability in Ministerial Leadership. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol.

- Please add IRB contact information to the informed consent (irb@seu.edu).

Any changes require approval before they can be implemented as part of your study. If your study requires any changes, the proposed modifications will need to be submitted in the form of an amendment request to the IRB to include the following:

- Description of proposed revisions;
- *If applicable,* any new or revised materials;
- *If applicable,* updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions

If there are any adverse events and/or any unanticipated problems during your study, you must notify the IRB within 24 hours of the event or problem.

At present time, there is no need for further action on your part with the IRB.

This approval is issued under Southeastern University's Federal Wide Assurance 00006943 with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the IRB's Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Rustin Lloyd
Chair, Institutional Review Board
irb@seu.edu

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Purpose: Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview. This interview is designed to provide insight into the perceptions of Christian ministry leaders concerning the role of vulnerability in leadership.

Interview Details: It is estimated that it will take approximately 45–60 minutes to participate in this interview. All of your responses are anonymous and will be kept confidential. *Please complete the consent form prior to your participation. You can send it back to me electronically if you have not already done so.*

Introductory Question

1. *How long have you been in ministry, and how would you describe your role in ministry?*
2. *In what ways, if any, have you practiced vulnerability in ministry?*

Vulnerability Definition

There are many ways that people have defined the concept of vulnerability, but in my research, I have compiled a definition as follows: a subjective perception of uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure.

3. *How would you define vulnerability? Do you have additional thoughts?*

Questions from Themes

Disregarding Hierarchy. In a review of literature, Shaw (2006) suggested that Christian leaders are prone to focusing too heavily on creating and maintaining a public image, and social status is often tied to the value of their role. The growing popularity of social media image is also now creating an atmosphere for Christian leaders that may cause them to fear vulnerability with persons in a lower station (Budde, 2007).

4. *How do you perceive (if at all) a relationship between vulnerability and status?*
5. *Can you give an example of status or image affecting vulnerability?*

Challenging Honor and Shame Codes. People often equate vulnerability with being shamed, but Brown (2015) suggested that the perception of vulnerability as being shameful and weak is far from true and vulnerability is instead a powerful tool.

6. *How do you think being vulnerable may affect perceptions of shame and honor?*

Recognizing Ongoing Sanctification. Theologians such as Augustine (2018) and researchers such as Thomas (1991) have noted that salvation begins with

justification and continues with salvation. Ongoing sanctification includes confession and forgiveness and these are vulnerable acts (Bacon, 1931; Countryman, 1987).

7. *How would you describe the relationship (if any) between vulnerability, justification, and sanctification?*

   Practicing Mutual Confession. Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) studied trust formation in the military and concluded that vulnerable exchanges are necessary to create a dependency between people, and mutual confession promotes trust and strengthens relationships.

8. *In what ways (if any) do you practice vulnerable confession in your ministry?*

   Addressing refusal. Vliet and Jessica (2008) noted that Christian ministers may have difficulty practicing vulnerability with followers because of the negative connotation of shame that some people attach to it, and this connotation may cause refusal by either party.

9. *When is it appropriate (if at all) for a Christian ministry leader to refuse vulnerability?*

   Loving One Another. Cooreman-Guittin (2021) suggested that Jesus took on the role of servant as a radical example of love that was demonstrated by vulnerability.

10. *Can you describe a time (if any) that you or another person close to you demonstrated love by being vulnerable?*

    Loving Through Betrayal. "Loving someone who may or may not love us back… who may be loyal to the day they die or betray us tomorrow—that's vulnerability" (Brown, 2015, p. 36).

11. *Can you describe a time (if any) that you have witnessed someone practicing vulnerability in the context of betrayal?*

    Growing Understanding. A better understanding of both oneself and others may be achieved by those that are willing to risk vulnerability, and this stems from spiritual awareness that every person has a place of true belonging (Brown, 2015).

12. *Can you describe some ways (if any) that vulnerable encounters have affected your growth of understanding or another person's growth of understanding?*

    Setting an Example. Vulnerable sharing between leaders and followers is effective for improving and maintaining a culture of trust that can span an entire organization, and followers are more likely to practice vulnerability when they see it modeled by leaders (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015).

13. *Can you think of a time that you have seen a vulnerable leader set an example that others followed?*

14. Do you have anything you would like to this discussion about the role of vulnerability in leadership?