THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF POST-DEPLOYED VETERAN USE OF RELIGION

AND SPIRITUALITY: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL

QUALITATIVE STUDY

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by

Candace R. Sneed

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DEDICATION

I hold much gratitude for those who encouraged me and supported me along this road to achieve my doctorate. God, my Creator has given me the ultimate gift in allowing me the mental, physical, and emotional ability and presence of mind to complete my culminating degree. Thank you, God for your wonderful gifts in my life!

To my husband and children who sacrificed daily, so I could achieve my goals - I am forever grateful and indebted! I love you all, I miss our time together, and am looking forward to getting this time back, so that I may give back to you all the time you sacrificed for me. You are my joy and my greatest cheerleaders! Thank you for supporting me, for willingly giving up your time so that I could fulfill my calling and life passion! To my parents who always pushed me to achieve my goals and encouraged the process, thank you! Even when life got hard, you were always there rooting me on!

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ABSTRACT

Sneed, Candace R., *The lived experiences of post-deployed veteran use of religion and spirituality: A transcendental phenomenological qualitative study*. Doctor of Philosophy (Counselor Education and Supervision), December, 2020, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans' use of religion and spirituality. I used a transcendental phenomenological approach, following the seven steps of the Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam (1956) method for analyzing data. I interviewed seven participants who had returned from deployment within 12 months prior to this study, guiding the interviews with four main interview questions.

Six religious and spiritual themes emerged underneath a larger umbrella of Family. The themes included Prayer, Connection, Spiritual/Religious Reading, Faith, Spiritual Practices, and Corporate Worship. Three subthemes emerged under Connection, which included Intentional Time with Self, Intentional Time with Others, and Intentional Time with Family. Two subthemes emerged under Spiritual Practices, which included Gratitude and Helping Others. The themes and subthemes indicated that certain elements of religion and spirituality were helpful to this group of post-deployed veterans. Further research with larger participant pools is recommended to provide additional supportive evidence for the themes of this study and expand upon the findings.

KEY WORDS: *Religion, Spirituality, Religion and Spirituality, Post-deployment, Resiliency, Reintegration*

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Religion and spirituality (RS) have been used for centuries in physical, mental, and spiritual healing of individuals. Additionally, some researchers have studied the role that RS plays in an individual's resiliency to various mental health conditions. Veterans are a concentrated population in which mental health resiliency is highly valued. Furthermore, veterans struggle with mental health issues that may be in excess of the general population. Veterans returning from deployment suffer from heightened depression, anxiety, and symptoms of PTSD among other struggles, such as reintegration into family or civilian life. Therefore, it appears necessary to explore the role that RS plays in post-deployment veteran reintegration.

Religion and Spirituality Explained

From the earliest of times, religion and spirituality have been a mysterious anomaly to people. In fact, definitions of spirituality and religion are varied and numerous. For example, religion has been defined as a set of philosophical and cultural principles concerned with an individual's belief in, and worship of, a higher power, often consisting of one or more gods (Candy et al., 2012). Religion also refers to an individual's allegiance to, or membership in, a social group united by shared spiritual beliefs; practices or beliefs designed to bring one closer to a sacred being (Koenig et al., 2014). In the same way, spirituality has been defined in various ways such as "beliefs regarding the existence of nonphysical forces, entities, or realities, within or beyond the observable universe" and "connection with a larger reality that gives one's life meaning" (Rochmawati et al., 2018, p. 232). For the purposes of this dissertation, *religion* and

spirituality will be used most interchangeably, with the understanding that, when used independently, *spirituality* relates to the feelings and emotions that increase one's sense of connectedness to a force outside of oneself and *religion* parallels with the practice of faith traditions.

Mental Health Providers, Religion, and Spirituality

From both an ethical and individual viewpoint, religion and spirituality are important components of mental health counseling. The ACA Code of Ethics requires counselors to be multiculturally sensitive, including but not limited to religious and spiritual diversity (American Counseling Association, 2014). In the same way, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development's (AMCD) Multicultural Counseling Competencies committee created specific statements regarding respect for religious diversity (Arredondo et al., 1996). Moreover, due to the need for counselor ability to provide services to religiously diverse clients, a set of competencies, developed by the Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) was constructed to provide guidelines for counselors to follow (Cashwell & Watts, 2010).

Individual counselors, however, may or may not feel competent to address spirituality and religious issues with their clients in counseling. Literature indicates that, although most counselors believe religion and spirituality are an important component of clients' lifestyles, these same helping professionals are reluctant to address religious and spiritual issues in counseling (Adams, 2012; Cole, 2009; Johns, 2017; Robertson, 2010; Young et al., 2002). Furthermore, many clients identify as religious or spiritual (Gallup, 2016; Kosmin & Keysar, 2009). From an integrative standpoint, taking into account that both clinician and client find religion and spirituality important, it is then reasonable to

offer services that encompass spirituality as a part of a holistic treatment plan for the client (Rochmawati, Wiechula, & Cameron, 2018). Therefore, in order to remain ethical and practical, it is imperative that religion and spirituality become an integral component of competent counseling (Cashwell & Watts, 2010).

Religion, Spirituality, and Resiliency

Numerous studies have been launched focusing on the use of RS and resiliency. There is some contradiction between the helpfulness of religion and spirituality. For example, some of these studies have shown that religion and spirituality can serve as a buffer against mental health disorders, increase resiliency to those at risk for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), increase body positivity, increase ability to cope, elevate an individual's hope, reduce the risk of suicide, decrease PTSD, and serve as a buffer for anxiety and depression, among other positive associations (Arrey et al., 2016; Currier, Drescher, Holland, et al., 2016; Currier, Pearce, Carroll et al., 2018; Kasen et al., 2012; Mahoney et al., 2016; Mandhouj et al., 2014; Tait et al., 2016; Vandsheep et al., 2017). On the other hand, other studies have indicated no association or negative associations between RS and mental health resiliency. For example, RS has been shown to increase distress to traumatic events, increase MDD and PTSD, and cause negative partner relationships, among other negative mental health outcomes (Ben-Ezra et al., 2010; Koenig et al., 2014; Sherman et al., 2018; Tait et al., 2016).

These studies are further explained in Chapter II. However, as evidenced in the literature, there are inconsistencies about the usefulness of RS in mental health resiliency. Although, RS can be a useful tool for aiding against negative mental health symptomology, there is antagonistic evidence indicating that RS may not be helpful for

some clients. Therefore, further research is needed to fully understand the role of RS in mental health.

Veteran Mental Health and Resiliency

Much literature has been published on veteran resiliency. A study by Isaacs et al. (2017) indicated that 65% of veterans are resilient. This result suggests that 35 out of every 100 veterans struggle with mental health issues. Furthermore, suicide rates for members of the military are nearly twice that of civilians (Marriot et al., 2016). Multiple pressures are placed on military members such as frequent deployments, frequent relocations, high job demands, long work hours even when not deployed, and exposure to war or other traumas (Rice & Liu, 2016). Military members and veterans are expected to serve the country despite mental health symptoms caused by these stressors. Therefore, identifying various ways to build the resiliency in this population is imperative. Thus, the purpose of this research study is to more adequately understand the personal experiences of RS in veterans during reintegration, with the anticipation that useful themes will emerge to help inform current and further research of veteran resilience factors.

Veteran Religion and Spirituality

As already suggested and supported by research, RS can impact individuals both positively, negatively, or no impact at all (Currier et al., 2018; Currier & Harris, 2016; Koenig et al., 2014; Vandsheep et al., 2017). In the same way, there is dearth of concrete evidence in the literature regarding the usefulness of RS within the veteran population. In one of the most recent studies, Koenig et al. (2018) indicated that RS should be used to help veterans, but only those with a preference for RS and only as much as the participant could handle. Therefore, there is indication that RS could be useful, but also a caution to

understand and know the client's preferences without assuming that RS will provide a positive coping mechanism for every client. Moreover, in studies specifically targeting the military veteran population, there is no apparent difference in the ways that veterans utilize RS than in other populations. However, in my review of studies with this population, the research is predominantly quantitative in nature and fails to answer the *whys* regarding the situational saliency of RS in treatment at times and an individual's adversity to RS at other times. My current study is designed to begin to take a deeper look, from a qualitative lens, aimed at beginning to explore the reasons for these inconsistencies of veteran use of RS in the literature through understanding veterans' lived experiences of the phenomenon.

Veteran Reintegration

Reintegration is the period following a deployment in which service members return to life as it was prior to their deployment. Reintegration is defined in the literature as, "the resumption of age, gender, and culturally appropriate roles in the family, community, and workplace" (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [DVA], 2010, p. 1). It has also been defined as the process during which veterans' transition back into personal and organizational roles upon returning from deployment (Currie et al., 2011). It is a dynamic system of adapting that is highly personal and unique to each veteran (Elnitsky et al., 2017).

Research suggests that during the reintegration period, veterans may go through a variety of experiences such as a decrease in mental health well-being, an increase or initial occurrence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms, depression symptoms, grief, or increased risk for suicide (Lusk et al., 2015; McAndrew et al., 2013; Phillips,

2013; Steenkamp et al., 2015; Toblin et al., 2012). Additionally, returned veterans may experience increased risk for substance use disorders, Traumatic Brain Injury symptoms they incurred while deployed that interfere with daily living, or engaging in high risk behaviors, such as risky driving behaviors (due to high levels of anxiety experienced while driving), compulsive sexual behavior and engaging in criminal activity (Fear et al., 2006; Hoge, 2008; Kelley et al., 2012; Russell et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014; Zinzow et al., 2018). Some veterans have experienced successes during reintegration periods and rely on such resiliency factors as greater self-confidence, a sense of pride, post-traumatic growth factors, a willingness to accept change, feelings of commitment and control, socially supportive friends and family. Additionally, "The research suggests coping with life stresses plays an integral role in military service member and veteran post-deployment reintegration" (Elnitsky, Fisher, & Blevins, 2017, p. 8). Therefore, it is important to take into account the multiple factors affecting a veteran's ability to reintegrate smoothly, as well as the factors that increase positive coping during reintegration. It is also necessary to identify specific coping mechanisms that help veterans upon reintegration.

Statement of the Problem

Religion and spirituality are important facets of life and a play a significant role for many individuals. Veterans are no exception to this phenomenon. Post-deployed veterans tap into many resources for coping with reintegration, with RS being one of the resources utilized. There are many quantitative studies indicating military personnel usage of RS, as well as the usage of RS in veterans. However, after an exhaustive review of the literature, I found no qualitative studies specifically targeting post-deployed

veterans and their usage of spirituality and religion during reintegration. It is important to understand the lived experiences of such veterans in order to effectively engage in the most useful therapeutic relationship with them, as well as to effectively advocate for further literature to more comprehensibly understand how to support veterans returning from deployment.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate and describe the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans (within the last 12 months) use of RS.

Significance of the Study

My study is significant, as it appears to be the first phenomenological qualitative study of post-deployed veterans' use of RS. Additionally, there is conflicting quantitative research about various ways individuals perceive and utilize RS (Leondari & Giolamas, 2009; Lloreda & Garcia, 2017; Pargament & Lomax, 2013). Furthermore, much of the existing research has been conducted utilizing individuals who have presented for treatment at the VA for negative mental health symptomology, meeting various Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) diagnoses such as PTSD and MDD (Berg, 2011; Sharma et al., 2017). I propose that whether veterans hold a DSM diagnosis or not, they can still tap into RS for help when needed. Finally, one of the largest quantitative studies conducted to date was performed on subjects who were still in the active war zones of deployment (Hourani et al., 2012). Therefore, understanding the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans can help us get a clearer understanding of the exact ways that RS is utilized during post-deployment struggles.

Definition of Terms

Religion

Religion is a set of practices that are philosophical in nature that is concerned with the belief and worship of a higher power. Religion also refers to the communal gathering of individuals who share similar beliefs and engage in set practices of that belief system (Candy et al., 2012).

Spirituality

Spirituality is the connection to something beyond oneself that gives meaning and purpose to life (Rochmawati, et al., 2018).

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality (RS) is a term that has been coined to encompass both religious and spiritual belief systems. RS could refer to one or both of the constructs based on the research study being examined. Due to failure of previous literature to adequately separate the two terms for research purposes, I chose this definition so that the reader understands that both constructs are being utilized for similar purposes in research.

Post-Deployment

Post-deployment refers to the period that follows a required (as a part of a veterans' job duties and responsibilities) deployment. The post-deployment period is a time of transition back into the civilian world (or as it was prior to deployment) and comes with a multitude of changes (Institute of Medicine, 1999).

Resiliency

Resiliency is a construct that refers to the capacity to withstand and recover from disturbances, with positive adaptation in the midst of or following disturbances (Masten, 2007; Masten et al., 2008).

Reintegration

Reintegration is the period following a deployment in which service members return to life as it was prior to their deployment, taking into consideration dynamic individual factors such as age, gender, cultural background and roles in family community and work (Currie et al., 2011; Elnitsky et al., 2017; U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The lens from which I engaged in this study was an Adlerian approach. Adlerian theory has been referred to as the *original positive psychology*, as it focuses on utilizing a person's strengths and internal resources on their path toward healing (Watts and Erguner-Tekinalp, 2017). Adlerian psychology is a holistic theory that takes into account all aspects of an individual, including religious and spiritual beliefs (Watts, 2000b). Due to the nature of Adlerian holism, many Adlerian helpers identify the usefulness of religion and spirituality in conceptualizing and treating clients. As stated by Johansen (2009), "In attempting to understand patients, Adlerian practitioners conceptualize people in terms of psychological, social, and emotional, as well as spiritual development" (p. X). There are few theoretical orientations that speak about or support the facilitation of a spiritual self, yet many Adlerians see spirituality as a basic component, an innate tendency in all human beings. Alfred Adler coined the term *individual psychology*, which

stems from the Latin word *individuum*, indicating that an individual cannot be separated

into parts but operates as a unified whole (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). As such,

spirituality cannot be removed from an individual, given that (from this theory's point of

view) all people have an innate spiritual self. Thus, Individual Psychology is a holistic

approach to viewing clients, taking into account even their spiritual self.

A second and most relevant part of Adlerian theory is the notion of social

connection or social interest. Adlerian theorists refer to this connection as

Gemeinschaftsgefuhl, a German word that describes *social interest* and *community*

feeling (Watts, 2012). A literal translation into English is difficult to gather precisely.

According to Watts and Erguner-Tekinalp (2017), "…true community feeling (e.g., sense

of belonging, empathy, caring, compassion, acceptance of others) results in social interest

(i.e., thoughts and behaviors that contribute to the common good, the good of the whole

at both micro- and macrosystemic levels)…" (p.331). One could think of this construct as

a social connection, a community feeling - a place of belonging with self, others, and the

world, including a connectedness to a higher power or an individual's personal innately

spiritual self (Ansbacher, 1991). Adler stressed the importance of understanding humans

within their social context (Hoffman, 1994), which included spirituality and religion.

When one is not connected, not experiencing *Gemeinschaftsgefuhl,* such an individual is

determined to be discouraged. As a person cannot be separated into parts, when the

spiritual self is discouraged and not being nurtured, it disrupts the entire being. Two

Adlerians, Mosak and Maniacci (1998), supported this idea by stating, "Therapists need

to be versed in more than psychology. Literature, myths, religion, ethnicity, history,

movies and the like all help to illuminate a person's picture" (p. 21). As an Adlerian, it is

most important to view the individual as a whole person, not separate from themselves or the social constructs in which they live.

According to Adlerian theory, individuals strive for *superiority*. Simply stated, people are striving for mastery and competence in areas of life in which they feel insignificant or less than competent, for both the edification of themselves and for the greater mankind. There is a *striving toward* moving from a state of negativity to one of more positivity and empowerment/encouragement (Watts, 2012). Many Adlerians recognize individuals as *striving toward superiority* in their five life tasks, which include love, friendship, work, self, and spirituality (Dreikurs & Mosak, 1967a; Dreikurs & Mosak, 1967b; Mosak & Dreikurs, 1967). One goal of Adlerian psychology is to help individuals move into a more encouraged and socially useful state, in which they feel a sense of belonging and significance (i.e. striving towards superiority) (Adler, 1956), in such a way that they are successful in all the life tasks. Watts (2000b) stated, "These tasks of life address intimate love relationships, relationships with friends and fellow beings in society, our relationships at work, our relationship with self, and our relationship with God or the universe (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006; Watts, 2003; Williamson, & Williamson, 2004)" (p.42).

These theoretical concepts can be clearly connected to religious and spiritual beliefs, as they indicate a strongly relational connection between self, others, and a Higher Power (Watts, 2000b). For example, Christianity and Adlerian concepts that are paralleled include having a healthy relationship with self, the Higher Power and others. Church community and a belief that one has a true relationship with those in the community, as well as an intimate relationship with God are social and relational

constructs (Watts, 2000b). Furthermore, helping others is a tenant of both social interest and Christianity (Watts, 2000b). Such relationships (both intimate and helping) aid individuals in their striving toward superiority (being better versions of themselves). In the same way, similar relational and helping constructs of Adlerian psychology can be found in Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist belief systems.

When a therapist takes into account a person as a whole organism, influenced by their environment and their social context, RS cannot be ignored as this construct makes up one aspect of an individual that must be explored. As such, spirituality must be nurtured in order for individuals to successfully overcome discouragement and succeed in all life tasks. Therefore, from an Adlerian lens, spirituality is a vital element in the resilience of all individuals, including veterans and those who have recently returned from deployment.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans (within the last 12 months) use of RS?

Limitations

The limitations of my study included a smaller sample size, researcher positionality and restricted access to participants. As this is the first known (to the limits of my ability), qualitative study of its kind, and with a small sample size, making inferences about other veteran experiences is not suggested. Furthermore, my biases and understanding of RS (based on my literature review) had been formed before the current study. Moreover, restricted access to the participants provided a challenge that was difficult to navigate.

Delimitations

I chose to delimit the study by focusing solely on veterans who had returned from deployment within the last 12 months. Since I used snowballing to gather participants, the participants were gathered from a relatively small population size, since several participants came from others' suggestions. Moreover, I chose to delimit my research to qualitatively studying participants, with no quantitative aspects.

Assumptions

I entered into the study with an assumption of truthfulness. I assumed that the participants would be willing to honestly share their personal experiences with me. Additionally, I assumed that I would gain useful and consistent themes regarding RS on the participants' resiliency. Another assumption I made is that the veterans in my study understand the concepts of religion and spirituality. Finally, I assumed that the participants willingly agreed to participate in my study and did not feel pressured or coerced by my military contacts helping connect me to this population.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter I includes a brief background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and my assumptions inherent in the research study. Chapter II contains an in-depth review of the relevant literature regarding RS, veteran mental health, resiliency, and veteran use of RS for resilience. The literature review includes an overview of religion and spirituality, including both positive links and negative links to mental health, veteran resiliency,

veterans' use of religion and spirituality, and the use of religion and spirituality in post-deployed veterans.

Chapter III consists of a discussion of the methodology, including a the phenomenological qualitative method, containing research design, participant selection, instrumentation with research questions based on literature, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. Chapter IV details the results of my analysis including descriptive themes that emerged from the interviews. Finally, Chapter V concludes with a summary of the study, discussion of my findings with implications of the results, and my recommendations for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Literature regarding spirituality and religion is vast and there is no dearth of information concerning the uses of religion and spirituality (RS). Associated links between RS, mental health, emotional health, and physical well-being have been studied for several decades. However, mixed messages have developed about the usefulness of RS in individuals recovering from physical, emotional, or mental health conditions. More recently, RS has been studied as a resiliency factor, buffering factor, or mediating factor for certain distresses. Resiliency is a major focus for military personnel and veterans alike. As newer studies are beginning to emerge, so also emerges a possibility that RS can serve as a resiliency factor to mental and emotional health of veterans. Due to the high levels of distress and PTSD of veterans returning from war, of particular interest are the uses of RS during reintegration for post-deployed veterans. I began the review of the literature with a broad overview of some of the most recent literature concerning the uses of spirituality and religion. Next, I discussed veteran resiliency and the recent studies published on veterans and RS. I completed my literature review by providing an in-depth review of four of the more recent and relevant studies concerning RS uses in post-deployed veterans.

Religion and Spirituality

Religion and spirituality is a construct that has been in existence since the beginning of time. Religion and spirituality (RS) can be a source of strength and coping for clients (Counted et al., 2018). On the other hand, RS can cause distress and negative outcomes for some individuals (Ben-Ezra et al., 2010). Some studies have suggested that

RS has no effect on certain constructs one may have assumed were being impacted (Counted et al., 2018; Leondari & Gialamas, 2009; Tiggemann & Hage, 2019). Therefore, a more in-depth review of the literature is needed to understand more fully the construct of RS in an individual's life.

Positive Links

There is an immense amount of literature published on RS in multiple subject areas. RS has been used in various settings and in different ways to support individuals. The benefits of spirituality and religion on physical, emotional, and mental health have been cited in numerous studies. For example, RS can support a healthy body image. Tiggemann and Hage (2019) found a link between spirituality, religious engagement and positive body image. Individuals who were higher in RS were more likely to view themselves in a positive light than others with lower RS beliefs. In the same way, Mahoney et al. (2005) developed a conceptual model of RS based on Christian Biblical scripture, which stated that the body is a temple of God. They determined that college students who believed their body housed the divine were more likely to engage in healthy bodily behaviors and less likely to engage in unhealthy body behaviors.

RS has been linked to individual positive coping in various studies as well. For example, a sample study of Sub-Saharan African Migrant women with HIV in Belgium indicated that spirituality and religion were an important part of coping with their disease, with particular emphasis on prayer, meditation, church services and activities of the religion (Arrey et al., 2016). Furthermore, multiple studies have addressed links between quality of life and RS. In general, the greater the RS, the better one's quality of life (Counted et al., 2018). A study performed on parents and professionals in a neonatal unit

indicated that 60% of parents perceive RS as being integral to neonatal care, with a large

percentage who utilized RS to provide comfort, support, and hope (Lloreda-Garcia,

2017). Moreover, incarcerated individuals tap into RS as a source of strength, coping,

belonging, as well as prevention of future offenses and decreased likelihood for suicide

(Mandhouj et al., 2014). Additionally, studies have shown positive links between

religiosity in a marriage relationship. Such benefits included better sexual functioning,

more intimacy, better communication, and a greater understanding of how to fulfill

relationship roles (Duba & Watts, 2009). Thus, RS plays a significant role in individual

coping, given various stressful and difficult life situations.

Researchers have also discovered links between RS and positive mental health

outcomes. Pargament and Lomax (2013) stated, "Religion serves a variety of adaptation

functions for people, including and especially for those with serious mental illnesses" (p.

28). For example, Leondari and Gialamas (2009) found a significant positive association

between anxiety and personal prayer. In this same study, the researchers determined that

church attendance was positively associated with more life satisfaction. Therefore,

individuals who prayed more and attended religious services were generally more relaxed

and happier. Other researchers have discovered that greater RS may contribute to the

development of resiliency in individuals. For example, Kasen et al. (2012) conducted a

study on individuals with an increased risk for Major Depressive Disorder (MDD). They

found that those with higher RS beliefs were less likely to have risk factors associated

with MDD. Additionally, frequent attendance of religious services was correlated with

significantly lower suicide rates (VanderWeele, Shanshan, Tsai, & Kawachi, 2016). A

more recent study conducted on individuals who suffer from anxiety indicated that

strengthening spiritual health decreases anxiety (Nikfarjam et al., 2018). Thus, RS could prove to be useful in preventing major mental health concerns. Therefore, RS appears to be a factor for building an individual's positive coping mechanisms: mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

Negative Links

On the other hand, some studies revealed that religion and spirituality can cause or increase distress, rather that acting as a supportive mechanism. In the same study cited above by Lloreda and Garcia (2017), the researchers indicated that although RS was helpful for the families in the neonate unit, 45% of the professionals on this unit preferred that parents *not* express their RS beliefs. In addition, although positive religious coping can decrease stressors, negative religious coping can have negative effects. Carpenter et al. (2012) found that negative religious coping exacerbated the effects of adolescent individual stressors, with an increase of negative mental health symptoms. Furthermore, a study performed on a sample of college students indicated that spirituality could be a source of negative emotions. In this study, Kellems et al. (2010) discovered that college students beginning to assimilate their own spiritual beliefs encountered guilt and rejection when they chose a spiritual path different from their family's traditional RS beliefs and values. Additionally, many of these college students struggled with issues of RS as related to sexual behaviors. Last, these same participants reported struggles in leaving family RS traditions, while developing and defining their own RS beliefs. Moreover, although Lender and Gialamas (2009) found significant associations between some constructs of RS and mental health (i.e. anxiety and prayer, church attendance and life satisfaction), they also revealed that personal beliefs in God did not relate to any of their

psychological well-being constructs (depression, anxiety, stress, etc.). Moreover, Koenig et al. (2014) determined that greater RS had no effect on depression symptoms in a sample of individuals with Major Depressive Disorder.

