RETHINKING READINESS AND RESILIENCE: AN EXPLORATION OF THE

SPIRITUAL DOMAIN ON THE OTHER COMPREHENSIVE AIRMAN FITNESS

FRAMEWORK DOMAINS FOR ACTIVE-DUTY AIRMEN SERVING ON AIR

NATIONAL GUARD INSTALLATIONS– A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to fill critical gaps in literature by understanding an Airman's view of spiritual fitness, how spiritual fitness contributes to overall fitness, resilience and readiness, and what steps could be taken to improve Air Force spiritual fitness programming. To ensure equitability, Airmen were split into two different tenure-based groups: Active-duty Low Tenure (AD*lt*) and Active-duty high tenure (AD*ht*). AD*lt* had an average age of 27.9 years old (SD=3.2), were 90% male, 60% White/Caucasian, and 30% Catholic/30% Christian. AD*ht* had an average age of 34.7 years old (SD=2.0), were 100% male, 80% White/Caucasian, and 50% Christian. Spiritual fitness was reported by the following percentages of Airmen as contributing to the other three CAF domains: Physical domain – 70%, Mental domain – 100%, and Social domain – 95%. Readiness (95%) and resilience (90%) were also outlined as heavily impacted by an Airman's spiritual fitness. Spirituality encouraged Airmen's physical fitness through the idea that a healthy body is part of a spiritual discipline, the idea that it is part of Air Force requirements, and the idea of treating the body as a temple. Spirituality contributes to mental fitness through trusting in God's promises, providing perspective to reassess situations, and providing a focal point to maintain positivity. Spirituality contributes to social fitness by serving as a source of people who provide a team mentality, support and accountability. Spirituality contributes to readiness by providing strength/excellence in Christ, inner purpose to motivate to action, and living by the Word. Spirituality contributes to resilience by individual perspective and finding strength in God's word. Airmen suggested four areas to strengthen core values, which were truly embracing and inhabiting the Air Force core values, holding a stronger faith in

God, and reinforcing the need to live up to personal core values. Airmen noted that cognitive reframing and prioritization, and doing good for others as methods to aid in strengthen a healthy perspective. In strengthening perseverance, Airmen outline four key areas, which were intentional self-reflective moments, greater religious accommodation/more chaplain interaction, greater devotion to developing spiritual fitness, and inspiring a stronger reliance on others/accountability. Recommendations to strengthen purpose were loving other people and creating shared values and goals, bringing a unique perspective to everyday situations, and continually working on one's spirituality. Lastly, four key areas were uncovered in strengthening spiritual fitness, which will also impact an Airman's ability to meet the demand of their assigned missions. Those areas were: Listening to and understanding other Airmen and their plights, educating the force more on spiritual fitness and the spiritual domain of CAF, spending more time in working on self-development in spiritual fitness, and authenticity. This study directly contributes to the understanding of spiritual fitness within the United States Air Force. Contributions to the field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology can be seen in this study through real-world experiences of Airmen and how spiritual fitness guides their readiness, resilience, physical fitness, mental fitness, and social fitness. This study also contributes to faith-based interventions and spiritual applications for non-military organizations.

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Dedication

To my wife, Anna-lee, you are my rock. You always provided a word of encouragement and supported me through various challenges of life. I would not be who I am today without you. To my dad and stepmother, Ulises and Judy, thank you for the words of encouragement. Your belief in me and various life lessons helped shape me into the man I am – I hope I made you proud. Lastly, to my mother, Clara, I have never forgotten you. The glory of achieving this monumental goal rests with you and God. Now and forever, I love you and miss you tremendously.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Airman readiness is the complete and unhindered capability of United States Air Force Airmen to positively contribute to their assigned mission, uninterrupted operability of forces, and mobility facets in any domain (Garcia et al., 2017). Airman resiliency is the ability of Airmen to effectively overcome personal, professional, and academic distress, thereby sharpening an Airman's coping mechanism skillset (Barrett & Constas, 2014; Jensen & Bowen, 2017). With lives, country, and mission on the line, Airman readiness and resiliency are of central importance. According to Bowen et al (2016), the Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF) framework provides United States Air Force Airmen a capabilities-based approach on achieving military readiness and resiliency. The CAF framework contains four main domains: (a) physical, (b) mental, (c) social, and (d) spiritual (Air Force Instruction (AFI) 90-506, 2014). Each domain is believed to be important for readiness and resiliency skillsets. Although there have been considerable efforts and base-wide programming to bolster physical, mental, and social fitness, efforts to boost spiritual fitness have been more compartmentalized (Nieves, 2020). Further, although Chaplaincy has played a major role in facilitating the improvement of Airman spiritual fitness, there may be additional ways to improve efforts to enhance spiritual fitness. Therefore, the current study aims to take a deeper look into how Airmen exercise their spiritual fitness, how spiritual fitness contributes to overall fitness, how readiness and resilience is affected, how spiritual tenets are affected, how stress and coping mechanisms are affected, and what steps could be taken to improve Air Force spiritual fitness programming.

Chapter 1 includes a background of the problem, statement of the problem, and purpose of the study. Chapter 1 consists of a theoretical framework, which sets the foundation for the two primary research questions and 11 sub-questions. Definition of unique terms, scope, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are also be presented. Chapter 1 concludes with a detailed summary of the chapter.

Background

According to AFH 1 (2017), all United States Air Force members, from the ranks of Airman Basic to General are classified as Airmen. A United States Air Force (USAF) Airman is placed under considerable demands. As such, the Department of the Air Force leaders are committed to developing initiatives to ensure that Airmen are at optimal levels of physical, mental, social, and spiritual fitness. Before launching into the Comprehensive Airmen Fitness framework, it is important to take a step back and review the expectations of and impact serving has on a US Airman.

Expectations of and Impact on a US Airman

The expectations of USAF Airmen are to fly, fight, and win in air, space, and cyberspace (Air Force Handbook (AFH) 1, 2017). Airmen must be able to perform their duties to increase the lethality of the Air Force enterprise, which include combat and non-combat duties in often hostile and ambiguous environments (Howell, 2020). The expectations of Airmen often place tremendous physical and mental burdens on them (Sussman et al., 2021). In addition to military duties, Airmen are also expected to undergo continuous process improvement initiatives, profession military education

requirements, computer-based training items, total force training items, medical requirements, and professional growth opportunities (Howell, 2020).

Shifting from conventional warfare to modern warfare, military members are now operating in more volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous environments. Operational duties in these ambiguous environments place tremendous stress on Airmen (Ormsby et al., 2016), which lead to physical, mental, social, and spiritual degradation (Kopacz & Connery, 2015; Nindl et al., 2018). Stemming from modern warfare, degradations in CAF domains are evident. Degradations in CAF are directly related to the exertion of more physical activity, cognitive overload, sleep restriction, caloric deprivation, decreased contact with support networks and systems, and hindered religious opportunities (Nindl et al., 2018).

Further, the Air Force experiences significant difficulties in combating mental health and suicides. Nearly 25% of active-duty Air Force enlisted and commissioned officers face mental health issues with only 3% of members seeking assistance from a Military Treatment Facility (MTF) (NAMI, 2021). This raises genuine concerns as the United States population has an approximate 20% rate for individuals seeking mental health treatment (Mendez, 2019). Another astounding figure is that 82 active-duty Air Force Airmen committed suicide in 2020. As of the early 2021, an additional 21 active-duty Air Force members took their own lives (Orvis, 2021).

Further, the various requirements and expectations of Airmen can create moral injuries that drastically impact the values and beliefs of Airmen (Bremault-Phillips et al., 2019; Carey et al., 2016). Moral injuries are deep senses of transgression against personal moral beliefs that affect an Airman's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual systems (Koenig & Zaben, 2021). Severe distress and functional impairments (Bussing &

Recchia, 2016), such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), isolation, loss of faith, severe generalized anxiety (Mark et al., 2018), loss of temper control, loss of the ability to effectively regulate emotions, and depression are noted as prominent clinical moral injuries that military members face (Bremault-Phillips et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2019).

