



ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM SPONSORED REPORT SERIES

Enhancing Spiritual and Emotional Well-Being of United States Navy Sailors Through the Virtue of Transcendence

September 2023

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates current practices, policies, and gaps in promoting transcendence within the U.S. military, with a focus on enhancing the spiritual and emotional well-being of Navy Sailors. Transcendence, involving a connection to a higher purpose, holds potential for individuals to find meaning in life. Five character strengths associated with transcendence—gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty, humor, and spirituality—play a significant role in facilitating well-being. The study employs a literature review and analysis of military policies and programs to assess the state of spiritual fitness initiatives. The findings inform evidence-based recommendations for improving spiritual fitness and well-being in the Navy. The research contributes to enhancing the quality of life for service members and offers insights for promoting well-being in other high-performance work environments. Limitations include a U.S. military focus and potential biases in self-reported data. Overall, this research provides a comprehensive examination of transcendence and spiritual fitness in the military, identifying gaps and offering recommendations for further improvement.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFI	Air Force Instruction
ALMARS	All Marine Corps Activities
CAC	Common Access Card
CAF	Comprehensive Airman Fitness
CDC	Centers for Disease
CJCSI	Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff Instruction
CRMD	Command Religious Ministry Departments
CSF2	Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness
DOD	Department of Defense
FM	Field Manual
GAT	Global Assessment Tool
H2F	Holistic Health and Fitness
HSQ	Humor Styles Questionnaire
OCCH	Office of the Chief of Chaplains
POTFF	Preservation of the Force and Family
SFG	Spiritual Fitness Guide
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SRI	Spiritual Readiness Initiative
TFF	Total Force Fitness
USMC	U.S. Marine Corps
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command
VIA	Values in Action
WGS	Work Gratitude Scale



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I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

Military and academia have placed significant emphasis on understanding how virtues and character strengths influence behavior. “Virtue” is defined as behavior showing high moral standards (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.a) and character strengths are positive qualities and abilities that allow people to show their best virtues through their actions and behaviors (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The concept of transcendence provides a compelling framework for understanding how individuals establish a profound connection with something beyond their own existence and discover a sense of purpose in life. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), transcendence entails the ability to connect with a greater entity or purpose and derive meaning from the world. Within the virtue of transcendence, there are five character strengths that contribute to this aspect: gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty, humor, and spirituality. These character strengths play a significant role in facilitating individuals’ transcendental experiences and enhancing their overall well-being.

While there are many paths to transcendence, religion and spirituality have long been recognized as powerful avenues for connecting individuals to the larger universe and providing meaning to their lives. In the past decade, there has been a growing interest in the role of spirituality, also known as spiritual fitness or spiritual readiness in military contexts, particularly as a holistic approach to promoting the spiritual and emotional well-being of service members (Thomas et al., 2018).

This thesis aims to explore the current practices and policies related to promoting transcendence in the U.S. military and to identify opportunities for enhancing these efforts, such as focusing on all character strengths of transcendence versus just the spirituality piece, to better support the spiritual and emotional needs of military personnel.

B. RESEARCH PURPOSE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the current state of spiritual fitness within the U.S. military and to identify opportunities for improving the implementation of spiritual



fitness programs and policies to better support the spiritual and emotional well-being of United States Navy Sailors. The target audience for this research includes military leaders, policymakers, and researchers interested in enhancing the quality of life for service members. By providing an in-depth analysis of the existing research on transcendence and spirituality in the workplace and reviewing the policies and programs currently in place within the military, this study aims to inform the development of evidence-based policies and practices that can promote spiritual fitness among Navy Sailors. Ultimately, the findings from this research can help to enhance the overall quality of life for those who serve our country, while also providing insights into how transcendence and spirituality can be leveraged to promote well-being in other high-stress, high-performance work environments.

C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the current practices and policies for promoting transcendence within the U.S. military?
2. What are the gaps in the programs?
3. How can these practices be improved to enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of United States Navy Sailors?

D. METHODOLOGY

This thesis utilized a mixed-methods analysis involving a comprehensive literature review on transcendence in academia and the U.S. military, as well as a gap analysis between Navy doctrine on transcendence and the existing literature and policy. This literature review sought out to identify relevant studies on the virtue of transcendence and its character strengths of gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty and excellence, humor, and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This review included peer-reviewed articles, books, and government reports in addition to all relevant instructions and documents published by the United States military branches on spiritual readiness or spiritual fitness were analyzed to investigate the implementation of spiritual fitness in the U.S. military.



This foundation provided a detailed understanding of the current state of spiritual fitness within the U.S. military and how it aligns with existing research on transcendence.

The policy gap analysis served as a systematic framework for examining the existing policies and practices within the Navy. By comparing the current state with the desired state, gaps and discrepancies were identified. Based on the analysis of the gaps, actionable recommendations were developed to bridge the identified gaps. These recommendations aimed to be specific and feasible for implementation. Metrics, interventions, and potential policy changes were considered to effectively resolve the gaps and improve the spiritual and emotional well-being of Navy Sailors.

Overall, the study adopted a detailed and systematic approach, incorporating an extensive literature review, comparative analysis, and policy gap analysis to address the research questions. The goal was to provide a comprehensive understanding of transcendence within the U.S. Navy and contribute valuable insights and recommendations for enhancing the spiritual and emotional well-being of Navy Sailors.

E. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

First, the study's military perspective was confined to examining published documents, possibly restricting the generalizability of the findings by excluding relevant data that may exist outside written policies. The focus strictly adhered to existing literature and policy as human subject research via clinical trials, surveys, interviews, or observational studies was not conducted. Additionally, the analysis of these documents is limited by the information available within them, which may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the efforts being made to promote spiritual fitness within the military as many times, commands create their own internal doctrine that is not accessible to the public. These findings may be limited by the quality and scope of the existing research in the field. This may result in a biased or incomplete representation of the topic.

As spiritual fitness is clinically undefined and therefore is a subjective concept, individuals may have varied interpretations of spiritual fitness. This subjectivity may affect the accuracy and reliability of measures used to assess spiritual fitness and may limit the comparability of results across different studies. To note, many studies on spiritual fitness



rely on self-reported data, which can be subject to bias and inaccuracies. Participants may be inclined to present themselves in a positive light or may have difficulty in accurately recalling or reporting their spiritual experiences.

Overall, these limitations highlight the need for further research in this area, which can help to address some of these concerns and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of spiritual fitness in military readiness.

F. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The introduction, Chapter I, offers an overview of the research. Chapter II presents a systematic literature review on the virtue of transcendence derived from Peterson and Seligman (2004), focusing on its five-character strengths: gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty and excellence, humor, and spirituality. Moving on to Chapter III, we detail the methodology employed for analyzing academic literature on transcendence and its connection to the spiritual dimension of the U.S. military's actions. Chapter IV contains a summary of our work and findings, accompanied by proposals for future research on leveraging the virtue of transcendence within the U.S. Navy. Finally, Chapter V serves as the conclusion.



II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores the concept of transcendence as studied by psychologists Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, who developed the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths and Virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It compares their framework to the current practices and policies in the United States military for promoting transcendence. The review identifies gaps in these programs and suggests improvements to enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of United States Navy Sailors. The analysis begins by examining Peterson and Seligman's framework, as well as the broader academic literature on this topic, and then investigates the practices and policies in the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), followed by an in-depth analysis of the Navy's current policy, doctrine, and training.

A. OVERVIEW OF TRANSCENDENCE

The concept of transcendence offers a powerful framework for connecting with something larger than oneself and finding purpose in life. Transcendence, defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004), involves the capacity to connect with something larger than oneself and find meaning in the world. The virtue of transcendence is broken down into five-character strengths: appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality and are defined in Table 1.



Table 1. Classification of Character Strengths. Adapted from Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 30).

Transcendence -strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
<i>Appreciation of beauty and excellence [awe, wonder, elevation]:</i> Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience
<i>Gratitude:</i> Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
<i>Hope [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]:</i> Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
<i>Humor [playfulness]:</i> Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
<i>Spirituality [religiousness, faith, purpose]:</i> Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe, knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

The American Psychological Association (2023) similarly defined transcendence as a condition of being or awareness that eludes precise definition within the realm of ordinary comprehension or familiarity. This broad definition is exemplified in Viktor E. Frankl’s book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, which emphasizes the importance of finding meaning in life through serving a cause or loving another person (Frankl, 1992). The military profession, with its focus on serving a larger cause and facing challenges that require personal sacrifice, may provide an ideal context for discussing the concept of transcendence.

Additionally, the well-being of service members and their families is crucial for the success of military operations and the maintenance of their health and fitness (Bowles et al., 2017). “Well-being” is defined as “the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous” (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.b). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) states that while there is no single definition of well-being, there is consensus that it entails the existence of positive emotions and moods, the lack of negative emotions, life contentment, fulfillment, and positive functioning (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).



In other words, it is about judging life positively and feeling good. Physical well-being is also considered critical to overall well-being for public health purposes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). As we dig deeper into our studies, the connection between gratitude, hope, humor, appreciation of beauty, and spirituality with overall well-being and other positive associations within the workplace will unfold.

1. Gratitude

Gratitude involves recognizing and appreciating the positive aspects of one's life and expressing thanks to others for their kindness and generosity and is one of the more popularly studied and researched character strengths out of the bunch. Gratitude is often overlooked as an emotion and undervalued as a virtue; gratitude is a positive emotion and a moral virtue that can be cultivated through intentional practice (Emmons, 2004). According to Emmons (2004), gratitude is defined as a feeling of thankfulness and happiness when acknowledging receipt of a gift, whether the gift takes the form of a concrete advantage provided by a particular individual or an instance of tranquil happiness inspired by the beauty of nature. Peterson and Seligman (2004) state that gratitude entails a feeling of thankfulness and happiness upon receiving a gift. This gift could manifest as a tangible benefit from a particular individual, or a moment of serene contentment sparked by the beauty of nature and is considered a theological strength. The term "gratitude" originates from the Latin root "gratia," which signifies grace, graciousness, or a state of being thankful (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

"Trait gratitude and trait optimism both predicted lower heart rate and blood pressure, better sleep quality, more exercise, less stress, more positive expectations and reflections, and greater feelings of appreciation toward others." (Newman et al., 2021, p. 1). Practicing gratitude can have a positive impact on one's subjective well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003) and can have a positive impact on various outcomes related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived support from supervisors and co-workers (Youssef-Morgan et al., 2022) and may be an important factor in promoting social support and reducing stress and depression over time (Wood et al., 2008). Gratitude is an important psychological construct that can have significant benefits for individuals who



intentionally practice it in their daily lives resulting in increased happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being while reducing negative emotions such as envy, resentment, and regret (Emmons, 2004). Gratitude interventions can be an effective tool for promoting positive change and enhancing an individual's psychological well-being and have also proved successful in schools, workplaces, and healthcare settings (Dickens, 2017).

McCullough et al. (2002) conducted a four-part study to investigate the relationship between gratitude and various outcomes which encompassed well-being. Specifically, the authors examined the relationship between gratitude and positive affect, well-being, prosocial behaviors, religiousness/spirituality, envy, and materialistic attitudes. The studies found that gratitude was positively associated with all variables of interest and negatively associated with envy and materialistic attitudes (McCullough et al., 2002). Given the importance of well-being in high-demand occupations such as the military, it is crucial to prioritize this aspect of transcendence when developing a spiritual fitness or readiness program for the military.

Encouraging gratitude among military personnel is important because it may lead to a reduction in stress, increase positive behaviors and experiences, and enhance overall satisfaction with rigorous military service. In terms of stress levels, military personnel were more prone to indicating higher stress levels related to their military duties (39%) compared to their family life (22%); both male and female service members reported similar levels of work-related stress, with approximately 40% perceiving a significant or a substantial degree of stress (Bray et al., 2001). A study was conducted by Newman et al. (2021) on the association between gratitude and psychological and physiological experiences in daily life. The study utilized McCullough's Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6); a 6-item questionnaire that measures gratitude based on daily life experiences (Figure 1). The study also collected physiological measures, such as heart rate and blood pressure, from nearly 5,000 adults. The findings indicate that gratitude was associated with better health outcomes and had a unique influence on different aspects of well-being (Newman et al., 2021).



Instructions: Using the scale below as a guide, write a number beside each statement to indicate how much you agree with it.

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = neutral
- 5 = slightly agree
- 6 = agree
- 7 = strongly agree

- ___ 1. I have so much in life to be thankful for.
- ___ 2. If I had to list everything that I felt grateful for, it would be a very long list.
- ___ 3. When I look at the world, I don't see much to be grateful for.
- ___ 4. I am grateful to a wide variety of people.
- ___ 5. As I get older I find myself more able to appreciate the people, events, and situations that have been part of my life history.
- ___ 6. Long amounts of time can go by before I feel grateful to something or someone.

Scoring: Compute a mean across the item ratings; items 3 and 6 are reverse-scored.

Figure 1. The Gratitude Questionnaire: Six Item Form. Source: McCullough et al. (2002).