Traumatic experiences can also dampen a previously strong faith or spiritual belief system. This was especially true for individuals with higher RS beliefs and values. Ter Kuile and Ehring (2014) discovered that individuals were more likely to move away from their faith following a traumatic experience, especially if they had higher levels of RS. Supporting this statement, in a study conducted on Jewish sexual assault survivors, Ben-Ezra et al. (2010) concluded that nearly half of the participants distanced themselves from their faith following the sexual assault. Therefore, some individuals find RS to be a strong supportive mechanism during difficult life situations, but others find RS to be a source of pain and struggle.

Bonelli and Koenig (2012) performed a review of research from 1990-2010 of the literature regarding RS. They reported

> There is good evidence that religious involvement is correlated with better mental health in the areas of depression, substance abuse, and suicide; some evidence in stress-related disorders and dementia; insufficient evidence in bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, and no data in many other mental disorders. (p. 657)

Moreover, a Gallup Poll indicated that many Americans believe religion is no longer relevant (Isis, 2018). Therefore, although religion can have a positive influence on many, it certainly does not affect all people in the same ways. Furthermore, differing life situations cause individuals to respond in various ways to RS beliefs. The assortment of findings in various situations provide a solid indication that the affect religion and

spirituality has on individuals should be furthered explored. Thus, continuing the exploration of RS, furthering research in the literature, as it relates to mental health and coping continues to remain an important focus in research.

Religion, Spirituality, and Counselors

Debate

Religion and spirituality have been heavily represented in the counseling literature for multiple decades to date. Within this literature, there has been some debate as to whether religion and spirituality should be a part of counseling. As early as Skinner and Freud, religion and spirituality were described in a negative light as a part of the client's dysfunction, rather than an avenue for healing (Pargament, 2007). This influence has not altogether changed over the years. For example, more recently Helminiak (2001) stated that counselors addressing spiritual concerns within the client's spiritual framework are illegitimate in their practice, supporting some of the early 20th century theorists' philosophies. Helminiak suggested that when matters of religion and spirituality arise in counseling, clients should be referred to their clergy or religious leaders. He also argued that the two constructs of religion and spirituality would be difficult to separate within individuals; although, this theory has been proven incorrect and fallible on the basis of our fields' current (and very distinctly separated) definitions religion and spirituality.

However, as time went on, the helping world experienced a shift in the way that RS was viewed. Many counselors and psychologists now see religion and spirituality as an integral part of an individual and also a multicultural element that should not be ignored (Watts, 2000a). For example, several individuals wrote articles in response to Helminiak arguing for the opposing point of view - that religion is legitimate and there is

good reason to include RS in counseling practice. In response to Helminiak's article, Watts (2000a) clearly outlined the appropriateness for religious and spiritual openness in counseling as ethical, responsible, multiculturally competent, and inclusive of necessary components to fully conceptualize and aid a client in the treatment process. Furthermore, in an article based on Adlerian therapy, Watts (1992) pointed out the parallels between *Gemeinschaftgefuhl* (social interest) and the Christian Biblical belief of agape type love to support the interconnection of RS and therapy. Such tangible connections can be deeply meaningful for a holistic practitioner with a religious or spiritual client. Additionally, in response to Helminiak's (2001) article, Marquis et al. (2001) pointed out his fallacies in refusing to consider RS an integral part of psychotherapy, based on previous models that support the notion of including a clients' religion and spirituality in therapy. Furthermore, these authors suggest that Helminiak's model would do more harm to the client than good, thus violating ethical codes of practice. Stife and Richards (2001) also adamantly opposed Helminiak's model, pointing out several inconsistencies and therapeutic biases within his model.

In addition to Helminiak's criticisms of using religion and spirituality in the therapy sessions, other writers have accused religious counselors of bias, due to a small subset of religious therapists refusing service to certain individuals based on religious conviction. For example, Caldwell (2018) wrote an online article addressing religious counselors' refusal to see certain marginalized groups, based on their own religious laws or beliefs. However, this type of behavior happens only occasionally. More often than not, counselors seeking to explore religion and spirituality in therapy are simply choosing to conceptualize the client holistically (Johansen, 2009). Thus, although, there have been

individuals who may believe there is not a place for RS in therapy, there are many clinicians supporting the exploration or RS in therapy as it relates to the individual client.

As evidenced in literature, other counselors and psychologists have written extensively, adamantly supporting the use of RS in therapy. Bornsheuer-Boswell et al. (2013) completed a study on including a Christian element in filial group therapy, discovering that families believed counseling was much more helpful when their religious practices were intertwined within the therapeutic strategies and goals of the groups. Balkin et al. (2013) also support the inclusion of religious and spiritual exploration. The authors wrote

> Thus, if clients need to process religious and spiritual issues in counseling, counselors should be competent to facilitate this exploration. This does not mean that counselors are obliged to be religious authorities, but rather that counselors should be open to addressing the needs of clients. (p. 191)

Balkin et al. (2013), took it one step further to explain their position on the ethicality of ignoring a client's religious or spiritual side. They believed that it is most ethical to consider religion and spirituality as one component of the complex multiculturality of clients. Thus, to ignore this aspect of a client's life indicates failure to adhere to multicultural best practices in counseling.

According to Pargament (2007), "When people walk into the therapist's office, they don't leave their spirituality behind in the waiting room. They bring their spiritual beliefs, practices, experiences, values, relationships, and struggles along with them" (p. 4). In his book, he also described examples of how religion and spirituality manifest in

the counseling dialogue, as well as in what ways counselors can use a client's RS to help them heal.

In a conceptual article, Watts (2000b), strongly advocated for the use of Adlerian therapy treatments as related to Christian spirituality concepts. He stated, "To ignore or discount clients' spiritualites is to close one's eyes to a vital therapeutic factor" (p.315). Within this same article, Watts (2000b) describes commonalities between Biblical principles and Adlerian psychology. Such shared factors included conceptualizing "human functioning from cognitive, psychodynamic, and systemic perspectives" and "creative, holistic, socially oriented, and teleologically motivated (goal directed), as well as a "focus on equality, value and dignity of all human beings" and "shared relational perspectives" (pp.319-320). Thus, although there are some unanswered questions about using RS in therapy, there is certainly strong support for inclusion of RS as an integral part of a client's treatment.

Counselor Training in RS Issues

Although many researchers discern the benefits of bringing RS into therapy, concerns have been raised about the efficacy of training for using RS in counseling. According to Pargament (2007), most graduate students receive their degrees without preparation to address RS issues that undoubtedly will arise in their work. Duba Onedera (2008) stated that counselors question their own competence related to using RS in therapy. Such counselors included individuals with supervisory roles. Therefore, because supervisors feel underprepared to address RS in therapy, this lack of knowledge will filter down to their trainees. For example, one study, conducted by Henriksen et al. (2015) revealed that many master's level counseling students have never received training on

how to effectively use RS in therapy. Additionally, the authors point out the need for further training of both the students and counselor educators, so that practitioners can be more fully equipped to provide religious and spiritual counseling. In a study of counselor trainees, Adams (2012) reported that counseling students were instructed to ask about RS in therapeutic intake sessions, as a way to conceptualize the client. Yet, these same students were unlikely to use RS as an integrative part of therapy. In addition, student trainees received mixed messages from their counselor educators about whether and how to address RS issues in counseling. Thus, these findings reiterate the need for further RS training for both students and those in teaching and supervisory roles. Based on recent polls in 2017, 80% of individuals believe in God and another 9% believe in a higher spiritual power (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2017). Therefore, there is a high likelihood that clinicians in training will be exposed to a client with a belief in a Higher Power. As such, counselor educators should be equipped to instruct supervisees and trainees on how to explore and support the religious and spiritual beliefs of their clients, including the use of RS for therapeutic change (not simply conceptualization).

Ethical Guidelines for Practitioners and Trainees

Ethical guidelines and rules have been created by multiple governing boards, as a response to the increase in literature regarding counselors' understanding of RS as an integral facet of clients that should be explored and as a response to the reluctance of individuals to explore RS diverse aspects of clients. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) implicitly states that no counselor can discriminate clients on the basis of multicultural components, including religious and spiritual beliefs. This indicates that not only are practitioners required to see such individuals, they must acknowledge religion and

spirituality in the same ways other cultural elements are acknowledged. Furthermore, to

help practitioners understand the ethical use of RS, The Association for Spiritual, Ethical,

and Religious Values in Counseling (ASERVIC) created a model by which therapists

could operate. These competencies included culture and worldview, counselor self-

awareness, human and spiritual development, communication, assessment, and diagnosis

and treatment (ASERVIC, 2009). If a practitioner is competent in each of these areas,

then they are aligning with the ACA Code of Ethics and best practices in counseling.

These competencies are designed to work alongside of ethics, theory, and technique to

aid the counselor in conceptualizing and treating individuals with diverse religious and

spiritual backgrounds. Cashwell and Watts (2010), who both played an integral part of

the construction of these competencies stated, "The establishment of these competencies

was groundbreaking and supported the burgeoning groundswell of interest in spiritually

sensitive counseling" (p. 3). Finally, the Association for Multicultural Counseling and

Development (AMCD) also has a list of competencies to help therapists remain ethical in

their work with multicultural individuals. The document states, "Culturally skilled

counselors respect clients' religious and/ or spiritual beliefs and values, including

attributions and taboos, because they affect worldview, psychosocial functioning, and

expressions of distress" (AMCD Multicultural Counseling Competencies, 1996).

Therefore, the overarching ACA Code of Ethics (2014) standards, the ASERVIC

competencies, and the AMCD competencies all call for religious and spiritual sensitivity.

Thus, if supervisors and counselors are not competent in religiously and spiritually

diverse discourse and practice, they are acting in an unethical manner and at risk of

promoting unethical behavior in their supervisees and within themselves.

Veteran Resiliency

Veteran resilience has been a source of research in the military literature for a number of years. A more concentrated focus on resiliency came about as a response to veteran mental health issues, climbing completed suicides and attempted suicide rates, as well as general life struggles faced by military members. In August of 2014, nearly 900 veterans attempted suicide and in the entire year of 2014, 20 veterans died by suicide daily (VA Office for Suicide Prevention, 2014). Thus, finding new ways to build veteran resilience and increase positive coping is imperative. "Resilience is defined as a broad systems construct, referring to the capacity of dynamic systems to withstand or recover from significant disturbances" (Masten, 2007, p. 1). Furthermore, resilience has been defined as a, "positive adaptation of a system during or following significant disturbances" (Masten et al., 2008, p. 77). Veterans encounter significant disturbances more often than civilians. Their work and training around wars and war zones provides the perfect concoction for increased risk of encountering stress related struggles, PTSD, and MDD, among other negative mental and emotional consequences. Thus, creating an environment in which veterans can build their resiliency is ideal. Therefore, a focus on the current literature of modalities used to build veteran resiliency is necessary.

Given the previously cited literature on veteran suicidality, a wealth of new studies began to emerge, identifying resiliency factors to PTSD and MDD in order to decrease veteran suicidality. Research studies conducted on veterans utilizing mindfulness based strategies and deep breathing exercises to increase resilience to PTSD symptoms have shown promising results. An experimental study conducted by Seppl et al. (2014) indicated that Susharan Kriya breathing-based meditation increased resiliency

of PTSD symptoms in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans. Veterans in this study were attending a VA residential treatment program for PTSD. Participants who used the breathing based meditative exercises curriculum showed significant improvement as compared to the control group, who received traditional treatment for PTSD. In the same way, Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) was shown to increase mood and decrease pain of some veterans in a sample population (Serpa et al., 2014). There exists a link between positive mood and resiliency to mental health disorders as well as a wealth of research performed on pain and mental health. Increasing mood and decreasing pain is a promising beginning to building resilience to mental health disorders in this population.

Moreover, according to a nationally represented cohort study with over 2000 veteran participants, more than 65% of veterans are resilient. Among the resilient veterans, the authors reported, "Higher levels of emotional stability, dispositional gratitude, purpose in life, and altruism, and lower levels of openness to experiences predicted resilient status" (Isaacs et al., 2017, p. 301). Post-traumatic growth is also an indicator of veteran resilience. Tsai et al. (2015) examined the results from a *National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study* and determined that post-traumatic growth was indicated by a greater sense of social connectedness, a greater sense of self-purpose, and intrinsic religiosity.

Each of the facets of resilience mentioned above are interconnected with various aspects of RS. For example, meditative practices, gratitude for life, social connection and altruism can all be a part of religious practices. According to Chaplain Major Bryan Koyn (2015)

Failure to include religious observance as a tool for building individual and unit

resilience should be very troubling since the body of peer-reviewed research on

the positive link between active participation in religious observance and overall

physical and mental health is abundant and compelling. Leaving out religion from

efforts to build and sustain resilience is comparable to leaving out nutrition in

discussions about physical fitness. (p. 121)

Chaplain Bryan described some of his own experiences working with active duty

military, sharing briefly about his concerns about the number of suicides, lack of mental

and emotional wellness of individuals, and lack of wellness within marriages and family

structure. His first-hand experience of the importance of understanding one's perceptions

of RS gives mental health providers and clinicians sound reason for exploring individual

veteran RS in greater depth.

Religion, Spirituality, and Veteran Resiliency

According to Thomas et al. (2018), "Spiritual fitness has emerged over the last

decade as an important concept in military behavioral health" (p. 1169). The participants

in their study showed a high interest in expanding their spiritual fitness in an attempt to

increase resiliency. Sweeney, Rhodes, and Boling (2012) published an article in the *Joint

Force Quarterly* outlining the importance of spirituality to military members' resiliency.

They posited that the use of the *Domain of the Human Spirit Model* framework provides

a strong guide for military members to learn to self-evaluate their own levels of

spirituality and make a plan to increase spiritual awareness. This publication indicated

how strongly spirituality is stressed and how integral spirituality is for members of

military branches. Currier et al. (2015) discovered that forgiveness in RS is associated

with better quality of life for combat veterans. Sharma et al. (2017) determined that RS can have a buffering effect on veterans. Specifically, in a cross-sectional analysis of previously derived data from a sample of over 3000 veterans, the researchers found that greater RS decreased the risk for Depression, PTSD, and alcoholism and had a positive relationship to life purpose and gratitude. This same study provided evidence that even moderate levels of spirituality can decrease certain mental health symptoms in veterans, such as decreased depression and suicidality over the veterans' lifetime.

Additionally, a few recent studies have been conducted with implications for resiliency and mental health among the veteran population. According to a quantitative cross-sectional analysis performed by Vanshdeep et al. (2017), RS may act as a buffer for certain mental health disorders in the veteran population. The researchers also found that higher RS scores were associated with decreased risk for PTSD, MDD, and suicidal ideation. The majority of these participants had never been deployed into a war zone and were older veterans. Wortmann et al. (2017) identified how moral injury from post-combat spiritual turmoil can impact veteran resilience. The authors discussed the ways in which veterans might conceptualize themselves after completing work-related tasks that are contrary to their belief system and how clinicians can aid these individuals to release feelings of guilt, shame, and unforgiveness associated with these tasks. Interestingly, this is one of few studies I discovered with literature directly relating to counseling clinicians. Another study directly relating to clinical implications was conducted, regarding veteran preferences for using RS in therapy. In this study Currier et al. (2018) determined that veterans who were more highly religious wished to discuss issues pertaining to RS, but veterans who were less religious identified incorporation of RS into therapy treatment as

only somewhat important. Thus, as with previous studies about individual preferences for therapy, clinicians must be diligent about meeting individual needs, rather than generalizing treatment.

Tait et al. (2016) found that when OEF and IEF veterans prayed for assistance, calming, and focus, they were more likely to have decreased depressive and PTSD symptoms. However, veterans who prayed for avoidance were more likely to have greater depression symptoms. According to Currier et al. (2015), inpatient combat veterans with a PTSD diagnosis, who had higher adaptive spirituality indicated more change by the end of the program than those with lower adaptive spirituality. Additionally, individuals who had negative spiritual struggles fared poorer on the outset of their treatment. A unique case study indicated that RS also has implications in veteran couple-ships. Sherman, Usset, Voecks, and Harris (2018) conducted a qualitative study in which participants were interviewed regarding their combat traumas with a focus on the partnership and RS. The researchers reported varying themes. Some partners relied upon RS as a support and strength in both recovery from trauma and building deeper intimate relationships with partners. However, other participants disclosed that their spouses resent RS and use that to create conflict in the partnership. Thus, again, clinicians should be careful to understand the role of RS in each individual client, being careful not to make assumptions about such.

A unique investigation performed by Kopacz and Connery (2015) raised some important issues related to veterans' spiritual struggles. The authors provide a concrete rationale for RS as a focus of research in veteran mental health. For example, they posited that spiritual struggles were a part of negative emotional and mental health

symptoms, even contributing to suicidality and risk factors for other mental health disorders. Furthermore, they pointed out that spiritual struggles happened along a continuum and throughout the lifespan. The writers encouraged practitioners to take a spiritual history and understand spirituality from a unique, individual perspective, in order to best help the veteran with their struggles. Furthermore, Kopacz et al. (2016) determined that spiritual struggles (problems with negative religious coping and forgiveness) were positively correlated to suicidality. They also discovered that involvement in religious community decreased the risk for suicidal thoughts. Additionally, the researchers learned that the more daily spiritual experiences the veteran had, the less suicidal ideations were present.

According to Smith-MacDonald et al. (2017), "Spirituality had an effect on PTSD, suicide, depression, anger and aggression, anxiety, quality of life, and other mental well-being outcomes for veterans." Moreover, the researchers stated, "Further high-quality research is needed to isolate the salient components of spirituality that are most harmful and helpful in veterans' mental well-being, including the incorporating of veterans' perspectives directly" (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2017, Abstract). Therefore, not only is further research needed, qualitative research could be of great value in furthering our understanding of the components of spirituality that are helpful or harmful in the veteran population.

Post-Deployment: Religion, Spirituality and Resiliency

The role of religion and spirituality in post-deployed veterans is becoming a recent focus of literature. In one of the first of the more recent studies, Berg (2011) found that depression and PTSD are associated with spiritual factors in post-deployed combat

veterans from the Vietnam war. In the same manner, after examining the Survey of Experiences of Returning Veterans (SERV) Study from 630 participants with combat exposure, Park et al. (2017) found that negative RS coping was associated with higher PTSD. In this same sample, positive RS coping was associated with higher Post-traumatic growth. Similarly, Hourani et al. (2012) reported an inverse relationship between RS and lowered PTSD and depression. Moreover, Lisman et al. (2017) observed a direct relationship between positive religious coping and adaptive mechanisms in their participants. These most recent findings suggest that veterans who utilize positive RS coping may have an advantage over those who do not. Moreover, there are some indications of greater resiliency for those who utilize RS, versus veterans who do not rely on their RS structures for post-combat support.

Depression, PTSD, and Spiritual Factors

Berg (2011) performed a study on 94 combat veterans from the Vietnam war who assessed for PTSD. Berg was curious if there was a relationship between spiritual distress and PTSD or depression in this veteran population. The demographics of this Vietnam veteran population included 95% Caucasian participants. The majority of the participants were affiliated with Christian faith sectors. Most of these veterans were divorced. The mean age for this sample was 47 years old. The sample of Vietnam veterans was obtained from treatment programs through the VA for substance abuse or other mental health disorder. The demographics of this data are fitting for a population of Vietnam veterans, given their age and the war era in which they were connected.

Levels of PTSD were measured using the Watson Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Interview. Spirituality was assessed using the Berg Spiritual Injury Scale and

the Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Motivation Scale. Depression was assessed using the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale. The researcher found spiritual injuries and spiritual distress is significantly associated with PTSD. Additionally, Berg noted there was a strong association between spiritual distress and depression. He discovered an inverse relationship between intrinsic faith and spiritual distress, intrinsic faith and PTSD, and intrinsic faith and depression. There was no relationship found between extrinsic religious faith and any of the constructs. Finally, Berg discovered, consistent with previous studies, that the more one attends religious services and engaged in religious community, the less the depression and PTSD symptoms.

One must be aware that there is biased information within this study. First, this sample was non-representative with all being Vietnam war veterans, who were Caucasian and seeking treatment for substance abuse mental health problems at a VA. Generalizability is difficulty given the demographics as well as the small sample size. Additionally, the assessments utilized to measure depression, PTSD, and spirituality are dated and are less evidence based than other assessments. Furthermore, the researcher is a chaplain with a focus on RS and likely holds some biases that spirituality and religion are a useful construct for the veterans.

On the other hand, this study helps us understand the ways that some veterans identify with and understand the constructs of RS. Although not easily generalizable, this data could help us understand spiritual constructs within veterans of the OEF and OIF in the future. The data underscores the importance of discussing spirituality as spiritual distress is highly associated with depression and PTSD. Additionally, the more intrinsic the faith, the less the distress, PTSD, and depression. Therefore, discussing faith from a

personal and individualized standpoint is imperative. Quantitative data has given us a good starting point. This is another example of a research study that used a quantitative approach. However, these data suggest the need for qualitative research methods, so that researchers and clinicians may better understand individual perceptions of spirituality in post-combat veterans.

Religious Coping and Post-Traumatic Growth

Park et al. (2017) designed an analysis of archival data, extracted from the SERV. The researchers examined the relationships between RS and combat exposure, PTSD, and Post Traumatic Growth (PTG). The measures of focus included RS coping, combat exposure, demographics, and mental health outcomes. The researchers used various statistical analyses to assess different components of the study. Sample descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, *t*-tests, correlation matrix, and regression analyses were used to examine each aspect of the study. The findings were numerous as outlined below.

The assessment used to measure RS was the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality. This measure uses a Likert scale, scored on a scale of 1 to 4 (*not at all* to *a great deal*). Higher scores on the scale indicate higher RS (Park et al., 2017). PTSD was measured by the PTSD symptom checklist. This was also reported using a Likert scale with scores ranging from 1 to 5 (*not at all* to *extremely*). Higher scores indicated higher levels of PTSD (Park et al., 2017). PTG was measured using the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory. PTG and PTSD were significantly inversely related. As PTG increased, PTSD decreased and as PTSD increased, PTG decreased. This study provides strong evidence to focus on increasing post-traumatic growth in the veteran population. Additionally, moderate combat exposure was associated with higher PTSD

symptomology and high combat exposure was associated with PTG. Moreover, higher RS coping was associated with more PTG, but no association was found with higher RS coping and PTSD symptoms. Negative RS coping was also associated with heightened PTSD but negatively associated with PTG (Park et al., 2017).

This study is valuable in understanding post-traumatic growth, RS coping, combat exposure, and mental health outcomes. The most significant finding of this data relevant to my research study was the association between religious and spiritual coping and PTG the association between PTG and PTSD. These associations indicate that RS coping may prove to be a resilience factor in reducing PTG, thus reducing PTSD symptoms. Future studies are needed to support or refute the study's findings. Moreover, as this is a quantitative study, the Likert scale responses pose a firm basis for beginning to understand the utility of RS on certain mental health outcomes. However, for a more complete and in-depth understanding of the ways RS coping can help or hinder veteran resiliency, qualitative research may be necessary.

Religion, Spirituality, PTSD, and Depression

Hourani et al. (2012) conducted a large-scale study to explore the effects of religion and spirituality on depression, PTSD, coping, and suicidality in actively deployed military members. This study consisted of over 24,600 actively deployed military members, including a random selection of active service members from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. Each member completed a Survey of Health-Related Behaviors Among Active Duty Military Personnel (HRB), which is a 32-page self-report measure provided by the Department of Defense (DOD). The researchers visited 64 military installations worldwide to collect their data. Key measures of the

assessment included demographics, spirituality, combat exposure, coping, depression, PTSD, and suicidal ideation and attempts.