Theoretical Foundation: Readiness Theory

Readiness is defined as the degree to which military members are able to meet global demands while remaining optimally postured for major contingencies, humanitarian operations, and other Department of Defense assigned missions (U.S. Army, 2017). Readiness also requires uniformed military members to conduct the full range of military operations without hindrances or exclusions (U.S. Army, 2017). According to Galluccio (2015), the readiness theory pertains to how an individual decides how to enter negotiation aimed at settling an intractable conflict. Often, these negotiations occur solely within oneself, as Airmen consider the situation and determine the best course of action (Meadows et al., 2015).

Readiness requires mental fortitude, alertness, and confidence to combat the psychological stresses and risks associated with combat deployments and ambiguous environments (Prykhodko et al., 2021). Further, readiness is considered to be a critical precursor to the successful implementation of complex changes. These changes, to meet global military demands rest upon training variances, manpower authorizations, skill levels, and functional areas responsibilities (Weiner, 2009).

There is broad agreement amongst military officials on the importance of overall military readiness (Harrison, 2014). Further, leaders also agree that individual Airman readiness is reliant upon personal resilience (Bowen et al., 2016) and evidenced by newly

implemented virtual learning and development programs to cultivate personal and

professional potential (BetterUp, 2021). Airmen resiliency is the ability of Airmen to

effectively overcome personal, professional, and academic distress, thereby sharpening

an Airman's coping skillsets (Barrett & Constas, 2014; Jensen & Bowen, 2017). Given

resiliency's close association with stress and coping, it is important to also consider stress

and coping theory. Outlined in Figure 1, stress and coping are paramount to developing

overall Airman readiness and resilience (Barrett & Constas, 2014; Jensen & Bowen,

2017).

Resiliency Theory: Stress & Coping

Figure 1

CAF Framework and Theories on Airman Readiness and Resilience
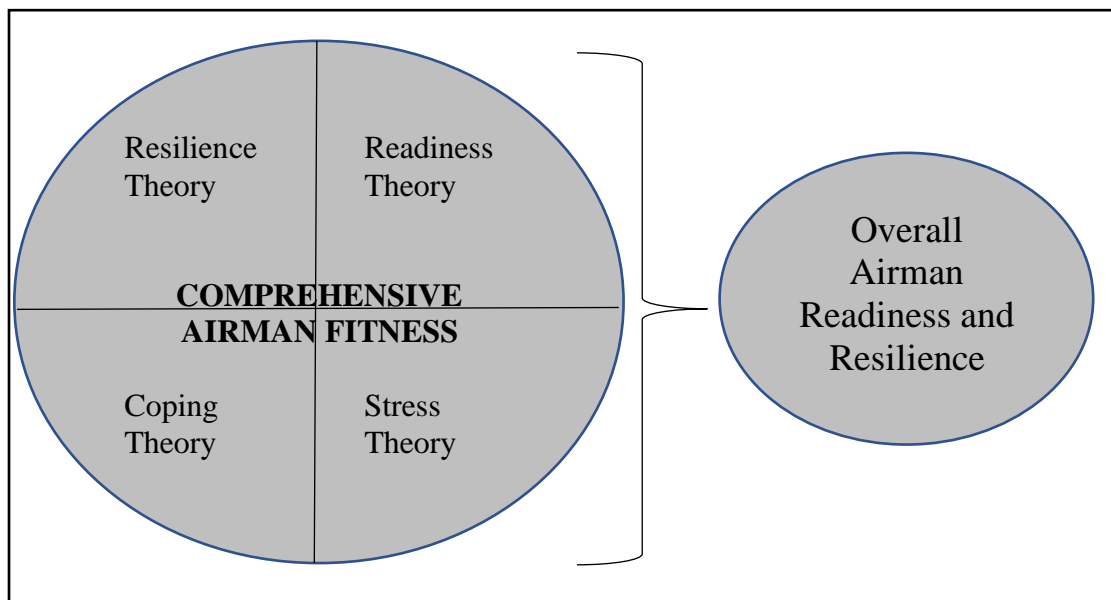
The theory of stress and coping looks at stress as a result from an interaction

between events that have occurred in the environment and in the individual's appraisal of

them (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress within this theory occurs when an individual

appraises a situation as relevant to their well-being and their resources to address it are taxed or exceeded (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this theory, an individual sizes up the circumstances, resulting in primary and secondary appraisals. In primary appraisal, an individual judges if a situation is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Here, an irrelevant encounter has no significance for an individual's well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A benign-positive encounter means that the individual anticipates a good outcome. A stressful appraisal means that there is potential for either a threat (the potential for harm or loss) or challenge (the potential for growth or mastery), or harm or loss has already occurred (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Secondary appraisal involves the individual evaluating the resources for coping and determining what they can do to resolve the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping is a dynamic process that involves cognitive and behavioral efforts aimed to resolve a potential stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this theory, coping has two functions: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping includes cognitive and behavioral efforts that are directed at reducing/managing emotional distress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Whereas problem-focused coping involves the cognitive problem-solving efforts and behavioral strategies used to manage the source of a problem (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress on the human body can have psychological and physical implications which can cause harm if experienced in a prolonged manner (Akinola et al., 2019).

According to the Meadows et al. (2015) RAND study, the United States military has placed increased emphasis on how military members and their families cope with stressors. These stressors were identified as individual stress, uncertainty about

assignment timelines, culture shock in theater, fear of confrontation, fear of death, differences in climate, separation from friends and family, and lack of support system (Meadows et al., 2015). Some military members suffer from negative physical, mental, social, and spiritual consequences as a result of military-related stressors (Bowen et al., 2016). Such consequences include, anxiety, mood disorders (Thomas et al., 2018), PTSD, spiritual crisis, substance abuse (Currier et al., 2015), family dysfunction, marital problems, dissolutions, social isolation (Bormann et al., 2011), and even suicide or suicide attempts (Meadows et al., 2015). Yet, some Airmen are able to bounce back in the face of the intense stressors, showcasing that resiliency seems to play a role.

The resiliency theory, crafted by Norman Garmezy, sought to explore the conceptual scaffolding on positive contextual, social, and individual variables. These variables aid with successfully coping with circumstances that interfered with or disrupted developmental trajectories (Garmezy et al., 1984). The resiliency theory explored why some individuals developed into healthy, productive members of society despite the adversity that they faced (Wang et al., 2015). The components of resiliency include active coping efforts (Crane et al., 2019, O'Leary, 1998), in addition to having a reliable support system, making meaning from life's difficulties, and healthy emotional regulation (O'Leary, 1998).

Active vs Avoidant Coping

Active coping consists of an individual's cognitive and behavioral efforts to successfully resolve a stressor. Engaging in active coping requires both a confidence that the coping techniques will work, and a belief in one's ability to have what is required to carry out the techniques. A lack in either or both of these beliefs often prompts the use of

avoidant coping. Avoidance, in the resiliency theory, is stated to be the physical, mental, social, and/or spiritual escape from chronic adversity, over time, in the face of a myriad of stressors (Barrett & Constas, 2014). Here, individuals do not successfully process and regulate their emotions, they just do things to distract from them or become numb to them (O'Leary, 1998).

Individuals high in resiliency tend to engage in active coping because they are confident that they can do what it takes to resolve a stressor (Crane et al., 2019). Active coping can be either problem-focused or emotion-focused in nature, and a resilient person is good at determining when to use each. Problem-focused coping is most beneficial if there are actual actions that can be taken (training, encountering the stressor) to modify or eliminate the sources of stress. Emotion-focused coping is most beneficial when no direct actions can be taken because the situation has ended or is just beyond personal or group abilities to resolve. Here, resilient individuals will take time to process their emotions and receive support from others as they accept the situation and move forward to find meaning and grow from the difficulty (O'Leary, 1998). The criticality of active coping has a direct and profound impact on reducing burnout (Yi et al., 2020) and improving mental health (Freire et al., 2020). Yet, a tendency to default to avoidant coping instead of active coping is associated with poor mental health (Crane et al., 2019).

Current Assessment of Airman Readiness and Resilience

The United States Air Force endorses the idea that individual Airman readiness is a function of resilience and job training (Bowen et al., 2016; Lyles, 2003). Job training is monitored by assessing items such as flight hours, sorties generated, streaming days, tank miles, and training events (Harrison, 2014). Current Air Force metrics are focused on

employment of various combat assets for the purpose of asset effectiveness, replacement

measures, peak utilization, and manpower requirements (Harrison, 2014). There is broad

agreement amongst military officials on the importance of overall military readiness

(Harrison, 2014), and general agreement on readiness' critical domains of resiliency,

physical, mental, social and spiritual fitness (Bowen et al., 2016; Meadows et al., 2015).