The Work Gratitude Scale (WGS) study demonstrates the multidimensional nature of gratitude, encompassing intentional, cognitive, affective, and social aspects with three dimensions: grateful appraisals, gratitude toward others, and intentional attitude of gratitude (Youssef-Morgan et al., 2022). Intentional gratitude refers to a proactive attitude towards expressing gratitude. It implies that a person actively chooses to cultivate and practice gratitude, rather than merely reacting to external circumstances or the actions of others. Cognitive gratitude encompasses recognizing the gift, perceiving its value, acknowledging the giver's goodness, and realizing the benefits beyond social expectations. This multifaceted perspective of gratitude enhances our understanding of its role and importance, adding depth to the thesis. Affective gratitude refers to gratitude as an emotional state or discrete emotion. It is measured as a unidimensional, emotional response associated with experiencing gratitude in a specific context or situation. Social gratitude refers to the aspect of gratitude that involves recognizing and appreciating the generosity



of others, and it may include reciprocating acts of kindness or engaging in prosocial behaviors towards either the original giver or others (Youssef-Morgan et al., 2022).

This scale can be used by organizations and individuals to assess and improve gratitude in the workplace, which can have numerous benefits such as increasing job satisfaction, reducing turnover, and improving mental and physical health. Additionally, this study contributes to the growing body of research on gratitude, highlighting its importance and relevance in the workplace (Youssef-Morgan et al., 2022). The studies' findings suggest that the WGS has the potential to gauge overall gratitude related to work and monitor the impact of workplace interventions aimed at promoting gratitude (Youssef-Morgan et al., 2022). As outlined by Youssef-Morgan et al. (2022), the WGS has the potential to serve as a valuable instrument for the military, enabling the assessment of comprehensive work-related gratitude and the monitoring of the impact of workplace interventions related to cultivating gratitude.

There is a potential for gratitude practice to increase altruistic behavior and support overall well-being. The connection between altruism and gratitude can be explored by examining how acts of selfless concern for others can foster a sense of appreciation and thankfulness, highlighting the reciprocal relationship between these two important virtues. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.c) defines “altruism” as “disinterested or selfless concern for the well-being of others, especially as a principle of action. In the military, service before self is an altruistic way to look at serving one’s country. Karns et al. (2017) investigated the relationship between gratitude and neural reward systems, specifically in the context of altruistic motivations. The method used involved functional magnetic resonance imaging scans and self-reported measures of gratitude and altruism in young adult female participants. The study discovered that participants who reported feeling grateful and having the desire to help others were also found to have specific brain activity related to reward and positive feelings. Additionally, a gratitude-journaling intervention was found to increase the neural pure altruism response (Karns et al., 2017).

Considering and expressing gratitude, even if only done weekly, can offer emotional and social advantages, and it could be valuable to include this practice in spiritual fitness and readiness programs (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Participants in



this study were divided into three groups: gratitude, hassle, and neutral, and were asked to record their feelings, behaviors, symptoms, and evaluations once a week for 10 weeks. The gratitude group reflected on things they were thankful for, while the hassle group listed things that annoyed them, and the neutral group recalled events that impacted them. The gratitude group showed enhanced well-being across several measures compared to the other groups, with the most significant increase being in positive affect. (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Considering and expressing gratitude could be a valuable practice to include in spiritual fitness and readiness programs within the military.

Gratitude can be leveraged to aid in times of uncertainty. Wood et al. (2008) explored the interconnections between trait gratitude, perceived social support, stress, and depression within the context of a life transition. They carried out two longitudinal studies, employing a comprehensive cross-lagged panel design. Participants were required to complete assessments at the beginning and end of their inaugural college semester. The results of the research conducted by Wood et al. (2008) unveiled a direct correlation between gratitude and elevated levels of perceived social support, alongside a corresponding link to decreased stress and depression levels. Intriguingly, no single variable was found to be a precursor to gratitude, and most proposed mediation models were discarded. The study's implications suggest that gratitude can autonomously cultivate social support and potentially serve as a shield against stress and depression. These findings have potential relevance for clinical interventions (Wood et al., 2008). This finding may be especially relevant to the Navy given that more than 150,000 join this military service each year (Laich, 2022), with the mean age at the time of enlistment being 19 years and 3 months (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2021). It is well-documented that joining the military represents a major life transition and entails significant stress (Bowles et al., 2017). Thus, fostering gratitude within this population likely matters because doing so may serve as an important pathway toward reducing stress and potentially improving first-term attrition, decreasing maladaptive behavioral patterns, and improving overall satisfaction with military service.



2. Hope

Hope is cultivated not during periods of ease or comfort, but rather through facing adversity and discomfort (Brown, 2021). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), hope is a character strength that represents a positive outlook on the future and the potential for positive outcomes and is considered an emotional strength. Hope can be defined as the certainty in an individual's capacity to recognize and follow paths leading to desired goals, accompanied by the motivation to act and utilize those pathways through agency thinking (Snyder, 2002) while hopelessness is simply the inverse of hope or lack thereof (Huen et al., 2015). Hope involves thinking about the future with expectation, taking action to make positive outcomes more likely, and feeling confident that these outcomes are possible. This positive stance toward the future can lead to increased motivation and a more positive attitude in the present. Hope can improve mental health (Laranjeira & Querido, 2022) especially in the realm of depression and suicide (Inoue et al., 2023) and increase resiliency building and expanding coping processes that foster growth (Waters et al., 2021).

Charles Richard Snyder, a prominent psychologist known for his work on hope theory, emphasizes that hope is a cognitive process that involves setting specific goals, developing strategies to achieve them, and maintaining the motivation to pursue those goals even in the face of obstacles (Snyder, 2022). He also highlights the significance of agency thinking, which refers to the belief in one's capacity to act and influence outcomes, as a key component of hope. Snyder's hope theory underscores hope's role in fostering resilience, motivation, and positive psychological well-being (Snyder, 2002).

Being in the military is no easy feat and comes with various struggles. Inoue et al. (2023) revealed "separation from loved ones and support systems, stressors of combat, and seeing oneself and others in harm's way are all elements that increase the risk of depression in active duty and veteran populations" (Depression section, para. 1). Unfortunately, the active duty and veteran populations are at a heightened risk of developing depression due to the challenges associated with the military environment. However, a recent study found that individuals with an optimistic and hopeful outlook are more likely to adapt to adversity and exhibit behaviors associated with greater life satisfaction, while also having a lower likelihood of developing mental disorders (Laranjeira & Queirido, 2022). Given the



increased risk of mental health disorders in the military, it is imperative to embed the character trait of learned hopefulness in military training.

Snyder's hope theory provides a framework that can support the military in fostering resilience, goal achievement, problem-solving, motivation, and overall well-being among its personnel. By integrating learned hopefulness into military training, individuals can develop the cognitive skills and mindset necessary to navigate the challenges they face, maintain motivation in the face of adversity, and exhibit greater life satisfaction. This proactive approach to cultivating hope can contribute to the mental well-being and overall effectiveness of military personnel in fulfilling their demanding roles (Inoue et al., 2023; Laranjeira & Queirido, 2022).

Learned hopefulness is a concept that describes the capacity to gain insight from past events and apply that wisdom to sustain a positive outlook for the future. This concept entails having confidence that circumstances will improve, even in the face of adversity (Tomasulo, 2021). A range of simple practices and modifications to one's lifestyle are noted by Laranjeira and Queirido (2022) that can be incorporated into daily routine. Some of these strategies to cultivate a hopeful mindset include hopeful thinking, spending time with hopeful and optimistic people, practicing gratitude, and resilience training.

According to Tomasulo (2021), learned hopefulness interventions have the potential to enhance several key aspects of hope, including our ability to see possibilities instead of limitations, transform negative beliefs into hopeful ones, cultivate positive emotions, utilize our strengths more effectively, set motivating goals, find purpose and meaning, and build deep, reciprocal relationships. As the military shifts its attention from solely focusing on mental and physical strength to spiritual strength, hope is a virtue that cannot be ignored. As noted by Huen et al. (2015) these daily practices and interventions can be learned, and we believe that this may assist with the mental health crisis the military is currently experiencing as the presence of hope has the potential to mitigate the adverse effects of hopelessness on thoughts of suicide.

Research also underscores the impact that hope can have on physical health. For example, a study was conducted by Long et al. (2020) that explored the relationship



between hope and health outcomes in older adults. A heightened sense of hope was linked to improved physical health and more health-conscious behaviors in specific domains, including a lowered risk of overall mortality, a decreased incidence of chronic ailments, a diminished susceptibility to cancer, and a reduction in sleep-related issues. Furthermore, this heightened hope was connected to a decrease in psychological distress and an enhancement in social well-being (Long et al., 2020). While one cannot avoid all the stressors of military life, one can employ the practice of learned hopefulness as a resilience factor that might alleviate the potential of developing mental illnesses.

3. Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence

Appreciation of beauty and excellence has been extensively studied in the domain of philosophy and critical theory but is one of the lesser-studied and researched character strengths in popular psychology.

To elucidate the profound emotional state associated with experiencing awe, Peterson and Seligman (2004, p. 520) illustrate it as follows: “the person feels oneness with the universe, a sense of truth, an inability to express experience in mere words, and a vividness and clarity of sensations and perceptions.” It encompasses the ability to notice and deeply appreciate beauty and excellence across various domains of life, including art, music, athletic performance, nature, and the moral brilliance of others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and it may be valuable to explore the potential benefits of cultivating an appreciation of beauty among servicemembers.

An argument can be made that embracing the beauty and excellence present in the world can contribute to the ethical development and moral decision-making of service members. When individuals have a heightened appreciation for the beauty around them, they are more likely to acknowledge the intrinsic value of life and the interconnectedness of humanity (Allen, 2018). By recognizing the inherent beauty in life’s diverse aspects, even amidst challenges and difficulties, individuals may develop a deeper sense of compassion and empathy and may resist engaging in immoral actions that could harm others. This recognition can foster a greater sense of responsibility towards others and deter



engagement in transgressions such as war crimes or actions that compromise the well-being and dignity of individuals.

By integrating the concept of appreciating beauty into military training, education, and support programs, service members can be encouraged to cultivate a mindset that values the preservation of life, promotes empathy, and discourages immoral conduct. Such an approach aims to foster a deeper understanding of the consequences of one's actions and instill a commitment to upholding ethical standards.

4. Humor

While it may seem like a stretch to relate playful humor to the military, research shows that employee humor is linked to improved job performance satisfaction, stronger workgroup cohesion, better health, increased coping effectiveness, and reduced burnout, stress, and work withdrawal (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2015; Wijewardena et al., 2017). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), humor is considered a character strength that was added to their classification due to its universality and the need to balance the classification from being too grim. Humor serves as a form of communication that involves interactions within a social context, incorporates both emotional and cognitive elements, and generally culminates in laughter (Lang and Lee, 2010). Peterson and Seligman (2004) highlight that excessive seriousness, even in matters of virtue, can be suspect and lacking in true virtue.

When examining the impact of humor on various aspects of the workplace, it is crucial to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of humor, as it encompasses diverse perspectives and interpretations of its true essence. Mesmer-Magnus (2012) discusses employee humor and leader humor, and the outcomes of each while Martin et al. (2003) describe four different types of humor as measured by the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), a psychological assessment tool aimed at measuring an individual's preferred styles of humor. Self-enhancing humor involves using humor as a coping mechanism to maintain a positive mood and perspective in stressful situations, affiliative humor is used to enhance social relationships and create a harmonious atmosphere, aggressive humor involves mocking or teasing others to gain power, and self-defeating humor entails using self-



deprecation to cope with insecurities or seek approval, but it is linked to lower psychological well-being.

Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) explore the role of humor in the workplace and its impact on employee well-being and organizational effectiveness through a meta-analysis of prior research. “Results suggest employee humor is associated with enhanced work performance, satisfaction, workgroup cohesion, health, and coping effectiveness, as well as decreased burnout, stress, and work withdrawal” (Mesmer et al., 2012, p. 155). Hu et al. (2023) conducted a study that supports the positive association between leader humor and employee creativity, suggesting that leader humor can serve as a useful tool for coping with stress and enhancing interpersonal communication.

Given the recognition of humor as a valuable leadership tool for positive workplace outcomes, Karakowsky and coauthors (2019) address the limited theoretical understanding of leader humor and its influence on follower outcomes. The researchers devised and validated a model grounded in signaling theory to investigate the correlation between leader humor and the proactive pursuit of feedback from followers. The study collected data from 304 employees and their leaders within a sizable Canadian retail organization. The findings revealed that the humor exhibited by leaders can influence the inclination of subordinates to actively seek feedback, mainly through its impact on the level of trust they hold for their leader (Karakowsky et al., 2019). Kim and coauthors (2015) found that supervisors’ utilization of self-enhancing humor exhibited a positive connection with the psychological well-being and job performance of their subordinates. Additionally, affiliative humor displayed a positive link with psychological well-being, whereas aggressive humor displayed a detrimental association with psychological well-being. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2015) revealed that supervisor humor indirectly influenced the psychological well-being of subordinates through social distance. Additionally, the extent of emotional trust vested in supervisors played a moderating role in the connection between supervisor humor and social detachment. Specifically, the association between affiliative humor and social separation exhibited greater strength in instances of elevated trust in the supervisor in comparison to situations of lower trust (Kim et al., 2015). This research highlights the relevance of humor in leadership and its potential impact on fostering



proactive feedback-seeking behavior, mental wellness and work performance among followers and could prove useful in a military construct.