To address spirituality, the respondents answered two questions using a Likert scale with a range of 0-4 (strongly agree to strongly disagree). One question queried the importance of RS in the veteran and the other question identified how strongly RS influenced decisions made in the veteran's life (Hourani et al. 2012). Likert scale responses are not specific and have great variability among what one means when they *strongly agree* or *strongly disagree.* Given the nature of the study and the focus on RS, the authors may have gained stronger results, had they chosen a more robust assessment of the levels of RS of these veterans. Results from this study are hardly generalizable given the nature of the vague and non-specific RS data received from the Likert scale responses.

Nonetheless, there are more findings and implications of this study that should be discussed. Hourani et al. (2012) also assessed the coping of the military respondents. The researchers provided a list of possible coping strategies and asked the participants to identify which coping strategies they use during negative times in their life. These questions appeared to be a consistent and accurate evaluation of types of coping that veterans use when faced with challenging situations. The results of the study indicated that veterans actively using coping mechanisms were less likely to have PTSD, depression or suffer from suicidal thoughts or ideations.

Moreover, PTSD severity was assessed through an empirically validated self-report instrument. Participants were considered to have PTSD if the utilized measurement results revealed a score of 50 or above. Approximately 11% of the respondents met

criteria for PTSD. The result of the study indicated that active military personnel with high spirituality had a buffer against PTSD even when in high combat situations. Additionally, depression was assessed using a shortened version of a 10-item depression scale. The cut-off scores were assessed for depression. To be classified as having depression, cut-off scores were 10 or greater for depression. Over 30% of the respondents met the criteria for depression in this study. The researchers found that high levels of spirituality were indeed a buffer against depressive symptomology. This was especially true for those in low-moderate combat experience.

Suicidality was assessed through a few different questions. First, respondents were asked whether they had suicidal thoughts. A question regarding the frequency of these thoughts followed. Another question was designed to assess whether the subjects had contemplated suicide in the past year. A third questioned was asked regarding whether the individual had attempted suicide in the previous year. Interestingly, medium, not high spirituality, showed a significant buffering effect for suicidality (Hourani et al., 2012). Again, self-report measures are often not the most accurate way to assess actual suicidality. However, for the study under review, self-report made most sense, given the large population sample and quantitative nature of the study.

A noteworthy finding is the risk factors for depression and PTSD included "being female, being in younger age groups, non-Hispanic ethnicity, junior-enlisted pay grades, avoidant coping behaviors, and those with moderate or high combat exposure" (Hourani et al., 2012, direct quote from online resource). Risk factors for suicidality included all of these except age and gender. Risk factors, while not directly related to studies can aid researchers in the direction for further research areas. Additionally, risk factors can help

researchers understand a phenomenon in more detail and clear up vague understandings of certain phenomena.

The results of this study indicate the RS can provide buffering effects for depression, PTSD, and suicidality in actively deployed veterans. Implications and limitations of this study must be considered. First, this study was conducted with actively deployed individuals. These individuals were still encountering situations that could induce mental health symptomology. Furthermore, the participants had less access to organized RS structure. Additionally, this study contained modified versions of mental health assessments and vague self-report measures. The quantitative nature of this study provides data that was wide but not particularly deep. However, this study provided some valuable directions for future research. Future research could be conducted on post-deployed veterans to determine if outcome results are similar. The full assessments could be utilized to compare results. Additionally, singular concepts or findings from this study should be explored in more detail in future research endeavors.

Religious Coping and Adaptive Mechanisms

Lisman et al. (2017) conducted a study with 90 veterans who had returned from Iraq or Afghanistan. The researchers were curious about the role of religion and how post-combat veterans rely on RS to process traumas. The researchers examined the *adaptive* and *maladaptive* factors of RS during post-war zone reintegration. The authors discovered a positive association between religious support and adaptive processing. They also reported a negative association between spiritual distress and adaptive processing.

The participants for this study were collected from returning OEF and OIF veterans over the span of two years. The researchers conducted phone calls inviting individuals to complete some surveys on adjusting to life post-deployment. The authors kept only completed studies, providing 90 participants for the data analysis. Over 80% of the participants had completed one or two deployments and 97% returned from their most recent deployment within two years prior to this study. The average age was 31 years old with over 80% male participants and over 90% Caucasian ethnicity. About 56% of the participants identified as Christian, 34% as Catholic, and the rest were of other varying religions. As is clear, the demographic data of this study is concentrated with the majority of participants being young adult, male, Caucasians with a Christian faith background. When interpreting results, one should use discernment, understanding that that the participant sample is likely not representative of all military service members.

Within this study, Lisman et al. (2017) measured combat exposure, social support, depression symptoms, PTSD symptoms, religious coping, religious comforts and strains, the functions of prayer, and cognitive processing. The researchers used a multivariate analysis with principal components analysis and hierarchical regression analysis to compare different portions of the data. This was a cross-sectional and quantitative design. Results are discussed briefly.

The results of the study indicated that veterans who scored higher on seeking religious support, particularly those who engaged in positive religious coping, more prayer, finding comfort in their relationship with a Higher power, and connection with faith communities, showed higher levels of adaptive processing of traumas. This indicated better ability to accept and resolve stressors in a most helpful manner. On the

other hand, the findings of the study revealed that when the participants were experiencing spiritual struggles or distress, veterans were less able to adaptively process their traumas. Veterans of this study who believed more highly in religious fear or guilt, or who felt perceived abandonment from their Higher Power, showed significantly more difficulty in processing stressors. The researchers found no link between RS and maladaptive trauma processing. The findings support that maladaptive functioning was more likely to occur within the constructs of mental health versus a religious or spiritual problem (Lisman et al. 2017).

The findings of this study reveal a promising link between RS and positive cognitive functioning; processing traumas in a more helpful manner. Yet, there are some implications and limitations that should be discussed, as well. First, this was a cross-sectional analysis, as many previous studies have been regarding RS and mental health resiliency and coping. There is no way to conclude causality from this study. In addition, generalizability cannot be inferred, given the demographics and small sample size of the study.

However, finding a relationship between RS and positive processing of traumas provides a basis for future studies. Given that many veterans have experienced potential trauma causing situations, there exists a need to study the ways in which RS can more deeply impact individual veterans on a most personal level. For example, different aspects of RS might affect trauma processing or coping in different ways for each unique person. However, there are likely similarities, as well, which could be explored through a systematic qualitative analysis. This study results implied that there is a need to

understand how RS impacts trauma processing in the recent months post-deployment for war veterans.

Summary

Only the most recent literature has been cited in this review (within the last 10 years), excluding older research studies that would add more expanse than could be justified for this research study. Thus, the focus of this review was on the most recent research regarding the usage of spirituality, focusing on veteran resiliency as it relates to RS. As numerous studies have shown, higher RS can increase growth after trauma, decrease the likelihood of depression and PTSD, increase positive relationships, increase positive self-image, lead to a happier and more purposeful individual, and lead to a more altruistic lifestyle, thus increasing an individual's resiliency.

Additionally, counselors have an ethical responsibility to provide religiously and spiritually relevant and competent counseling. This includes taking into account the many facets of religion and spirituality and how each affects individual clients. Counselors have the responsibility to explore and treat individuals using the client's religion and spirituality as a guide of how to best help the client. Therefore, it is important to further explore RS as it relates to returning veterans as the literature provides contraindicating evidence as to whether or not and in what ways RS can support post-deployed veterans. By whatever modality offered, it is the counselor's responsibility to discover and employ strategies to support religious and spiritual diversity.

Furthermore, when reviewing the studies in this document, all of the studies cited are based on quantitative data. A few quantitative studies performed on veterans have called for a more in-depth understanding of veteran perspectives. One important way to

satisfy this calling is to develop qualitative studies to provide an in-depth account of the

experiences veterans have with religion and spirituality. There is a dearth of qualitative

data examining veteran use of RS during reintegration. Although one could reasonably

assume that there are likely relationships between greater RS in veterans and certain

aspects of resiliency to PTSD and depressive symptoms, there is much to be explored in

the personal and individual differences within these findings. Researchers have attempted

to take a complex concept (RS) and reduce it to a quantitative state. However robust and

specific certain quantitative measures are, the fact remains that even within this data,

there is an immense amount of variability that has yet to be explored. The variability

could be accounted for through a qualitative approach. By taking an in-depth examination

of the lived experiences of veterans, we might better understand the RS factors that

contribute to veteran resilience. For these reasons, I have chosen to perform a

phenomenological study on the lived experiences of RS in post-deployed veterans.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of my study was to describe the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans' use of religion and spirituality. Within Chapter III, I have provided a thorough description of the transcendental phenomenological qualitative methodology I chose for this study based on the following research question: What are the lived experiences of post-deployed combat veterans' use of religion and spirituality? The chapter is organized into five sections: (a) research design, (b) participants, (c) instrumentation, (d) data collection, and (e) data analysis.

Research Design

After an exhaustive literature review, I found much quantitative research and many statistics regarding the use of religion and spirituality in the veteran population, using psychometrically sound instrumentation. However, the data collected has been largely surveys with contradictory and unclear outcomes (Berg, 2011; Hourani et al., 2012; Lisman et al., 2017). Moreover, religion and spirituality is a deeply personal journey for most individuals (Manning, 2013). As such, solely quantitative statistics cannot fully capture the details of the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans' use of spirituality and religion. Therefore, an in-depth examination and understanding of personal experiences is necessary to fully explore this topic. Creswell and Poth (2018) pointed out that qualitative research is conducted when there is need for a more "complex, detailed understanding" (p. 45) of an issue. Qualitative methodology allows a researcher to provide depth and meaning to a particular identified problem, through gathering data via interviews and observations in a participant's natural setting and

providing a holistic account of the participants' descriptions of a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The present qualitative study has been an attempt to give voice to a cultural group that is not represented in current literature. Moreover, a transcendental phenomenological design helped me describe the phenomenon of religion and spirituality in the veteran population, through capturing themes of the interpersonal experiences of this population and relating it back to the identified literature (Creswell, 2016). Therefore, through this study, I hoped to give voice to the participating veterans and their experiences of using religion and spirituality during their post-combat reintegration.

Phenomenology describes the *what* and *how* of a common meaning of a phenomenon as described by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I developed an in-depth description, detailing post-deployed veterans' experiences of utilizing religion and spirituality during reintegration in order to expand the ways counselors may conceptualize veterans in the returning months from war. I examined the descriptions and reported the described commonalities of my participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of how this phenomenon is experienced from their point of view. Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) identified a transcendental design as one that identified the meanings individuals drew from their lived experiences with the phenomenon. Through a transcendental design, I captured and provided a detailed description of the meanings this sample of veterans have drawn from their experiences of religion and spirituality during post-deployment reintegration. Therefore, a transcendental phenomenological design facilitated an answer to the research question: What are the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans' use of religion and spirituality?

As opposed to other approaches, such as experimental or quasi-experimental quantitative designs or other qualitative designs such as ethnography, grounded research theory or hermeneutics, transcendental phenomenology was best suited for my study, because it focuses on the lived experiences of participants as described by their own interview responses. Experimental and quasi-experimental designs require manipulation of variables, while qualitative researchers tend to include little or no manipulation of variables in order to more closely examine the experiences of participants as they take place in real life (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, other types of qualitative research such as the aforementioned ethnography, grounded theory, or hermeneutics each include a component of interpretation. Transcendental phenomenology is an approach that is focused solely on the participant and their experiences with no interpretation of the outcome.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Transcendental phenomenology, as defined by Moustakas (1994), provided structure and support for my study. Transcendental phenomenology focuses on the participants' description of their lived experiences of a phenomenon versus the researcher's interpretation of participants' provided descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) described this process by stating

> Phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a pre-judgement, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience. (p. 41)

A major concept of transcendental phenomenology is *epoche*, which means a way of seeing things and describing such things without judgment (Moustakas, 1994). *Epoche* is the process by which one is able to clear the mind of everything, including preconceptions of the phenomenon or judgments of the experience. Epoche also includes allowing oneself to experience the phenomenon of the study, with openness and fresh eyes. When one performs Epoche, it is necessary to hear and experience all of the phenomenon without placing value on any portion but creating all as equal value and importance. *Epoche* requires non-judgment, but a fresh, clear, and open stance to all that will be heard and experienced (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, in an attempt to better understand the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans use of religion and spirituality on resiliency, I described the events and experiences as dictated by the participants in a factual and non-judgmental manner. I acted in due diligence to ensure the voice of the participants was heard versus my filtered understanding of the phenomenon.

Phenomenological Reduction

Furthermore, transcendental phenomenology also included "Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis of Meanings and Essences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). Phenomenological reduction was used to "derive a textural description of the meaning and essences of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Phenomenological reduction refers to what happened - the literal event or situation that took place. I used Phenomenological reduction to describe the phenomenon, using language provided by the participants. I described the situation or event using the words of the participant, so that it was the voice of the participant being heard.

Imaginative Variation

Imaginative Variation provided the "structural description of the essences of the experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). Imaginative variation described how the situation or event was experienced. Imaginative Variation is called thusly because there are infinite number of possibilities of ways in which an individual could experience a situation. Therefore, imaginative variation takes into account all of these unique ways the participant experiences a phenomenon including how they imagine it, feel it, sense it, remember it, perceive it, and ultimately experience it (Husserl, 1931). Husserl (1931) also posited that people move through imaginative variation intuitively. Therefore, during my research interviews and analysis, I was mindful of the ways in which the participants experienced the phenomenon. I mindfully listened for each of the above aspects and prompted several participants to further share the *how* of their experiences when more depth was necessary to get a complete picture of the ways they existed within the particular experiences.

Synthesis and Meaning of Essences

Synthesis of meanings and essences is a way to sum up the phenomenon described, incorporating both phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) identified this as the textural-structural synthesis that is gathered in order to gain a clear, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. In order to provide an accurate and complete picture of a phenomenon, I gathered data that addressed both what the participant experienced, how they experienced it, and then synthesized these into a description of the full lived experience of the individual. As such, through in-depth interviews with participants, I attempted to integrate both the textural

and structural aspects of the participant responses to create a full picture for the reader and future researchers.

Bracketing

An essential step in successful qualitative research is bracketing. Bracketing refers to a researcher's intentional evaluation of their own positions, experiences and judgments of the population and phenomenon being studied, then setting these aside in order to focus on the participant experiences (Giorgi, 2009). For the current study, I bracketed my experiences in order to remove my personal biases or judgments from the process. To begin the process of bracketing, I have shared my positionality and described ways in which I attempted to bracket my personal influences below.

In regard to the phenomenon under study, it is important for the reader to understand my own experiences with the variables being examined. I am a highly religious and spiritual person. I was raised in a conservative Christian faith, with church and Biblical principles saturating my life since birth. Additionally, I am married to a pastor and Chaplain in the United States Air Force (USAF). I have both a personal understanding of struggles faced by the general population of religious and spiritual individuals and a high loyalty to the USAF. I have experienced religion and spirituality as both a strength and a factor of struggle in certain life situations. Additionally, I am connected with veterans and families who also have experienced religious and spiritual issues as both a source of strength and a source of problems. Furthermore, as my husband is a Chaplain, his duties are to support veterans and their families facing life's hardships. I am even more keenly aware of life struggles and religious and spiritual difficulties faced by this population, by virtue of being married to a veteran and someone who supports

veterans and veteran families battling with life situations. My life and experiences as a

military spouse deepen my empathy for this population. As such, bracketing out my own

experiences and putting them aside momentarily was be of key importance. Part of the

beauty of being personally connected to both constructs under study (spirituality/religion

and the veteran population) is that I easily empathize, wishing to support growth in this

population. However, part of my struggle to bracket was the same; that is, both variables

are deeply intertwined with my own identity. I provided my best attempt to bracket this

integral part of my identity from my own study, in order to create an unbiased description

of the phenomenon.

In order to engage in bracketing, I documented my own experiences of the

phenomenon as my participants shared their experiences. In this way, I was able to

recognize my experiences as relevant only to myself. Thus, I had the ability to

acknowledge my own feelings and biases, set them aside, with the understanding that my

experiences are irrelevant in the moments I spent sitting with my interviewees.

Furthermore, I had process discussions with an identified member of my dissertation

committee, as well as a trusted counselor. These individuals challenged me to avoid

imposing my values on the participants' lived experiences. In addition, these individuals

helped me bracket my own experiences to prevent projecting my meaning into the

experiences of the interviewees. Throughout the process, I was in discussion with my

dissertation committee, all of whom have challenged my writing and my personal

reflections to ensure my personal judgments and biases are appropriately bracketed.

For bracketing purposes, I have also included the experiences of my dissertation

committee in this section. Dr. Richard Henriksen Jr. is a tenured professor in the

Department of Counselor Education. He is a Christian and lifelong member of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. He has served in many capacities including that of church elder and he has been part of several religious based publications and presentations. Dr. Henriksen is focused on how conservative Christians are addressed in the counseling profession and will use journaling as his method of bracketing.

Dr. Richard E. Watts has significant background addressing the current research study. He identified as a protestant Christian. Additionally, he has published and presented extensively on religious and spirituality values in counseling, edited a national journal on spiritual, ethical and religious values in counseling, and taught graduate courses addressing counseling and religion and spirituality. He has also had significant experiences counseling clients, implementing their religious and spiritual values as a part of his therapeutic practices. Because of his extended professional experience, he understands the components of this research study and will bracket his experiences through discussions with the dissertation committee.

Dr. Susan Henderson is an Assistant Professor in Counselor Education. She is a 50-year-old Caucasian female that has been married to her husband for 26 years. She has two children, ages 16 and 20. Dr. Henderson is a protestant Christian. As she has grown professionally, her political views have transitioned from conservative to moderate. Dr. Henderson is a Licensed Professional Counselor and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Associate. She will bracket her positionality through discussions with the dissertation committee.

Participants

My participants consisted of seven military veterans, both women and men who range in age from 26 years and up. I collected the rank of each participant, as well as their job functions. I also collected data focused on the participants' religious affiliation that would include atheism and agnosticism and spirituality, marital or partner status, whether or not the participant has children, and the sexuality/affectionality of the participants.

Sampling

Participants were gathered using purposeful sampling and snowball procedures. Purposeful sampling refers to an intentional choice of participants that will bring about the most informed responses to the research problem (Creswell & Poth, 2018). More specifically, I used criterion sampling, which is a category of purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling is often used in phenomenology when participants are chosen because they meet certain parameters that are crucial for the study (2018). In this study, participants were drawn from a military population, from those of whom have been actively deployed in the last 12 months. Individuals who did not meet these criteria were not considered for this study. Furthermore, snowball sampling occurs when, "individuals in the sample are asked to identify other individuals, for a fixed number of stages, for the purpose of estimating the number of mutual relationships or social circles in the population" (Thompson, 2002, p. 183). In other words, snowball sampling is carried out when one participant is asked to identify another person that might be interested in engaging in the research study. I gathered multiple participants through snowball sampling, as well.

I gained participants by contacting therapists who work with the military population and requested referrals of participants for my study, supplying them with an overview of my study and emailed flyers (Figure E1) for distribution to possible participants. Additionally, I contacted various faith group United States Air Force (USAF) Chaplains and request referrals for my study that fit the delegated criteria. Last, I reached out to the Airman and Family Readiness Center (AFRC) at a single military base and learned the process for which they aid in participant recruitment. I chose to not use any AFRC installations due to reaching out a second time and learning that they were not permitted to distribute flyers for individual research studies. I also recruited through closed social media groups that were designed only for military members, spouses or mental health practitioners treating military members or families. In the participant recruiting process, participants were informed that it is not necessary that they identify as religious or spiritual to participate in the study. This served as a buffer against obtaining only individuals who highly identify as religious or spiritual and provided various perspectives to consider when analyzing the data. However, all of the seven participants were connected with an identified faith group.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018) the optimal number of participants for a qualitative phenomenological study is 10. However, given the dearth of literature and inconsistency of result findings regarding this subject, I was willing to accept up to 15 participants. I recruited only seven participants over a three-month time span, yet was able to reach saturation with these participants. Saturation occurs at the point in which consistent themes begin to emerge in during data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) also indicated that themes usually begin to become consistent

around the eighth participant. Although eight to ten participants were the minimal

number suggested for consistency of themes, I reached saturation prior to even my

seventh interview. Therefore, my dissertation chair and I determined there was no need to

recruit additional participants for the study.

Instrumentation

In qualitative research, the primary research instrument is the interview (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), researchers often use semi-

structured interviews with semi-structured questions formed in advance of the actual

interview that can be changed during the interview progression based upon participant

responses. Therefore, the primary instrument used in my study was a semi-structured

interview with my participants. The semi-structured interviews were a maximum of an

hour long, with the following questions: (a) Walk me through a description of your most

recent experiences of reintegration following your deployment, (b) What have been your

greatest struggles during reintegration? (c) Tell me about factors that made reintegration

easier for you. (d) What helped you cope and/or reengage in the typical functions of life

following your return from your most recent deployment? According to Spradley (2002),

the steps to becoming a trusted interviewer include asking questions that increase rapport

building, restating what the participant has conveyed directly in the participant's own

words, getting the interviewee to talk as much as possible, and gaining the most

participation from the participant as is possible. Additionally, according to Spradley

(2002) researchers should seek to create an atmosphere of mutual cooperation in which

both parties feel free to speak. Spradley (2002) identified a grand tour question as being a

way to address the rapport building process. The grand tour question is asked in such a

way that the participant literally takes the researcher on a verbal (or literal) tour of their specific experiences in a given situation. Therefore, the grand tour question, the one in which I sought to gain an understanding of the general experiences of the participant's post-deployment reintegration was, "Walk me through a description of your most recent experiences of reintegration following your deployment." This question helped me begin to gain a picture of how the participant experienced the return from deployment. It also helped me build rapport through focusing on the client's lived experiences during post-deployed reintegration.

The second interview question, "What have been your greatest struggles during reintegration?" was a way to help me further understand the lived experiences of the post-deployment reintegration experiences. Research suggests that reintegration is a difficult time for veterans and their families with increased stressors (Brownlow et al., 2018). Certainly, each participant faced some struggles during reintegration. Additionally, Listman et al. (2017) discovered that when veterans were facing religious or spiritual distress, they were less able to process previous deployment traumas than those with a strong faith. Furthermore, Kopacz and Connery (2015) identified negative implications for veterans when facing spiritual struggles, calling for a complete spiritual history to be taken in order to fully understand the experiences of veteran resiliency. Therefore, understanding the experiences of the struggles faced during reintegration, through allowing the veteran participants to describe their own experiences allowed for any negative religious or spiritual influences to emerge, if such influences existed for a particular participant.

I designed the third interview question, "Tell me about factors that made reintegration easier for you," in order to understand the opposite side of the previous question. Many veterans faced struggles during reintegration following deployment (Danish & Antonides, 2009; McNulty, 2010; Sayers, Farrow, Ross & Oslin, 2009; Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008), but the opposite side of the coin seems equally important to assess in order to obtain a full depiction of the participants' lived experiences of this phenomenon. I was interested in exploring the full essence of the veterans' experiences including both positive and negative experiences they encountered upon returning from deployment. Literature has already identified some factors that help veterans post-deployment. These helpful factors included engaging in meditation, mindfulness exercises, keeping a positive attitude, and increased social connectedness (Isaacs et al., 2017; Seppl, 2014; Serpa et al., 2014; Tsai et al., 2015). However, according to previous authors, there is still need for future research about which factors are most helpful for individual veterans upon return from deployment (Elnitsky & Fisher et al., 2017; Elnitsky & Blevins, et al., 2017; Freytes et al., 2017). I used this third research question to assess for new emerging factors that could support, add to, or refute previous findings.

The last interview question I asked the participants is, "What helped you cope and/or reengage in the typical functions of life following your return from your most recent deployment?" This interview question was designed to bring up any spiritual or religious factors (and other factors) that may have helped the veteran reintegrate. Through this question, I was able to determine some religious and spiritual factors that were indeed useful. This question was based on multiple studies from the literature that include support for inclusion or religiosity and spirituality, as well as identified variables

that do not support the use of religion and spirituality for purposes of positive coping during transitions. For example, several authors supported the use of religion and spirituality in post-combat veteran resilience (Berg, 2011; Hourani, et al., 2012; Koyn, 2015; Lisman et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017). On the other hand, there were some instances when religious or spiritual beliefs created a negative mental health symptomology or prevented positive coping, decreasing resiliency factors in some participants (Kopacz et al., 2016; Sherman et al., 2018; Smith-MacDonald et al., 2017; Tait, Currier, & Harris, 2016). Smith -MacDonald et al. (2017) directly stated, "Further high-quality research is needed to isolate the salient components of spirituality that are most harmful and helpful in veterans' mental well-being, including the incorporating of veterans' perspectives directly" (abstract). Sherman et al. (2018) also called for more research so that the use of RS could be better understood in the veteran population. Thus, a qualitative study, with the above outlined interview questions began to reveal the perspectives of a subset of veterans and have added to the literature in a meaningful way, with of useful themes emerging.