Yet, until recently, Air Force leadership had not created an accurate method of measuring

readiness through the four CAF domains and its components (Bowen et al., 2016).

Specifically, Bowen and colleagues developed the Comprehensive Airman Fitness

Measure (CAF Measure). The CAF Measure contains a total of 15 items, three items

tapping each construct: resiliency, physical, mental, social, and spiritual fitness. Despite

the CAF Measure's development, it has not been adopted for regular use in the Air Force

to determine Airmen readiness and resiliency skills. Anecdotally, current protocol for

identifying Airman CAF needs include informal staff monitoring of these aspects, or

Airman inquiry.

Figure 2

Total Fitness on Resiliency, Readiness, and Job Facets
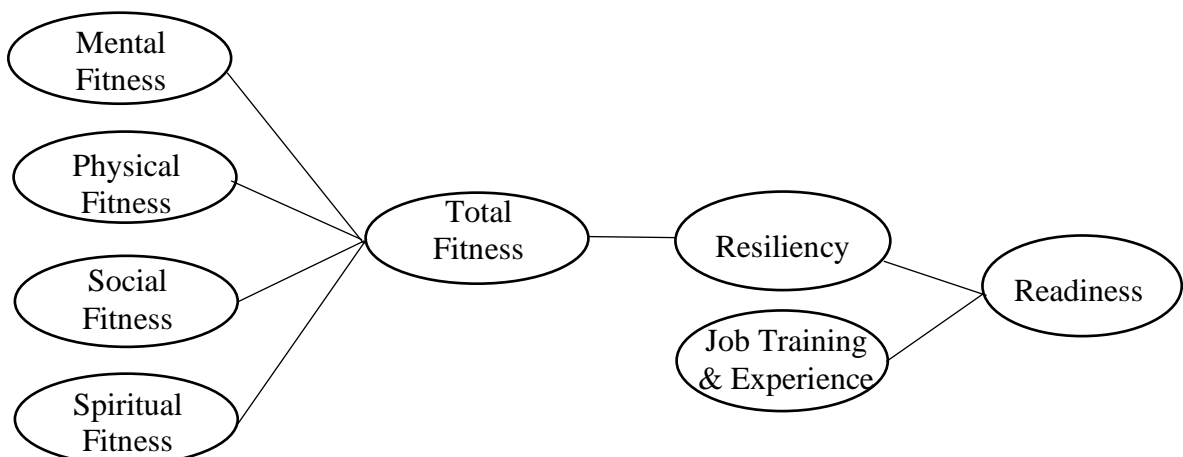
Comprehensive Airman Fitness

In an effort to target the components that are essential to Airman readiness and resilience, the United States Air Force launched the CAF program Air Force-wide on March 30, 2011 (Gonzalez et al., 2014). As outlined by Bowen et al. (2016) in Figure 2, the CAF framework was crafted within the health promotion framework of providing Airmen a holistic approach that incorporates a capabilities-based, total life-cycle approach to managing Airmen (Bowen et al., 2016). Further, CAF was created as a performance-based projection model concentrating solely on human performance (Bowen et al., 2016). The internal subdivision of CAF into four pillars directly contributes to human performance, directly equating to Airman readiness and resilience (Bowen et al., 2016; Garcia, Ganey, & Wilbert, 2017).

CAF is unique to each individual Airman and is inextricably connected to an Airman's overall readiness and resiliency (Bowen et al., 2016; Jensen & Bowen, 2017). The physical domain of CAF encompasses the ability of Airmen to physically accomplish the mission while remaining healthy, uninjured, and physically capable (Bowen et al., 2016). The mental domain of CAF involves the ability of Airmen to overcome tremendous psychological barriers, unique stressors, mental burnout, overload, and other various tolls on an Airman's psyche (AFI 90-506, 2014; Nindl et al., 2018). The social domain of CAF outlines the healthy social networking and support systems that are required of Airmen to optimize communication skills, increase involvement in the mission, and share information with others (AFI 90-506, 2014; Jensen & Bowen, 2017). Lastly, the spiritual domain of CAF encompasses the beliefs, principles, and values that

each Airman needs to prevail against personal challenges of faith and/or purpose (AFI 90-506, 2014). Each domain in the CAF framework contains four sub-tenets that further delineate the intricate details that are contained to each primary domain.

  Physical Domain of CAF. According to AFI 90-506 (2014), physical fitness is stated to be the ability of Airmen to adopt behaviors that are required for the healthy betterment of physical activities. These physical activities contribute to overall Airman health and well-being (AFH 1, 2017). The physical domain of CAF encompasses four primary components. These components are: (a) endurance, (b) recovery, (c) nutrition, and (d) strength. The primary objective of the physical domain of CAF is to ensure Airmen are healthy and uninjured in order to accomplish Air Force missions, goals, or tasks (Blackwell, 2012; Lyles, 2019b). According to AFH 1 (2017), Airmen meet physical requirements by participating in the Air Force fitness program and continually strive to meet Air Force fitness standards. To meet these standards, Airmen must abide by year-round physical conditioning and programs that are focused on aerobic conditioning, muscular fitness training, muscular endurance, flexibility, and healthy eating (AFH 1, 2017).

  The specific components of the physical domain of CAF directly contribute to Airmen adopting and sustaining healthy behaviors in efforts to enhance health and well-being (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). Endurance is the component which emphasizes the body's ability to continually accomplish a repetitive task in a repetitive fashion (AFI 90-506, 2014). The endurance component focuses specifically on the components of muscular development and muscular endurance, with an emphasis on physical fitness

testing elements to meet Air Force performance fitness evaluation standards (AFI 90-506, 2014).

The second component in the physical domain in CAF is recovery. Recovery is the practices that aid in restoring energy and counterbalance stress to offset an Airman's mood and avoid hindrances to performance (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). AFI 1 (2017) stated that recovery meals provide the body with needed carbohydrates burned during physical exercise and convert carbohydrates into glycogen. Recovery also means the strategic balancing and alternation of workouts. Balancing and alternating physical fitness routines promotes optimal recovery and avoids the consecutive training the same muscle groups and the detriments to the body on overexertion of those parts (AFH 1, 2017).

The third component in the physical domain in CAF is nutrition. Nutrition is stated to be the provision and consumption of food in quantities, quality, and proportions that promote optimal physical performance to replenish the body to protect against disease, injury, or a combination thereof (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). Proper nutrition, coupled with frequent physical activity, are the primary elements for weight control and avoidance of health risks (AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019b). According to AFH 1 (2017), 48% of Airmen are overweight and 14% are obese. These statistics highlight the criticality of proper nutrition, nutrition training, and requirement for physical activity in Airmen across the Air Force enterprise.

The last component in the physical domain in CAF is strength. Strength is the ability to generate force and power (AFH 1, 2017). Strength ultimately decreases the exertion needed to complete desired objectives (AFI 90-506, 2014). According to AFH 1

(2017), muscular strength includes the principles of specificity, regularity, balance, and variety. The primary thrust of muscular strength is to safely build muscle and muscular strength (AFI 90-506, 2014).

  Mental Domain of CAF. According to AFI 90-506 (2014), mental fitness is stated to be the ability of Airmen to effectively cope with unique mental stressors and/or challenges that they face (Simmons & Yoder, 2013). The mental domain of CAF encompasses four main components which are awareness, adaptability, decision-making, and positive thinking (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). The primary thrust of the mental domain in CAF is to ensure that Airmen are psychologically fit to operate in various environments under varying circumstances (Blackwell, 2012). Additionally, adequate mental fitness enables Airmen to cope with stressors requires for the timely and sufficient accomplishment of the mission (Blackwell, 2012; Lyles, 2019a). According to AFH 1 (2017), Airmen can ensure that they are mentally ready to accomplish the mission by identifying issues that affect and detract quality of life. Blackwell (2012) noted that detractions from an Airman's quality of life include financial problems, sexual harassment, assault, discrimination, stress, marital problems, and substance abuse. Additionally, there are numerous potential issues that may impact the mental domain of CAF for Airmen. The range of mental detractions is subjective between Airmen and diminishes motivation, erodes positive attitude, reduces quality of work, and decreases stress management techniques (AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019a).