One of the most diagnosed mental health disorders in active-duty service amongst its members is adjustment disorder, accounting for nearly one-third of mental health diagnoses from 2016 to 2020 (Morgan, 2022). While not all the adjustment disorder diagnoses are attributed to initially joining the service, Wijewardena and coauthors (2017) found that humor in the workplace can lead to improved newcomer adjustment. Their research investigated how a supervisor's positive humor is connected to newcomers' adjustment, specifically looking at how the mediating role of their identification with the supervisor influences this relationship. The study utilized a sample of 117 newcomers and employed the snowball method for data collection. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to analyze the data. The results showed that a supervisor's positive humor has a beneficial impact on newcomers' adaptation by affecting their identification with the supervisor (Wijewardena et al., 2017). These findings offer valuable insights into how supervisor humor affects identification and the adjustment of newcomers. The military should thoroughly examine these results to assess whether adopting this leadership style could yield beneficial outcomes. While there are challenges to promoting humor within the workplace generally and by leaders specifically—after all, humor is somewhat subjective and indeed can be risky in the workplace—it may nevertheless be an area worth exploring for the military as it can positively affect well-being other outcomes of interest.

5. Spirituality

The concepts of religion and spirituality share a common foundation as they both seek to explore the meaning of life and the potential influence of a higher power. However, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the ways in which they are practiced reveal significant differences (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2016). Religion is characterized by its organized and communal structure, encompassing a system of beliefs shared within a community. On the other hand, spirituality is an individualistic experience, shaped by personal beliefs and convictions though it can be described as the level of fulfillment, significance, or guidance obtained through engaging in a specific task, whether



it is related to religion or society, with the ultimate outcome of improving oneself and benefiting others (Altaf & Awan, 2011). While religion incorporates spirituality, the presence of spirituality does not necessarily imply adherence to a specific religious tradition (*The Mental Health Benefits of Religion and Spirituality*, 2016).

Workplace spirituality encompasses various dimensions, one of which is spiritual leadership, a relatively new concept that has gained recognition within the field of workplace spirituality and transcendental leadership research (Gotsis & Grimani, 2017). Spiritual leadership involves elements such as meaningful work, a sense of community, and alignment of values with work (Aydin & Ceylan, 2009). It emphasizes the importance of creating a work environment that fosters a deeper sense of purpose, connection, and shared values among employees. Spirituality is commonly regarded as a deeply personal realm, where individuals have the autonomy to define it for themselves, largely independent from the constraints, formalities, and obligations associated with religious systems (Koenig, 2009) while spiritual leadership embodies and upholds values such as integrity, goodness, teamwork, knowledge, wholeness, and interconnectedness (Aydin & Ceylan, 2009). Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe spirituality as a character strength that involves having a coherent belief system pertaining to the greater meaning and purpose of the universe, and an individual's role within it. By integrating spiritual principles into leadership practices, spiritual leaders aim to promote a sense of fulfillment, belonging, and ethical behavior within the workplace.

There are a lot of tedious and menial tasks in the military but if leaders depict why each task has a purpose and is important, regardless of how seemingly small and insignificant, it is possible to reduce work-related stress. Petchsawang and Duchon (2009) developed a measure for workplace spirituality, focusing on its multi-dimensional nature and interconnected components. The study conducted a confirmatory factor analysis on data from employees in a large Thai company and found support for a four-factor model consisting of *compassion*, *meaningful work*, *mindfulness*, and *transcendence*. The authors in turn define workplace spirituality as a sense of connection and compassion towards others, accompanied by a mindful awareness within oneself, as individuals strive to engage in meaningful work that fosters a sense of transcendence Petchsawang and Duchon (2009).



The research highlights the importance of spirituality in the workplace, suggesting its potential to reduce stress, conflict, and absenteeism while enhancing work performance. It also explores the Eastern context of workplace spirituality, acknowledging its relevance in Human Resource Development and organizational development, promoting values such as virtue, corporate citizenship, honesty, and integrity. The study contributes to the field by providing a measurement tool and emphasizing the significance of workplace spirituality in organizational settings which may aid the military in embracing a measurement tool to effectively measure workplace spirituality.

The military should be exploring all avenues to help reduce stress to include looking at workplace spirituality. Daniel (2015) investigated workplace spirituality and work-related stress in Mexico and the United States. The results indicated that having a sense of purpose in one's work was linked to lower levels of work-related stress in both countries. This underscores the significance of participating in meaningful tasks during work to alleviate stress. The study conducted by Arnetz et al. (2013) aligns with prior literature, providing evidence that workplace incorporation of spiritual values relates to decreased job-related stress. The outcomes affirm a constructive correlation between spirituality and diminished stress effects, as evidenced by logistic regression analyses. These analyses demonstrated a favorable connection between the Spiritual Values in the Workplace scale, improved mental well-being, and decreased occupational stress and supplements the existing body of knowledge by demonstrating the beneficial impact of spiritual values in the workplace on mitigating stress levels (Arnetz et al., 2013; Daniel, 2015). These studies provide practical implications for managing work-related stress and contribute to cross-cultural research on workplace spirituality.

With the United States military facing challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel, it is crucial to prioritize retention strategies and address the declining interest in military service to ensure the sustainability of the all-volunteer force (McNally et al., 2023). Studies have indicated that acknowledging spirituality within the work environment, both on an individual and contextual level, enhances job satisfaction and bolsters organizational commitment. Conversely, another investigation revealed that introduction of a workplace spirituality program had a negligible effect on the desire to



quit raising concerns about differences in industries (Atlaf & Awan, 2011; Beehner & Blackwell, 2015; Belwalker et al., 2018). Atlaf and Awan (2011) found that workplace spirituality has a positive impact and the ability to induce job satisfaction and better employee performance. Their study suggests that work overload is a common issue faced by employees, leading to negative impacts on health and mental well-being, as well as reduced performance and inability to meet standards. Atlaf and Awan (2011) proposed that workplace spirituality addresses the challenges posed by work overload. Their study centers on investigating how workplace spirituality influences the connection between job overload and employee satisfaction. The outcomes reveal that workplace spirituality indeed holds noteworthy moderating effects on job satisfaction, challenging the initial conceptualization based on theory.

The positive impacts of workplace spirituality on job satisfaction and organizational citizenship behaviors, supported by evidence, offer valuable insights for promoting managerial effectiveness and fostering group dynamics through the cultivation of workplace spirituality (Belwalker et al., 2018). On the contrary, Beehner and Blackwell (2015) explored the impact of workplace spirituality on turnover intention in the food service industry and found that workplace spirituality was not impactful on turnover intention raising the need for additional studies on other industries. Taking these studies into account, fostering a sense of meaning, purpose, and interconnectedness within the military work environment, workplace spirituality may encourage a greater sense of fulfillment, engagement, and dedication among service members, ultimately leading to higher job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to the organization.

In the military, workforce diversity is also a significant consideration, and creating inclusive environments is crucial for optimal team performance and cohesion. Gotsis and Grimani (2017) examine the significance of spiritual leadership in fostering humane and inclusive workplaces within the context of workforce diversity and proposed a mediation model wherein inclusive practices, rooted in spiritual values, serve as a mediator between spiritual leadership and the creation of a climate for inclusion.

Workplace spirituality, including concepts like spiritual leadership and interconnectedness, has the potential to positively impact job satisfaction, organizational



commitment, and inclusive environments. Incorporating workplace spirituality principles can be a valuable strategy for increasing effectiveness and addressing challenges in recruitment and retention within the armed forces, creating a more inclusive, cohesive, and effective military organization.

6. Academic Literature Summary

This literature review explores the concept of transcendence, as defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004), and its relevance to the well-being of United States Navy Sailors. Transcendence involves connecting with something larger than oneself and finding meaning in the world focusing on five specific character strengths: gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty and excellence, humor, and spirituality though the focus will primarily be on spirituality and its significance in various contexts. It is important to acknowledge a definitional issue regarding the concept, particularly in academic and military literature.

Within academia, transcendence is commonly regarded as the overarching construct, encompassing five specific character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, in military literature, spirituality takes precedence as the superordinate structure that represents purpose and meaning in life, often disregarding the other character strengths associated with transcendence. This divergence presents a major gap that can be addressed in this thesis.

This thesis aims to highlight the importance of spirituality and its recognition within different organizations, particularly military services. While most services have some degree of doctrine, policy, and programs to address spirituality, there is a tendency to overlook other facets of transcendence. This incomplete approach results in an uneven or incomplete development and sustainment of character among service members.

By exploring this gap and delving deeper into the understanding of spirituality, this research intends to shed light on the significance of comprehensive transcendence, encompassing all relevant character strengths. This examination will contribute to a more holistic understanding of spirituality and its role in personal and collective betterment,



emphasizing the need for a well-rounded approach in cultivating character among individuals within diverse settings.

Overall, prioritizing these character strengths can enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of Navy Sailors and military personnel. By incorporating practices that promote gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty and excellence, humor, and spirituality, the military can support the positive psychological and social outcomes of its personnel.

B. CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF TRANSCENDENCE ACROSS THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Within the Department of Defense (DOD), the conceptualizations of transcendence, most closely related to spiritual strength, play a crucial role in shaping the comprehensive approach to physical, mental, and spiritual fitness. Each branch of the military—Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy—has developed its own understanding of spiritual fitness and its integration into the overall well-being of service members. These conceptualizations reflect a growing recognition that holistic fitness encompasses various interconnected aspects of an individual’s life, including physical capabilities, mental resilience, and spiritual well-being. By exploring how each branch addresses transcendence within its respective programs, we can gain insights into the diverse approaches taken by the DOD to promote the health, resilience, and effectiveness of our military personnel. In the sections that follow, I will first address how the DOD, Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) views transcendence and, more specifically, I will largely focus on those organizations’ views on spirituality given the centrality of spirituality to my research questions. Following a summary of those organizations’ policy, programs, and doctrine on spirituality, I will separately address the same for the Navy.

1. The Department of Defense’s View

The DOD has not written any instructions, notices, or guidance specifically about transcendence as a virtue or about gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty, or humor, but the DOD is traversing the realm of spirituality.



On September 1, 2011, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3405.01 was published describing the new initiative of a total force fitness (TFF) framework (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2011). The TFF framework serves as a method for comprehending, evaluating, and sustaining the fitness of the military, consisting of eight interconnected domains that are guided by five fundamental principles, aiming to promote the resilience and well-being of Service members amidst prolonged deployment and combat operations. The CJCSI 3405.01 describes the domain of spiritual fitness within the eight domains that encompass transcendence, considering factors such as worldview, core values, identity, meaning and purpose, ethical foundation, and diversity, closely aligning with this holistic understanding. Building inner strength through spiritual fitness fosters resilience and improves individuals' capacity to effectively cope with stress. Emphasizing spiritual fitness is a crucial element within a TFF program, synergistically complementing the other seven fitness domains.

Additionally, DOD Instruction 1300.17 "Religious Liberty in the Military Services," published in 2020, provides guidance on religious accommodation, expression, and the rights and responsibilities of service members regarding their religious beliefs (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a). This instruction emphasizes that members of the armed services possess the right to observe the principles of their belief system or to have no religious beliefs but does not go into any benefits of religion or spirituality. DOD Instruction 1304.28 "The Appointment of Service of Chaplains" published in 2021 establishes policy regarding the role of chaplains in meeting the religious requirements and tending to the spiritual needs of service members and other authorized individuals (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020b). Additionally, it outlines the responsibility of chaplains in providing guidance to individuals and commands on matters pertaining to religion, morals, ethics, well-being, and morale.



2. The Army's View

The Army's historical emphasis has predominantly centered on the physical, nutritional, mental, and sleep domains, with less attention given to the spiritual domain. However, the introduction of the Army Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) System signifies a recognition of the essential importance of spiritual readiness in our fundamental existence as human beings (The Department of the Army [DA], 2023). The United States Army launched the Spiritual Readiness Initiative (SRI) in 2020 through the Office of the Chief of Chaplains (OCCH) (Grimes, 2022). The Spiritual Readiness Initiative empowers chaplains with essential tools to evaluate each newly enlisted personnel's spiritual readiness while it fosters cooperation among the Army Chaplain Corps, Army Behavioral Health, and additional healthcare professionals (Duffield, 2023). Furthermore, it involves Army leadership applying scientific discoveries to improve Soldiers' overall well-being. According to Colonel Kevin Groke, U.S. Army Chief of Behavioral Health, a commander's utmost focus is the mission at hand and its successful accomplishment. He highlights the importance of having prepared Soldiers, underscoring the necessity for behavioral health experts and chaplains to collaborate as a cohesive unit (Stamps, 2022).

To put the SRI into action, the Army released the Army Field Manual (FM) 7-22, titled Holistic Health and Fitness, also known as H2F, in October 2020 which lays down the Army's guidelines for preparing Soldiers for readiness training (DA, 2020b). According to FM 7-22, spiritual readiness is described as the capacity to withstand and transcend difficult circumstances, adversity, and crises through the interpretation and significance given to life events. It further explains that personal spiritual attributes, shaped by core beliefs, values, motivation, and identity, play a crucial role in constructing this meaning. FM 7-22 describes a handful of basic spiritual readiness practices such as regular gatherings with like-minded individuals, service to others through charity, providing hospitality, journaling, meditating, praying, and personal or group belief-based education while providing examples of spiritual readiness self-assessments (Table 2). Moreover, FM 7-22 includes a resource section that outlines the responsibilities and duties of Commanders and leaders. It also provides a comprehensive list of additional resources along with their descriptions (DA, 2020b). These resources encompass various entities



such as Chaplains, Equal Opportunity Advisors, the Army Fit website, local organizations, and internally assigned assets.