Because this was a phenomenological study and, after an exhaustive search of the literature, finding no qualitative studies on my topic, there were no specific qualitative interview questions in the literature from which I based my interview questions. However, the questions provided are prompted by previous literature that has failed to provide a full picture and detailed description of the experiences of post-deployed veterans' use of religion and spirituality. Selected professionals on my dissertation committee reviewed these questions prior to the launch of the study, and we made some adjustments to support the clarity of the questions.

Observation, archival data, myself and my dissertation committee were also recognized as instruments. Observations are often used by qualitative researchers to gain a more complete picture of the qualitative data being gathered (Lunenberg & Irvy, 2018). I made observations (as a participant observer) and recorded them in my field notes during data collection. Additionally, I gathered an audio recording of the interviews which served as archival data that I transcribed following the interviews. Last, I was the individual in charge of guiding the interviews, so I acted as an instrument.

Finally, I utilized a Demographics Questionnaire with the following delineations: (a) age, (b) identified ethnic background, (c) marital/relationship status, (d) length of time in the military, (e) title/position/rank, (f) gender, (g) sexuality/affectuality, (h) length of time since most recent deployment and length of deployment, (i) whether participant identifies with a faith group or religious group and providing the name of the group, (j) how often the participant engages in religious practices, and (k) how often the participant engages in spiritual exercises, to allow me to collect the information needed to describe my participants. I designed the demographics questionnaire. I based the demographics questions on the types of data necessary to provide a complete picture of the contextual factors surrounding participant responses in order to most fully understand the phenomenon of resiliency as related to post-deployed veterans' use of religion and spirituality.

Last, I conducted member checking to ensure that my documented data was representative of the participant responses. Member checking is essential to support the trustworthiness of the study (Maxwell, 2013). Member-checking questions may include (a) Do you believe the themes I provided are accurate to your experiences? (b) Is there

anything that you would like to clarify about the themes I have provided? (c) What other feedback would you like to give about the reported themes from the interviews? These questions supported the participant-centered ideas of a true phenomenological study and further verified that my positionality was in check.

Data Collection

Before the study was launched and data was collected, I met with the dissertation research committee to review and approve my study. Next, I submitted my study with all relevant information to the Sam Houston State University Institutional Review Board (SHSU IRB) for research on human subjects to obtain approval to carry out the study as designed. Furthermore, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), approval must be gained from the research site as well, before launching a study. Due to the COVID-19, I did not need to gain permissions from the research site, as my home office served as the research site. Furthermore, I gained approval from the SHSU IRB to conduct my interviews via telecommunication due to the governmental restrictions and social distancing policies in place. Upon approval from the SHSU IRB, participants were selected using criterion sampling and snowball sampling, as detailed above. Prior to the research interview, I obtained verbal informed consent. Additionally, I provided the participants with my contact information at the university, the contact information of the SHSU IRB, and disclosed guidelines for maintaining strict confidentiality throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once participants were selected and informed consent was gained, I scheduled one-hour interviews with each participant and instructed them to be in a confidential location during the interview. I kept a research journal during the study to record any

observations or other experiences and responses elicited from the interviewee and myself. Additionally, I audio recorded these interviews and took field notes during the interviews. Next, I transcribed the interviews verbatim. Last, I conducted member checking following extraction of themes to confirm the congruence of the themes to the participants' intent. Throughout the process, I stored gathered data, including journals, audio recordings and observations in double locked files, as well as electronic copies on an encrypted device, in order to maintain confidentiality and to keep back-up files for protection of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using several steps. First, I outlined the ways in which I tended to trustworthiness. Next, I analyzed the data using Moustakas' modification of the Van Kaam qualitative data analysis structure. Last, I provided themes that emerged using specific statements and descriptions from the participant interviews.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the validity and reliability of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the establishment of trustworthiness as dependent on the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the research data conclusions. Credibility means that reports about the study and its findings are truthful in nature. Transferability refers to whether or not the findings can be applied in other contexts to determine if there are similar outcomes. Dependability can be determined by findings that are consistent from a study that could be replicated. Thus, the use of a step-by-step process that can be replicated is important to address dependability. Confirmability simply means that the researcher takes a non-biased approach and uses

various methods to reduce the occurrence of researcher-influenced outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Threats to validity are described next, along with a plan to decrease the threats and increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the current research study.

Threats to conclusion validity

In qualitative studies, there are certain threats to the validity of conclusions made by the researchers that should be examined and identified in order to maintain a trustworthy and credible study. Thus, qualitative researchers use methods to assess and maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, throughout the study's progression. Several authors and researchers have identified ways to maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of a study. For example, Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined some methods to obtain trustworthiness in a qualitative study. Such methods included identifying researcher positionality (bias), triangulation, providing data that is rich and thick, using negative case analysis (actively searching for information that is contradictory to findings and presenting it as such), and providing rich, thick descriptions of participant responses. Maxwell (2013), also offered a list of eight tests used to evaluate the validity of the study's conclusions. These tests included intensive long-term involvement, rich data, respondent validation (i.e. member checks), intervention, searching for discrepant or negative cases, triangulation, numerical results, and comparison. Not all validity tests are appropriate for every qualitative study. Therefore, I identified the following tests for validity that were used in my study - identifying research positionality, triangulation, rich and thick data, negative case analysis, member checking, numerical results, and intervention.

Researcher Positionality

Research positionality refers to a researcher's position in a qualitative research study. A researcher's position includes age, race, ethnicity, gender, social class, affectual orientation, personal experiences, personal beliefs, political beliefs, and professional beliefs (Berger, 2015). Furthermore, two important components of research positionality include reflexivity and external accountability. Accountability comes through the form of both reflexivity and dialogue with an individual who is unbiased in regard to the study's outcome. Reflexivity refers to a researcher's ability to critically evaluate their own biases through internal dialogue, adhering to the awareness that their own biases may impact the research processes (Berger, 2015). Therefore, in this section, I identified my own positionality and discussed ways that I used reflexivity and accountability to keep my positionality in check.

In order to check my own biases, I first recorded my positionality, in the Bracketing section of this document. In the Bracketing section above, I included a statement outlining some of my positionality. In that section, I described my background as a conservative Protestant Christian and as a veteran's spouse. In addition to my personal and spiritual background, I am a 33-year-old, middle class, Caucasian female. I have been married to one husband for 13 years, with two children ages 9 and 6. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor with a focus on the young adult population. I have a professional interest in treating individuals with depression, PTSD, anxiety, autism spectrum disorders, veterans and family issues. My previous counseling experiences include providing therapy at a facility that treated substance abuse disorders, performing individual, group and family counseling in residential, intensive outpatient, and

outpatient treatment settings. I have also treated individuals, couples, children, and adolescents in a private practice setting. My most recent counseling experiences included counseling college students ranging from 18 years old to middle 60s as well as working for an independent telemental health agency. I have counseled a variety of individuals, from various multicultural backgrounds and with various mental health struggles. My personal political preferences are moderate to conservative in nature.

Throughout the research study, I was aware of my own internal dialogue, acting with reflexivity about the research experiences. I used journaling not only to internally dialogue with myself, but to keep an external account of that dialogue. Writing down my experiences gave me the opportunity to reflect more deeply about my own personal thoughts and emotions, thus, allowing me to bracket these more easily. Thus, I acted with reflexivity, examining my own biases so that they have a lesser impact or no impact at all on the research process.

Some critics argue that reflexivity is, in itself a biased process, due to the deeply personal internal nature of reflexivity (Berger, 2015). Therefore, I used a committee member from my dissertation committee and a therapist to discuss the themes that emerged from my own internal dialogue and journaling process. This sharing of my thoughts and emotions allowed for external accountability. Such accountability aided in the process of removing my personal biases so that the focus of my research remained on the participants and their story. Thus, my personal biases, thoughts, opinions, or emotions remained bracketed to prevent interference with results of the study.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to collecting multiple sources of data (Maxwell, 2013). Such data includes, but is not limited to verbal interview questions, written interview responses, demographic questionnaires, field notes, live observations, and personal reflexivity. I collected demographic data, recorded and transcribed interview question responses, took field notes, made observations which I processed with a therapist and wrote in my journal, journaled about my process of reflexivity, and had discussions about my own experiences with a dissertation committee member. Through using multiple modalities of collecting data, I was able to successfully triangulate the data and form a complete picture of the experiences of the participants.

Rich and Thick Data

Rich and thick data is required for successful and meaningful qualitative analyses. Rich and thick data refers to long or intensive interviews with in-depth details that provide a full understanding of the phenomenon under study (Maxwell, 2013). Providing verbatim transcripts and documenting specific observations are important in maintaining the integrity of the data provided by the participants. For the current study, I did not engage in long term interviewing with the clients. I conducted up to one-hour long interviews that were audio recorded. However, the interviews were sufficient to provide an in-depth account of the phenomenon, as long interviews are not necessary to get a full picture of the experiences of religion and spirituality in post-deployed veterans. During the interviews, I documented observations (with a date and time stamp) in my observation journal. Following the interviews, I transcribed each interview, word for word, including all documented observations I made during the interview. This process

allowed me to focus on the details that participants provided along with any contextual observations that occurred, in order to support the participant interview responses. By using this method, I provided out a detailed account of participant experiences of the phenomenon, thus presenting a rich and thick description of the phenomenon based solely on the participant's interview responses.

Negative Case Analysis

Negative case analysis, or the process of finding discrepant data is also an important part of validity testing in qualitative research studies. Finding supporting data is important to increase the validity and reliability of qualitative research. However, it is equally important to fully examine all data to determine whether any discrepant data exists (Maxwell, 2013). Discrepant data should be analyzed and reported in the conclusions of the research study. Additionally, asking others to review the research conclusion is a way to check that the results reported appear unbiased by the researcher (Maxwell, 2013).

Therefore, in order to maintain the most credible and trustworthy results of my study, I reported data that did not seem to fit or support my conclusions. Additionally, I searched the literature for discrepancies in an attempt to use literature to support any discrepancies found in my data that may have presented in previous research studies. Furthermore, I provided a full account of the discrepancies and limitations. Last, I consulted with members of my research dissertation committee in order to check for any apparent biases in my research conclusions. Thus, although discrepant data can be a threat to the credibility or trustworthiness of the study, I have accounted for the

discrepancies by maintaining an open account of all research findings, including a search for negative cases.

Member Checking

Member checking, also known as respondent validation, is one way to validate that the findings a researcher reports are an accurate depiction of the information a participant provides during the interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013). It is a systematic way to gain feedback from the participants about the data gathered during and after the interview. Furthermore, member checking is an important way to ensure the researcher has not misinterpreted what the participant said or what was observed (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, member checking in an integral piece of the process to maintain a credible and trustworthy study. For this study, I conducted member checking during the interview process to review my understanding of the participant's responses, as well as at the conclusion of the study, following my data analysis. Conducting member checking at two points during the study will increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study's outcome findings. No discrepancies were reported. However, if any discrepancies existed between my understanding and the participant's intended meaning, I planned to document such and make any necessary changes, so that the study's conclusions matched the participant's intended meaning. There were no discrepancies identified. However, this process verified the accuracy of all documented and reported information regarding the themes of the study.

Numerical Results

While qualitative studies are focused on the depth and meaning of lived experiences of participants, numerical figures can be used to support the findings of the

qualitative research study (Maxwell, 2010). For example, a researcher could simply state, "These results were found to be true for most of the participants responses." A more accurate report would include quasi-statistics. Quasi-statistics are numerical results that support the claims of the researcher. Thus, a stronger result report would include, "These results were found to be true in 80% of the participant interview responses." Thus, I used numerical results, in conjunction with detailed descriptions to increase the credibility of the study's conclusions. For the current study, I used numerical data in a number of ways. First, I used numerical descriptions for the demographics of my study. Next, I used numerical descriptors to provide support for the themes and sub themes that emerge as a result of my study. Finally, I planned to use numbers as a way to account for discrepancies and results that may have proven contradictory in the study (again, there were none). Therefore, the numerical data provided support for the strength of the study findings. Moreover, the numbers provided support for future research needed in this area of study.

Intervention

Intervention refers to the manipulation of a variable within a research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In qualitative research, there is generally no direct manipulation of the variables. Yet, indirect interventions may occur in the absence of direct or deliberate variable manipulation. Maxwell (2013) pointed out that by the researcher simply being present, the researcher acts as an intervention in the study. For example, the behavior or verbal responses of the researcher to the participant could inadvertently affect the participant responses. Additionally, there are many interpersonal and interpersonal cues to which people's brain's and bodies respond, of which individuals are often

unaware. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that my presence in the room with the participants of the study will affect some of the discourse that takes place. Ignoring this assumption would decrease the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. On the other hand, simply being aware of myself and using my journals to log my feelings and observations of how I may have acted as an intervention during the research study, helped me to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Analysis and Identification of Themes

I used the Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method to analyze the data and identify themes. Moustakas' modification of the Van Kaam method addressed the following: Horizontalization (Listing and Grouping) using Reduction or Elimination of interview content, Clustering and Identifying Emergent Themes, Identification of Constituents, Creation of General Descriptions, Construction of Specific Participant Descriptions, and Comparing Themes to the Literature (1994). With each of these steps, I provided excerpts from the participant interview to support my described data. In the final step, I revisited the literature review, looked for new related literature, and began to make concrete connections between my findings and what has previously been reported in the provided literature. I have outlined each step below and how they were integral in reporting my participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon studied.

Horizontalization

Horizontalization begins the process of analyzing the data, to find themes and subthemes within the interviewee responses. Horizontalization is the step in which I began to pull out and record all of the excerpts and quotes that were relevant to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It required me to complete an unbiased review of the

transcripts gathered from the participant interviews. During this review, I began to identify quotes that seemed to be the most relevant to the purposes of my study. Then, I began to group them in a preliminary fashion.

For this study, I began the process by transcribing the audio taped interview sessions of each of the participants. Then, I read each transcript to determine quotes that appeared most relevant to the responses of each question. Next, I attempted to group these into preliminary list categories. I then moved on to the next step of the process, Reduction and Elimination.

Reduction and Elimination

Reduction and Elimination is the step following horizontalization in which I began to determine the invariant constituents. This step required me to read the identified quotes and ask two questions - (a) Does this quote contain a moment from the participant's experience that is directly relatable to the phenomenon under investigations and (b) Can the quote be reduced to a label or meaning? If I answer "no" to either of these questions, the quote should be dismissed, while I attempted to find a more suitable quote for emergent themes (Moustakas, 1994).

I conducted the reduction and elimination process by reading the quotes identified in the horizontalization process. I then determined whether or not the quote appeared directly relevant to the participant's lived experiences of the research question asked. Then, I determined if I could deconstruct the quote, reducing it to a single label. This reduction process helped me determine and identify any emergent themes. When I was unable to determine the relevance of the quote to the research question, or when I was unable to reduce the identified statement to a single label, I eliminated it from my list of

relevant data. I continued this process for each participant, on each interview question, until I reached a satisfactory point in which I could cluster group the data and identify emergent themes.

Clustering and Identifying Emergent Themes

Following the reduction and elimination process, I clustered the identified statements in order to establish shared themes. In this step, I took the labeled themes from the previous process and placed quotes with similar themes into a group or cluster. Then, I relabeled (or renamed) the group according to the emergent themes that bound the statements together. My emergent themes appropriately depicted the core of each individual's experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to fully address this step, I read over the previously identified statements and labels to determine any parallels or similarities among the identified participant quotations. Next, I began to separate the quotes into identified labels, which then started transforming into clear themes that the participants shared. I continued this process until all statements were placed into thematic groupings and themes of the participant experiences began to emerge.

Identification of Constituents

Identification of constituents is the step that I addressed after clear themes emerged from the clustering process. In this step, my identified themes were compared back against the interviewee responses. At this point, determined if the identified themes, did indeed match the participant's intended response to each question. I followed this process for each identified them in each participant interview and found that the theme matched the participants intended responses. Had the themes not matched the

participants' descriptions of the phenomenon, I would have returned to the previous steps in order to better match themes to the data set (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to complete this step of the process, I compared the labels that I identified to the overall descriptions provided by the participants, by reviewing the audio recordings, observations, and transcriptions. I also consulted with my methodologist to reduce any possibility of bias. If the identified constituents did not seem to fit the participant responses, I revisited the previous steps, with the information I gathered from reviewing the collected data. If the identified constituents appeared to fit and were approved by my methodologist, I moved on to the next step of creating general descriptions.

Creation of General Descriptions

In this step, I used the participants' structural and textural descriptions of their experiences to provide a general description of their overall experiences. In the previous step, the textual descriptions are the verbatim quotation examples provided. In this step, the structural descriptions will add more depth to the textural descriptions, by including emotional and other connections between participants, their experiences, and their responses. Imaginative variation is necessary to complete this step properly (Moustakas, 1994). As such, I attempted to merge the textural and structural descriptions to provide an overview and general description of the participant experiences, using imaginative variation to ensure the focus remained on the participants and their lived experiences.

Construction of Specific Participant Descriptions

Constructing specific participant descriptions is also necessary in order to maintain focus on the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In this step, I

provided specific excerpts from the interviews. This step was performed for each

participant so that the interviewee voices were heard. The findings from these specific

accounts were included in both the textual-structural considerations of data outcomes, as

well as the overall findings of themes that emerged from the study.

Comparing Themes to the Literature

The final step in the data analysis process was to compare themes of my study to

the literature. Thus, I revisited previously cited literature in order to compare the outcome

findings of the study. I, also, searched for new literature to support or refute the findings

from my current study (Moustakas, 1994). I actively sought out new information and

research findings that may have presented since my initial search for literature and

included this research to support my current study findings. In this step, I provided

justification for the results of my study using my gathered data and the cited supportive

literature.

Summary

In this chapter, I revisited the research question. I also provided the specific

interview questions I utilized during the study. I outlined my anticipated participant

population and my research design. Additionally, I outlined how I intended to collect and

analyze the data and my plans to reduce bias and introduced my own researcher

positionality. I also detailed the process I used to identify and synthesize the themes that

emerged from the interview process. Furthermore, I identified the ways in which I used

literature to support (and refute) the results of the study. In the next chapter, I will

provide the results of the study.

CHAPTER IV

Results

Military members returning from deployment face a wide array of reintegration challenges. Some individuals adapt to these challenges easily, while others face barriers to smooth reintegration. To date, research has indicated helpful practices that returning veterans may engage in that could help the reintegration process go more smoothly. Furthermore, previous studies have indicated that religion and spirituality might have had an impact on reintegration experiences. Therefore, I completed this phenomenological qualitative study to gain insight into the lived experiences of a sample of returning veterans to learn if religion and spirituality played any role during the reintegration process.

Chapter IV consists of the results of my transcendental phenomenological qualitative study in which I addressed the research question – What are the lived experiences of veterans' use of religion and spirituality during post-deployment reintegration? I followed the data collection and analysis steps, as outlined in Chapter III. One major thread emerged, with six themes: Family - Prayer, Connection, Spiritual/Religious Reading (Devotions), Faith, Spiritual Practices, and Corporate Worship. Three subthemes were identified under Connection as follows: Intentional Time with Family, Intentional Time with Self, and Intentional Time with Friends. Two sub-themes emerged under Spiritual Practices - Helping Others and Gratitude. The participants and results of the study, along with direct quotations from the participants are described below.

Participants

My sample size consisted of seven participants. The number of eight participants was the average at which one can satisfactorily conclude that saturation has been reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are times when saturation is reached before eight participants. While I attempted to obtain at least eight to 10 participants over a 3-month span, I settled with seven participants, which yielded consistent and saturated themes. Therefore, it was not necessary for me to obtain an eighth participant. I interviewed five male participants and two female participants. The participants engaged in a verbal, fill-in-the-blank style demographics questionnaire prior to the interview. Demographics questions included (a) age, (b) identified ethnic background, (c) marital/relationship status, (d) length of time in the military, (e) title/position/rank, (f) gender, (g) sexuality/affectuality, (h) length of time since most recent deployment and length of deployment, (i) whether participant identifies with a faith group or religious group and providing the name of the group, (j) how often the participant engages in religious practices, and (k) how often the participant engages in spiritual exercises. I asked these questions to the participants verbally before beginning the actual semi-structured interview questions. Then, the participants underwent one-hour interviews, giving a descriptive account of their experiences of returning from deployment. Within these accounts, participants explained their experiences, including their greatest struggles, the types of things that made reintegration easier or more difficult for them, as well as the ways in which religion and spirituality were used during their reintegration experiences. The responses were recorded verbatim and major themes in

regard to religion and spirituality use were extracted and documented from the participant responses.

Participants ranged from 26-51 years of age. One participant had served in the military less than two years, two participants served for 10-15 years, two served for 15-20 years and the other two have served in the military for 20+ years. The ethnicities of the participants (identified by each individual participant) included four White individuals, one Black individual, one European/Native American individual and one Italian individual. All participants but one identified as engaging in religious practices weekly or multiple times a week. Additionally, all participants identified as practicing spirituality weekly, multiple times a week, or even daily. There was a range of ranks and titles represented, from enlisted to high ranking officer, as well as a range of job functions from commander to judge to chaplain work. The length of deployments ranged from 30 days up to 385 days, with six of the seven participants deployed in active combat zones.

Participant Profiles

Each participant answered a set of demographic questions that provided a basic profile of each participant. All participants identified as heterosexual. Participants returned from deployment between one and nine months ago. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide a pseudonym if they so wished. One participant chose their own and the other six pseudonyms were chosen by the researcher, to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The participants all identified with a religious faith group, although two participants stated they were not particularly religious. Specific faith affiliations are provided in the Participant Profiles below. Each participant was also asked to provide a definition of religion and a definition of spirituality. These responses and a

detailed profile of each participant are found below. I included major themes from each participant interview that were not associated with spirituality and religion themes, as well, to help the reader get a sense of the participant's experiences upon reintegration.

Participant #1

Angie was a 36-year-old self-identified White, divorced female who had served in the U.S. Air Force for 17 years. Angie identified as a non-denominational protestant Christian, who practiced her religion and spirituality daily. Angie was a Non-Commissioned officer in charge of Religious Affairs. Her job duties included the following: administrative paperwork, financial documents, religious accommodations, and crisis intervention counseling. She stated humorously, while laughing, "I basically run the base chapel."

When asked to define religion, Angie replied, "Religion is your belief in something more than yourself." When asked to define spirituality, Angie stated that spirituality is the same (definition as religion) for her. She went on to describe spirituality as "being more in tune with what makes you process things." When asked if spirituality and religion were the same or different for her, she replied that they are synonymous and "pretty much the same to me."

As Angie described her experiences of reintegration, she depicted some difficulties, but also some strengths she relied upon to help her overcome her struggles. Angie's struggles included reintegrating into a "new normal" as she settled back into life as a single mom of a 10-year-old daughter. She described the struggles she faced, as she and her daughter figured out their new mother-daughter relationship roles, due to the developmental changes her daughter experienced while she was deployed. Angie also

experienced struggles of getting back to her "new normal" as she figured out ways to "fit in" upon returning to work responsibilities while also facing a relocation shortly after returning. Her relocation plans were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, ultimately causing her further distress reintegrating into her work, as her replacement was already there and fitting in felt difficult. Work struggles included figuring out her new role amid the changes and learning how to work with new people who had transitioned to her duty station while she was deployed. One statement she made as she was discussing her work transition struggles was, "And, being able to figure out where I fit in. I think that's the biggest thing – is where do you fit back in, ya know, without, without disrupting and kind of making a seamless transition back in."

Angie also identified some tools that helped her reintegrate more smoothly, such as having a sense of acceptance of the difficulties she faced due to situational changes, as well as her faith and spirituality practices. She stated that re-engaging in a daily routine of exercise and spirituality practices was useful. Angie also indicated that allowing herself time to do things that "re-energize[d]" her including reading a book, watching a tv show, exercising or even doing dishes – "just something that, that is mindless that I can just go do and I don't feel like someone's needing something from me all the time" – were helpful during her transition back into her life routine following deployment. More details of how her faith and spirituality were used during her reintegration experiences are provided in the Themes section.