  The specific components of the mental domain of CAF directly contribute to an Airman's ability to effectively cope with unique mental stressors and challenges (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). The subcomponents of the mental domain also affect an

Airman's attitude and work output (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). Awareness is the

component that is defined as the self-descriptions ascribed that influence an individual's

behavior, motivation, and feelings about themselves (AFI 90-506, 2014). Additionally,

awareness encompasses the cues needed for Airmen to effectively understand and

navigate their immediate environment (AFI 90-506, 2014). Awareness is the framing of

the mind where Airmen are fully aware of their own values, needs, and biases (AFH 1,

2017). Awareness also encapsulates how those principles affect their mental state of mind

(AFH 1, 2017).

The second component in the mental domain in CAF is adaptability. Adaptability

is stated to be the ease of adapting to changes associated with the complexities of the

military profession (AFI 90-506, 2014). Adaptability revolves around the continuous

cycle of changes that occur within an Airman's life (Lyles, 2019b). Changes in an

Airman's life include new work structures, processes, schedules, requirements, locations,

cultures, and leadership hierarchies (AFH 1, 2017). These changes revolve around an

Airman's mental capacity in experiencing major changes in a variety of environments

(AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019a).

The third component in the mental domain in CAF is decision-making. Decision-

making is stated to be the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors of Airmen which are used for

evaluating and choosing courses of action to solve a problem or reach a goal (AFI 90-

506, 2014). Moreover, the decision-making component includes the factors of problem

solving, setting appropriate goals, adaptive thinking, and intuitive thinking (AFI 90-506,

2014). In decision-making, the utilization of mental frameworks and shortcuts simplify

understandings of the complexities in an Airman's life (AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019b).

These frameworks consist of individual assumptions about how various life facets are related and how they interact with each other to make appropriate decisions (AFH 1, 2017).

The last component in the mental domain in CAF is positive thinking. Positive thinking is stated to be the ability of Airmen to process information, apply knowledge, and change preferences through positive reframing, cognitive flexibility, and psychological preparation (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). Positive thinking is directly linked with the resilience theory as it is a personal trait that aids Airmen in overcoming adversity and subsequently achieve optimal adjustment (Lyles, 2019a; Wang et al., 2015).

Social Domain of CAF. According to AFI 90-506 (2014), social fitness is stated to be the ability of Airmen to engage in healthy social networks which promote the overall well-being of the Airman and achieve optimal performance. The social domain of CAF encompasses four main components which are communication, connectedness, social support, and teamwork (AFI 90-506, 2014). The main focus of the social domain of CAF is to ensure that Airmen are engaging in healthy networks, such as family and friends, which will positively contribute to the overall well-being of the Airman and encourages optimal performance (Blackwell, 2012). According to AFH 1 (2017), Airmen can ensure that they are socially ready to accomplish the mission by building positive relationships with coworkers, peers, family, friends, and mentors which can impact the way the Airman accomplishes his or her assigned tasks, goals, or missions. As a key component to increase personal resilience, the social domain of CAF and its components are structured around communicative and team aspects (AFI 1, 2017).

The specific components of the social domain of CAF directly contribute to Airmen communication and the building of relationships (AFH 1, 2017). As a critical component to the social domain of CAF, communication is stated to be the exchange of thoughts, opinions, information, or beliefs which include problem-solving and relationship management (AFI 90-506, 2014). The Air Force encourage personnel communication openly and freely with their superiors, peers, and subordinates regarding their careers, performance, duties, and missions (AFH 1, 2017). This vital exchange of information can uncover beliefs or opinions which members can connect with one another.

The second component in the social domain in CAF is connectedness. Connectedness is stated to be the quality and number of connections that an Airman has with other people (AFI 90-506, 2014). These connections include commitment, structure, roles, responsibility, and communication to build upon a professional relationship (AFI 90-506, 2014). As a foundational element to creating a climate of dignity, the component of connectedness supports the Air Force's zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment, sexual assault, and discrimination by linking people together with common ideals (AFH 1, 2017).

The third component in the social domain in CAF is social support. Social support is the perception that comfort is available to those Airmen that need it (AFI 90-506, 2014). Social support spans the emotional, tangible, instrumental, informational, and spiritual elements that provide the comfort (AFI 90-506, 2014). In addition to support from personal social networks, there are support services available to Airmen to include Chaplains, legal services, alcohol and drug counselors, Airman and Family Readiness

Centers, and mentors (AFI 1, 2017). As noted in AFH 1 (2017), Chaplains are military faith leaders that provide privileged communications under the Military Rules of Evidence. As a vital element of social support, Chaplains provide one hundred percent confidentiality and cannot make reports against an Airman, therefore allowing for those Airmen to communicate openly and freely (AFH 1, 2017).

The last component in the social domain in CAF is teamwork. Teamwork is stated to be the coordinated effort among team members to achieve a goal, mission, or task (AFI 90-506, 2014). While there are several teams that make up varying aspects of Air Force service, the foundation of teamwork relies upon communication, connectedness, and social support which are the other three components of the social domain of CAF (AFI 90-506, 2014).

Spiritual Domain of CAF. According to AFI 90-506 (2014), spiritual fitness is stated to be the ability of Airmen to adhere to beliefs, principles, and values that are needed in times of distress or personal adversity. The spiritual domain of CAF encompasses four main components which are core values, perseverance, perspective, and purpose (AFI 90-506, 2014). The main focus of the spiritual domain of CAF is to ensure that Airmen are able to follow a core set of beliefs or principles needed to prevail in combating distress and accomplish the mission (Blackwell, 2012; Lyles, 2019a). According to AFH 1 (2017), Airmen can ensure that they are spiritually ready to accomplish the mission by proactively practicing and establishing a sense of purpose in life to achieve personal goals or priorities (Lyles, 2019b). In this domain of CAF, spiritual fitness may or may not include religious activities needed to develop the skills in times of stress, hardship, or tragedy (AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019b).

The specific components of the spiritual domain of CAF directly contribute to those beliefs, principles, and values that Airmen need to prevail in difficult times (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). As a component to the spiritual domain of CAF, core values are the specific principles that guide an individual's internal conduct (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). While the Air Force trains and develops Airmen to internalize the core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all they do, Airmen may adopt other core values to assist in personal resilience in times of hardship (AFH 1, 2017). Core values are also stated to be the relationship between an Airman's internal conduct and the external world (AFI 90-506, 2014). The internalized core values are stated to be the basis for Air Force policies, guidance, and overall focus among all tiers within the enlisted force structure (AFH 1, 2017).

The second component in the spiritual domain in CAF is perseverance. Perseverance is the steady persistence toward an action, purpose, or state (AFI 90-506, 2014). As a principle of war, perseverance is stated to encompass the patient, resolute, and persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives, for as long as necessary to achieve them (AFH 1, 2017). Much alike the perseverance principle of war, Airmen must be patient, resolute, and persistent in achieving their goals. The feeling of winning or achieving, in perseverance, can lead to eustress which is a positive form of stress (AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019b). Perseverance, in sports psychology, drives optimal performance through the combined faith in God (Roychowdhury, 2019). Through perseverance, the interconnectedness of group dynamics, the sensation of accomplishment, and spirituality harbored by team members equate to greater overall output by all members (Roychowdhury, 2019).

The third component in the spiritual domain of CAF is perspective. Perspective consists of how Airmen view situations or facts and how they judge this information's relative importance (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). The Air Force enhances an Airman's perspective in various ways such as pre-exposure preparation. In pre-exposure preparation, Airmen are subjected to realistic training to anticipate and understand normal responses to unusual stressors that they may face (AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019a). Additionally, the Air Force promotes psychological first aid. Psychological first aid is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and can be utilized for ongoing operational stress (AFH 1, 2017). While these areas are mostly operationally driven, perspective has much deeper roots in spirituality. Perspective is the belief that something greater than ourselves lives through each individual (Roychowdhury, 2019). In that regard, individuals bolster spirituality through positivity and finding a deeper meaning in the challenges of life (Koenig, 2012; Roychowdhury, 2019).