Table 2. Spiritual Readiness Assessment. Source: DA (2020b).

Factor	Questions	
Personhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What perceptions do I have about myself that give me inherent value? • What gives my life meaning if anything? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I believe that my life has purpose? If not why not? • If so, what purpose?
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do my worldviews and associated beliefs say about who I am in relation to others? • How would I answer the question, "Who am I?" 	
Growth Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What mindset do I use to progress through life? • On what do I base this mindset? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what do I engage that shapes this mindset? • What am I reading to reinforce this mindset?
Personal Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over what do I have the ability to exercise control? • What aspects of my life are completely out of my control? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can I do about adverse situations in my life over which I have no control? • How do I handle guilt and shame?
Factor	Questions	
Coping Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I typically respond when experiencing adversity? • What, if anything, has worked well? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has not worked? • How can I improve my ability to cope with adversity?
Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what or whom do I feel most connected? • How am I reinforcing those connections? • What connections cause significant distress? • How can I healthfully disconnect from those? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If disconnection is impossible, how can I manage the connection to minimize the distress? • How can I re-establish damaged connections? • Who, if anyone, do I need to forgive to include myself?

Since the Army’s most important asset is its people, the Global Assessment Tool (GAT), an online survey, is utilized to confidentially evaluate individuals’ overall health and resilience. Introduced in 2009, the GAT is tailored for Soldiers, Family Members, and Army Civilians, aiming to enhance self-awareness and support personal growth endeavors (Vie et al., 2016). It assesses readiness and resilience through five dimensions of strength: social, emotional, family, *spiritual*, and physical. Soldiers are required to complete the GAT annually via the Azimuth Check, a recently updated ten minute version of the GAT



easily assessable online; however, there are multiple approaches to measuring your spiritual resilience (*Army Ready and Resilient* n.d.). As of the “Spiritual Fitness Inventory” Technical Guide 360, accessible via the U.S. Army Public Health Command Spiritual Health website, is one such tool. Just as you evaluate your physical health by stepping on a scale or monitoring your exercise, it is equally crucial to prioritize your spiritual well-being (Cooper, 2018).

3. The Air Force’s View

In the context of spiritual readiness within the United States Air Force, Chaplain Matthew Wilson of the 446th Airlift Wing emphasizes that every Airman, regardless of their affiliation with organized religion, possesses the capacity to nurture their spiritual dimension (Andom, 2020). Following the release and in direct support of CJCSI 3405.01, the Air Force published the Integrated Resilience Instruction 90–506 on April 2, 2014 (Secretary of the Air Force, 2014). This instruction outlines and defines Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF). CAF is a holistic approach that fosters the development of resilience, encompassing mental, physical, social, and spiritual domains and requiring a cultural shift in how fitness is perceived and maintained, promoting accountability among Airmen in alignment with Air Force Core Values, and integrating various educational, training, and programmatic efforts to sustain a prepared and resilient force with the support of leaders and individuals at all levels (Table 3).

Table 3. Spiritual Fitness as Defined by the Air Force. Source: Secretary of the Air Force (2014, p. 16).

<p><i>Spiritual Fitness</i> - The ability to adhere to beliefs, principles, or values needed to persevere and prevail in accomplishing missions.</p>	<p><i>Core Values</i> - Principles that guide an organization's or a person's internal conduct as well as its relationship with the external world.</p>
	<p><i>Perseverance</i> - Steady persistence in a course of action, a purpose, a state, etc., especially in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement.</p>
	<p><i>Perspective</i> - How one views situations, facts, etc. and judges their relative importance.</p>
	<p><i>Purpose</i> - The reason for which one exists.</p>



The Air Force has many opportunities to strengthen spiritual resilience through the Chaplain Corps. AFI 90–5001 released on January 25, 2019, also discusses the oversight of Chaplain Corps policies, and offers guidance to leaders regarding the spiritual aspect of the CAF framework. It also contributes significantly to the other three domains of CAF (Secretary of the Air Force, 2019). The Chaplain Corps’ mission is to care for the spiritual, moral, and emotional well-being of the Army and to make it stronger from the inside out (U.S. Army, n.d.) The Chaplain Corps offers different services such as spiritual retreats, worship and prayer services, religious education, pastoral counseling, resource libraries at various chapels, and wounded warrior ministry (U.S. Navy, n.d.). In a recent memorandum, Col. Randy A. Marshall, the Air Force Reserve Command chaplain at Robins Air Force Base explained that spirituality fundamentally encompasses an individual’s fundamental beliefs, methods of interacting with others, and a framework for understanding the world (Andom, 2020).

4. The Marine Corps’ View

The United States Marine Corps (USMC) has always been known for its physical fitness. In 2016, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Neller, introduced a comprehensive approach to fitness by incorporating spiritual, mental, and social components into the regimen and announced this new approach via the Spiritual Fitness All Marine Corps Activities (ALMARS) 033/16 (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2016). This new tactic towards holistic fitness was influenced by extensive research demonstrating the substantial impact of spiritual fitness on building resilience, promoting personal growth, facilitating recovery, healing, and enhancing adaptability, irrespective of individual perspectives or beliefs (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2016).

With the changing cultural landscape, the Chaplain Corps of the U.S. Navy created the Spiritual Fitness Guide (SFG) as a resource to assist Marines in nurturing their spiritual well-being, offering voluntary guidance that can act as a valuable reference to determine when it may be beneficial to seek support and counsel from a chaplain (United States Navy Chaplain Corps, n.d.). The first version of the SFG was released in May 2019 with the updated version being released in February 2022. The Marine Corps SFG comprises various sections that provide valuable insights and guidance on spiritual fitness. It begins with an introduction,



outlining the purpose of the guide and emphasizing the significance of spiritual fitness in Marine leader development, warfighting, and human performance and resilience. The guide references Commandant's "Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness" Guidance, ALMARS 027/20, as a foundational document (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2020). Addressing common misperceptions, it presents the Spiritual Fitness Model, which encompasses definitions, tangible and intangible factors, internal and external influences, as well as three elements and seven indicators of spiritual fitness. The guide also includes a visual representation of the Spiritual Fitness Infographic (Appendix A). Additionally, it incorporates contemporary learning techniques aimed at effectively leading Marines in discussions related to spiritual fitness. Overall, this comprehensive guide serves as a valuable resource for understanding and promoting spiritual well-being within the Marine Corps.

5. United States Special Forces Operations Command's View

The United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) launched the Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) Program in 2013 as a pilot, making it one of the pioneering resiliency initiatives to incorporate spiritual fitness in the military. It received official permanent authority in 2017 (Kamarck & Pedrigi, 2021). USSOCOM's mission is to develop and utilize the world's top Special Operations Forces (SOF) to carry out special operations and activities on a global scale. POTFF's mission is to enhance and maintain the readiness, longevity, and performance of the SOF. This is achieved through comprehensive and integrated human performance programs that focus on the well-being and strength of both the force members and their families. The goal is to ensure that SOF personnel are physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared to carry out their demanding missions effectively. POTFF strives to provide support, resources, and interventions that address the unique challenges faced by SOF members and their families, fostering resilience, and enabling them to thrive in their roles (Staff, 2021).

POTFF has five domain properties including physical, psychological, cognitive, social and family, and spiritual (Staff, 2021). The spiritual domain most closely aligns with Peterson and Seligman's character strength, transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The spiritual domain encompasses a range of interconnected elements aimed at enhancing the



well-being and performance of SOF personnel. Through spiritual practice, character ethics, values, and beliefs, as well as the pursuit of meaning and purpose, individuals are supported in their personal and professional growth. The provision of counseling, support for individual beliefs, and facilitation of spiritual practices contribute to the holistic development of SOF personnel. Furthermore, fostering a sense of connection and belonging, alongside the continuous assessment of spiritual fitness, enables tailored programs and interventions to include workshops, retreats, and counseling. An updated POTFF mission statement was released in February 2023 by Colonel Michael Stone in which he emphasized the need for better guidance and implementation of POTFF (Stone, 2023). Recognizing the significance of the spiritual dimension, POTFF acknowledges its role in strengthening the character, resilience, and overall effectiveness of SOF members, aligning them with their individual beliefs, values, and shared purpose.

6. Summary: Spirituality in the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and USSOCOM

The importance of incorporating spiritual fitness into overall fitness programs has been acknowledged by the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and USSOCOM. These military organizations recognize and provide resources to promote spiritual fitness among service members. Additionally, the Navy acknowledges the significance of spiritual fitness and its approach to fostering spiritual well-being which will be examined next.

C. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TRANSCENDENCE WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

Currently, the Navy lacks formal guidance specifically addressing spirituality in contrast to these other branches. It appears to be command and base dependent throughout the fleet on if, how, and when to implement spiritual fitness. Although the Navy has not independently published material on spiritual fitness, the SFG created by Navy Chaplains and released as a Marine Corps leadership guide, serves as a valuable resource, though it is primarily focused on Marines.



1. The Navy and Spirituality: Policy and Doctrine

At present, the Navy has not published any formal guidance, directives, or instructions specifically dedicated to spiritual fitness, unlike other branches, though the Marine Corps SFG was created by the Navy Chaplain Corps. However, there is an available self-assessment tool for spiritual fitness from the Marine Corps SFG that can be accessed through the Command Navy Region Southwest portal. Spiritual fitness currently appears to be command and base dependent. According to the Command, Navy Region Southwest website, Naval Base Coronado houses a dedicated division known as the “Spiritual Fitness Division,” previously referred to as the Chaplains Religious Enrichment Development Operation (U.S. Navy, n.d.). This division receives support from the Chief of Naval Operations and collaborates closely with the Navy Chief of Chaplains. Its primary objective is to raise awareness among Sailors and their families about the transformative advantages of maintaining a healthy spiritual life (*Spiritual Fitness*, n.d.). To accomplish this mission, the division organizes a range of programs and events, including personal and spiritual growth retreats, marriage enrichment retreats, team-building workshops, and various gatherings throughout the year. By offering these opportunities, the division aims to nurture personal and social resilience, empowering individuals and families to explore and cultivate their spiritual well-being.

West Coast commands are not the only entities to integrate spiritual fitness into their regimen. Carrier Strike Group 10, located at Naval Station Norfolk, strives to offer a comprehensive range of pastoral care and spiritual services (Rodgers, 2023). This includes daily worship, prayer, study, reflection, and a variety of religious services catering to different preferences and denominations. According to Carrier Strike group 10 leadership, command religious ministry departments (CRMD) provide religious and secular counseling, confidential support, and even accommodate lay-led services such as scriptural studies, faith formation classes, and meditation sessions. CRMDs also maintain ships’ libraries that offer spiritual and religious books for Sailors to access and borrow (Rodgers, 2023).

2. The Navy and Spirituality: Training and Development

The SFG, which serves as a comprehensive training resource for Marines and Sailors to nurture their spiritual well-being, was developed by the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps (United



States Navy Chaplain Corps, n.d.). While the Navy itself has not independently published any material on spiritual fitness solely directed at its Sailors, the SFG stands as a joint guide that offers valuable insights. This voluntary guide serves as a referral tool, indicating when individuals should seek support and guidance from chaplains. The SFG is a comprehensive document that primarily focuses on Marines, as evidenced by the word “Marine” appearing 316 times, while the term “Sailor” is mentioned only 6 times (United States Navy Chaplain Corps, n.d.).

3. Summary

In the current state, the Navy Chaplain Corps developed the SFG used to help Marines and Sailors maintain a healthy spiritual life though it appears that this guide favors the Marine Corps side of the house. It is important to note that individual Naval commands and bases have implemented programs to enhance spiritual fitness among their Sailors.

This literature review has provided insights into the existing landscape of spiritual fitness within the Navy, highlighting the absence of formal guidance and the varying integration of spiritual programs across commands. It also underscores the significance of the SFG developed by the U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps, which serves as a valuable resource. To dig deeper into these matters, the subsequent methods section will outline the approach used to investigate the current practices, policies, and gaps in promoting transcendence and provide a framework for improving spiritual and emotional well-being among United States Navy Sailors.



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III. METHODOLOGY AND ANALYSIS

A. INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGY

The methodology section of this thesis presents a comprehensive overview of the research approach and methods used to address the current practices and policies for promoting transcendence within the U.S. military and to understand how these practices can be improved to enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of U.S. Navy Sailors. This section outlines the mixed-methods process undertaken to investigate transcendence, including an extensive literature review that examined academic literature, a comparative analysis of what each branch has to offer regarding transcendence, and a thorough gap analysis of the policy and doctrine surrounding spiritual fitness within the military. This research aims to provide a pathway for policymakers to enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of Navy Sailors by recognizing gaps and offering valuable insights. This systematic approach aims to contribute to the existing knowledge in this field.