Participant #2

Reverend was a 43-year-old self-identified Black married male, who had served in the U.S. Air Force for 23 years. Reverend identified his religious affiliation as

Christianity and stated that he engaged in religious practices at least weekly. He also

stated that he engaged in spiritual practices "daily, and sometimes more." Reverend was a

Lieutenant Colonel and identified his role as Commander. He described the following job

functions: Running an ROTC unit, which included a staff of himself and four others with

50 cadets. His duties included teaching military customs, courtesies, drill and ceremony,

history, practices and other important information; liaison with headquarters, obtaining

resources for the unit, liaison with the university in a representational nature, and

counseling. Reverend received a Bronze Star for his role while deployed.

When providing his definition of religion, Reverend gave the following response,

"I would define religion as something that people do repetitively." When defining

spirituality, Reverend replied, "A nature of connectedness to something that is

supernatural or other worldly." Reverend identified spirituality and religion as being

separate but "they can be the same." He stated, "Religion can be connected to their

spirituality. But, for many people, religion is just something people do."

When learning about Reverend's experiences returning from deployment,

Reverend identified having some difficult transitions during his reintegration process, as

well as some positive "touch points" along the way. Reverend recounted his experiences

with his exercise routine and having difficulty deadlifting the same amount of weight as

during his deployment, which felt disappointing to him. He also revisited struggles he

had while driving and being around large crowds of people or making choices in stores,

upon his return home. When he returned home, his family had already experienced a

Permanent Change of Station (PCS'd) to their new duty station and he remembered

feeling eager to reunite with them, but also feeling like a "guest" in his new home once

he arrived. Furthermore, Reverend detailed difficulties he had with noises such as a "shooting in the woods," a "jackhammer" or "something falling" that caused him some immediate distress. Additionally, Reverend had difficulty trusting others, upon his return to the United States. He stated, "Uh, trust I think that was a difficult thing to do – to uh, to trust people… being in a new place, you know trying to trust people." Getting back into the habit of work and home life was also difficult for Reverend. He believed he was "late to the game," because his children had already started school and his new command had been operating for several months without a commander. He also found out, shortly after returning home, that he did not get promoted, which was, "a little bit tough." Due to some of his struggles upon return, Reverend recognized he needed some extra support and attempted to get counseling. This was also a disappointing endeavor because he was told to "come back next year and maybe we can help then." Even so, Reverend found ways to stay positive and keep moving forward.

Reverend recounted positive experiences, as well, such as his family planning a welcome home committee, a supportive wife, as well as having dinners with friends. He stated, "My wife … she helped. She… tried to be understanding…That was helpful." He also described having dinner with friends in this way, "He and his family… took me out to dinner… that was nice." Additionally, he indicated that the simple act of accepting that life was different when he returned from deployment was helpful for him. He said, "I think to an extent, just realizing that… realizing that I was a different person…the person that left a year before, that person is gone…just a grounding, a grounding." Moreover, he described helping others as helping him reintegrate upon his return, describing a time when he was invited to share a "message" at a local rehab that was a hopeful experience

for him. "You know, I got to be a part of either the seed planting or the watering process…to help people find a wholeness…" He stated that he learned how to play guitar while deployed and still strummed it upon return for a sense of comfort – "sometimes it's just comforting just to strum." Reverend also identified his faith and spirituality practices, as well as his religious community as being helpful and supportive for him upon his return. Similarly, he identified praise and worship, religious music and helping and volunteering his time to help at his church as positive experiences during reintegration.

Participant #3

Jeff was a 44-year-old self-identified European-Native American married male, who had served in the U.S. Air Force for 10 years and is currently a Chaplain Captain. Jeff identified his religion as Judeo-Christianity and indicated that he practices both religion and spirituality "several times a day." When asked to describe his job functions, Jeff indicated that his job includes: meeting people's religious needs and accommodations, planning and executing programs including a holistic approach to meeting the spiritual needs of all, localized training with his unit that includes physical fitness, rucking (placing 40-50 pounds of military gear into a backpack and carrying it on a brisk hike), local training (such as air trainings and land navigation courses), and that his primary mission was to provide religious assets and accommodations (to provide for the free exercise of religion for all people).

When asked to define religion, Jeff stated, "Religion is practices or beliefs that link or bind you to God." In the same way, when asked to define spirituality, Jeff stated, "God and religion and things that bind you and bring honor and glory to God." Additionally, he indicated that spirituality is a vertical relationship to God and the

universe. He added that it is "not positive psychology, nor is it only a horizontal relationship; but we must fall in a vertical relationship with God and the universe." When asked if spirituality and religion are synonymous or separate for him, Jeff replied that the two are separate. He went on to describe how he experienced the two as being different by indicating that religion involved acts – sacraments, and things that he found in the instruction manual (the Bible), and the things that linked his being to the vertical God of the universe. He indicated that spirituality included specific prayers, devotions, and other religious acts that linked him to the God of the universe.

Jeff returned from his deployment and depicted little difficulty with reintegration. Jeff stated that, although his deployments were typically shorter, he deployed often, this being his third deployment in the last two years. He indicated that this was his eighth deployment with previous deployments having proved more difficult to return from than this one. His reintegration process included spending time working on home projects, spending time with family "on the beach," and getting back into "family devotions, with the children." Jeff described being intentional about his time with his family and friends. He stated, "…just catching up with friends who are getting ready to deploy."

Jeff also indicated that his previous experiences were useful in helping him prepare for overcoming any reintegration difficulties he might have faced. He stated, "So, pretty, pretty common to come back, you know, to family kind of already dealing with those expectations and those challenges." He went on to state, "…we don't have any reintegration challenges." Jeff identified "the hobbies of a dad" that prevented him from experiencing reintegration challenges, such as learning languages with his children, listening to them read at night, playing board games, and exercising together. Moreover,

Jeff described the ways in which he was intentional about keeping work life and family life separate so that his time with his family was focused on only the family. He described his feeling this way,

> Uh, I do work a 24/7 schedule so obviously, if the phone rings, I've got to pick it up, but that doesn't mean I've got to uh, you know bring things that happened at 10 am home at 1700…you know, you invest in these things [family] and a lot of those things [work] just kind of disappear.

Additionally, Jeff indicated that keeping his expectations manageable was useful in helping him reintegrate smoothly. He stated,

> Again, you know, I don't have high expectations. We've been doing this enough that we know that, let's just take for example Afghanistan. When I leave Afghanistan, I'm not going to be home in 2 days. I'm not even hoping for that. You know, so it's the same thing when it comes close to a birthday or comes close to an anniversary or to a special moment, you just have to realize, you're probably not going to make it. Don't' get your hopes up. I mean, always under-project versus over-project…there's just so much beyond your control don't let it affect your happiness and joy.

Jeff's perspective of intentionality helped him reintegrate with little difficulty, as indicated in his statement,

> …like not thinking I'm coming back to a vacation. I'm coming back to alleviate a mom whose been working all day, every day. And she's tired of nighttime routine, or not tired of it, but there's just been no sharing of responsibilities. So again, it's the way you phrase that right. If you phrase it to say, I get to learn, I get to enjoy, I

get to teach them, I get to shape these little minds. Then, it's actually it's what I

want to come back to.

Other things that helped him reintegrate easily were taking time to talk to others

and get to know them and their stories. Jeff also stated that he enjoyed reading about

culture, ethnicity and leaning about and experiencing diversity through conversations and

community with others as well as reading and studying. Moreover, he shared that

exercise was a helpful part of his life. Jeff identified spiritual and religious practices as

being helpful as well, such as reading devotions, engaging in Bible studies, prayer,

apologetics, singing with groups, and corporate worship.

Participant #4

Michael was a 26-year-old self-identified Italian, White, single male, who has

served in the U.S. Air Force for one year and nine months. Michael was a Senior Airman

of religious affairs and identified as engaging in religious practices one or two times per

week and spiritual practices four or more times per week. Michael identified as an

Independent Baptist, practicing protestant Christianity. When asked to describe some of

his job functions, Michael responded that his job was to support chaplains, helping with

religious accommodations, holding confidentiality, helping with running the "white

ropes" program, acting as a card holder, carrying out administrative duties, providing unit

engagement and crisis intervention.

Michael defined religion as "believing in a higher power" and "having a

relationship with Jesus." He defined spirituality as "taking care of your soul." He stated

that religion and spirituality are different for him. He stated that religion was more of a

"personal relationship" that included a "group of people." Additionally, he stated, "[In] One you can see – religion. And, [In] one you can't see – spirituality (inner peace)."

During our interview about his reintegration experiences, Michael also did not identify reintegration as a struggle. Michael's return was full of mostly positive experiences and only a couple of difficult ones. As he described his experiences, he first stated, "And then, getting back to the states was, I didn't have any problems. It just felt normal again. Felt nice to see grass. That was my favorite part! Seeing grass was awesome!" Michael also stated that he spent his reintegration time, spending time at home, playing video games, playing basketball (before COVID-19 hit), working out, and going out to eat food. Each of these experiences helped reintegration go smoothly for Michael.

Michael stated that the hardest part of reintegration for him was losing a friend with whom he was close prior to his deployment. He stated,

It felt weird after six months and I'm like, hey, I'm back and they kinda just adjust to life without you. And you're like, 'Oh, ok.' Like one of my friends I used to hang out with all the time, I don't hang out with him anymore because we just grew apart during my deployment. So that's probably the hardest part for me.

On the other hand, through using social media outlets to remain connected, Michael believed that his friendships grew closer while he was deployed. Michael said, "I'd say I got close to my one friend through all of it [deployment]. I'm living with him now." Michael also identified some struggles when he returned to work. Michael changed job descriptions post-deployment. He stated that getting back into the pace of his work and returning to a new role at work was difficult. "And, coming back to work, it was like I

didn't really know what to do because I really didn't get any clear guidance. So, I was kind of confused on what to do when I came back." On the other hand, he described being accepted well by his team with many familiar faces which was helpful for him. When asked what helped him acclimate to his new role, he laughed and stated, "COVID…cause then I got a new like duty/role through that, which you know helped out a lot!"

Connecting with his family was also helpful for Michael, "… I'll call them, and you know, after I call them, I feel really good, you know feel happy. I usually don't call people when I'm annoyed or bothered. I just let myself sulk" (light humor). Alone time and taking time out for himself was also useful for him. Michael reported, "You know, it was nice to have alone time. Because you are living with someone, you're just always with people. And then you just get back to your own place and you're just like 'Ahhh, peace and quiet.'" Michael also identified his faith practices, religion, and spirituality as being helpful for him. Such things as praying, reading the Bible and going to church were helpful for him. He also indicated that he had a daily routine in which he read the Bible or spiritual books. Overall, reintegration was not difficult for him and religious and spiritual practices were useful for him. To sum up his experiences, he stated,

> I found it, kind of, it didn't seem too hard for me. I had everything I needed on
>
> my deployment. And so, back home, I felt more luxurious when I got back. I was
>
> like, 'Wow, this is great! Like, I've got all of these amenities now!'

Participant #5

Bradley was a 51-year-old identified married, White male, who had served in the U.S. Air Force for 21 years. Bradley was a Lieutenant Colonel, acting as a Deputy

Command Chaplain. Bradley indicated that he engaged in religious and spiritual practices on a daily basis. His identified faith group was the Southern Baptist Convention, practicing protestant Christianity. When asked to describe some of his job functions, he outlined the following: organize and resource chaplain corps assets across the theatre of operations, validate training requirements and develop military partner engagements with allied nations, and to provide for the spiritual and religious needs of the members and their families within his command.

Bradley defined religion as "a set of beliefs that govern the ways we think and act." For him, this "usually involves aspects of faith and belief." He defined spirituality as, "The idea and understanding that there is something bigger and outside of us as individuals that we are a part of that moves us and motivates us to action." When asked if religion and spirituality are the same or separate for him, he replied that they are "difficult to separate and closely aligned." He went on to state that spiritual could be separate when it was apart from faith. In other words, people could be spiritual without faith, but he had difficulty separating the two for himself.

Bradley identified as both a chaplain, as well as a clinically trained pastoral counselor. When describing his views about life, faith, and how he viewed counseling and religion in his own life, he indicated that he had difficulty separating his faith from his counseling or his own deeply spiritual and religious being. He stated,

It means that I don't wear a cross on my uniform [chaplains wear the cross on their uniform] just because I think it looks nice. The way in which I understand the world, the way in which I structure my behavior, my thoughts, my worldview, based on evangelical Christian teaching from the scriptures you know of the Old

and New Testaments, and the counsel and advice and guidance and direction that

you will receive from me flows out of that foundational perspective of life.

And again, later, he stated,

So, I can't necessarily in my mind, divorce my person and being from my faith

and my religion because it infuses every aspect of the way in which I think, the

way in which I see the world, my worldview and the way I respond and react to

situations, people, events, crises, and success.

During our interview, Bradley shared about his reintegration experiences which

he identified as "relatively a smooth transition." He described the experience this way,

"… the personal piece is… a lot of personal prayer and meditation and conversations

with friends," including before the deployment, during the deployment and upon return

from deployment. Bradley identified having a "strong connectivity" to family through

their continued faith practices while deployed, which allowed the deployment

reintegration to be easier for him. He also stated that, upon return, he spent some

intentional time connecting with his wife and children. Later in the interview he reiterated

this point,

Um, yeah for me a lot of my life revolves around my faith, my church community

and my family. But, we have 12 children so um, only 7 still live at home. But you

know we got grandchildren in the area and stuff like that. So, that is high priority

for me is my family and uh, so if there's not really any activities to connect with

outside of my friend group, my church and my family, I'm okay with that.

Therefore, intentionality about spending time engaging in faith and family was important

for him.

Bradley identified returning to a PCS, like Angie and Reverend. However, after coming home, he learned that his family would not be able to accompany him on his move. Therefore, he had two months with his family before leaving again on a remote two-year tour (i.e. a new duty station by himself in which he would work for two years before returning to his family). He stated, "So that reintegration time became much more, um focused for us as we not only took time to get back together and reconnect post-deployment, but in anticipation of another long separation."

Bradley stated that his return was not particularly difficult as this was his third time returning from an active combat zone and his fourth deployment. He indicated, "… I wouldn't call any aspect of it difficult, actually. There wasn't like, there wasn't any real anxiety or concerns or fears or issues that I was coming home to except for the whole process of moving." He also mentioned an element of keeping his expectations reasonable, like Jeff. Bradley was well-versed in expectation management as he provides briefings the topic. He said, "A lot of stress and anxiety, I feel, comes from unmet and unreliable expectations. And, I'm not saying I keep my expectations low. But, I know that my expectations are my expectations and they are not necessarily reality." This was a coping tool that had been useful in dealing with struggles in life, including reintegration stressors.

Because variations of communication came up during other interviews, I asked Bradley about the importance of communication for him. He responded,

> Well, yeah, yeah ok. That is very much the tenant/ aspect and um, I guess I didn't
> necessarily consider that because, I didn't have poor communication. We had
> really good communication throughout. So yeah that makes it smoother

obviously. Causes a lot less problems when you can communicate with each

other.

Additionally, similar to Angie, Bradley mentioned that not rushing was important for a

smooth reintegration experience. He stated,

Uh, not uh, not rushing, not rushing. But, taking a measured approach in

reconnecting is important. We have a tendency to be impatient and to forget that

you're not entering back in the same space as you left - you know your work or

calling or family or whatever - and so just be patient. Not to push - take that

measured and steady approach to reconnect.

Like Angie, Bradley also identified the importance of recognizing that children had

changed and developed and he stated,

…remember that finding creative ways to reconnect is important because not

everybody reconnects in the same ways. And, even with children as they grow in

change - even in 6 months to a year time frame, depends on how long you were

gone - the way in which you connected with your children prior to that might not

be the same, just because they have gotten older there's some development that

has happened you know cognitively, physically, all of those things.

Participant #6

Greg was a 46-year-old self-identified White male, who was separated and getting

divorced from his partner and had served in the U.S. Air Force for 13 years. Greg

identified as a Unitarian Universalist who engaged in religious and spiritual practices

three to four times weekly. His title in the military was Military Judge. He described his

job functions as presiding over court martial, judging and sentencing individuals accused

of crimes, and managing court martials when the accused wished to have members be their jurors.

When asked to define religion, Greg stated that religion was a "personal experience between the individual and the individual's higher power." When asked to define spirituality, he responded, "I don't know if I have a good definition of spirituality." He also indicated that the two are different for him but did not provide any additional details for how they were different.

During our interview, Greg indicated that his post-deployment reintegration was difficult because he had difficulty driving, as well as returning to a sick daughter. He went on to talk more about his daughter,

> Ah, honestly my biggest struggle is that my youngest daughter who…has a lot of medical complications and because of that, she is taking pain medication and it has changed a little bit of her personality. So, dealing with her, on a one-on-one, face to face, I'm not gone so therefore you know everything has to be great when she talks to me. Instead she can be real, you know that's been, that's honestly been my most difficult struggle, is being there for her but at the same time dealing with the new her. And trying to help her um just deal with life.

Greg described his daughter as having various and concerning medical issues. Later in the interview he divulged, "I grieve for her…you know she's been dealing with the sickness for 4 years and you just throw everything else on top of it [graduating and birthdays during COVID]. And, you know she can't seem to catch a break." On the other hand, Greg mentioned that good times with his daughter were encouraging for him. He recounted an occasion when they were able to play ball together,

So my daughter and I went out into - we actually have 5 acres and we went out to

the field and she wanted to hit the tennis ball with a baseball bat and we had a

blast and did that, and that was great. You know, just spending that time with her

whenever she felt well enough to do it was great.

Although Greg and his wife were separated and moving toward a divorce, Greg

felt encouraged by the way she supported their daughter while he was gone, which he

identified as being helpful for him.

So, yeah, so literally my soon-to-be ex and her travelled - about 2 weeks ago now

- to get her a service dog. And honestly, it has been night and day difference since

then. So, I mean it's been a huge lifesaver.

And again, later he mentioned her help,

You know, what's made it easier honestly is my soon-to-be ex and just being able

to rely on her when I did and, you know, and honestly a lot of empathy for her of

dealing with our daughter for the past year.

Therefore, Greg's family dynamics were both a source of difficulty and of strength upon

returning from deployment.

Greg had returned from deployment so recently that he had not yet gone back

to work as usual, due to the COVID-19 and upcoming training. Like some other

participants, he returned to quarantine measures for two weeks. He then, left for a

Temporary Duty (TDY) location to gain some training for his new position as Military

Judge. His classes were virtual, rather than the typical face-to-face classes. Greg stated,

"So, honestly the course has been good. It's been a lot of work. It's been you know

intense at times… I would say what made it easier, honestly, is the fact that I did have this TDY coming up."

Therefore, according to Greg, the TDY and work-related learning made reintegration easier for him.

Greg also indicated that his return home into familiarity with his dog made reintegration easier. "And then just being home you know and being in a familiar location was nice. Um, being with my dog was wonderful!" Greg's boxer/mastiff mix helped him feel "unconditional love" upon his return. "Absolutely, yeah! Dogs don't judge you. And honestly has little expectations." Greg also mentioned spending time connecting with friends as being helpful.

> "Um, you know one of, one of the things that has helped me is so one of my best friends lives in California, and whenever I was deployed, it was hard to talk to him because of the time zone difference. And now, with it being much less, being able to talk to him on a more regular basis has been very nice.

Additionally, Greg identified religious and spiritual practices, such as prayer and devotional reading as being useful during his reintegration. Prayer had been particularly useful for Greg when thinking about his struggles with his sick daughter.

Participant #7

Carli was a 39-year-old, married self-identified White female, who had served in the U.S. Air Force for 17 years. Her position at the time of the interview was a Senior Master Sergeant. Carli indicated that she went to a non-denominational Baptist Church. Carli had returned from her eighth deployment. She stated that she did not engage in religious practices but also stated that she had been attending church services at a local

church. She did, however, identify as engaging in spiritual practices daily. Carli described the following as her job functions: squadron superintendent, mentor, making sure that young officers and airmen know their position and how to get there, and being available so that she could help people.

Carli defined religion as the "organization that you put your faith into rather than your independent thought." She also stated that religion was "whatever you put your faith in that gives you motivation to reach your purpose." Carli defined spirituality as "The supreme power, whatever it might be that drives your purpose." She included in this the idea of independent thought. Carli saw religion and spirituality as different for herself, which was clear in the definitions she provided.

When learning about what was difficult for Carli during reintegration, she indicated that the logistics of her return were difficult because it took her a full five days to reunite with family. Upon reuniting, Carli was met with a new home and a new neighborhood, because her husband and two children had moved across town while she was deployed. She stated,

> So, it was kind of a crazy way to come home, because I was coming home to - it took me a long time to get home. And then I came back to a place that I had never been before. In, in a section of town that I had never been. So, we moved to a completely different section of town and so it was it was really kind of a crazy reintegration as far as coming home and trying to rejoin my family.

Carli indicated that the new house was both a joyful experience, as well as a place where she did not quite feel at home in the beginning. This was indicated in her statement,

So the reason we moved was to be in a younger community with people who had kids. And I came home and the girls had, they already had friends on the block. So, I was overwhelmed with the joy of seeing them play with people that weren't me and my husband. But, everything was moved in. I didn't get to choose where the couch went or the plates went in the kitchen. That was all done and I was very, very grateful, but it was all done by my mother in law. So, it just, it felt like I was moving in to someone else's house and not into my own if that makes sense.

Her children also caused her some distress upon return. She described that this way,

So, they had a really, really hard time with me being gone…the older one had behavioral issues when I got home because she didn't know if I would be leaving again, very clingy…she had a hard time realizing that she now had to listen to me, cuz I wasn't through a phone…You have to find that balance. You can't go in guns blazing and discipline them, cuz then they're like you need to go away again, life was easier when you weren't here, I didn't have to have this discipline…And my little one she was 3…I couldn't leave her sight if I went to the bathroom, she would look around wondering if I was gone. So, it was it was really hard. It was very, very sad and it took, it took a while. And it was very hard on me, cuz I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't do anything without them around. So, part of you misses that being able to wake up, go to work and go to the gym and do your daily routine that you do on your deployment without having the needs of little people and big people - my husband needed my attention as well. And, um

so it was very complicated and emotional…something that I had to focus a lot of energy on and finding a balance and finding my place in the home again.

Carli also discussed the difficulties of returning from deployment, facing an unexpected PCS upon return. She said, "I thought we were going to be here, at least for another year and a half or so, and then we found out 5 months after I got back from deployment that we were PCSing." At the time of the interview, Carli and her family were still preparing for PCSing, had successfully rented their house out, and were living in a camper on base until her last day of work.

Furthermore, Carli identified problems reintegrating with her spouse. Even though there were struggles, she indicated that they were able to overcome their struggles and formed a stronger bond. When discussing her hardships reintegrating with her spouse, she stated,

Um, very difficult - almost overwhelming…we had a couple months where we didn't know if we were going to make it through - because of the 'I need some of your attention too,' um, type mentality and I was being pulled in what I felt as being multiple directions…he and I struggled a lot and... I'm very grateful that we made it through, cuz we are stronger now that I think that we've ever been. But it was very, very hard and sometimes you didn't see the end of it - you didn't see the light at the end. But, we found it and we held hands and made it there.

Work reintegration was both a struggle and something that felt validating for Carli. When discussing how work was validating, she stated,

And, I came back and it was, it was amazing because of everybody's reaction. Like when people respect you to the point where they nearly had a physical, they

had a physical collapse - reactions like, (gasping) 'You're here!' You know the,

it's … (struggling for words), it was very emotional. Cuz, it was awesome to be

loved like that.

Carli described the difficult emotions and processes of reintegrating into work as follows,

"I felt that first day I was dizzy. I felt like I got hit upside the head with a 2x4,

honestly…I couldn't focus because it was so much all at once… and you have the

people who are like 'here are all my problems'…I wasn't able to ease back into

work. I was hit in the face with a firehose.

Carli, then, found a way to deal healthily with her work reintegration stressors.

Then, after I got back up from being knocked over like that, I was able to take

small bites. It was like, 'Okay, I can't process everything at once.' So, I stepped

back a little bit and…put myself in receive mode instead of action mode. And me

changing my focal point made it easier to digest and actually do - be a

contributing member or a contributing leader…from 'I need to take action and fix

this right now' to 'okay, let me receive all the information let me digest it and

figure out exactly how to go forward from there.'

After that, work felt more manageable and she was able to focus on her family and

relationship with her husband.