The last component in the spiritual domain of CAF is purpose. Purpose is stated to be the reason(s) for which an Airman exists (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). The main element in purpose is understanding and living the cultural, religious, or spiritual beliefs that Airmen hold to help reduce distress, support self-preservation, and discourage suicide (AFH 1, 2017; Lyles, 2019a).

Application of CAF

In achieving CAF's overarching goals, the AFI established flexibility for commanders and community support coordinators to plan and schedule resiliency events and training (Leslie, 2014). Below is a review of this effort, broken down by fitness domain.

Physical Fitness

The Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) on active-duty installations offers several programs that increase the physical domain of CAF. Getting It Off/Keeping It Off (GOKO) is an eight-week, cost-free class that provides Airmen an opportunity to attend meaningful seminars regarding healthy eating habits and physical activities aimed for physical health betterment (Hyatt, 2012). GOKO provides certified professionals to aid and hold Airmen accountable for constructing goals in losing weight and maintaining healthy weight management (Hyatt, 2012).

In addition to the GOKO classes focused on healthy activities and choices, Air Force installations also offer nutrition and diet-focused cooking courses (Hyatt, 2012). These cooking courses are planned, scheduled, and carried out through HAWC professionals to inform Airmen that positive nutrition, coupled with physical activity, fuels human performance (Bowen et al., 2016; Hyatt, 2012). The various cooking classes have the ultimate goal of informing Airmen on the alternatives of their established diets and how human performance can be affected through positive physical readiness (Hyatt, 2012).

While programs like GOKO and HAWK-provided nutrition classes are paramount to an Airman's nutritional decisions, the HAWC facilities are the main hub for Airmen to engage in strenuous physical activities (Hyatt, 2012; Stewart, 2019). Challenging physical limitations is a daily practice in the Air Force, which aids in Airman resiliency and readiness (Stewart, 2019). Engaging in physical activities and promulgating a healthy lifestyle extends beyond merely passing the semi-annual or annual performance fitness assessment (PFA) (Stewart, 2019).

Airmen remaining year-round physically fit is a top priority for the Air Force (Hyatt, 2012). Stewart (2019) outlined that physical activities such as running, hiking, dancing, strength training, endurance training, and swimming are key elements to strengthen the physical domain in the CAF framework. The HAWC facility is the focal point for Airmen to engage with other Airmen on accomplishing their weight loss endeavors, formulate positive nutritional habits, and strengthen human performance (Hyatt, 2012).

Mental Fitness

The Department of Defense takes mental health seriously as one in five adults in the United States experience mental health illnesses (Lyles, 2019a; Mendez, 2019). The National Institute of Mental Health estimated that nearly 46.6 million individuals suffer from various illnesses stemming from mental health (Mendez, 2019). This is concerning as nearly 25% of active-duty Air Force members face mental health issues with only 3% of members seeking assistance from a Military Treatment Facility (MTF) (NAMI, 2021). In the Department of Defense, several avenues have been created for Airmen to receive treatment or preventative measures regarding their personal mental health (Mendez, 2019). Air Force Mental Health, operating out of the Medical Group on active-duty installations, provide services for Airmen to ensure that all Airmen operate at full capacity and establish healthy mechanisms for distressful moments (Erwin, 2018).

Air Force Mental Health is a cost-free service for Airmen to bring awareness to healthy coping mechanisms for unique Airman issues to strengthen the mental domain of the CAF framework (Erwin, 2018). Mental health also provides Airmen, supervisors, and leadership information on mental health indicators (Moffett, 2014). Mental health

indicators are stated as degradations in the mental domain of CAF such as substance abuse, isolation, or behavioral changes (Moffett, 2014). As one of the central locations for aiding Airmen in dealing with unique mental health concerns, Air Force Mental Health has the goal of ensuring Airmen take care of one another while maintaining a healthy balance in their own personal lives (Mendez, 2019).

Exercise is another method that the Air Force employs to assist in positively reinforcing Airman mental health. According to Sharma et al. (2006), aerobic exercises, such as jogging, swimming, cycling, walking, gardening, and dancing, have vastly reduced anxiety and depression from those suffering from a mental health illness. Exercising in teams vastly contributes to an individual's blood circulation to the brain and stimulate a feeling of accomplishment within the team (Erwin, 2018; Sharma et al., 2006). As a paramount domain to the CAF framework, improving mental health involves positively enhancing an individual self-esteem and cognitive function while successfully reducing anxiety, distress, depression, and negative emotions or behaviors (Sharma et al., 2006).

The criticality of addressing mental health in Airman is evident as the Air Force has seen a drastic spike in Airman suicides in 2019 (Brantley, 2019). Distress stemming from combat, work-life balance, or unique personal issues is not an exclusive factor on rank, seniority, or prestige in the military career (Brantley, 2019). Understanding the need for enhanced mental health services, the Air Force implemented a Tactical Pause to decrease Airman suicides by informing Airman on their options for help, information on sources of information, confidentiality, and building a stronger sense of connectedness (Mendez, 2019). Some active-duty locations took advantage of the Tactical Pause by

strengthening mental health through unique initiatives, such as the Encouraging

Resiliency Through Recreation initiative at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

(Brantley, 2019).

One of the long-standing avenues for combatting mental health issues is having a

safe and confidential outlet to speak about it with one hundred percent confidentiality

(Jenne, 2017). The Air Force Chaplain is a commissioned officer that provides religious

and non-religious opportunities for Airmen to speak about overall well-being (Carey et

al., 2016), sense of purpose, and mechanisms behind individual feelings (VanderWeele,

2018). Additionally, Chaplain's aid in a support network between Airmen and Mental

Health clinics (Erwin, 2018).

Social Fitness

The uniqueness of the social domain in the CAF framework is the fact that it is

directly involved with the other three CAF domains. As an underlying theme of the social

domain in the CAF framework, Strength in Numbers is an initiative employed by the Air

Force which develops and maintains communication skills, exchanges of ideas, and

experiences (Moffett, 2014). Linking directly with the mental domain of CAF, the social

domain exploits gaps in Airman comfortability by encouraging Airmen to speak out in

times of distress (Moffett, 2014).

Linking to the physical domain of CAF, the social domain is strengthened when

Airmen involve themselves with cross-functional activities and physical wellness (Leslie,

2014). These activities are often held at HAWC facilities and involve Airmen and their

families (Leslie, 2014). Through effective physical activities in teams, an Airman's social

domain is heightened through peer and mentor support, family activities, and other social events (Leslie, 2014).

The Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) outlined that Airmen express their individual social traits differently (Moffett, 2014). In strengthening an Airman's social domain within the CAF framework, Airmen are better suited to exhibit healthier social connections and behaviors, thus creating a stronger unit (Moffett, 2014). Moreover, unit leadership has a direct impact on the development and enhancement of an Airman's social CAF domain by fostering a sense of camaraderie, providing a clear understanding of the mission and goals, and encouraging unit cohesion (Moffett, 2014). All of which are stated to increase an Airman's sense of connectedness, communicative value, and personal resiliency (Brantley, 2019).

Spiritual Fitness

Specializing in the spiritual domain in the CAF framework, Air Force Chaplains provide religious participation and religious services to the entire Air Force installation (VanderWeele, 2018). Directly affecting human performance, resiliency skills, and readiness, Chaplains strengthen the spiritual domain in CAF by providing Airmen insight on the critical element of purpose (Erwin, 2018). As a steward for creating a stronger sense of spirituality, Chaplains recognize that personal beliefs vastly differ from Airman to Airman (Jenne, 2017). Recognizing the differences in beliefs, Chaplains accommodate all religious preference and offer Airmen one hundred percent confidential communications to ensure that Airmen are able to speak freely and receive advice in distressing times (Jenne, 2017). Advice on purpose through religious or non-religious

contexts help build a stronger spiritual CAF domain while aiding the social and mental domains of CAF (VanderWeele, 2018; Zimmerman, 2013).