B. METHODOLOGY

A comparative analysis and policy gap analysis framework were used to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the current practices and policies for promoting transcendence within the U.S. military, identifying gaps in existing programs, and proposing improvements to enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of United States Navy Sailors. Gap analysis is widely recognized for its effectiveness in enhancing company performance across a broad spectrum of areas, including but not limited to finance, human resources, marketing, innovation, information technology, sales, education, and engineering (Alexander, 2020). The framework itself represents a systematic and structured method for identifying and analyzing gaps between policy objectives and outcomes. It helps in evaluating the effectiveness of policies and identifying areas for improvement (Leonard et al., 2022).

To start this process, it was necessary to establish a focal point as the basis for our research on transcendence. As previously described, transcendence is a concept that has been extensively studied by psychologists Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman and



together, they developed the VIA framework. The VIA framework looks at six virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) and breaks each virtue down into specific character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The literature review chapter shadowed Peterson and Seligman's VIA framework starting with the overview of transcendence followed by each character strength category. This was the chosen outline as it created a streamlined process for presenting the data in an organized manner.

In this thesis, the sole focus was on transcendence. The character strengths for transcendence are appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The virtue of transcendence and its character strengths were the starting point when searching for studies within academia. The following keywords and phrases were used in this search: *transcendence*, *appreciation of beauty*, *gratitude*, *hope*, *humor*, *spirituality*, *spiritual fitness*, and *spiritual readiness*. The character strength search criteria served as the recorded independent variable for each study and this search provided over 125 studies that were then analyzed. These studies were retrieved from Google Scholar and the Naval Postgraduate School Dudley Knox Library. For each study, the independent and dependent variables were annotated, along with the key findings for each study. This helped with grouping studies and findings together to outline the literature review.

After completing the academic literature review, the analysis shifted towards examining military doctrine. The same manner to locate related studies for academic literature was repeated to find military doctrine. The following keywords and phrases were used in this search: *transcendence*, *appreciation of beauty*, *gratitude*, *hope*, *humor*, *spirituality*, *spiritual fitness*, and *spiritual readiness*. The United States Department of Defense official website was the starting part to find DOD related directives and instructions related to transcendence. Google was utilized, as well as each branch's independent website to search for applicable doctrine related to transcendence.

Upon concluding the academic literature review and the examination of military doctrine, the focus turned towards conducting a comparative analysis of military doctrine related to transcendence. The documents examined in the comparative analysis included



those from the United States Department of Defense, Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Special Operations Command. A thorough review of each document against the VIA framework helped to determine whether it addressed appreciating beauty, expressing gratitude, fostering hope, embracing humor, and cultivating spirituality. The metrics and interventions within these policies, if any, were also documented to help with the Navy Spiritual Fitness Program's proposed desired state. This simplified the assessment of current policy and doctrine in each branch, specifically for the Navy's policy gap analysis.

The next step in the research involved performing a policy gap analysis for the Navy's Spiritual Fitness Program. This analysis began by gaining an in-depth understanding of the Navy's current state, drawing on the information obtained from the comparative analysis phase, which examined various military doctrines. This helped to identify the existing strengths and limitations of the Navy's spiritual fitness initiatives.

With a clear understanding of the Navy's current state, the research then progressed to define the desired state of the Navy's Spiritual Fitness Program. To achieve this, insights were drawn from Peterson and Seligman's VIA framework, which encompasses the fundamental character strengths linked to transcendence. During the analysis of military policies, metrics and interventions related to spiritual fitness were also identified. This included the use of psychometric instruments, self-assessment scales, and assessments of overall health and resilience, often incorporating questions related to spirituality. Additionally, interventions were identified as strategies and activities designed to enhance spiritual fitness among military personnel. These interventions ranged from individual and corporate meetings, charitable activities, journaling, meditation, and prayer to engaging with chaplains, participating in group discussions, and reading about spirituality. By combining insights from the VIA framework, analysis of military policies, and the identification of metrics and interventions, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of which spiritual fitness was measured and promoted within the context of the Navy.

After conveying both the desired and current states, a thorough comparison was undertaken to identify gaps between the two. This process highlighted the disparities and areas requiring improvement in the Navy's Spiritual Fitness Program. By conducting this



policy gap analysis, the research aimed to pave the way for actionable recommendations that would align the Navy’s Spiritual Fitness Program with its envisioned comprehensive and effective approach.

While our research did not include direct interviews, efforts were made to explore possible causes that contribute to the identified gaps, although these causes are not definitive in nature. A thorough analysis was conducted to examine the factors that play a role in the gaps observed in policy implementation. By examining available data, existing literature, and contextual information, we aspired to gain insights into the root causes underlying these gaps. This analysis provided a foundation for determining the specific areas that need to be addressed to bridge the identified gaps, facilitating future research and potential recommendations.

After analyzing the identified gaps and understanding their potential underlying causes, the next step involved developing actionable recommendations to bridge these gaps. These recommendations were formulated to be specific, feasible, and focused on addressing the root causes of the gaps. A comprehensive approach was adopted, considering a range of strategies, interventions, and potential policy changes that could effectively resolve the identified gaps. The recommendations aimed to provide practical and implementable solutions, ensuring alignment with the overall objectives of the policy.

To conclude, through targeted actions aimed at addressing current practices and policies, our goal was to close identified gaps and enhance the effectiveness and impact of the policies and practices under scrutiny, thus paving the way for meaningful improvements that promote transcendence within the military and enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of Navy Sailors.

C. INTRODUCTION TO ANALYSIS

The preceding methodology section has laid the groundwork for a rigorous analysis into the current practices and policies for promoting transcendence within the United States military. In the current section, a thorough assessment of the data collected through the comparative analysis and policy gap analysis framework is presented.



D. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Following the in-depth literature review, a comparative analysis was conducted by taking each individual military policy, program, directive, or instruction and thoroughly examining them to determine whether they encompass any of the five character strengths of the virtue transcendence found in Peterson and Seligman's VIA framework. This was the chosen method as this is the framework that has been the focal point for this research from the beginning.

It was discovered that all branches, including the DOD at large and USSOCOM, touch on spirituality but not all the branches' doctrine encompass the other transcendent character strengths. Table 4 lays out the government entities and their doctrine on spirituality and compares them against the five character virtues.

Upon examination, it was revealed that there is overlap between the Global Assessment Tool (GAT) and the Azimuth Check. However, it should be noted that not all the questions pertaining to transcendence in the GAT were included in the Azimuth Check.

Additionally, Appendix B presents a comprehensive list of statements and questions related to transcendence and its associated five character strengths, sourced from the GAT while demonstrating the overlap between the GAT and the newly enhanced assessment, the Azimuth Check, where the questions and statements from the GAT have been boldly incorporated.



Table 4. Comprehensive Comparison Between Military Doctrine and VIA Character Strengths.

	Doctrine	VIA Character Strengths				
		Gratitude	Hope	Appreciation of Beauty	Humor	Spirituality
Department of Defense						X
	CJCSI 3405.01					X
	DODI 1300.17					X
	DODI 1304.28					X
Army		X	X	X	X	X
	Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness					X
	Holistic Health and Fitness					X
	Spiritual Readiness Initiative	X				X
	Field Manual 7-22					X
	Global Assessment Tool	X	X	X	X	X
	Azimuth Check	X	X	X	X	X
	Spiritual Fitness Inventory Technical Guide 360		X	X	X	X
Air Force						X
	AFI 90-5001					X
	CAFI 90-506					X
Marine Corps			X			X
	ALMARS 033/16					X
	Spiritual Fitness Guide		X			X
	ALMARS 027/20					X
Special Operations Command		X	X			X
	POTFF					X
	SOCOM Directive 10-12	X				X
	Spiritual Fitness Scale	X	X			X
Navy			X			X
	Spiritual Fitness Guide		X			X

1. The Department of Defense

- **“Chairman’s Total Force Fitness Framework” Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3405.01:** This instruction offers comprehensive guidance on the concept of “Total Force Fitness,” encompassing domains such as physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects (DOD, 2011). It underscores the considerable impact of spiritual fitness on overall well-being and resilience. Furthermore, the instruction outlines various potential metrics for assessing spiritual fitness,



including mental health advisory teams, inspections, focus groups, surveys, health and work performance questionnaires, coping style questionnaires, perceived stress scales, and more (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2011).

- **“Religious Liberty in the Military Services” Department of Defense Instruction 1300.17:** This instruction establishes DOD policy to accommodate the religious practices and expressions of sincerely held beliefs of Service members, ensuring they do not have adverse effects on the military readiness, cohesion, discipline, or safety (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020a). It upholds the right of Service members to observe the tenets of their religion or have no religion at all, in accordance with the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment. This instruction does not discuss metrics or interventions.
 - **“The Appointment and Service of Chaplains” Department of Defense Instruction 1304.28:** This instruction sets the policy for chaplains, covering two main areas: meeting religious requirements and caring for the spiritual needs of Service members and authorized individuals, and advising on various topics like religion, morals, ethics, well-being, and morale (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2020b). Additionally, it encourages visits from agents to military installations to enhance the spiritual welfare of Service members and authorized individuals, particularly during seasons of special religious significance. No other metrics or interventions were disclosed in the document.
2. **The Army**
- **“Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness” Army Regulation 350-53:** The Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness Program (CSF2) defines spirituality as a component of the Five Dimensions of Strength and addresses the concept of holistic fitness, recognizing the importance of a



multidimensional approach to health and well-being (DA, 2014a). This regulation does not provide specific metrics or interventions for spirituality.

- **Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F):** This program recognizes the significance of spirituality in the H2F system, addressing it through personal, philosophical, psychological, and religious teachings and beliefs to strengthen soldiers' inner resilience and ethical behavior (DA, 2023). Additionally, the program suggests integrating empirically promising non-physical domains like yoga, biofeedback, guided imagery, mindfulness, and therapeutic massage for the holistic well-being of soldiers. This cultural shift towards a comprehensive system will continue to evolve, emphasizing mental readiness and overall health.
- **Spiritual Readiness Initiative (SRI):** The Spiritual Readiness Initiative enables chaplains to evaluate the spiritual preparedness of recently enlisted individuals while promoting collaboration between chaplains and medical experts (Stamps, 2022). It also involves Army command teams in utilizing scientific discoveries to enhance comprehensive care for Soldiers (Duffield, 2023). While the SRI addresses spirituality and gratitude, it lacks specific details on metrics and interventions. This initiative formed the foundation for the Army's Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F), which integrated spiritual fitness and well-being as pillars to assess overall health and resilience from a holistic perspective.
- **Field Manual 7-22:** This manual concentrates on spirituality and introduces metrics in the form of a spiritual readiness assessment. It also provides various interventions such as corporate and individual meetings, charitable activities, journaling, meditation, prayer, belief-based readings, and more (DA, 2020b).



- **Global Assessment Tool (GAT):** Christopher Peterson is largely credited with developing the GAT, a 105-item psychometric instrument designed to assess overall health and resilience, including questions related to spirituality (Lester et al., 2014). Army Soldiers took this assessment annually between 2009–2022 in accordance with the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program.
- **Azimuth Check:** The Army’s Azimuth Check is the new version of the Global Assessment Tool (*Army Ready and Resilient*, n.d.). The Azimuth Check is a comprehensive assessment measuring overall fitness across the five dimensions of readiness that also encompass the virtues within the VIA framework (U.S. Army: Directorate of Prevention, Resilience, and Readiness, n.d.). This assessment has specific questions tailored to transcendence and its five character strengths, falling under the emotional and spiritual categories. This survey is conveniently accessed online through the Army Fit website using a Common Access Card. It is a user-friendly 10-minute survey, and the questions related to transcendence.
- **Spiritual Fitness Inventory Technical Guide 360:** This 10-item assessment, found in Appendix C, is designed to measure spiritual fitness, which is an essential aspect of Soldier readiness and force protection (U.S. Army Public Health Command, 2012). It aims to evaluate the individual’s lens through which they view and interpret the world, whether that’s shaped by religious faith, belief systems, world views, or general outlook on life. The assessment helps identify the level of inner congruity and integrity, as well as the ability to find inner peace, which is vital for achieving spiritual fitness.

3. The Air Force

- **Integrated Resilience Air Force Instruction 90–5001:** This instruction published by the order of the Secretary of the Air Force (2019) establishes guidance for resilience and violence prevention programs and activities in



the Air Force (Secretary of the Air Force, 2019). It emphasizes the Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF) framework, which integrates mental, physical, social, and spiritual domains to support Airmen's well-being and mission readiness. This instruction addresses the development and standardization of metrics but lacks elaboration and does not reveal any spiritual fitness interventions.

- **Comprehensive Airman Fitness Air Force Instruction 90–506:** This instruction published by the order of the Secretary of the Air Force (2014) outlines the guidelines to strengthen resilience within the Air Force, including a focus on spiritual fitness. It highlights CAF as an essential element for evaluating Airmen's well-being and supporting the overall mission, but it solely addresses spirituality without providing specific metrics or interventions (Secretary of the Air Force, 2014).

4. The Marine Corps

- **“Spiritual Fitness” All Marine Corps Activities 033/16:** This message from General Robert B. Neller, Commandant of the Marine Corps, emphasizes the significance of overall fitness, including spiritual, mental, and social aspects, for every Marine and Sailor individually and for the Corps collectively (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2016). It recognizes that spiritual fitness is a major component in resilience, growth, recovery, and adaptability, making warriors better equipped to face challenges. The message calls on Marines and Sailors to focus on all aspects of fitness, particularly physical and spiritual domains, with support from leaders and chaplains, to become honorable warriors and model citizens. However, it does not disclose specific metrics or interventions for spiritual fitness.
- **Spiritual Fitness Guide (SFG):** The SFG covers hope and spirituality, providing a self-assessment for service members to determine their spiritual condition. It also includes interventions like reading about



spirituality, answering questions from the Spiritual Fitness Leadership Guide, and participating in group discussions (United States Navy Chaplain Corps, n.d.).