Carli identified her new neighborhood, "amazing friends" who watched her

children while she and her husband went on dates, watching her children play with

friends, and attending a local church within their new home community as being helpful

for her during reintegration. She also identified spirituality as a very important part of her

overcoming reintegration difficulties. Additionally, her daily yoga practices became a

source of healing for her marriage, because she and her husband attended yoga classes together. Her spiritual yoga practices were also a way to help her challenge her body and refocus her mind on what was important to her. She described her feelings this way,

It gives me the physical challenge…the message that the instructors put into your head while you're doing poses are very mindful…and insightful. It, it's I swear that it's like they're almost living in my head sometimes, because they'll say something and it's like I, that's exactly what I've been struggling with and I haven't been able to find a perspective that makes any sense to me. And, they tap into something that opens my mind…you know, there's all of these different struggles that you are facing but you are still able to hold, which is life - You're still able to maintain whatever pose you're in and just be present in the moment and I think that's my biggest thing in life in general is that I'm always fighting to just be present in the moment...so, yoga teaches me to be present in the moment…stop and be present in the moment right now.

The last difficulty this participant shared was her grief from leaving the relationships she made while on deployment behind. Carli mourned the loss of close friends she had made while on deployment. She shared her feelings in the following words,

I knew my people and I was really, really close with them and it made it very difficult to leave. Because, you've built these awesome unbreakable relationships. So, you come home and it's different and you don't have those relationships and you try to maintain 'em because they're from all over the world. So, it's not like you come home together. You leave the people that you've built these, um

relationships with and you try to maintain those friendships and relationships that

you've built…but, it's almost like a break-up when you leave. So, that part was

hard too.

Carli went on to acknowledge her friendships at home but shared that they did not feel

quite as close as the bonds she made while deployed.

Emerged Themes

Upon completion of all semi-structured interviews, I transcribed each

participant's statements. I then invited each participant to listen to their audio recorded

interview or read their transcript prior to analyzing the data. Each participant declined to

listen to their audio recording or read their transcript. I then set up meetings for member

checking to confirm the accuracy of the content of the results of the study. While several

themes emerged that were unrelated to religion and spirituality, some themes emerged

supporting the use of religion and spirituality during post-deployment reintegration

experiences. My study sought to answer the research question: What are the lived

experiences of veterans' use of religion and spirituality during post-deployment

reintegration? The major themes that addressed this question are presented here. It is

important to note that an overall theme that had the most effect on the reintegration of the

participants was family. Every participant indicated that family played a significant role

during the reintegration process whether the family was present upon the return of the

participant or not. The overall themes for this study included: Family, Prayer,

Connection, Spiritual/Religious Reading, Faith, Spiritual Practices, and Corporate
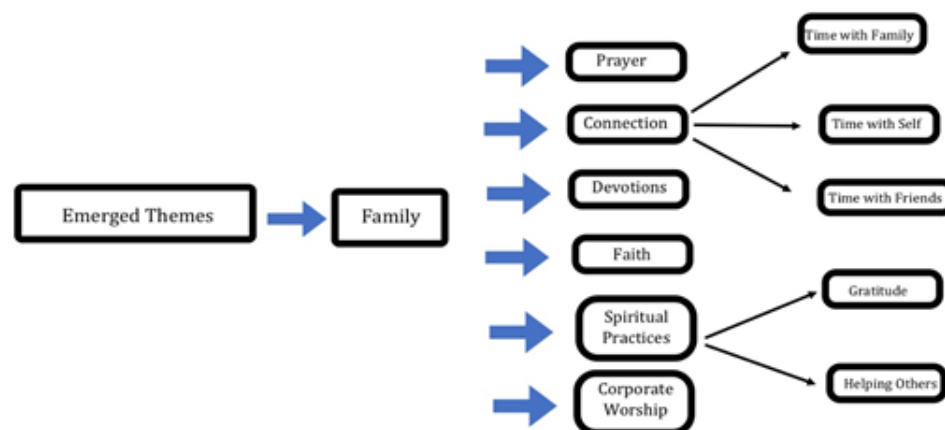
Worship.

Figure 1 *Emerging Themes and Subthemes*

Family

A major overarching theme among all of the participants was family. Five of the participants placed great value on the role that family members played in their reintegration experiences, while two others mentioned family only briefly. However, each participant mentioned family at least once in their responses to the interview questions. Furthermore, for four of the participants, returning to family life was at least somewhat difficult. On the other hand, three of the participants indicated that reintegration with family was a source of strength and coping. For three of the participants, there was an element of both strength and struggle as they recounted their experiences reintegrating with family. Therefore, family served as a dynamic theme, serving multiple and varied purposes for the participants.

For Angie, Carli, and Greg, family struggles were present. Angie described reintegrating with her daughter in this way

…but then also coming back and realizing that things are not the same as they were before when you left…I have a ten year old daughter…one of the things

coming back [I] was trying to figure out how to be a mom again…one of the things she said to me was…I don't feel like you're my mom anymore. And so I said, "Ok, let's talk about it. Let's process it. Let's see how we can navigate this together…"

In the end, Angie and her daughter were able to sort out their struggles and their relationship grew stronger. In the same way, Carli, her husband, and her children all had difficulty returning to life as usual post-deployment. She shared that her children were having some behavioral and attachment issues, as was her husband. She felt pulled in multiple directions until she was able to find sources of coping to help her ground. She reported that yoga served as a source of connection for her and her husband as well as intentional time together. She stated, "We had a couple months where we didn't know if we were going to make it through… I'm very grateful that we made it through cuz we are stronger now than I think that we've ever been." Greg also shared about his struggles reintegrating with his daughter and recounted positive feelings toward his soon-to-be-ex spouse for her role in supporting their daughter while he was away. He also disclosed a fond memory of playing with his daughter and building up their relationship upon his return. So, although family struggles were present, the overcoming of these struggles brought the participants closer to their family members and helped them form stronger bonds.

For Bradley and Jeff, family served as a major source of connection and coping. An integral part of their reintegration experience was the joys of reconnecting with their families. Jeff reported

But you know I spent some time, you know just uh, with the family on the beach.

Got back into family devotions, uh, with the children. Always tried to make sure

that uh, we spend some time together every night. Been very intentional about

having a strong family…we have simplistic fun, we like learning vocabulary

words from different languages, we play board games, we exercise quite a bit. I

try to hear them read at least 2 chapters of a book every night.

Jeff went on sharing other ways he is intentional about spending time with his family and

wife, which was an important aspect of Jeff's reintegration coping. Bradley shared about

his family in a similar fashion, indicating the importance of spending intentional time

together and being. Bradley shared, "So, although physically absent, not necessarily

absent from the family life… spent some time individually with was just my wife and I

and spent some time together individually with the children." Michael also mentioned his

family as being supportive upon his return, as well as during his deployment. While

family was important to him, he stated that he lived several hours away from them. He

did, however express contentment when connecting with his family long-distance.

Reverend also mentioned elements of family life in his reintegration experience

disclosing that his wife tried to be helpful and understanding upon his return from

deployment and sharing some brief experiences returning to parenthood. Overall, all

participants faced various familial experiences. Yet, for all the participants, once family

relationship stressors got solved, there was also an element of family unity that helped

them cope draw closer to one another during reintegration changes.

Prayer

For all seven participants, prayer was an integral part of their reintegration. For four participants, prayer helped them cope with difficulties they faced upon reintegration, such as coping with family illnesses in Greg's case or dealing with spousal relationships as in Carli's case, or a continued ritual of a daily routine that incorporated prayer to keep in touch with one's self and/or higher power. Greg described his use of prayer in this way,

> Oh, absolutely. My daughter is, you know, she's definitely made it so I've reached out….it's my personal relationship with my higher power and so generally my prayer… it just depends on you know what kind of um, emotional state I'm in at the time. But, generally, it is just if I'm not having a hard day then I'm generally asking for my Higher Power to look out for those that I care about. If I'm having a hard day, I'm asking for something specific which is, please look over my daughter. Please help her. Please, help me be the best father that I can be, you know and communicate well with her [his daughter]. And connect…you know, part of it is an unburdening - realizing that I don't' have to go at it alone. Part of it is a just feeling like somebody has my back."

Jeff described prayer in this way,

> Yeah, prayer is probably the easiest one for me to easily identify. Absolute prayer. And that's just not like my morning prayers or my nightly prayers. Even daily prayers. It's not always asking for something - not always necessarily thanking God for something. For me sometimes it's just acknowledging beauty in creation, beauty around you. Other people's challenges, you know, going back to

thankfulness for where you're at in life. I find myself talking to God, quite a bit

actually um, you know and it keeps me humble. It keeps me meek…

Reverend describe his prayers as a regular time to meet with his Higher Power. He

shared about prayer in this way,

Well, I mean it's having a, a regular touch point every day. Just, take the quiet

time, because even in the, even though sometimes there's uh rocket attacks

happening, there not always happening. And, so, finding those peaceful moments

and praying or reading the Bible or writing a song or something like that."

For Carli, prayer was not connected as strongly with a particular deity but was more

deeply rooted in her spirituality and personal growth practices. She described prayer like

this,

I think that, at least for me, if I'm dealing with something whether it's a past

mistake that you are actually beating yourself up about and have not forgiven

yourself for. Or, you are having a frustration with your children's behavior at the

moment. Or, your husband's needing this, or whatever the case is, um, I think

when you sit down, stop everything and take the time to actually acknowledge it

and for me I'm able to acknowledge it, um more honestly with myself if I say it

out loud. So, um, sometimes it's not the typical um, prayer style. It's just me

talking, actually hearing myself say it - cuz sometimes when I hear myself say it,

I'm like what are you talking about? (laughing) That makes no sense. You know

like, you are the adult they are the child, they're supposed to be acting like this.

And you're not supposed to be reacting like that. So, sometimes it's just me

saying it out loud and for me to be honest with what is going on and come to a

solution on how to proceed.

Connection

The importance of social interest was a theme that emerged during the interviews. Social interest manifested through participants having a self and community feeling and interest. Connecting with self, others, friends, and family provided life with meaning for all seven of the participants. The result was three sub-themes: Intentional time with family, Intentional Time with Self, and Intentional Time with Friends.

Intentional Time with Family

All seven participants identified with spending intentional time with family. This was consistent with the overall theme of family as identified by all seven participants. For three participants, this intentionality came with focus on repairing relationships. For the other four participants, intentional family time was a focus void of any relationship rifts.

When Angie returned to a difficult relationship with her daughter, she spent intentional time with her daughter trying to connect and make reparations. She described,

Yes, I think that just sitting down talking about it and…I think discussing it - my

daughter does not like to talk about like her emotions, and she's very closed. And

she tends to try to avoid anything that makes her feel anything…she's very

surface. So, I … started slowly, like, 'Okay, we have to talk about this, you have

to tell me when you have feelings or when you, when something doesn't feel right

to you, you have to confront it, you can't just let it sit there.'"

In the same way, Carli spent intentional time with her spouse to strengthen their relationship and deepen their connection. She stated, "Even though … you feel guilty

doing it, cuz you just got home and now you're leaving your kids with somebody else. Um, you still have to take time for you and your spouse."

Those who kept a strong connection to family while deployed, like Jeff and Bradley, also identified family connection as important upon return. Jeff stated his thoughts this way, "But you know I spent some time…with the family on the beach. Got back into family devotions with the children. Always tried to make sure that…we spend some time together every night." Bradley also shared his thoughts,

> Being a family of strong faith, Christian, and practice…there was a lot
> of…connectivity between home and the deployed location while I was gone. So,
> although physically absent, not necessarily absent from the family life. Current
> technology makes that an easy aspect… you know… [I] spent some time
> individually with… just my wife and I and spent some time together with children
> and individually with the children.

In the same way, other participants shared stories of their reintegration experiences and intentionally connecting with family as important part of a smooth reintegration.

Intentional Time with Self

Because spirituality encompasses spending time with oneself and inner reflection, intentional time with self was a theme that emerged for all seven participants. Each participant engaged in self-care activities that involved both others and self. Intentional self-time looked differently for all participants but was a crucial aspect for understanding their experiences of spirituality upon return from deployment.

For example, Carli made a connection to yoga, her spirituality, as well as her self-focused time. Carli pointed out,

Through yoga and my spirituality, I have been able to mindfully focus inward

instead of focusing my energy outward all the time. So, I would meditate and

um, focus on myself and my emotions just everything that was going on within

me and how I could control it better and be a better mom and be a better wife

and be a better me. Cuz my fuse was short and um, I was getting irritable with

the reintegration…I would take time for me and meditate and do yoga and work

out and come back and try to re-attack.

While different than Carli, yet equally validating and helpful, Reverend described

his self-focused time in this way,

I keep going and reading. Taking time to just…to be apart from the world… I did

that throughout the whole deployment… I think…that perhaps had I not done that

through the whole deployment, maybe it would have been a bit tougher. But um,

you know I would say that that's the one thing that that helped me with the

reintegration process before you have to uh, reintegrate…You know, it's uh, it's I

guess…preventative therapy if you will. As opposed to, uh, reactionary or uh,

crisis management.

Even still different from the shared quotes above, Michael, as the only participant

who identified as a single male with no dependents, described his alone time like this,

I don't know if I did but eh, yea it's nice to have alone time. I'll say that…You

know it was nice to have alone time. Because, you are living with someone,

you're just always with people. And then you just get back to your own place and

you're just like, "Ahhhh, peace and quiet…" Um, I like to music is nice. Music

helps me be productive. Um, like video games. I like to play them and they, you

know, put me at ease. Um, what else? Playing basketball, That's fun. That helps

me too.

Therefore, although the experiences of taking intentional time for self was different for

each participant, self-time was an important aspect of healthy reintegration and

connecting to oneself for this population sample.

Intentional Time with Friends

In the same way that the participants spent intentional time with family and self,

six of the seven participants identified that time with friends was helpful in their

reintegration. Connection to someone outside of themselves and their families played an

important role in a smooth reintegration process.

Greg shared on two different occasions during the interview about time he spent

with friends that was both intentional and helpful. His first description was,

Well, it wasn't really a behavior but one of the things I did that after I was done

with the quarantine was one of my friends that lives near me, he and I went and

played golf. So, you know having that, while it was okay to play golf and it was

hot and the golf game was horrible, it was more about the closeness of the

friendship and being able to see someone I had not seen in a long time. And, uh,

you know having a one on one conversation with a friend. So, that was definitely

something.

Then, again, later in our conversation, he recalled another helpful friend connection,

Um, you know one of, one of the things that has helped me is so one of my best

friends lives in California, and whenever I was deployed, it was hard to talk to

him because of the time zone difference. And now, with it being much less, being

able to talk to him on a more regular basis has been very nice.

Reverend also identified the importance of connecting with friends on more than

one occurrence during our interview, "And so, I called him up and let him know I was in

town. And uh, he and his family uh, took me out to dinner. And so…I remember that.

That was, that was nice…" Later in the conversation, he stated,

I let folks know, from the church, that I was back in town for just a few days and

they wanted to take me out to dinner because they didn't get to take me out to

dinner before I deployed and so I said, sure.

Michael and Carli also indicated the importance of friendships upon their return

from deployment. Michael recalled,

Um, you know, it's hard for them to shift when you have social media and stuff

now days. I can just contact them whenever I want. So, that was pretty easy so we

kind of kept in contact. But, I'd say I got close to my one friend through all of it.

I'm living with him now.

Carli spoke of her new community friends fondly during our interview on more

than one occasion.

Um, the new neighborhood. The watching my kids play with other kids on the

block was, was big for me. The friends, the amazing friends that we have that

would take the girls so my husband and I could have a date night.

Again, intentional time with friends occurred differently for each of the six participants,

yet each of them found connecting with others, things outside of themselves, as helpful

and necessary for reintegration.

Spiritual/Religious Reading (Devotions)

All seven of the participants shared about daily reading that helped them cope with life. Some of the individuals made reading a daily part of their routine, while others searched for sacred texts and spiritual mantras to support different life circumstances. For all participants, reading was a way to connect them more deeply with their spiritual self as well as with their Higher Power and religion.

Angie was a participant who both relied on her religious scripture, the Bible, as well as technology search engines to help her in her study time. She described, "For me…when it comes to faith, I'm pretty set for myself - like I read my Bible, like I do the things you know, that I feel like make me stronger in my faith." And again,

> I mean besides the Bible. Um, whenever I come across something and I'm not
>
> sure, I'll, put it in Google and I'll find a reference in the Bible and I'll go back
>
> and I'll look. You know, for example, one of the things that I deal with is anxiety.
>
> So, if something comes up and I feel like I'm not sure how, how to respond to it,
>
> I'll just type something in Google and then it will give me a reference and
>
> sometimes that brings more clarity - like, 'Oh, okay this makes sense…that's
>
> pretty much what I do. (laughing)

Michael made daily time to read the Bible, including it in his morning routine. He stated,

> Um, it kind of helps me realize - sometimes you forget things, like how you're
>
> supposed to act, how you're supposed to treat people, respond to people, how
>
> you're supposed to do things and then you read the Bible, you know a verse and
>
> you're like 'Oh, I need to do that.' Just helps you get your world view back on
>
> track.

Bradley also shared a strong viewpoint on his use of Biblical scriptures for daily living. He shared,

> Uh, my scriptural understanding of the sovereignty of God over all things and that while many people in this world make a distinction between secular and sacred, I do not see that as clearly. It's that everything exists inside of God and God is sovereign over all things. Every aspect of life is in a sense a sacred moment and we live and move and breathe and have our being in God and we live and exist for the chief end of man which is to glorify God and to live forever. So, in whatever I do, whether I eat or drink, I do it all for the glory of God. So, yes, the scriptures inform all of that because if you are familiar with the Christian scriptures, you hear a lot of that in what I just said. Uh, so yes, the scriptures are the foundation which guides us in right living before God and man. So, my conviction of the sovereignty of God is in the inherency of scripture.

Jeff described his devotional reading in this way,

> Yeah, And, I mean, for me I would call that devotions. Some people might just call it sitting down with a good book. But for me, it's like, 'okay what am I going to focus my mind on today?' Typically, mine are always in the morning. Um doesn't have to be and, you know, I typically, I always carry a book with me. Kind of a practice I've had for 20 years…definitely intentional about like what I set my mind on when I get up in the morning or throughout other parts of the day. For me, it's always a devotion. I'm always trying to learn, see, expand, so again, for me typically, it's in some form of theology something like that, you know I

enjoy books on theology…you know it's one of those things I kind of carry with

me everywhere I go.

Carli described devotional reading in this way,

I do like devotionals. I wish I…I took the time to read scripture, but I don't. But, I

do like the, the devotional pamphlets - most of them come in like little pamphlets.

Or, if I'm feeling a certain way, I Google it and um, get mindful and it's not

necessarily devotionals that are pulled out of the scripture either…some amazing

things just to get your mind going in the right direction. So for me it's just about

getting my mind going in a positive direction…what I need to do in order to open

my mind to other ways of thinking about it. So…I focus my energy on things that

um, help me help me open my mind to different ways of viewing things or

handling situations.

The rest of the participants also described various types of reading that supported and

strengthened their faith and spirituality, which was important in their reintegration

experiences.

Faith

When discussing their spirituality practices, all of the participants expressed a

faith in a Higher Power or belief that things would work out for themselves. Angie

described her experiences with faith in this way,

Well and I think that as people go along and they may feel lost if…they're not tied

to something bigger than themselves, you know. Um, because there were many

points, ya know, like in, in coming back and being back here where I said this

really sucks. Ya know, cuz I mean it does! But, ya know, I have faith and I know

that, 'Okay, everything is going to work out the way it is supposed to be whether I stress out about it or not.'

Later in the interview, Angie, also stated,

Yeah, having faith. I mean just having faith. I mean I think that's just kind of my whole foundation is just having faith. Knowing that things are going to work out the way they are supposed to be… and accepting how things are and navigating through that. But always going back to the fact like, having that foundation of knowing that you just put your trust in God and that it will all work out.

Reverend described his faith experiences as being a resiliency tool. He stated, "Yea, yea, but that's okay, right? So, you just try to uh, the best you can - try to work through it…have faith." Michael also shared how his faith helps him in his daily life, "Uh, it gives you - for me it gives you joy. Puts some pep in your step. React to people differently; You're excited to go do things, meet new people, get the job done, help others out."

Bradley described his understanding of faith in this way,

So, I will come back to my faith and the way in which I allow that to structure my life and the things that I take from that in the way in which I interact with other people. And, and interact with the various aspect of just daily life… one of the tenants of Christianity, especially the sermon on the mount is, 'Hey, don't worry about tomorrow, today's got enough worries of its own.' So, I don't worry about tomorrow…so, having a…strong religious spiritual foundation is a huge strength for me.

Carli shared her thoughts about faith in this way, "I'm not religious by any means. Um, but…I do have faith in Christ…I'm spiritual, but I wouldn't call myself religious at all." A belief in a Higher Power or existence outside of themselves was helpful, because all participants described believing in something outside of themselves that could help them with daily life.

Spiritual Practices

All of the participants indicated that they used spiritual practices during their reintegration process. Some of these spiritual practices have already been mentioned such as prayer, having faith in a Higher Power, reading sacred texts or spiritual mantras, as well as nurturing internal spiritual needs. In addition to these specific practices, two other themes emerged that were directly related to their religious and spiritual convictions about life.

Helping Others

Five of the seven participants mentioned an aspect of helping others during their reintegration. Reverend volunteered his time at his local church, as well as at a local substance treatment center. Reverend mentioned the importance of helping others on several occasions during our interview. One statement he made was,

> "How do they really put that into, into action? You know, what good is it if you
>
> see somebody who is hungry and you say, be well? It's definitely not a you know,
>
> what they need. You gotta meet their needs, you know, meet their needs. And so I
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> think a little bit of both, helping people to be well spiritually as well as to, as to
>
> walk out a healthy spiritual life."

Later in our interview he also stated, "But, you know, I think that when it's all said and done, I'd probably be most fulfilled just trying to help people." When discussing his spiritual and religions practices, Michael stated, "…React to people differently; You're excited to go do things, meet new people, get the job done, help others out." In the same way, Jeff described his experiences connecting with people and learning about their life and stories. He stated, "It's just something I enjoy trying to figure out what people have encountered you know what their experiences are…it's something you do when you care about people."

Gratitude

All seven participants mentioned something in their life for which they were grateful, although they did not necessarily use the word gratitude. This attitude of gratefulness was helpful in the reintegration experiences for each participant. For example, Michael shared his gratitude on multiple occasions during our interview:

> First, "So, I guess I'll start with when we left. We left and they had us go to…the deployment transition center and I thought that was really good because they let you vent and just let you talk about whatever you want to talk about…And that was really cool because it was a nice time to just relax and hang out and stay in an actual room. (laughing) …And that was really nice. So, that was really awesome."
>
> Second, "I had everything I needed on my deployment. And, so, back home, I kind of, I felt more luxurious when I got back. I was like, 'Wow, this is great! Like I've got all these amenities now!'"

In the same way, Greg showed his gratitude for the experiences he encountered upon his return. He stated, "And then just being home you know and being in a familiar location was nice. Um, being with my dog was wonderful!" When sharing about his faith and gratitude experiences, Jeff also stated, "…you know, going back to thankfulness for where you're at in life…You know it helps me realize how good I have things sometimes…" Therefore, a sense of gratitude is an indication of smoother reintegration for the participants in this study.

Corporate Worship

A final theme that emerged regarding the use of religion or spirituality during post-deployment reintegration was corporate worship and engaging in a faith community. Five of the seven identified connection with a local church community. Reverend stated,

"… Um, just trying to be involved with our, our local church. I did try to join the praise team, but the timing didn't work out. But, I'm able to help the folks in the parking lot, so that's nice…so, I'm just driving the golf cart around and pick people up, if they park far away and greet them and just being useful. You know, I'm helping other people."

Additionally, Jeff stated, "But, I do enjoy corporate worship. I do enjoy corporate services where people get together." Jeff also mentioned Bible studies with others and topical studies, as an integral part of his reintegration experiences. Furthermore, Michael identified corporate worship as helpful, stating, "I'd say, spiritually. Spiritual practices helped - praying, reading the Bible… going to church helped." Bradley described his church experiences in this way,

"So, faith, reconnecting with my family, reconnecting with our faith community

you know our, our friends and stuff at our church - that is already an active part of

ours….So… if there's not really any activities to connect with outside of my

friend group, my church and my family, I'm okay with that."