Need to Expand Spiritual Fitness

Although the USAF Chaplaincy efforts are making a difference, as evidenced above, the spiritual domain of CAF has not received as much programming attention as the other three CAF domains. The need to expand spiritual fitness efforts can be seen in the strides that the United States Army took to bolster spiritual fitness into their Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) program. The Army overhauled its CSF program to incorporate spirituality (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011), faith, and purpose into training processes and command structures (Weitzman, 2021). One major deviation from this overhaul was that spiritual fitness was not delegated solely to Chaplains but was incorporated into the CSF training program (Weitzman, 2021). This levied spiritual fitness responsibilities onto noncommissioned officers as part of their Master Resilience Training (MRT) responsibilities (Weitzman, 2021). The Army's efforts to define, measure, and improve spiritual fitness were endorsed by psychological research and renowned psychologist Martin Seligman, so the spiritual fitness component of CSF has promise (Weitzman, 2021). This raises genuine concerns for the CAF framework as it far lags behind the research and implementation efforts of that seen for the CSF program.

One critical area behind the Army CSF framework on spirituality is their definition of spirituality. Spirituality in the CSF framework is not based on any particular stances or positions, but rather on the ontological truths of religious and nonreligious practices and beliefs (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011). The premise of the CSF framework is facilitating the search of those truths for every Soldier, whether that be through

religious mean, nonreligious mean, or a combination thereof (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011; Weitzman, 2021). Recognizing that not every Soldier inhabits a religious need, the Army molded it CSF framework to encompass both religion and nonreligious means to appeal to the diverse personnel serving (Weitzman, 2021). However, given that there is no evidence to date that taking a non-religious approach to spiritual fitness is beneficial (Weitzman, 2021), the purpose of the current study is to explore what Airmen have found helpful in maintaining spiritual fitness and consider the addition of religious programming.

Published in April 2014, AFI 90-506 was created to outline the criticality of the CAF framework. AFI 90-506 outlined each fitness domain and its associated tenets to provide Airmen, supervisors, and leadership a means to understand and promulgate the framework across the Air Force enterprise (Blackwell, 2012). However, AFI 90-506 was superseded by AFI 90-5001, *Integrated Resilience*, in April 2019. Within AFI 90-5001, the CAF framework has been drastically shortened to less than a half page, which reinforces the need to further understand, educate, and promote the CAF framework across the Air Force enterprise.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

The relationship between the physical, mental, social, and spiritual domains of CAF can be found in the Holy Bible. Linking most with the mental domain of the CAF framework, the book of Ephesians 6:11 notes that individuals should always wear the armor of God, enabling them to stand against life's evils and the schemes of the devil (Bible, 2022). This verse speaks about the resilience that one has to face the complex challenges in life. Further, the book of Corinthians 2:13 mentions that your body is a

temple to harbor the Holy Spirit that is contained within you (Bible, 2022). Reflecting on

the body being a temple for God, the actual body and the actions taken by the body

encompass physical, mental, social, and spiritual means. With the body as a temple,

meaningful connection and interactivity of the four CAF domains is evident (Bible,

2022).

Physical Biblical Foundations

The Bible speaks about the physical health of individuals and the importance of

maintaining optimal health. In the book of John 1:2-3, it states that "He was in the

beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was

made that was made" (New King James Bible, 2022). Further, Corinthians 3:17 mentions

that you should not destroy the temple of God (the body), as it is holy (King James Bible,

2022). Therefore, each person should be a good steward of the body given to them,

practicing healthy behaviors to optimize the body. Further, as a means of decreasing

bodily stress and increasing mood, physical exertion and the tenet of recovery enables

individuals to honor their temple of His body (John 2:21) while prospering in the health

of the body, mind, and the soul (King James Bible, 2022; Lyles, 2019b).

The physical domain of CAF encompasses goals for members to achieve for

themselves (AFH 1, 2017). In the book of Philippians 3:12, it states "I don't mean to say

that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I

press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me" (Bible

Gateway, 2022). This bible verse speaks to be goals one may set on the betterment of the

body (the temple), and how those goals instill a sense of motivation to achieve their

desired end state (Bible Gateway, 2022; Sharma et al., 2017).

Mental Biblical Foundations

In Philippians 4:6-7, it states that individuals should "rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse speaks upon an individual's perspective on negative mental health, such as anxieties, and how those negative mental states should be discarded and replaced with prayer and the peace of God (Bible, 2022). As a prevalent symptom of negative mental health, anxiety may reduce the ability of individuals to enact positive religious coping (PRC) and create a far-sighted meaning in life (Lyles, 2019a; Ozcan et al., 2021). The book of Peter 1:7 also called upon individuals to "cast their anxieties onto Him because God cares for all" (Bible, 2022). Additionally, aligning with PRC and meaning making constructs of spiritual fitness, the book of Roman 8:28 outlines that "those who love God in all things, good will inevitably come being that they are serving His purpose" (Bible, 2022). This verse speaks directly to perspective and purpose that an individual harbors to increase positive mindsets.

The book of Psalm 52:8 states that "I am like an olive tree, thriving in the house of God. I will always trust in God's unfailing love" (Bible Gateway, 2022). This verse speaks to mental fitness and resilience being that it speaks about growth in all facets of life (Howell, 2020). Most importantly, this verse instills a positive mindset in individuals to understand that growth is continuous (Howell, 2020), and trusting in God's plan (Bible Gateway, 2022) will enable one to persevere in challenging times (Hartog et al., 2017).

Social Biblical Foundations

The Bible has a direct relation to the social domain of CAF. In the book of Proverbs 17:17, it mentions that "a friend loves you at all times, thereby a brother is born

in your time of adversity" (Bible, 2022). In Proverbs 27:6, it states that "a person who has many companions may come to ruin, but a true friend is closer than a brother" (Bible, 2022). This verse outlines the criticality of support systems while delineating the importance of quality over quantity. Also enhancing the social nature of individuals, the book of Thessalonians 5:11 states that people should encourage one another to build each other up (Bible, 2022). Positive and prolonged support networks enhance resilience and mental health (Li et al., 2021). The criticality of maintaining social fitness, in a spiritual context, places one closer to God and farther from adversity; Proverbs 17:17 (Bible, 2022).

Spiritual Fitness Biblical Foundation

Aligning with God's Word, drawing strength from it and using it to guide personal decisions and actions can help an individual to thrive. This is evidenced in Psalm 1:1-3, which states "oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night. They are like tress planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leave never wither, and they prosper in all they do" (Bible Gateway, 2022).

Resiliency Biblical Foundation

Similarly, God's Word can inspire a person to not give up, to be filled with hope and positive expectations, and to bounce back when faced with adversity. Philippians 3:12-1: Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what

is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Psalm 92:12-14: The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green. Psalm 52:8: But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever.

Problem Statement

The United States Air Force mission is to fly, fight, and win – airpower anytime, anywhere (US Air Force, 2022). Whether an Airman is full time, part time, in uniform, or out of uniform, each Airman plays an instrumental role in achieving the Air Force's primary mission. Each Airman is tasked with breaking barriers, providing innovation ideations, conducting humanitarian efforts, and providing hope and relief around the world (US Air Force, 2022).

The Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF) framework provides a holistic approach to optimizing Airman readiness and resilience to propel Airmen forward to accomplish the Air Force mission (Bowen et al., 2016; Nieves, 2020). The CAF framework contains four main domains: (a) physical, (b) mental, (c) social, and (d) spiritual (AFI 90-506, 2014). The loose application of the CAF framework hinders the full potential of the framework domains, education, training, and experience (AFH 1, 2017). Specifically, underemphasized application of the spiritual domain may be limiting possibilities for optimizing Airman readiness and resilience. The current study aims to take a deeper look into how Airmen exercise their spiritual fitness, how spiritual fitness contributes to overall fitness, how readiness and resilience is affected, how spiritual

tenets are affected, how stress and coping mechanisms are affected, and what steps could be taken to improve Air Force spiritual fitness programming. The criticality of understanding these pieces of the CAF framework is paramount in sustaining a fit, ready, and resilient force to accomplish various missions and contingencies stateside and abroad (AFI 90-5001, 2019; Harrison, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to fill critical gaps in literature by understanding an Airman's view of spiritual fitness, how spiritual fitness contributes to overall fitness, readiness and resilience, and what steps could be taken to improve Air Force spiritual fitness programming. Uncovering strengths and weaknesses in the spiritual fitness CAF domain can give Air Force leaders a more developed insight on strengthening Airman readiness and resilience. This was accomplished by soliciting a population of 20 active-duty Airmen at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama, through interview questioning, to better explore Airman fitness and overall Airman readiness and resilience. These efforts can directly contribute to developing a stronger understanding of how to bolster Airman readiness and resiliency skillsets. Further, leadership insight from this study may lead to more developed Air Force enterprise understanding on how to increase Airman readiness and resilience. Leaders must know what affects Airmen even if they do not directly work with them. This study may provide Air Force leaders insight on unit-level active-duty perspectives on CAF, readiness, and resilience.