- **“Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness” All Marine Corps Activities 027/20:**

This message from General David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps, highlights the importance of physical, mental, social, and spiritual fitness for building resilience and character in Marines and Sailors (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2020). It emphasizes that spiritual fitness is critical for moral and ethical decision-making and supports character development. The message calls on leaders and chaplains to optimize spiritual fitness at all levels, but it does not disclose specific metrics or interventions for achieving spiritual fitness (Commandant of the Marine Corps, 2020).

5. **United States Special Forces Operations Command**

- **Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF):** The POTFF mission aims to optimize and sustain Special Operations Forces (SOF) readiness and performance through human performance programs (Staff, 2021). It focuses on physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and family, and spiritual aspects, providing integrated, evidence-based care to enhance overall human performance and well-being. The initiative includes periodic assessments using the Spiritual Fitness Scale and interventions involving chaplain support and appreciation of everyday spirituality and forgiveness to strengthen character and moral values.
- **Special Operations Command Directive 10–12:** This directive discusses the mission and approach of the POTFF program, aiming to optimize and sustain performance, readiness, and longevity for SOF. It outlines five domains of fitness, including the spiritual domain, but does not provide specific metrics or interventions for spirituality (Russell, 2021).



- **Spiritual Fitness Scale (SFS):** The SFS is a multi-dimensional 18 question survey designed to measure spiritual fitness and performance in military service members (Appendix D). It assesses three core attributes: Personal Connection with a Higher Power, Pursuing Meaning, Purpose, and Value, and Service and Sacrifice for the Greater Good. The scale provides a concise and reliable tool to track and optimize spiritual fitness programs and services, with sensitivity to diverse belief systems and correlations with wider wellness traits (Human Performance Resource Center, n.d.).

6. The Navy

- **Spiritual Fitness Guide (SFG):** The SFG for the Navy is the same guide as the one created for the Marine Corps. It includes hope and spirituality and provides service members with a self-assessment to evaluate their spiritual condition. The interventions in both guides involve reading about spirituality and answering questions from the Spiritual Fitness Leadership Guide, as well as engaging in group discussions.

E. CURRENT STATE OF THE SPIRITUAL FITNESS PROGRAMS ACROSS THE MILITARY BRANCHES

The current state of spiritual fitness programs across the military branches was evaluated against the VIA framework. The Army lacks a single policy or program that incorporates all five character strengths, including transcendence. However, it extensively covers spirituality in its published doctrine, offering various metrics and interventions. The Air Force discusses spirituality in two instructions but lacks specific metrics or interventions. The Marine Corps heavily emphasizes spirituality and briefly touches on hopefulness in the SFG while offering a self-assessment and group-led discussion topic on spirituality. USSOCOM recently released a directive in February 2023 that adds emphasis on gratitude to its spirituality focus, featuring metrics and interventions within the POTFF (Stone, 2023). Overall, all military branches analyzed provide some form of guidance on spiritual fitness.



F. CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S. NAVY'S SPIRITUAL FITNESS PROGRAM

The current state of the Navy's spiritual fitness program was assessed through comparative analysis and incorporated into the policy gap analysis. While the Navy can leverage the SFG designed for the Marine Corps by Navy Chaplains, it lacks a Sailor-centric focus. The existing SFG predominantly centers on spirituality, briefly touching on gratitude in one of its stories for facilitating spirituality discussions. However, it lacks the inclusion of essential character strengths that constitute transcendence, such as hope, appreciation of beauty, and humor. Despite this, the guide provides comprehensive insights into spiritual fitness, its significance, and strategies for cultivation. Notably, it includes self-assessments and group discussion topics, serving as interventions to enhance spiritual fitness.

G. DESIRED STATE OF THE U.S. NAVY'S SPIRITUAL FITNESS PROGRAM

The recommended desired state of the Navy's Spiritual Fitness Program would be a comprehensive and inclusive initiative that fosters the development of all five character strengths of the virtue transcendence, as outlined in the well-established psychological framework developed by Peterson and Seligman. By incorporating all components of this framework, the program can achieve its goal of spiritual fitness for every Sailor, acknowledging that a strong spiritual foundation contributes to overall resilience and readiness.

As spiritual fitness is a relatively new and evolving subject across all services, it is essential to draw upon the best practices from each service's programs and integrate empirical research from academia to create the most robust program. However, some perceived barriers may arise during implementation, such as individuals doubting the importance of spiritual fitness and viewing it as a futile allocation of time and resources. Additionally, there may be resistance from those who equate spiritual fitness solely with religiosity and are hesitant to participate or work on strengthening this aspect of their well-being.



To overcome these challenges, the Navy should focus on raising awareness about the significance of spiritual fitness in enhancing overall performance and well-being. Emphasizing that spiritual fitness is not solely tied to religious beliefs but encompasses a broader sense of purpose and meaning in life can encourage broader participation. Providing evidence-based examples of how spiritual fitness contributes to resilience and readiness can further justify the program's importance and efficacy.

Key features of the desired program include:

1. **Comprehensive Character Development:** The program would encompass all five character strengths of transcendence, addressing areas such as gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty, humor, and spirituality. This holistic approach ensures that every Sailor's spiritual journey is nurtured and strengthened.
2. **Flexible Self-Assessment:** Sailors would have access to self-assessment tools that can be utilized at any time. These assessments allow individuals to reflect on their spiritual growth and identify areas for improvement.
3. **Regular Annual Assessments:** To track progress and growth, voluntary annual assessments would be conducted for each Sailor, like the physical fitness assessment or annual physical health assessment. These assessments would offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of the program and areas requiring further attention.
4. **Personalized Interventions:** The program would recommend specific interventions to address areas where character strengths need improvement. These interventions could include workshops, training, mentoring, or counseling, designed to foster personal growth and resilience.
5. **Continued Development:** Sailors who have achieved acceptable levels of character strength would be provided with options for continued enhancement. This allows individuals to pursue deeper spiritual development as part of their ongoing journey.



6. **Hierarchical Implementation:** The spiritual fitness program would be addressed at all levels within the Navy, encompassing Navy-wide, Base, and command levels. Each base would establish a dedicated spiritual fitness working group responsible for organizing events throughout the year to promote spiritual well-being.
7. **Command-Level Leadership:** To ensure effective implementation, each command would designate a spiritual fitness leader responsible for coordinating events and activities related to spiritual development within the command.
8. **Regular Emphasis and Encouragement:** Just as physical fitness is emphasized and promoted, highlighting its importance. Similarly, there is potential to acknowledge and appreciate the significance of spiritual well-being in our lives. Just as consistent attention is given to physical fitness, integrating moments of spiritual reflection and growth into regular routines could contribute to a more balanced and holistic approach to overall well-being. This approach recognizes the value of nurturing both the physical and spiritual dimensions of life. The Navy's commitment to spiritual well-being would be evident through ongoing support and emphasis on this aspect of Sailor development.
9. **Sailor-Centric Approach:** The program would be centered around the unique challenges and experiences faced by Navy Sailors as the "Use of Stories to Discuss Spiritual Fitness" section of the SFG should reflect that. This intervention activity would incorporate the diverse backgrounds and beliefs within the Navy and create an inclusive environment that respects and supports everyone's spiritual journey.

By adopting such a comprehensive and inclusive approach, the U.S. Navy's Spiritual Fitness Program would foster a resilient and spiritually well-grounded force, ensuring that every Sailor can thrive personally and professionally in the face of the challenges and demands of military service.



H. POLICY GAP ANALYSIS

The policy gap analysis reveals significant disparities between the proposed desired state of the U.S. Navy's spiritual fitness program and its current state. The current program's shortcomings have been identified through a comparative analysis and present opportunities for improvement to align with the envisioned Sailor-centric and comprehensive approach.

1. **Lack of Sailor-Centric Approach:** The current state of the Navy's spiritual fitness program falls short of being Sailor-centric. While the existing SFG, adopted from the Marine Corps, offers valuable insights into spirituality discussions, it does not adequately consider the unique challenges and experiences faced by Navy Sailors. The program requires a tailored approach that recognizes the diverse backgrounds and beliefs within the Navy and creates an inclusive environment that supports and respects each Sailor's spiritual journey.
2. **Incomplete Character Strengths Coverage:** The current SFG primarily focuses on spirituality and briefly touches on gratitude, neglecting to incorporate other essential character strengths critical for personal and spiritual development. Specifically, the program lacks coverage of character strengths such as hope, appreciation of beauty, and humor. The desired state advocates for an all-inclusive program that encompasses all five character strengths of virtue, recognizing that a holistic approach to character development enhances overall spiritual well-being.
3. **Limited Intervention Strategies:** While the current program does include self-assessments and group discussions as intervention methods, it does not go beyond this scope to recommend personalized interventions for strengthening spiritual fitness. The desired state emphasizes the importance of tailored interventions that address individual needs, guiding Sailors on their spiritual journeys and supporting growth in character strengths that require improvement.



4. **Incomplete Assessment Structure:** The current program lacks a comprehensive assessment structure that combines self-assessments and regular annual assessments. Without a well-structured assessment process, it becomes challenging to track individual progress and measure the program's effectiveness accurately. A need exists to establish a clear framework outlining how these assessments will be utilized to facilitate meaningful insights. Further exploration of this aspect will be presented in the recommendations section of the following chapter.
5. **Limited Character Development Focus:** The current program places significant emphasis on defining and cultivating spiritual fitness but falls short in comprehensively addressing the development of all five character strengths of virtue. The desired state advocates for a more comprehensive character development focus, recognizing that each strength contributes uniquely to an individual's spiritual well-being.
6. **Limited Base and Command-Level Involvement:** The current program lacks a formalized base-level spiritual fitness committee and command-level spiritual fitness leaders responsible for organizing events and activities.

In summary, the policy gap analysis demonstrates that the current state of the U.S. Navy's spiritual fitness program falls short of the desired state in various critical aspects. To bridge these gaps effectively, the Navy should implement a Sailor-centric program that encompasses all five character strengths of virtue, integrates evidence-based interventions, establishes a comprehensive assessment structure, and involves base and command-level participation. By addressing these deficiencies, the Navy can create a more robust and effective spiritual fitness program that supports the well-being and resilience of its Sailors. In the subsequent chapter, I will address these identified deficiencies and provide specific recommendations, drawing from evidence-based interventions found in the academic literature, to strengthen and enhance the U.S. Navy's spiritual fitness program.



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IV. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of promoting transcendence in the U.S. military, focusing on the U.S. Navy’s Spiritual Fitness Program. By revisiting research objectives, interpreting results, and exploring practical and theoretical implications, we identify program gaps. This chapter presents a summary of the key findings obtained from the analysis conducted in Chapter III and actionable recommendations are presented to improve spiritual and emotional well-being for Navy Sailors, fostering growth and overall well-being. Implementing these evidence-based suggestions aims to support holistic development and advance transcendence-promoting initiatives within the U.S. military context.

B. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The methodology and analysis chapter began with a comprehensive overview of the research approach and methods undertaken to investigate transcendence within the U.S. military context. Through a mixed-methods process, an extensive literature review examined academic sources, and a comparative analysis of military doctrine was conducted, followed by a policy gap analysis of the U.S. Navy’s Spiritual Fitness Program.

The comparative analysis revealed that while all branches of the military touch on spirituality, not all comprehensively address the character strengths associated with transcendence. Likewise, the policy gap analysis highlighted significant deficiencies in the U.S. Navy’s Spiritual Fitness Program. The Navy’s current program lacks a “Sailorized” approach as it was built for the Marine Corps, and although the Navy Sailors can utilize it in its current form, it would likely resonate with Sailors more if it were tailored to the Naval community. The existing Spiritual Fitness Guide (SFG) lacks the inclusion of all five character strengths of virtue, instead emphasizing spirituality and gratitude. Additionally, the program lacks options for personalized interventions and a comprehensive assessment structure to track individual progress effectively. There is a need for a more holistic character development focus, encompassing all strengths associated with transcendence.



C. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The findings from the comparative analysis demonstrate that while doctrine from all service branches of the U.S. military at least touch on spirituality, none address each essential character strength associated with transcendence. This indicates that there is room for improvement in the current practices and policies for promoting spiritual fitness across the military.

The policy gap analysis revealed significant disparities between the current state of the U.S. Navy’s Spiritual Fitness Program and the desired state outlined by the well-established VIA framework. The U.S. Marine Corps presently provides a published Spiritual Fitness Guide accessible to Sailors. While the current guide has some identified gaps, it remains a well-constructed resource that can serve as the basis for formulating the new U.S. Navy policy.

The initiative to update the Spiritual Fitness Guide for Navy use should be led by the Navy Chaplain Corps, as they were the creators of the original guide. Their expertise and understanding of the specific spiritual and emotional needs of Navy Sailors make them the ideal candidates to spearhead this important update. The following section is dedicated to addressing the identified gaps in the current Spiritual Fitness Guide and offers recommendations to the Navy Chaplain Corps on how to rectify these shortcomings.

D. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section is dedicated to addressing the identified gaps in the current Spiritual Fitness Guide and offers recommendations to the Navy Chaplain Corps on how to rectify these shortcomings.

1. Sailor-Oriented Spiritual Fitness Guide

The current Spiritual Fitness Guide, accessible to Navy Sailors, does not cater to their unique experiences. It is specifically tailored to the Marine Corps, evident in the “Use of Stories to Discuss Spiritual Fitness” section, which primarily features Marine Corps examples that may not fully resonate with Navy Sailors.



To address this finding, continuing to use the current Spiritual Fitness Guide but refitted with photos of Sailors in the fleet and fleet-specific stories could be more relatable and effective in supporting the spiritual journey and well-being of Navy personnel. By incorporating visuals and stories from their own community, Sailors can better connect with the content, making the guide more meaningful and impactful in their spiritual and emotional development. This relatable approach is likely to resonate more deeply with Navy personnel, fostering a stronger sense of support and engagement in their spiritual growth and overall well-being. Likewise, this is a cost-effective approach compared to heavily revising the program or building a new program from the ground up.

2. Character Development

The existing Spiritual Fitness Guide places significant emphasis on spirituality, with only a brief mention of gratitude in one of the story examples. While spirituality is undoubtedly important, the guide lacks adequate attention to other vital aspects of transcendence, such as *gratitude*, *hope*, *appreciation of beauty*, and *humor*. To ensure a more balanced and comprehensive approach, it is crucial to address these additional dimensions of transcendence within the updated guide to enhance spiritual and emotional well-being.

To accomplish a more balanced and comprehensive approach to transcendence in the Spiritual Fitness Guide, a multidisciplinary team comprised of the Navy Chaplain Corps, psychology, andragogical experts, senior Naval legal experts, and program evaluators should be formed. Ultimately, the Navy Chaplain Corps should take the lead in overseeing the development and implementation of the updated guide. Their expertise in spiritual matters, coupled with collaboration from experts from other fields, will ensure the guide's relevance, effectiveness, and alignment with the Navy's values and mission.

3. Evidence-Based Interventions

The current guide's strict focus on spirituality leaves a significant gap in evidence-based interventions for the other four character strengths of transcendence. These strengths, namely *gratitude*, *hope*, *appreciation of beauty*, and *humor*, are essential aspects of spiritual and emotional well-being that also require attention and nurturing. By addressing



this limitation and incorporating evidence-based interventions for all five character strengths, the updated Spiritual Fitness Guide can provide a more comprehensive and holistic approach to support the spiritual journey and well-being of Navy personnel. Furthermore, it is imperative to establish a rigorous testing and evaluation process for the newly proposed and integrated interventions. This step is crucial to continuously enhance the guide's effectiveness and relevance, ensuring it remains a valuable resource for supporting the spiritual journey and well-being of Navy personnel.

The updated Spiritual Fitness Guide should include evidence-based interventions on each of the five character strengths related to transcendence. These evidence-based interventions have their roots in academic research and this inclusive approach will empower Navy Sailors with practical tools and strategies to cultivate various dimensions of transcendence, ultimately contributing to their overall personal growth and resilience. Possible solutions include the following:

a. *Gratitude*

Incorporating a daily practice of grateful thinking can be encouraged within the program. This may involve introducing a gratitude journaling exercise, where participants write down moments of gratitude and appreciation daily. Providing prompts and guidance for reflective writing can help individuals become more mindful of the positive aspects of their lives (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, Dickens, 2017, Karns et al., 2017).

b. *Hope*

Introducing hopeful narratives can be an effective way to boost hope in Sailor. The program can incorporate stories, essays, and books that showcase individuals who have overcome challenges and achieved their goals through hope and resilience. Participants can discuss these narratives, identify key hope-building strategies, and apply them to their own lives (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

c. *Appreciation of Beauty*

The program can organize regular outdoor activities, excursions, and physical training sessions in natural settings, fostering a deeper appreciation of the beauty found in



nature. Greater integration of both Morale, Wellness, and Recreation (MWR) and the Chaplain Corps would be highly advantageous, considering their already established programs and retreats, which can significantly contribute to optimizing this character strength. The program can leverage the existing resources of MWR and the Chaplain Corps to enhance and diversify opportunities fostering a deeper appreciation for this aspect of their spiritual journey and overall well-being. Additionally, Sailors can be encouraged to spend their free time on the ship's deck, enjoying the sky, sea, and sunsets, which offer moments of beauty and tranquility (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

d. Humor

Including an educational section on humor in the updated Spiritual Fitness Guide could be highly beneficial for Navy Sailors. This section should not only inform them about the different types of humor—self-enhancing, affiliative, aggressive, and self-defeating—but also emphasize the positive effects humor can have in the workplace. Research has shown that a healthy sense of humor contributes to enhanced work performance, increased job satisfaction, improved group cohesion, and overall well-being (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012).

However, it is essential to acknowledge that humor's effective use requires a deeper understanding. Simply providing information about humor may not automatically foster its development and presence in their lives. Therefore, the education section should include practical strategies for incorporating appropriate humor into daily interactions and discuss the potential pitfalls of humor, such as its potential for destructiveness in the workplace, to cultivate a balanced and responsible approach to humor.

Additionally, providing training to leaders within the Navy community is equally vital, as they play a significant role in shaping the organizational culture. Their understanding of humor's impact can influence the overall workplace climate. By training leaders on the responsible use of humor and fostering a positive and inclusive humor climate, they can create an environment that encourages healthy and constructive humor while discouraging harmful or offensive behavior.



e. Spirituality

Given that the current Spiritual Fitness Guide already extensively covers spirituality and includes numerous interventions that Marines and Sailors can utilize, it is likely that this area does not require any additional detail as the guide is already saturated with comprehensive information and support.

4. Assessment Structure

Currently, the Spiritual Fitness Guide includes only a self-assessment tool to assist service members in determining their spiritual condition. However, to enhance the effectiveness of the program, there is a need for a legitimate and structured assessment that can be systematically tracked. Given the sensitivities around mandating a spiritual fitness questionnaire, the Navy should consider making the assessment voluntary. Admittedly, a voluntary assessment does open the door to self-selection bias, but having a voluntary yet Fleet-wide assessment would be a significant improvement over the Navy's current state. Thus, by introducing a voluntary, comprehensive, and standardized spiritual fitness assessment, the Navy can gain a deeper understanding of its personnel's spiritual well-being, monitor their growth over time, and pinpoint areas requiring targeted support and enhancement.

Prioritizing the adoption of such an assessment underscores the Navy's commitment to its service members' spiritual and emotional well-being, fostering a more resilient and thriving military community. Currently lacking a spiritual fitness assessment could hinder accurate tracking of individual progress and program effectiveness. To address this crucial gap, it may be prudent to consider integrating spiritual fitness questions into existing assessments, such as the annual periodic health assessment tool utilized for evaluating physical health. By incorporating a spiritual aspect into this assessment. Adding spiritual questions to the annual periodic health assessment can help identify individuals' spiritual needs, normalize discussions about mental health and spirituality, and provide tailored support while evaluating the effectiveness of the spirituality and transcendence program. This comprehensive approach fosters a more resilient and thriving military



community and would not only streamline the evaluation process but also provide a gentle reminder to Sailors about available support resources for their overall well-being.

The Navy's lack of a current spiritual fitness assessment could impede the accurate tracking of individual progress and the measurement of program effectiveness. Below are the recommendations to formulate a comprehensive spiritual fitness assessment for the Navy:

Sailors should be given the option take a spiritual fitness assessment yearly to monitor their spiritual growth, identify areas of support, and contribute to evidence-based decision-making, fostering a culture that prioritizes holistic well-being and resilience within the Navy community. Regular assessments enable targeted interventions, promote continuous self-reflection, and empower the Navy to proactively address sailors' spiritual needs, ultimately contributing to a thriving and resilient military force.

The spiritual fitness assessment for the Navy should be built upon the solid foundations of either the Army's current assessments, such as the Azimuth Check and the Spiritual Fitness Inventory, or the Special Operations Command's Spiritual Fitness Scale. These existing assessments serve as valuable models and offer insights into effective evaluation methods. By integrating spiritual fitness questions into existing assessments, like the annual periodic health assessment, the Navy can create an easy-to-use, comprehensible, time-efficient, and reliable instrument to gauge the spiritual well-being of its personnel. The adoption of such a well-validated assessment will support the Navy's commitment to promoting spiritual and emotional well-being, fostering a more resilient and thriving military community.

5. Base and Command-Level Involvement

Considering the observations on limited base and command-level involvement in the current Spiritual Fitness Program, it is recommended to revise the command-level guidance and incorporate base-level guidance for the Spiritual Fitness Guide. The revised guidance should emphasize the establishment of formalized base-level spiritual fitness working groups and the designation of command-level spiritual fitness leaders. These working groups will play a crucial role in enhancing the program's implementation by



organizing events and activities that promote spiritual well-being among Navy personnel. By actively involving bases and commands, the program can create a more supportive and engaged environment, significantly contributing to the spiritual and emotional growth of Sailors. The revised guidance should encourage proactive participation, reflecting the Navy's commitment to fostering spiritual fitness as an integral part of overall well-being and readiness.

To ensure the successful integration of the program into the Navy's culture, securing support at both base and command levels will be imperative. Active engagement and commitment from these levels will play a crucial role in fostering acceptance and sustainability of the spiritual fitness assessment initiative. To enhance the spiritual fitness program within the Navy, the following steps are essential:

1. Create base-level spiritual fitness working groups comprising knowledgeable and dedicated individuals from different ranks and specialties. These groups will oversee the program's implementation and integration at their respective bases, ensuring a consistent approach across the Navy.
2. Appoint command-level spiritual fitness leaders within each unit to act as advocates and facilitators for the spiritual well-being of the personnel. Their presence will foster a supportive and engaged environment, promoting spiritual growth and emotional resilience. Additionally, these leaders may fill gaps that cannot be covered by the limited number of Chaplain Corps officers across the Navy.
3. Provide comprehensive training programs to base and command-level leaders on conducting spiritual fitness assessments effectively and ethically. This will ensure a standardized approach throughout the Navy, leading to reliable and meaningful results.
4. Organize events and activities, such as meditation sessions, mindfulness workshops, and discussions on personal values, to actively promote



spiritual well-being. Encourage base and command-level leaders to actively participate and engage their personnel in these activities.

5. Be flexible and adaptive, adjusting and expanding the program based on feedback and outcomes. Gradually scale up the implementation to include all Navy bases and units, ensuring comprehensive coverage and maximum impact.
6. Establish a dedicated working group tasked with developing appropriate measures of performance and effectiveness for the improved spirituality and transcendence program. These measures will enable a comprehensive assessment of the program's outcomes, including adoption and market penetration, and identify areas that can be enhanced through ongoing program evaluation. By adopting this approach, we aim to strike a balance between garnering meaningful buy-in from command-level leaders and ensuring that the evaluation process does not become overly burdensome, allowing them to focus on other essential requirements.

By implementing these steps, the United States Navy can create a robust and comprehensive spiritual fitness program that supports the holistic well-being of its personnel and fosters a resilient and thriving military community.

E. CHAPTER SUMMARY

By following a collaborative and evidence-based approach, the updated Spiritual Fitness Guide can effectively address the different dimensions of transcendence, promoting the overall well-being and growth of Navy Sailors and fostering a resilient and thriving military community. Implementing these recommendations and proposed strategies will enable the Navy to advance its Spiritual Fitness Program, creating a more robust, Sailor-centric, and comprehensive approach to support the spiritual well-being of all Sailors. This concerted effort will undoubtedly contribute to the holistic development and enhanced spiritual and emotional welfare of Navy personnel, ensuring a stronger and more fulfilled Navy community.



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V. CONCLUSION AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study examines the current state of spiritual fitness within the U.S. military and seeks to identify opportunities for enhancing the implementation of spiritual fitness programs and policies within the United States Navy. The aim is to provide better support for the spiritual and emotional well-being of Navy Sailors.

The analysis indicated that all military branches address spirituality to some extent, but there is room for improvement by incorporating the VIA framework's focus on the virtue of transcendence and additional interventions and metrics backed by academia. By doing so, each branch can create a more robust and well-rounded program that enhances spiritual fitness. Given the specific focus on the Navy's spiritual fitness program and the analysis highlighting areas for improvement, it is essential for the Navy to redirect its efforts towards addressing the identified gaps and revamping the program accordingly.

A. ANSWERS TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research answers the following research questions:

- (1) What are the current practices and policies for promoting transcendence within the U.S. military?

Transcendence, as defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004), refers to the capacity to form a meaningful connection with something greater than oneself and derive significance and meaning from the world. This virtue can be categorized into five essential character strengths: *appreciation of beauty*, *gratitude*, *hope*, *humor*, and *spirituality*. Across the different branches of the U.S. military, there is an increasing understanding of the significance of spiritual well-being in promoting the overall fitness and resilience of military personnel, following the Department of Defense's Total Force Fitness framework, introduced in 2011 (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2011). Although not all branches have developed comprehensive programs dedicated solely to spiritual fitness, they have documented its importance and explored its integration into their broader fitness initiatives since the framework's introduction. In terms of addressing spiritual fitness, the Army has published the most extensive policies, offering



several tools and interventions. The Air Force has published a series of instructions but lacks a formal program.