Moreover, Carli indicated that church was helpful for her and her family during

reintegration. She stated,

"With that, new neighborhood that we moved into we found the non-

denominational church that we started participating in…It was a really great

community to be a part of and helped you um, find other focal pints that you're

not able to find when you're doing your own meditation. So, becoming a part of

that church was really um, really a great change for when I came home."

Therefore, corporate worship was also a theme that emerged.

Summary

In Chapter IV, I identified one major overarching emerged theme with 6

subthemes. Two of the subthemes included additional micro themes that validated the

strength of the subthemes. Moreover, I included direct quotations from each participant

to support the themes and subthemes found in Chapter IV. Additionally, all of the themes

were supported by at least five out of seven of the participants, whose stories created the

themes that emerged.

Chapter V included the results of the study and concluded my dissertation. In this

chapter, I have taken the major themes and findings from Chapter IV and compared them

to the previous literature and study results found in Chapter II. Additionally, I provided

implications for counselors, implications for veterans, and future research focus based on

my findings.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of my study was to describe the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans' use of religion and spirituality. I used a transcendental phenomenological qualitative approach to answer the research question - What are the lived experiences of post-deployed veterans' use of religion and spirituality? Additionally, I used Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological methodology to develop the essence of the participants' lived experiences and provided detailed descriptions of their experiences in Chapter IV. Through semi-structured interviews, I was able to understand obstacles that made reintegration more difficult as well as the parts of the reintegration process that proved easier for each participant. Additionally, I learned about each participant's personal coping strategies that were used to overcome any difficulties. Some participants, who reported experiencing very little difficulty, shared their continued routines and rituals that helped prevent them from turning to poor coping when difficulties did arise. While each individual experience of reintegration was vastly different, all participants identified elements of religion and/or spirituality that were important in coping with life upon (and sometimes prior to) return from deployment.

Guiding Theory

My study was guided by a single theoretical framework of Adlerian Theory. Adlerian theory is a social and relational theory which posits that people are uniquely different (even if circumstances are similar, as is the case of veterans returning from deployment) in the ways in which they engage in their life experiences and life tasks and that therapists must take a holistic approach with clients, which includes addressing the

spiritual and religious conceptualizations of the client (Dreikurs & Mosak, 1967a; Hoffman, 1994; Mosak and Maniacci, 1998; Watts, 1999). For example, Bradley shared his understanding of the role that spirituality/religion plays in his life as being a part of his being, rather than an outside entity. He stated,

> My scriptural understanding of the sovereignty of God over all things and that while many people in this world make a distinction between secular and sacred, I do not see that as clearly. It's that everything exists inside of God and God is sovereign over all things. Every aspect of life is, in a sense a sacred moment, and we live and move and breathe and have our being in God and we live and exist for the chief end of man which is to glorify God and to live forever. So, in whatever I do, whether I eat or drink, I do it all for the glory of God.

Additionally, Adlerian Theory includes a belief in *Gemeinschaftsgefuhl*, which translates into a feeling of *social interest* or *community feeling*. Because social interest includes aspects of connectedness to one another, nature, and self, as well as a genuine interest in the affairs of others and a *community feeling*, this concept could be closely related to one's spirituality. Watts (2000b) wrote a conceptual article comparing Adlerian theory with Biblical beliefs, from which he indicated several parallels between the Adlerian approach and Biblical principles. Six of the seven participants in this study identified the God of the Christian Bible, as well as Biblical scripture to be supportive in their reintegration experiences. Therefore, clear connections can be made between specific participant quotes and Adlerian constructs. Angie discussed her connectedness and relationship to her higher power in this way, "…knowing that you just put your trust in God and that um, it will all work out." Trust is a relationship skill, that which one

generally exercises in a close relationship with another. Thus, Angie's trust that her

Higher Power had things under control allowed her to have faith that her circumstances

would all work out. Greg described his connection to his higher power in this way, "You

know part of it is an unburdening…realizing that I don't have to go at it alone. Part of it

is a just feeling like somebody has my back." These participant statements strongly

support the notion that religion-based belief in a Higher Power and Adlerian theory share

a relational and social focus (Watts, 2000b), which proved highly valuable for six of the

participants in this study.

Other participants described the importance of being connected with someone,

whether it was a friendship, religious group, or family member upon return. Again, as

paralleled to both Adlerian theory and Christianity, a connection to a religious and

spiritual community, as well as to others, themselves or their Higher Power provided a

relational and social construct that was distinctly useful for the participants of this study,

upon their return from deployment. Watts (2000b) stated, "The strongest area of common

ground between Christian spirituality and Individual Psychology…is the shared relational

perspective" (p. 5). Angie, Revered, Jeff, Bradley, Carli and Greg shared a relational and

social aspect of connecting with family that was important upon their return from

deployment. Reverend, Michael, and Carli discussed their connections with friends as

important. Greg described connecting with a friend in this way,

> …one of my friends…he and I went and played golf. So…it was more about the
>
> closeness of the friendship and being able to see someone I had not seen in a long
>
> time. You know, having a one-on-one conversation with a friend.

Furthermore, although social interest has been studied extensively in Adlerian psychology, little research (although several conceptual articles exist) has been published regarding social interest and church or faith community. However, out of research studies conducted, there appeared to be a link between social interest and church community (Bigby, 2008; Leak, 1992). One of the major themes of this study was connectedness to a church community. Five of the seven participants identified church and religious community as a place that brought a sense of belonging, or a place of connection with others or their Higher Power. For example, Bradley shared, "… So, faith…reconnecting with our faith community our friends and stuff at our church…for me, a lot of my life revolves around my faith, my church community and my family."

The *social interest* construct of *Gemeinschaftsgefuhl* was supported by four of the seven participants (and identified in the other 3 participants' job duties descriptions), as well. *Gemeinschaftsgefuhl,* - a feeling of social interest and connection to edify others and self – is clearly depicted in the participant stories. Reverend shared a story of complete community feeling *and* social interest when he shared about his role in helping others in a substance abuse recovery meeting. He stated,

> But hey why not try to help somebody because there's folks are having probably worse days than me…ya know, maybe I can help, maybe that will help ease the pain that I've done something that can, help somebody else. … Then, they [church friends] also asked me if I could come and deliver the message at the, at, Monday night rehab. And so we went to a substance abuse recovery place and I was able to lead a Bible study… so, to know that I got to be part of either the seed planting or the watering process to help people find a find wholeness.

Therefore, the provided excerpts and supportive literature clarify the reasons for choosing Adlerian theory as a guiding framework in understanding the lived experiences of veterans' use of religion and spirituality post-deployment.

General Findings

Elnitsky et al., (2017) stated that reintegration is a dynamic system of adapting that is highly personal and unique to each veteran. The findings of this study supported that claim, because all of the veterans experienced their reintegration in vastly different ways. Although all of the veterans in this study experienced the themes in various ways, the results of this study also indicated participants in this study experienced similar helpful religious and spiritual phenomenon as previous participants within the studies cited in Chapter II. For example, supporting the study performed by Lloreda-Garcia (2017), five of the seven participants identified their religion and spirituality as a source of comfort, support and/or hope. A strong example of this was when Greg was discussing the ways in which prayer was helpful for him. He stated, "You know, part of it is an unburdening - realizing that I don't have to go at it alone. Part of it is a just feeling like somebody has my back. You know."

Furthermore, all the participants in my study identified spirituality or religion as an important part of coping. Angie identified, "Having faith, just having faith." She discussed a belief that everything would work out the way it is supposed to which she connected to her faith and belief in a Higher Power. Also consistent with prior research, were the specific themes of prayer, meditation, church service attendance and other activities of the religion (Arrey, Bilsen, Lacor, & Deschepper, 2016; Leondari &

Gialamas, 2009; VanderWeele, Shanshan, Tsai, & Kawachi, 2016), such as spiritual

readings and helping others, as useful for coping with reintegration.

On the other hand, my study did not support other research results as presented in

the literature review. For example, contrary to Tiggeman and Hage (2019), none of my

participants linked their religion or spirituality to body image or body positivity. In the

same way, refuting Mahoney et al. (2005), none of my participants related scripture to the

reasons for maintaining a healthy lifestyle of committed exercise (even though six of the

seven participants mentioned exercise as a consistent part of their daily or weekly

routine).

Isis (2018) indicated that many Americans believe that religion is no longer

relevant. However, in my study 100% of the participants found religious practices to be

useful in their lives. For five of the seven participants, these practices were carried out

daily. These results support a much earlier alternative study performed in 2005,

indicating that 60% of Americans were believers that religion was "very important"

(Campbell, Yoon, & Johnstone, 2005). Moreover, contradictory to the studies that

indicated RS could cause or increase distress (Ben-Ezra et al., 2010; Carperter, Laney, &

Mezulis, 2012; Kellems, Hill, Crook-Lyone & Freitas, 2010; Lloreda & Garcia, 2017;

Ter Kuile & Ehring, 2014), none of my participants identified religious or spiritual

elements that increased their distress or caused reintegration experiences to be more

difficult.

A final noteworthy observation is the apparent lack of clarity about differences

between religion and spirituality, even among those who serve as spiritual guides to their

military installation. When asked to provide definitions of religion and spirituality, I

received an array of responses. This is consistent with previous literature on religion and

spirituality that also contains varied definitions of the two constructs (Koenig et al., 2014;

Rochmawati et al., 2017). However, because two of my participants were chaplains and

two others served as support staff for the chapel, I expected there to be consistency in the

understanding of spirituality and religion. Yet, no two definitions were similar. For

example, Bradley, a Lieutenant Colonel Deputy Command Chaplain, stated that religion

is "a set of beliefs that govern the ways we think and act." He defined spirituality as,

"The idea and understanding that there is something bigger and outside of us as

individuals that we are a part of that moves us and motivates us to action." In a separate

manner, Jeff, a Chaplain Captain stated, "Religion is practices or beliefs that link or bind

you to God." He described spirituality as, "God and religion and things that bind you and

bring honor and glory to God." The two participants who served as support staff offered

two additional views on their perceptions of religion and spirituality. I shared the

definition of religion and spirituality (based on literature citations) used in this study,

prior to the interview, in order to provide the participants some clarity about the

difference between the two constructs. Yet, as the participants began to talk about

religion and spirituality in their lives, it became clear that they were responding from

their own personal operational definition of religion and spirituality. Because this study

was a transcendental phenomenological study, answering from their individual

perspective was appropriate and helpful. On the other hand, because these individuals

hold some responsibility for offering faith-based support and care to airmen and their

families, it appears there is a need for the military to provide training on the distinct

differences between the constructs of religion and spirituality. Such training would serve

to bring more clarity to those providing religious support (i.e. the chaplains and support staff) and also aid in their job functions of providing the highest level of spiritual care to the people whom they serve.

Emerged Themes

The themes that emerged from the study were Family, Prayer, Connection, Spiritual/Religious Reading, Faith, Spiritual Practices, and Corporate Worship. All these themes were supported by at least five of the participants, as outlined in Chapter IV. These themes are also found in previous literature and supported by past studies. Each of the themes and the supportive literature are outlined below.

Family

All of the participants in this study mentioned family as supportive in their reintegration experience. Three participants initially mentioned family as a source of stress. Yet, once resolved, family and the overcoming of each difficult relationship transformed into a resiliency factor and aided in positive coping. Several literary pieces supported the use of RS in familial satisfaction. For example, a conceptual article, written by Duba and Watts (2009), concluded that RS benefits marital relationships, including increasing sexual satisfaction, increased intimacy, better communications, and an elevated understanding of how to fulfill relationship roles. This was most strongly supported by Bradley and Jeff's stories, but showed up in other interviews as well. Moreover, the role that religion and spirituality contributed for each spouse guided their choices in how they interacted with one another (Rauer & Volling, 2015), thus supporting this study's findings. Furthermore, supporting the study performed by Bornsheuer-Boswell et al. (2013), the families in this study believed that religious or spiritual

practices were integral components of their lifestyle and should be included in the

conceptualization of their life goals (as paralleled to the results that indicated that

families believe religion and spirituality should be included in therapeutic treatment to

help clients reach their counseling goals). Other studies, particularly studies involving

religion and parenting, are not as consistent (Bornstein et al., 2017; Williams et al.,

2019). Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether or not the religious or spiritual

practices of the participants supported healthier and more positive relationships with their

children. Overall, however, family was a consistent theme among these seven

participants, who also all identify as religious or spiritual. Therefore, family interactions

certainly had an impact on their reintegration process.

Prayer

All seven participants in this study identified prayer as a helpful, weekly, or daily

practice. Prayer supported the participants in various ways, and the act of praying served

as a positive coping strategy during reintegration. Six participants reported praying to

God or their Higher Power. The seventh participant reported that her prayers were more

of an internal conversation with herself. No matter the modality of prayer, the consistent

report from the participants was that prayer was unequivocally useful. These results are

consistent with previous literature on the use of prayer for coping and defending against

mental health disorders (Arrey et al., 2016; Leondari & Gialamas, 2009; Lloreda-Garcia,

2017; Nikfarjam et al., 2018). In a study performed on a group of African American

hurricane Katrina survivors, the results indicated that the connection to a Higher Power is

a strong resiliency factor and that individuals do not necessarily need a church affiliation

to have a strong connection to their Higher Power. This is consistent with the findings in

my study, as all participants connected to a Higher Power, but not all participants identified as feeling connected to a local church (or religious) community (Lawson & Thomas, 2007). Thus, the strong evidence for the use of prayer among veterans returning from deployment suggests that increasing a focus on prayer or communication with a Higher Power could help veterans reintegrate more smoothly.

Connection

Seven of the seven participants also mentioned connection to others, themselves, or a Higher Power as being helpful during reintegration. This also coincided with the results of previous studies. Additionally, connection is a fundamental part of Adlerian theory that was highly supported with the results of this study. In addition to the supportive Adlerian tenants, the *National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study* indicated that social connectedness was one key factor in post-traumatic growth (Tsai et al., 2015). Moreover, *The Experience of Reintegration for Military Families and Implications for Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Programming* identified that social connection was an important aspect of positive reintegration experiences for veterans returning from deployment (Bommarito et al., 2015). Therefore, including connection as a focus of veteran reintegration appeared to be an integral theme, when identifying useful constructs to increase positive reintegration experiences.

Religious/Spiritual Readings (Devotions)

Every participant in this study reported engaging in devotions or spiritual readings as a source of strength, coping, hope, and resiliency. While five of the participants indicated consistent reading of devotions and religious scriptures related to their spiritual practices, two of the participants focused more on spiritual mantras and Google searches

for uplifting and encouraging quotes to help them with their daily functioning. In any

event, the results are consistent with research that has been conducted regarding the use

of religious and spiritual reading, as a source of assistance in dealing with life

circumstances. The results from a study by Lawson and Thomas (2007) indicated

devotional and other spiritual readings as being a major support during the displacement

of hurricane Katrina victims. Furthermore, the results from a study conducted by

DeAngelis and Bartkowski (2018) indicated that certain life circumstances increased the

likelihood of individuals turning to scripture for help and that scripture reading increased

mental well-being of the participants. Therefore, a deeper focus on integrating positive

mantras and scripture reading into the experiences of post-deployed veterans, as fits with

their personal beliefs systems, seems appropriate.

Faith

Herein again, all seven participants referred to faith or their belief in a Higher

Power as being extremely helpful for them during their reintegration experiences,

increasing their ability to deal with difficult life situations and imparting a sense of hope

and connection. Authors of several studies have suggested that a belief in a Higher

Power, particularly the practice of releasing the outcome of one's circumstances to a

power outside of oneself, is a prevailing coping tool in getting through difficult

circumstances (Jennings, 2005; True et al., 2005). It is important to mention here that

other researchers have discovered mediators that can account for the coping, rather than a

simple belief in a Higher Power (i.e., that a belief in a Higher Power is a more or less a

placebo effect) (Snider & McPhedran, 2014). Whether it is placebo effect or the actual

aid in coping, in this group of participants, a belief in God or their Higher Power was

exceedingly important. The belief in something outside of themselves helped the

veterans in this study release stressors, guide life decisions, act as an emotionally

supportive mechanism, and ground them when going through difficult circumstances.

Spiritual Practices

Helping Others and *Gratitude* were two additional noteworthy sub-themes that

emerged. First, five out of seven of the participants explicitly implied that helping others

was a useful aspect of their reintegration experiences. Helping others came in the form of

helping others in the community, in the workplace, as well as in the home. Helping

others is an Adlerian practice that is rooted in *Gemeinschaftsgefuhl*, as mentioned in the

beginning of Chapter V. Furthermore, the aforementioned study results by Lawson and

Thomas (2007) supported the use of helping others as an avenue to helping oneself.

Helping others was a way to take the participants' mind off of themselves and their own

problems for a period of time. The same was true for all of the participants in the study.

Reverend, in particular, shared the importance of helping others as a way to help himself

feel useful in life. Therefore, the veterans in this study learned how to help themselves

cope through pouring their life into others.

Additionally, all seven participants held a deep sense of gratitude for either life or

certain circumstances that worked out in their favor. Four of the participants appeared to

have a disposition of gratitude while the other three found gratefulness in specific

circumstances that worked out in beneficial ways for the participant. According to

Sharma et al. (2017), the greater one's RS, the more likely they are to hold gratitude and

life purpose. These results are appropriately applied to the current study, because

gratitude emerged as a theme and was clearly affixed to the veterans' religious or spiritual beliefs about life.

Corporate Worship

Last, five of the seven participants discussed corporate worship as an essential supportive practice during their reintegration experiences. Even one participant, who did not identify as religious, indicated that one of the most helpful experiences upon her return from deployment was engaging in church services with her neighbors and family. Previous research supports these findings. Engaging in church communities can be helpful in positive processing of traumas, adaptive coping, post-traumatic growth, increased life satisfaction, and a decreased likelihood for suicide (Leondari & Gialamas, 2009; Lisman et al., 2017; Tsai et al., 2015; VanderWeele, et al., 2016). Five of the seven participants in my study indicated some type of obstacle during their reintegration experiences. Yet, all of them were able to cope, grow, and expressed gratitude for such growth, resulting in increased life satisfaction. Additionally, none of the veterans in this study shared suicidal ideations or intentions (although, I did not specifically ask this question). Therefore, engagement in religious communities and corporate worship was imperative for the successful reintegration experiences of the returning veterans in my study.

Implications for Returning Veterans

Implications of my research findings include supportive evidence for the use of religious or spiritual practices with veterans upon reintegration (particularly for those who, like the participants of this study, identify as spiritual or religious). Additionally, I highlighted the importance of taking into consideration a holistic approach, detailing that

some veterans who return are able to reintegrate relatively smoothly. My shared results also serve as a reminder that veterans use of their religion and spirituality upon reintegration varies widely and appears more helpful than harmful.

Seven out of seven of the participants relied on some aspect of their religious or spiritual understanding to help them during reintegration. Several participants did not feel they had much difficulty upon returning from deployment. Even so, all participants used their religious or spiritual understanding on a regular basis during their reintegration period. I could find no studies on veteran use of religion and spirituality post-deployment to-date with similar findings (i.e. 100% of participants using religion and spirituality for positive coping post-deployment). However, studies performed on other populations supported evidence that those who identified as religious and spiritual had a greater quality of life and that greater religious and spiritual connection accounted for greater ability to deflect negative mental health symptomology (Counted, Possomai, & Mead, 2018).

Three of the seven participants (42%) identified relatively few struggles during reintegration. Fewer struggles indicated a sense of resiliency in this population. This result is a slightly lower percentage of resilient veterans than the 65% identified in the study by Issacs et al. (2017). Nonetheless, consistent with the study by Issacs et al. (2017), the results of this study supported the findings of higher levels of emotional stability, dispositional gratitude, purpose in life and altruism that were predictors of resilience. For example, as outlined above, two themes that emerged from the study were gratitude and helping others (i.e., altruism). Purpose in life was supported by all three resilient veterans (as well as some of the other participants). For the three most resilient

participants, life purpose appeared in the form of family responsibilities, faith and life calling, work responsibilities, and a general sense of living life in a purposive manner to be in unity within themselves, with others, and with their Higher Power. There were also few fluctuations in emotions among these three individuals who shared an equally optimistic and controlled view of their circumstances (i.e., emotional stability). Post-traumatic growth, an indicator of veteran resilience, was characterized in a former study by a sense of social connectedness, a greater sense of self-purpose, and intrinsic religiosity (Tsai et al., 2015). The three veterans with little difficulty during reintegration also possessed aspects of these traits in their experiences.

What is visible from the participant stories, each participants' use of religious and spiritual practices varied a great deal. While all participants found elements of religion or spirituality to be helpful, they did not all find the same aspects useful or appropriate for their own faith journey. For example, Angie, Carli and Greg did not believe church community was important for them be connected to their Higher Power. Yet, the other four mentioned the church community as being an important aspect of their connection to their Higher Power (although the church community was helpful for six of the participants). In addition, some participants found spiritual practices to be a very interpersonal journey, while others found spiritual practices to be an intrapersonal experience. For example, Carli stated that her prayer time was a conversation with herself, while the other participants described prayer as "talking" with their Higher Power. In the same token, talking with one's Higher Power could also be an interpersonal experience as it is something that edifies the individual, as was in the case of Carli. There were numerous other differences in the ways that the participants described their

understanding of religion and spirituality for their life. The singular point is that spirituality and religion is a deeply personal and unique journey. Therefore, when conceptualizing the implications of this study, one must remember that, in the true spirit of transcendental, phenomenological, qualitative research, experiences can be vastly and uniquely different.

Finally, while previous research findings have suggested that negative religious and spiritual coping can prove to be harmful for returning veterans (and other populations), my study found no such supporting evidence. None of the participants in my study described negative spiritual coping. Nor did any of the participants find religion or spiritual practices a barrier to their reintegration process. For all participants, religious or spiritual practices resonated as a positive anchor point for their return to the daily functions of life following deployment. The participants identified religion and spirituality as a helpful tool in their lives, including during their reintegration experiences. Thus, this study supports previous research finding that indicate religious and spiritual practices can be a positive source of coping (Arrey et al., 2016; Leondari & Gialamas, 2009; Lloreda-Garcia, 2017; Sharma et al., 2017; Tsai et al., 2015; VanderWeele et al., 2016).

Implications for Counselors

Implications of my research findings for counselors (helping professionals) include a reiteration that a thorough case conceptualization using appropriate theoretical models is needed to understand the unique role that RS plays in each individual client's life. Helping professionals working with veterans would do well to explore the unique ways that their client both experiences and uses their religious or spiritual practices for

support during varying life circumstances. As the participants in the current study

returned to very different life situations, with varying experiences, it seems plausible that

there is an array of possible reintegration circumstances (including beyond the scope of

what the participants in this study experienced) in which religion and spirituality have a

role.

Helping professionals should also consider working from an Adlerian Theoretical

model when helping returning veterans. "Adlerian therapists focus on developing a

respectful, egalitarian, optimistic, and growth-oriented therapeutic alliance that

emphasizes clients' assets, abilities, resources, and strengths" (Watts & Erguner-

Tekinalp, 2017, p. 333). In this study, the participants relied upon their strengths, assets,

abilities, and resources to move through and overcome difficult situations. Participant

strengths, assets and resources included relational and social constructs, based in

religious and spiritual beliefs or practices.

Through the findings of my study, I was able to validate several previous authors

who posited that religion and spirituality are an element of multiculturality, one element

to a holistic conceptualization of the individual (Balkin et al., 2013; Johansen, 2009;

Kopacz & Connery, 2015; Pargament, 2007; Watts, 2000a). Because all participants in

my study found support in their religious and faith elements, it seems important for

therapists to include this aspect of their client's lifestyle in their therapeutic approach.

Additionally, each participant placed differing values on various aspects of their

understanding of spiritual and religious practices. For example, Angie would not have

identified her church community as helpful, because she did not equate her church

attendance with her spiritual or religious beliefs - nor did Greg. However, Reverend

found much support in his church community, as did Carli. Therefore, therapists must be careful not to make assumptions but to fully evaluate clients, including specific aspects of their religion and spirituality that are uniquely important to them (Currier et al., 2018).