Research Questions

RQ1:   How does Airman spiritual fitness bolster readiness and resilience?

SQ1:   What role does spirituality play on an Airman's overall fitness to serve?

SQ2:   What role does spirituality play in an Airman's physical fitness?

SQ3:   What role does spirituality play in an Airman's mental fitness?

SQ4:   What role does spirituality play in an Airman's social fitness?

SQ5:   What role does spirituality play in overall Airman readiness?

SQ6:   What role does spirituality play in an Airman's resiliency skills?

RQ2:   What could be added to the Air Force's efforts to bolster Airman spiritual fitness?

SQ1:   What could be done to ensure that strengthened spiritual fitness has multi-domain effects?

SQ2:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's core values?

SQ3:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's perspective?

SQ4:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's perseverance?

SQ5:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's purpose?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that limitations to a research study are those facets of research in which the researchers cannot control. Of the most prevalent limitations, the replicability of this study may not be transferable to other units being that

Airmen on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard Base serve as a tenant unit to the 117th Air Refueling Wing – an Air National Guard installation.

Another limitation and challenge to the research study are the participants available for the study. With approximately 130 active-duty members serving on Sumpter Smith, the pool of participants is relatively narrow, thus raising concerns of participant diversity of experience and assignment experience (Surmiak, 2018). To mitigate any concerns over experience, the research implemented a participant quota based on Airman rank and tenure. Of the participants to be interviewed, ten Airmen were in the Active-Duty Low Tenure (AD*lt*); which are those Airmen ranked E1 to E5 and O-1 to O-3. Active-Duty High Tenure (AD*ht*) Airmen are those Airmen ranked E-6 to E-9 and O-4 to O-10. Additionally, since Chaplains were note be utilized for this study to avoid any perceived bias, thereby missing potentially vital insight on spiritual fitness.

As a limitation, the faith inhabited by the researcher carries the potential for bias in research. Additionally, the researcher previously conducted research on active-duty Airmen, which touched slightly on the spiritual domain of CAF. The prior research, strong belief in God, and belief that the God and religion has a strong influence on the other CAF domains further elevate concerns of bias. Despite the concerns of bias, the researcher remained completely neutral, asked the interview questions as written, and reported the findings in their entirety – even if those findings diverged from the beliefs of the researcher.

Questioning the spirituality of Airmen, specifically the religious facet, may be a challenge due to its sensitive and polarizing nature (Musco et al., 2018). While the spiritual domain contains the tenets of perseverance, purpose, core values, and

perspective, traversing the religious tendencies of Airmen and inquiring about how God shapes their CAF domains may be a significant challenge (AFI 90-506, 2014; Bowen et al., 2016). To mitigate this challenge, the researcher was upfront about the purpose of the study during the participant recruitment process, which included disclosure of spiritual and religious questioning. Also, the researcher remained neutral and non-judgmental with regards to spiritual beliefs shared by participants.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have varying meanings and are defined to provide clarity for this study:

Active-Duty High Tenure (ADht) – Active-duty participants in this study with the enlisted grades of E-6 to E-9 and commissioned officer grades of O-4 to O-10.

Active-Duty Low Tenure (*ADlt)* - Active-duty participants in this study with the enlisted grades of E-1 to E-5 and commissioned officer grades of O-1 to O-3.

Comprehensive Airman Fitness – A holistic approach to develop overarching Airman fitness and resilience through four main domains, which are: (a) Physical, (b) mental, (c) social, and (d) spiritual (AFH 90-506, 2014).

Core Values – The specific principles that an individual harbors, which are utilized to guide one's conduct and behavior (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a).

Mental Fitness – The mental domain of CAF is the ability of Airmen to effectively cope with unique mental stressors and/or challenges that they face and how they overcome those stressor or challenges (AFI 90-506, 2014).

Overall Fitness – The sustainment of a positive physical, mental, social, and spiritual state of United States Airmen.

Perseverance –The steady persistence of an individual to work towards a goal, action, purpose, or state of mind (AFI 90-506, 2014).

Perspective – How Airmen view situations or facts and how they judge its importance for application or discussion (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b).

Physical Fitness – The physical domain of CAF is the ability of Airmen to adopt and sustain healthy behaviors that are required for the betterment of physical health and well-being (AFI 90-506, 2014).

Purpose – Is the exact reason or reasons why an Airman exists (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b).

Readiness – Readiness is defined as the degree to which military members are able to meet global demands while remaining optimally postured for major contingencies, humanitarian operations, and other Department of Defense assigned missions (U.S. Army, 2017). Readiness also requires military members to conduct the full range of military operations without exclusions (U.S. Army, 2017).

Readiness Theory – The readiness theory concerns an individual's competency in the decision and action process for how a disputant decides how to enter negotiation and settle an intractable conflict (Galluccio, 2015). Often, these negotiations occur solely within oneself which requires Airmen to consider the situation and determine the best course of action (Meadows et al., 2015).

Resiliency Theory – The resiliency theory is a process in which individuals overcome tremendous stressors such as individual stress, uncertainty about assignment timelines, culture shock in theater, fear or confrontation, fear of death, differences in climate, separation from friends and family, etc. (Meadows et al., 2015). The resiliency theory

sought to explore the conceptual scaffolding on positive contextual, social, and individual variables which interfered or disrupted with developmental trajectories (Garmezy et al., 1984).

Social Fitness – The social domain of CAF is the ability of Airmen to engage in healthy social networks which promote the overall well-being of the Airman and achieve optimal performance (AFI 90-506, 2014).

Spiritual Fitness – The spiritual domain of is the ability of Airmen to adhere to beliefs, principles, and values that are needed in times of distress or personal adversity (AFI 90-506, 2014).

Stress & Coping Theory - Coping is stated to be a dynamic process which presents stress as a product of transaction between an individual and his or her appraisal of a situation as a potential stressor (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Tenant Unit – A tenant unit is a geographically separated unit from an active-duty installation that is currently being hosted on a different installation (AFH 1, 2017). The 99th Air Refueling Squadron is an active-duty unit that is assigned to MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. The 99th Air Refueling Squadron is geographically separated from MacDill Air Force Base and is being hosted in the 117th Air Refueling Wing, Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama.

Significance of the Study

Readiness and resilience are critical for Airmen to perform a full range of duties (Simmons & Yoder, 2013) in often ambiguous and volatile environments (Junor, 2017). Although the CAF was designed to target the important aspects that contribute to Airman readiness and resilience, the spiritual fitness domain appears to be understudied. This

qualitative case study gathered Airmen's perceptions on how the spiritual domain of CAF impacts the other CAF domains, its impact on their overall readiness and resilience, as well as ways to improve spiritual fitness. This information was uncovered from active-duty United States Air Force Airmen. The ability to understand how CAF domains interact with one another, utilizing the spiritual domain of CAF as the relationship focal point, may provide Department of Defense and Air Force leadership and decision-makers a broader insight on overall Airman readiness and resilience skillsets (Nieves, 2020).

Most importantly, this study may to enable Department of the Air Force leadership an opportunity to identify initiatives or activities to support the CAF framework to bolster individual Airman readiness and resilience. United States Airmen serving around the world are exposed to various stressors that may affect their individual resiliency, thus making this research study especially salient (Bowen et al., 2016). This study may uncover new opportunities for creating or reforming programs or initiatives to address future needs of active-duty Airmen. As a result of addressing critical CAF areas of concern, the opportunity to understand current Airman perspectives and experiences are instrumental in comprehending optimal levels of personal readiness and resilience (Nindl et al., 2018).