The Marine Corps has a formal guide, known as the Spiritual Fitness Guide, which leaders can access to support their Marines' spiritual well-being. As the Spiritual Fitness Guide was created by Navy Chaplains primarily for Marines, it is also available for use by Navy Sailors. Additionally, the Special Operations Command has established a robust framework and fitness scale to measure and enhance spiritual fitness and well-being among its members. Chapter III highlights that although there are differences in the level of emphasis and formal guidance, all branches have integrated some form of guidance to enhance spiritual well-being.

(2) What are the gaps in the programs?

The analysis of the military policies, programs, directives, and instructions revealed gaps in the programs' coverage of the five character strengths of the virtue transcendence, as defined in Peterson and Seligman's VIA framework. Across all branches of the U.S. military, there are differences in the extent of emphasis and formal guidance provided for enhancing spiritual well-being. While each branch has implemented some level of guidance on this matter, the focus tends to be primarily on spirituality, which is one of the character strengths associated with transcendence. In contrast, other character strengths within the broader context of the virtue of transcendence may receive less attention or, in some cases, may be overlooked entirely. Additionally, the lack of specific metrics and interventions related to spiritual fitness in some of the policies and programs highlights the need for more comprehensive and standardized approaches to address this crucial aspect of overall well-being and resilience.

Furthermore, the examination of assessment tools, such as the Global Assessment Tool (GAT) and the Azimuth Check, revealed that they both assess all five character strengths of transcendence. The GAT comprehensively evaluates these strengths. The Azimuth Check, as a derivative of the GAT, also incorporates questions related to transcendence. However, it was found that certain aspects of transcendence were not fully



addressed in other assessment tools throughout the U.S. military branches, indicating potential areas for improvement and further refinement in the evaluation of spiritual fitness.

To bridge these gaps, the development and implementation of more complete, standardized, and inclusive metrics and interventions could enhance the effectiveness of spiritual fitness programs across all branches of the U.S. military.

- (3) How can these practices be improved to enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of United States Navy Sailors?

To enhance the spiritual and emotional well-being of United States Navy Sailors, a series of evidence-based recommendations can improve the Navy's Spiritual Fitness Program. Starting with updating the Spiritual Fitness Guide, the program should encompass all five character strengths of transcendence, including gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty, and humor, in addition to its focus on spirituality. Incorporating fleet-specific stories and relatable imagery in the guide can better support Navy personnel's spiritual journey and overall well-being.

Success of this program would require base and command-level support, with formalized working groups and designated leaders overseeing implementation. Additionally, incorporating spiritual fitness questions into the annual periodic health assessment is crucial for a comprehensive evaluation of Sailors' well-being as this assessment would encompass physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. This approach enables regular monitoring, streamlines resource utilization, encourages openness about spiritual needs, and facilitates ongoing program effectiveness evaluation, fostering a more resilient and thriving military community.

Additionally, evidence-based interventions should be integrated, such as encouraging daily grateful thinking, introducing hopeful narratives, organizing nature-based activities, and providing education and training on humor's positive effects to promote spiritual wellness. By implementing these recommendations, the Navy can foster a more resilient environment, promoting a culture of holistic well-being throughout its ranks.



B. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study highlights avenues for further research aimed at enhancing the understanding and implementation of spiritual fitness within the United States military. Longitudinal studies can provide a comprehensive view of the long-term impact of spiritual fitness programs on service members' well-being, resilience, and overall performance. Rigorous evaluations of evidence-based interventions will help determine their effectiveness in enhancing spiritual and emotional well-being among military personnel.

A key area for further research centers on understanding the dynamics of the leader-subordinate relationship and its influence on promoting spiritual fitness within the military. Investigating how leadership practices impact service members' spiritual growth can inform the development of targeted leadership training programs that foster a supportive and spiritually aware environment. By exploring effective leadership behaviors, communication styles, and support mechanisms, researchers can optimize the leader-subordinate dynamic and promote the holistic well-being of military personnel.

In addition, several questions merit exploration, such as determining the appropriate level of leadership involvement in guiding subordinates through spiritual fitness and assessing the impact of different types of leaders on subordinates' spiritual well-being. Furthermore, studying whether a leader's genuine belief in and programmatic support of spiritual fitness affects program effectiveness can shed light on the importance of leader buy-in and commitment. Addressing these additional research questions will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of leadership's role in spiritual fitness and enable tailored approaches to support service members' well-being.

In conclusion, analyzing challenges and barriers in implementing spiritual fitness programs is crucial to ensuring successful integration. Identifying best practices and strategies to overcome obstacles will lead to improved program design and implementation, ultimately fostering more effective support for service members' holistic well-being. Addressing these areas of further research will continuously enhance spiritual fitness initiatives within the U.S. military, nurturing a healthier and more resilient military community.



C. SUMMARY OF STUDY

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the current state of spiritual fitness within the United States military, with a particular focus on opportunities for enhancing the United States Navy’s Spiritual Fitness Program. The analysis reveals that while all branches of the military address spirituality to some extent, there is room for improvement in fully incorporating the character strengths associated with transcendence. By implementing evidence-based interventions, establishing comprehensive assessment structures, and developing an updated Spiritual Fitness Guide, the Navy can create a more robust and inclusive program that promotes spiritual and emotional well-being among its Sailors. Additionally, areas for further research have been identified, which offer the potential to deepen our understanding of spiritual fitness and its impact on service members’ overall well-being and resilience. By addressing the identified gaps and continuing to explore new avenues of research, the military can better support the holistic well-being of its personnel and cultivate a more resilient and prepared force.



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APPENDIX A. SPIRITUAL FITNESS GUIDE

Spiritual Fitness Guide: This is a self-assessment tool to help service members determine their spiritual condition.			
FIT	STRESSED	DEPLETED	DRAINED
Potential Indicators > Engaged in life's meaning/purpose > Hopeful about life/future > Makes sound moral decisions > Fully engaged with family, friends, and community > Able to forgive self and others > Respectful of others > Engaged in core values/beliefs	Potential Indicators > Neglecting life's meaning/purpose > Less hopeful about life/future > Makes some poor moral decisions > Somewhat engaged with family, friends, and community > Difficulty forgiving self or others > Less respectful of others > Straying from core values/beliefs	Potential Indicators > Losing a sense of life's meaning/purpose > Holds very little hope about life/future > Makes poor moral decisions routinely > Weakly engaged with family, friends, and community > Not likely to forgive self or others > Strong disrespect for others > Disregards core values/beliefs	Potential Indicators > Feels like life has no meaning/purpose > Holds no hope about life/future > Engaged in extreme immoral behavior > Not engaged with family, friends or community > Forgiveness is not an option > Complete disrespect for others > Abandoned core values/beliefs
If you find yourself in need of support, do not suffer in silence. Seek immediately from any avenue of support.			
<u>Resources for Support</u> - Chaplain – Military and Family Life Counselors – Community Counseling Program – Family Readiness Officers – Leaders – Family or Friend – MCCS One Source – DSTRESS 1-877-476-7734			
Your Chaplain cares about you and is committed to helping with your spiritual fitness. Absolute 100% confidentiality is guaranteed.			
CHAPLAIN POC:			

Figure 2. Spiritual Fitness Guide. Source. Spiritual Fitness Leadership Guide (n.d., p. 14).



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APPENDIX B. TRANSCENDENT GLOBAL ASSESSMENT TOOL AND AZIMUTH CHECK QUESTIONS

Table 5. Comparative Analysis of Transcendence-Related Questions and Statements in the Global Assessment Tool and Azimuth Check.

Spiritual			
Answer in terms of whether the statement describes how you actually live your life.	I am a spiritual person.	Spiritual Fitness	Spiritual
Answer in terms of whether the statement describes how you actually live your life.	My life has a lasting meaning.	Spiritual Fitness	Spiritual
Answer in terms of whether the statement describes how you actually live your life.	I believe that in some way my life is closely connected to all humanity and all the world.	Spiritual Fitness	Spiritual
Answer in terms of whether the statement describes how you actually live your life.	The job I am doing in the military has lasting meaning.	Spiritual Fitness	Spiritual
Answer in terms of whether the statement describes how you actually live your life.	I believe there is a purpose for my life.	Spiritual Fitness	Spiritual
Think about how you have acted in actual situations during the past four weeks. Please answer only in terms of what YOU actually did. Please read carefully. Select a number from 0 to 10 according to how often you showed/used the qualities listed?	Spirituality	Emotional Fitness	Spiritual

Humor			
Think about how you have acted in actual situations during the past four weeks. Please answer only in terms of what YOU actually did. Please read carefully. Select a number from 0 to 10 according to how often you showed/used the qualities listed?	Playfulness or humor	Emotional Fitness	Humor
Here are a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. How often you have felt this way during the past four weeks?	amused /playful	Emotional Fitness	Humor

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence			
Think about how you have acted in actual situations during the past four weeks. Please answer only in terms of what YOU actually did. Please read carefully. Select a number from 0 to 10 according to how often you showed/used the qualities listed?	Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Emotional Fitness	Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence



Hope			
Think about how you have acted in actual situations during the past four weeks. Please answer only in terms of what YOU actually did. Please read carefully. Select a number from 0 to 10 according to how often you showed/used the qualities listed?	Hope or optimism	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Here are a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. How often you have felt this way during the past four weeks?	hopeful	Emotional Fitness	Hope
In the past four weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?	Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Please be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Answer according to your own feelings, rather than how you think most people would answer.	In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Answer in terms of how you usually think.	When bad things happen to me, I expect more bad things to happen.	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Answer in terms of how you usually think.	When bad things happen to me, I blame myself for them.	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Answer in terms of how you usually think.	I have no control over the things that happen to me.	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Answer in terms of how you usually think.	When bad things happen to me, I cannot stop thinking about how much worse things will get.	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Answer in terms of how you usually think.	When I have a physical problem, I am likely to think that it is something very serious.	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Answer in terms of how you usually think.	When I fail at something, I give up all hope.	Emotional Fitness	Hope
Answer in terms of how you usually think.	I respond to stress by making things worse than they are.	Emotional Fitness	Hope



APPENDIX C. SPIRITUAL FITNESS INVENTORY

Table 6. Spiritual Fitness Inventory. Source. U.S. Army Public Health Command (2012, p. B-3).

In each section, circle the number in the column that most closely matches your answer.

Question	Never	Less than once each year	Four times each year	Six times each year	Once each month	2-3 times each month	Once each week	2-3 times each week	Once each day	Several times each day
<p>1. How often do you get together with other people in wholesome activities outside of work?</p> <p>Some examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending worship services • Attending Family events • Playing team sports • Volunteering in the community 	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>2. How often do you engage in activities that build the human spirit?</p> <p>Some examples are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to music • Enjoying nature • Furthering your education • Fasting • Journaling • Praying • Giving to charity • Enjoying humor • Meditating 	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Question	Not at all									A lot
<p>3. How much do these kinds of activities help refresh you?</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p>4. Life brings big questions. (Who am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? What happens after I die? Why is there evil and suffering? etc.) How helpful are your core beliefs or values in giving meaning and purpose to your life?</p>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



Question	Not at all									A lot
5. How much do your core beliefs or values provide you support in times of stress?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. How much do your core beliefs or values influence your moral and ethical decision making?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. How much do your core beliefs or values encourage you to stop and think about who you are and who you are becoming?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. How much do your core beliefs or values build within you an allegiance to anyone or anything outside of yourself? (This could be God, nature, Country, Corps, community, Family, humanity, the greater good.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. How much do your core beliefs or values encourage you to be caring, forgiving, patient, gentle, generous, selfless, kind?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Question	Never									Many times
10. Have you ever been changed by an unusual or profound experience? (You might call this a spiritual crisis, conversion experience, mystical experience, exceptional human experience, sense of enlightenment, or a near-death experience.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10



APPENDIX D. SPIRITUAL FITNESS SCALE

Table 7. United States Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale. Adapted from United States Special Operations Command (n.d., pp. 3–4).

SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale				
Reflect on your attitudes, commitments, and beliefs and answer as accurately as possible.				
1. I know what my life is about.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. Human Value and respect should be the greatest social value.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. I've been able to find a sense of meaning in my life.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. I believe strongly in humanity and the power of people.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I have a core set of beliefs, ethics, and values that give my life a sense of meaning and purpose.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. I often think about a "grand plan" or process that human beings are a part of.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. The greatest moral decision is doing the greatest good for human beings.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. Being of service to others is an important source of meaning in my life.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. I can find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The next set of statements reflect commitment to God or a higher power. Even if you don't think of yourself as religious, try to answer as accurately as possible. If you believe a statement doesn't align with your belief system, then choose the option "The assumptions behind the statement aren't consistent with my world views."				
11. I believe in God or a higher power.				
Yes		No		
12. I feel God's love for me.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.</i>				
13. I look to God for strength, support, and guidance.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.</i>				
14. I feel God's presence.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.</i>				
15. I am grateful for all God has done for me.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.</i>				
16. God comforts and shelters me.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.</i>				
17. I've decided to place my life under God's direction.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.</i>				
18. Religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.				
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<i>The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.</i>				



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