The results of this study also imply that counselors should be trained in both conceptualizing clients from even a religious and spiritual lens and using this information to guide informed therapy practices. Students, seasoned clinicians, educators and supervisors should consider receiving training on how to conceptualize clients to include aspects of religion and spirituality. Based on the RS conceptualization, the helper may choose to proceed with the use of therapy skills and techniques that compliment this conceptualization (Adams, 2012; Duba Onedera, 2008; Henriksen et al., 2015; Pargament, 2007). Ignoring such spiritual/religious aspects for the participants of this study would likely prove to be a barrier in treatment. For example, Bradley identified all aspects of his being as interwoven into his faith understanding,

> So, I can't necessarily in my mind, divorce my person and being from my faith
> and my religion because it infuses every aspect of the way in which I think, the
> way in which I see the world, my worldview and the way I respond and react to
> situations, people, events, crises um, and success.

Therefore, in order to fully conceptualize and ethically treat an individual, particularly the participants in this study, the helper must be competent in understanding the unique ways that each individual understands and uses their faith experiences in their life.

Future Recommendations

Future qualitative research should be conducted on the use of religion and

spirituality post-deployment for complex and shifting life circumstances. For example, each of my participants returned to very different home dynamics. Future research could include an in-depth examination of each unique situation by identifying a larger sample of individuals who experienced similar situations upon return. For example, Angie returned as a single mom to a teenage daughter into a COVID environment, in which she was planning a move but got stuck at her current duty station due to moving logistics in light of the COVID. Therefore, future research could consist of religious and spiritual aspects focusing on single parents, focusing on returns from deployments and facing a rapid PCS, or focusing on returning to a world pandemic (as some participants returned to a COVID-19 pandemic). Michael returned as a single young male, with no immediate family nearby to offer physical support. He also returned into the COVID-19 global pandemic with social distancing measures in place. Thus, future research could focus on the experiences of single men returning from deployment. Two participants mentioned returning to sick family members (with Greg's story the most prominent); therefore, future research could be conducted on what it is like to return to a sick family member OR the experiences of being away on deployment while leaving a sick family member at home.

Since this is, to my knowledge, the first study of its kind, future research could simply replicate the current study using different participant samples. For example, all of the participants in my study were Active Duty U.S. Air Force veterans. However, the reintegration experiences of U.S. Active Duty Army, Navy, or Marines would likely have been different. Furthermore, one could replicate the study with a participant pool from the U.S. military Reserves in the various branches or the U.S. National Guard. Again, the

dynamics of the return would likely differ from those of Active Duty Air Force individuals.

Furthermore, four of my participants mentioned the need for more support and training on preparedness for a deployment. Thus, it seems plausible that conducting a phenomenological study on the experiences of military member preparedness for deployment might be useful. Moreover, as I was analyzing the data, I noticed some common tenants of Adlerian theory emerging from participant stories, particularly the *Crucial C's* - connect, capable, count, courage (Bettner & Lew, 2005). Additional research could include inquiries about the presence of the *Crucial C's* in reintegration experiences. Therefore, my study gives rise to future research that could aid in the understanding of military members' lived reintegration experiences.

Conclusion

The purpose of my study was to describe the lived experiences of a population sample of veterans' use of religion and spirituality post-deployment. In the first chapter, I provided a brief introduction and supportive reasons for the usefulness of this study. In Chapter II, I conducted an exhaustive literature search and provided a detailed review, from which I supported the need for this study through use of previous research findings. In Chapter III, I outlined the research methods for the study, giving specific detail of my plan for carrying out the study, including supportive references from the literature. In Chapter IV, I provided the results of the study identifying the emerged themes, including excerpts from the participants to support the themes. In Chapter V, I provided support for the themes based on literature, identified implications for the study, as well as provided some ideas for future research based on my study's findings.

The findings of this study included a major overarching tenant, with six themes and five subthemes. Relying on these themes and subthemes, I was able to determine that specific aspects of religion and spirituality were important for this population of returning veterans. As such, religious and spiritual beliefs appear to be a vital element in successful reintegration experiences. I was also able to deduce that more studies should be launched in order to validate these findings and provide further support for veterans returning from deployment.

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APPENDIX A

Date: Apr 2, 2020 9:52 AM CDT

TO: Candace Sneed Richard Henriksen

FROM: SHSU IRB

PROJECT TITLE: Post-Deployed Veterans Use of Religion and Spirituality: A

Phenomenological Qualitative Study

PROTOCOL #: IRB-2019-366

SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial

ACTION: Approved

DECISION DATE: March 30, 2020

ADMINISTRATIVE CHECK-IN DATE: March 30, 2021

EXPEDITED REVIEW CATEGORY: 6. Collection of data from voice, video,

digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not

limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language,

communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing

survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors

evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

SPECIAL IRB UPDATE REGARDING THE COVID-19 CRISIS: **Although**

this study is approved, please note that face-to-face human subject research must be

paused until the CDC and SHSU has determined that the current COVID-19 crisis has passed. This pause is effective immediately. Approved online human subject research may continue. If you have an approved face-to-face study and deem it feasible to move the study to online data collection, please submit a Modification through Cayuse. Indicate in the Modification that the change is being implemented as a COVID-19 safety precaution to help the IRB prioritize the submission. The IRB will continue reviewing applications unless we are advised to do otherwise.

Greetings,

The above-referenced submission has been reviewed by the IRB and it has been Approved. Because this study received expedited review and the IRB determined that a renewal submission is not needed, this decision does not necessarily expire; however, you will be receiving an email notification on the anniversary of this study approval, which will be on March 30, 2021 (NOTE: please review the reminder information below regarding Study Administrative Check-In). This study approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Since Cayuse IRB does not currently possess the ability to provide a "stamp of approval" on any recruitment or consent documentation, it is the strong recommendation of this office to please include the following approval language in the footer of those recruitment and consent documents: IRB-2019-366/March 30, 2020/March 30, 2021.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the

researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Modifications: Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please submit a Modification Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure.

Incidents: All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please submit an Incident Submission through Cayuse IRB for this procedure. All Department of Health and Human Services and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Study Administrative Check-In: Based on the risks, this project does not require renewal. Rather, you are required to administratively check in with the IRB on an annual basis. March 30, 2021 is the anniversary of the review of your protocol. The following are the conditions of the IRB approval for IRB-2019-366 Post-Deployed Veterans Use of Religion and Spirituality: A Phenomenological Qualitative Study .

1. When this project is finished or terminated, a Closure submission is required.

2. Changes to the approved protocol require prior board approval (NOTE: see the directive above related to Modifications).

3. Human subjects training is required to be kept current at citiprogram.org by renewing training every 5 years.

4. If incidents (i.e., adverse events) or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSO) (e.g., data collected unintentionally without obtaining

informed consent) have occurred during this approval period, you are required to submit a Incident to report the adverse event or UPIRSO to the IRB.

Please note that all research records should be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project. If you have any questions, please contact the Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or irb@shsu.edu. Please include your protocol number in all correspondence with this committee.

Sincerely,

Donna M. Desforges, Ph.D.

Chair, IRB

APPENDIX B

Sam Houston State University

Department of Counselor Education

Demographics Questionnaire

Dissertation: The Lived Experiences of Post-Deployed Veteran Use of Religion and

Spirituality: A Transcendental Phenomenological Qualitative Study

Please answer the following open ended questions:

1. How would you define religion?

2. How would you define spirituality?

3. Are the two synonymous or separate for you?

4. How old are you? _____

5. What is the length of time you have served in the military? _____

6. What is your identified gender? _____

7. How often do you engage in religious practices? _____

8. How often do you engage in spiritual practices? _____

9. What is your identified ethnic background ? _____

10. What is your Title/Position/Rank in the military? _____

11. Describe some of your job functions:

12. What is your marital or relationship status? _____

13. What is your identified sexual/affectual orientation? _____

14. Do you Identify with a faith or religious group? If so, which one?

_____

15. What is the length of your most recent deployment? _____

16. How many months has it been since you returned from your most recent

deployment? _____

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. Walk me through a description of your most recent experiences of reintegration following your deployment.

2. What have been your greatest struggles during reintegration?

3. Tell me about factors that made reintegration easier or more difficult for you.

4. What helped you cope and/or reengage in the typical functions of life following your return from your most recent deployment?

APPENDIX D

PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Sam Houston State University

Consent for Participation in Research

KEY INFORMATION FOR The Lived Experiences of Post-Deployed

Veteran Use of Religion and Spirituality: A Transcendental Phenomenological

Qualitative Study

You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about your experiences during post-deployment reintegration back to life as usual. You have been asked to participate in the research because you are a veteran who has been deployed in the last 12 months and may be eligible to participate.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE, PROCEDURES, AND DURATION OF THE STUDY?

By doing this study, we hope to learn about your lived experiences of post-deployment reintegration. We hope to learn the factors that were most difficult for you and the factors that were most helpful for you during your return from deployment into your life as usual living circumstances. We hope to learn whether or not religion and spirituality played a factor in your reintegration experiences. Your participation in this research will last about 1 hour accounting for both the time it takes to complete the demographics questionnaire, as well as the time for the interview to be completed. You may also be asked to complete some follow up questions (at a later date), so that the researcher may check for accuracy of descriptions, which will last for no more than 15 minutes. During the interviews, the researcher will audio tape the interview as well as take field notes throughout the interview. Your information will remain completely

confidential with no identifying information attached to the audio tapes or field notes.

Upon completion of the study, you will be entered to win a $50 gift card if you so wish.

The winner will be selected randomly from a pool of 10-15 participants. If your name is

selected, you may be contacted to claim your gift card.

WHAT ARE REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS

STUDY?

The reasons to volunteer for this study include:

1. To enhance the current body of literature with lived experiences of what it is like

    to reintegrate to life as usual following deployment.

2. To share your story of reintegration in a confidential manner.

WHAT ARE REASONS YOU MIGHT CHOOSE NOT TO VOLUNTEER FOR THIS

STUDY?

There are no anticipated risks in participating in this research study interview.

However, you may not choose to participate in the study for the following reasons:

a) You have not been deployed in the last 12 months.

b) You do not feel you have time for a one hour interview.

c) Talking about your experiences may seem too distressing for you.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to

volunteer. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if

you choose not to volunteer.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

The person in charge of this study is Candace Sneed, of the Sam Houston State University Department of Counselor Education and Supervision, who is working under the supervision ofDr. Richard C. Henriksen Jr., PhD, LPC-S, NCC, Professor of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study his/her contact information is: crs114@shsu.edu or rch008@shsu.edu. If you have any questions, suggestions or concerns about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs – Sharla Miles at 936-294-4875 or e-mail ORSP at sharla_miles@shsu.edu.

Sam Houston State University

Consent for Participation in Research

DETAILED CONSENT FOR The Lived Experiences of Post-Deployed Veteran Use of Religion and Spirituality: A Transcendental Phenomenological Qualitative Study

Informed Consent

My name is Candace R. Sneed, and I am a Counselor Education and Supervision doctoral student of the Department of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University, working under the direction of Dr. Richard C. Henriksen Jr., PhD, LPC-S, NCC, Professor of Counselor Education at Sam Houston State University. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to participate in a research study of veterans use of spirituality/religion during post-deployment reintegration. I hope that data from this research will give voice to the lived experiences of veterans upon their return from deployment, as well as expand the literature regarding veteran use of religion and spirituality post-deployment. You have been asked to participate in the research because

you are an active duty military veteran who has returned from a deployment in the last 12 months.

The research is relatively straightforward, and we do not expect the research to pose any risk to any of the volunteer participants. If you consent to participate in this research, you will be asked to verbally answer a demographics questionnaire and participate in your choice of a telephone or secure video interview. Any data obtained from you will only be used for the purpose of completing my doctoral research dissertation. Under no circumstances will you or any other participants who participated in this research be identified. In addition, your data will remain confidential.

This research will require approximately 1 hour of your time. Participants will not be paid or otherwise compensated for their participation in this project. The interview will be audio recorded for purposes of data analysis. You may listen to your audio recording at any time by contacting me via phone to set up a time, date, and location for private listening. Destruction of the recordings will take place no later than August 30th, 2020 to allow for enough time for completion of the study.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled, and the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me using the contact information below. If you are interested, the results of this study will be available at the conclusion of the project.

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me, Candace R. Sneed, or Dr. Richard Henriksen, using the contact information below. If you have

questions or concerns about your rights as research participants, please contact Sharla

Miles, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, using her contact information below.

Candace R. Sneed SHSU Department of Counselor Education Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (502) 500-3789 E-mail: crs114@shsu.edu	Dr. Richard Henriksen SHSU Department of Counselor Education Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 294-1209 E-mail: rch008@shsu.edu	Sharla Miles Office of Research and Sponsored Programs Sam Houston State University Huntsville, TX 77341 Phone: (936) 294-4875 Email: irb@shsu.edu

☐

I understand the above and consent to participate.

☐

I do not wish to participate in the current study.

AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT

As part of this project, an audio/video recording will be made of you during

your participation in this research project for transcription purposes only. This is

completely voluntary. In any use of the audio/video recording, your name will not be

identified. You may review your audio recording at any time by contacting me via

phone to set up a time, date, and location for private review. Destruction of the

recordings will take place no later than August 30th, 2020 to allow for enough time for completion of the study. You may request to stop the recording at any time during the interview or choose to erase any portion of your recording.

☐

I consent to participate in the audio/video recording activities.

APPENDIX E

Figure E1

Flyer Distributed for Participant Recruitment

VITA

Curriculum Vita

Candace Sneed LPC, TMHT, NCC, M. ED

Educational Background

- o Ph. D. in Counselor Education and Supervision –Sam Houston State University, December 2020

- o M. Ed. earned as Marriage Family Couple Counselor – Western Kentucky University, May 2014

- o Bachelor of Arts Degree earned in Middle School Education - Lindsey Wilson College, December 2008

Honors and Awards

- o Academic Summer Scholarship Non-specified Sam Houston State University

- o Academic Spring Scholarship Non-specified Sam Houston State University

- o 4 Year Academic Scholarship - Lindsey Wilson College

- o Bonner Leader Scholarship awarded - Lindsey Wilson College

- o Dean's List of Students - Lindsey Wilson College

- o President of Chi Sigma Iota – Omega Kappa Upsilon - Western Kentucky University

- o Summer Kentucky Counseling Association Scholarship – Western Kentucky University

- o Student Representative for Kentucky Counseling Association – Western Kentucky University

Certification and License

- o National Certified Counselor (NCC)

- o Licensed Professional Counselor TX (LPC) #76710

- o Trained Telemental Health Therapist (Certificate)

- o Trained CPT Therapist

Presentations

- o Sneed, C. (October, 2013). Effects of PRP on Adolescent Depression. Poster
  Presented at the Kentucky Counseling Association Conference, Lousiville, Ky.

- o LaFountain, R., Duba Sauerheber, J., Saiz, S., Watts, R., Baksh, M., Brewer, C.,
  Early, L., Melear, D., Sneed, C., & Asposito, E. (2014). Becoming an Adlerian in
  non-adlerian based graduate programs. Presented at the North American Society
  of Adlerian Psychology (NASAP) Conference, Chicago, IL.

- o Duba Sauerheber, J.D., Asposito, E., Sneed, C., Melear, D., Early, L., Brewer, C.,
  & Baksh, M. (2014, April). Becoming an Adlerian and embracing the courage to
  be imperfect: Counseling graduate students share their journeys. Sponsored by
  Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, CSI Omega Kappa Upsilon
  Chapter, Bowling Green, KY.

- o Duba Sauerheber, J.D., Asposito, E., Bennett, E., Hagan, S., Sneed, C. (2016,
  May). New Adlerians at work present opportunities for case sharing and peer
  consultation. Presented at the North American Society of Adlerian Psychology
  (NASAP) Conference, Minneapolis-St.Paul, MN.

- o Watts, R.E., Hand, L., Kumaran, A.C.P., & Sneed, C. (2018, November).
  Something old, something new: Understanding and applying Adlerian counseling

techniques. Presented at 61ˢᵗ annual TCA Professional Growth Conference, Galveston, TX.

o Watts, R.E., Akay-Sullivan, S., Henderson, S., Boswell, J., & Sneed, C. (2019, March). Using Integrative Interventions in Brief/Time-Limited Counseling. Presented at ACA Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA.

o Watts, R.E., Henderson, S., Boswell, J., & Sneed C. (2019, November). Using Integrative Interventions in Brief/Time-Limited Counseling. Presented at TCA Pre-Conference Workshop, Ft. Worth Texas

o Sneed, C.S. (2020, March). Brief Telemental Health Training (2020, April). Presented via zoom to Air Force Chaplains in and around military installations in San Antonio, TX.

International

o Sneed, C., & Divine, R. (June, 2018). Integrative therapy essential oils: Alternative aid in client treatment. Presented at North American Society of Adlerian Psychology (NASAP) 66ᵗʰ annual conference, Toronto, CA.

Guest Speaker

o Sneed, C. (June, 2018). Lecture conducted on Cognitive Behavioral Theory – theory, techniques and practice, The Woodlands, TX.

o Sneed, C. (July, 2018). Brief Lecture on Gestalt Therapy – experiential learning and practice of Gestalt techniques used in counseling, The Woodlands, TX.

o Sneed, C. (July, 2019). Lecture conducted on Cognitive Behavioral Therapies and Adlerian Therapy – theories, techniques, and practice, Huntsville, TX.

Professional membership

- o   North American Society of Adlerian Psychology (NASAP)

- o   Texas Counseling Association (TCA)

- o   American Counseling Association (ACA)

Work experience

- o   <u>Blended Care Therapist</u>: Lyra Health; January 2020 - Present

- o   <u>Post-Graduate Resident: Staff Therapist</u>**:** Sam Houston State University Student Counseling Center; February 2017-August 2019

- o   <u>Private Practice Therapist</u>: Derby Church of the Nazarene; January 2016 - June 2016

- o   <u>Western Kentucky University Super Graduate Assistant</u>: Department of Counseling and Student Affairs; August 2013 – May 2014

- o   <u>Internship student/Co-therapist on staff</u>: Lifeskills: Warren County Service Center; August 2013 – May 2014

- o   <u>Practicum student/Co-Therapist on Staff</u>: Lifeskills/Park Place Recovery Center; May 2013 – July 2013 (Summer Term for Practicum); January 2014 – May 2014

- o   <u>Math Teacher/ Cheerleading Coach Moss Middle School:</u> August 2010 – June 2011

- o   <u>Title 1, Reading/Math Tutor Lost River Elementary School:</u> November 2009 – May 2010

- o   <u>Substitute Teacher/Aide;</u> Glasgow Board of Education: (270) 651-6757; Jan 2009- May 2009

Counseling-Specific Experience

- o <u>Blended Care Therapist, Lyra Health</u> - provide evidence based tele-mental health care for clients in TX and California. Utilize video platform as well as telephone counseling.

- o <u>Post-Graduate Resident: Staff Therapist at Sam Houston State University Student Counseling Center-</u> provided counseling services, referrals, resources, group therapy, individual therapy, and couples therapy to the university students. In addition, I was involved in outreach measures such as presentations, psycho-education, and advocacy projects, provided to the student community as well as to the public.

- o <u>Private Practice Therapist at Derby Church of the Nazarene</u> - provided counseling services for individuals or couples, applied appropriate assessments, wrote treatment plans with appropriate goals and objectives, updated progress notes, and executed termination summaries. I, also, utilized appropriate measures to market myself via a personal website, social media, and face-to-face communications. Here, I offered reduced service fees to veterans and their families.

- o <u>Co-therapist at Park Place Recovery Center</u>: performed Group Counseling, Family Counseling, and Individual Therapy Sessions. I also performed assessments, configured treatment plans, wrote weekly progress notes, did termination summaries, and collaborated with other professionals, in daily meetings, to ensure appropriate treatment for all inpatients and family members.

- o <u>Drug Court Group Leader at LifeSkills</u>: lead two groups of females, who were recovering from AOD addictions, Drug Court Phase I groups, which consisted of 6 psycho-educational and processing groups weekly. In these groups, I enhanced

my group leadership skills, as well as provided information about drug addictions and recovery experiences.

o Counseling at LifeSkills: provided counseling services for individuals, families, or couples, applied appropriate assessments, wrote treatment plans with appropriate goals and objectives, updated progress notes, and executed termination summaries, when applicable. In addition, I continued to loan myself to Park Place Recovery Center for family counseling.

Teaching-Specific Experience

o "Super GA"- Through a Graduate Assistantship at Western Kentucky University, I helped co-teach CNS 110, Human Development, the first undergraduate counseling class offered at Western Kentucky University, in both Fall 2013 and Spring 2014. In addition, I helped co-teach a graduate level course, CNS 669, Expressive Arts Therapy.

o Math teacher and Cheerleading Coach at Henry F. Moss Middle School;

o Math and Reading tutor for Lost River Elementary School

o Substitute teacher and substitute teacher's aide for Glasgow Independent Schools

o Practicum at Caverna Middle School, (English) Spring 2008

o Student Teaching at Barren County Middle School (English/Grant Funded Reading Program) October 2008 – December 2008

o Student Teaching at Glasgow Middle School (Math) August 2008 – October 2008

o At each of these placements, I was able to further develop my skills in: - Instructional Planning - Instructional Implementation - Classroom Management -

Collaboration – Leadership - Professional Development - Student/Teacher

Relationship - Interpersonal Communication

Leadership

- o <u>NASAP Sections Liaison Board of Directors</u> (May 2019-present) – In this

  position, I serve on the board, connecting sections to the board and vice

  versa. My job is to help maintain continuity between ground work of

  sections and board. I also schedule and lead bi-monthly meetings to help

  the sections organize and plan new ways to reach members and build up

  the membership in NASAP, as well as edify those members. I keep minute

  notes and provide oversight and structure where needed.

- o <u>NASAP Newsletter Editor in Chief: (June 2019 – present)</u> – In this

  position, I have built an editorial team, from a once solitary role, in order

  to expand the content and reach of the newsletter. I have provided support,

  guidance, and PR for the newsletter. I have networked with other affiliates

  to create more useful and far-reaching content. Additionally, I run a bi-

  monthly meeting to continue building new and exciting ideas and content

  into the newsletter. I also provide support and encouragement to the

  membership in writing entertaining and informative pieces for the

  newsletter.

- o <u>NASAP Co-Chair of Professional Clinicians</u> (May 2016 - present) - In this

  shared position we have: utilized skills of long range planning and short

  term implementation of strategies to grow the Clinicians Section of

  NASAP; Worked with a colleague to invent new ways to help clinicians in

their professional development through NASAP; Examined and chosen over 30 Workshop and Seminar Proposals that will be presented at NASAP annual Conference; Networked with the members of Clinicians section to ensure a sense of belonging and to advocate for Clinician training; Created a social media page to connect other professional clinicians; attended multiple conference meetings to discuss the expansion of NASAP; began to compile a list of videos for Adlerian training that will help professional clinicians learn and implement Adlerian therapy techniques with their clients

o NASAP President Elect Nominating Committee- Through this position I: collaborated with others to invite NASAP members to run for president elect and collaborated with others to form a list of nominees for president elect.

o Student Representative for Kentucky Counseling Association (KCA) for Western Kentucky University - Through this position I: Advocated for more student involvement in the KCA conference via many emails to our degree-seeking students; Connected students who had questions about the conference to appropriate resources; Advocated for more student research proposal presentations, by presenting my own, and encouraging others to present; After presentations, I collaborated with CSI secretary to include pictures of the presentations in that month's CSI newsletter; Advocated for more Graduate Student Facilitators, by being a facilitator, explaining

facilitation process via email, and by encouraging others to facilitate in order to increase professional connections

- o President of Chi Sigma Iota – Omega Kappa Upsilon- Western Kentucky University - Through this organization I: Advocated for the professional organization through public representation via emails, hosting social events, and creating short video clip that professors could present in courses; Helped organize monthly meetings in which we held trainings relevant to professional development of students, offered food in order to raise funds for the organization, and promoted social connectedness within the department; Advocated for the community through several donation drives to various charities in the local area; Collaborated with other officers to increase participation and planned activities that would help bring unity to the master's level students; Held fundraisers in order to gain money and offer scholarships to help students fund professional organization activities (such as travel monies and expenses); Helped set up a website with blurbs about the chapter leaders, a listing of the present and upcoming community drives and club activities, and the monthly newsletters.

- o Member and President of Kentucky Education Association - Student Program- Lindsey Wilson College Through this organization I: Attended several workshops and conferences; Held community events, such as reading to children on Halloween as they waited to tour the campus for treats and fun; Volunteered at the local library to support literacy;

Advocated for the organization and for teachers by giving speeches and

presenting relevant information to classes of fellow college students;

Helped organize fundraisers and other events to support the local chapter