Perspectives from individuals on issues allow leaders and managers to explore areas that affect individual development, safety, and well-being. Moreover, workplace and social contributions from studies, such as this case study, can explore areas needing improvements to enhance individual development, safety, and well-being (Nieves, 2020). Lastly, this case study carries a potential to exert a positive influence that span personal, professional, and academic areas for active-duty Airmen serving on Air National Guard

installations (Nieves, 2020). By advancing potential and possibilities of active-duty Airmen serving at Air National Guard installations, leadership is greatly enhanced through knowledge, skills, and leadership abilities on resilience, stress, and coping capabilities (Nieves, 2020).

Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF) framework as a holistic approach to approach overall Airman readiness and resilience as a capabilities-based, total life-cycle framework concentrating on Airman performance (Bowen et al., 2016). The CAF framework contains the four domains, which are: (a) physical, (b) mental, (c) social, and (d) spiritual, in addition to four unique tenets contained within each domain (AFI 90-506, 2014; Bowen et al., 2016). In this qualitative case study, Airmen perspectives were utilized to explore the relationship between the physical, mental, and social domain of CAF based on spiritual domain, the spiritual domain's impact on their overall readiness and resilience, as well as ways to improve spiritual fitness.

The findings of this study may provide insight on the criticality of the spiritual domain of CAF and provide avenues on strengthening the overall framework based on individual Airmen perspectives. Chapter 2 address relevant research in the CAF, title searches and documentation, historical content, theoretical framework literature, methodology literature, and research design literature. Additionally, Chapter 2 outlines gaps in the literature.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter 2 presents literature obtained from topic searches of peer reviewed articles, dissertations, books, Air Force Instructions (AFIs), and Air Force publications to broaden the understanding of CAF domains and its direct importance on active-duty military members and overall Airman readiness and resilience. The spiritual domain of CAF has been detailed, alongside its corresponding components, to enable a deeper understanding of how CAF components converge with one another and how those interactions bolster Airman readiness and resilience. A biblical foundation for each of the spiritual fitness components was integrated into the literature review. Chapter 2 also detail gaps in literature and how this study aided in closing the identified gaps. A biblical foundation for the other three CAF domains are also outlined.

Description of Search Strategy

For the purpose of this research, several sources of information were utilized to include online databases, the Liberty University library, AFIs, textbooks, and credible websites relating to the topic. Air Force AFIs provide insight on the specifics of the physical, mental, social, and spiritual domains within CAF, to include each of the CAF domain components (AFI 90-506, 2014). Keywords utilized to gather literature were: Air Force Chaplain, Case study, Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF), coping, connectedness, military religious services, readiness, resilience, qualitative, spiritual readiness, and stress. Outlined in Table 1, a total of 159 references were utilized for this study. Of the 159 citations, 117 were derived from peer-reviewed journals, 18 were from books, and 24 were from government and military websites.

Table 1

Summary of Sources for Literature Review

Examination Topic	Peer Reviewed Journal Articles	Reference Books	Online/Government/ Military Websites
CAF	8	3	6
Readiness/Resilience	36	4	10
Framework Theories	41	2	4
Research Method	32	9	4
Total	117	18	24

Review of Literature

Since its inception in 2011, CAF's goal has expanded to building and sustaining a thriving and resilient force that fosters and internalizes the CAF four domains of physical, mental, social, and spiritual fitness (AFI 90-506, 2014; Leslie, 2014). The four CAF domains contribute to individual Airman's resilience. Resilience, paired with training and experience, sets the foundation for an Airman's readiness (Nieves, 2020). Recognizing the importance of the four components of fitness, the Air Force has been implementing programs to optimize them. Although some solid programming exists addressing all four fitness domains, there may be room for expanding efforts to improve spiritual fitness. This chapter takes a deeper look at the constructs from the field of Psychology informing spiritual fitness. Additionally, this chapter reviewed the components of spiritual fitness from a Christian worldview and how they can influence overall Airman readiness and resilience, as well as the three other fitness domains.

Constructs from Field of Psychology Informing Spiritual Fitness

Spirituality is among one of the most important areas in combating personal struggles or challenges (Dolcos et al., 2021). The jarring statistics of mental health issues from United States military personnel has created a need to understand positive psychology to strengthen spiritual fitness (Weitzman, 2021). With only 3% of Airmen seeking assistance for mental health issues, questions arise as to how the remaining 22% are bolstering readiness and resiliency skillsets (NAMI, 2021). Spiritual fitness is a domain in the CAF framework and mirrors the Army's Comprehensive Soldier Fitness domain of spirituality. Individual spirituality may be influenced by an array of factors (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011). However, two prevalent psychological constructs inform spiritual foundations: positive religious coping, and workplace spirituality. Each of these constructs are outlined below.

Positive Religious Coping

Positive religious coping (PRC) is a faith-based approach to effective coping that involves the use of religion and religious beliefs to facilitate problem-solving to traverse negative emotions and circumstances (Ozcan et al., 2021; Pargament, 1997). A strong connection to God and His word is the foundation to find strength and wisdom to cope with hardships, as well as enables individuals to derive meaning from those hardships (Mahamid & Bdier, 2021; Pargament, 1997). Illustrating the relative importance of religion in spiritual fitness, God is a reliable source of support, enabling individuals to use their faith to relieve worry and overcome stressors (Mahamic & Bdier, 2021; Ozcan et al., 2021). PRC also promotes social and emotional connectedness to other individuals, thus creating reliable support networks which encourage meaning making and healthy emotional regulation (Li et al., 2021; Mahamid & Bdier, 2021; Pargament et al., 2011).

PRC can be used to navigate the cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral challenges in all areas of life (Pargament, 1997; Torralba et al., 2021). Most importantly, PRC is linked with resilience and stress management via reframed cognitive processes and a more refined outlook on life. A refined outlook on life focuses on what is most important (Dolcos et al., 2021). Prevalent in Chaplain-provided services in the United States Air Force, PRC fosters CAF development through psychological adjustments to stress, stress-related growth, increased hope (Dolcos et al., 2021; Mahamid & Bdier, 2021), decreased depression, and decreased anxiety (Currier et al., 2015; Ozcan et al., 2021).

Workplace Spirituality

Workplace Spirituality is the ability of an individual to freely express their faith and ideas to develop a strong connection to others to bolster beliefs and values in the organization (Foster & Foster, 2019; Milliman et al., 2003; Rathee & Rajain, 2020). Workplace spirituality recognizes that employees have an inner life that nourishes and is able to be nourished by meaningful work that can take place in the context of community (Fanggidae al., 2016; Milliman et al., 2003) and transcendence above and beyond one's ego (Roh & Suh, 2014). This facilitates the employee's sense of being connected to other individuals in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy with the ability to find a purpose in their lives (Daniel, 2015; Fanggidae at el., 2016; Milliman et al, 2003). Workplace Spirituality continues to be a polarizing subject to discuss in the working environment, despite its tremendous positives documented in literature and practice (Foster & Foster, 2019). Despite its polarizing nature, workplace spirituality continues to be very prominent in every business environment (Foster & Foster, 2019). The criticality

of workplace spirituality is evident as it creates a sense of connection between individuals in the work environment (Rathee & Rajain, 2020).

The three aspects of workplace spirituality are: (a) alignment of personal values with those of the organization, (b) meaningful work, and (c) a sense of community (Milliman et al., 2003). These three aspects of workplace spirituality are aligned with the spiritual fitness constructs of core values and purpose. In an effort to find one's ultimate purpose in life, workplace spirituality enables the development of one's core values and beliefs through shared experiences, connectedness with co-workers, and expressing faith in a manner that is conducive to the organization's mission (Foster & Foster, 2019; Rathee & Rajain, 2020).

Workplace spirituality plays a tremendous role in the physical, mental, and social facets of an individual's life. Touching on physical health, positive workplace spirituality has been related to strengthened physical health through strengthened health-related behaviors, such as proper nutrition habits, prophylaxis, positive attitude, ability to relax, and willingness to engage in physical activities (Bozek et al., 2020). Workplace spirituality also plays a vital role in the development and sustainment of a positive mental mindset. The impact of workplace spirituality has been shown to decrease addictive and suicidal behaviors (Bozek et al., 2020). Alongside decreasing addictive and suicidal behaviors, workplace spirituality bolsters an individual's desire to engage in a dialogue with other, thus strengthening one's social fitness (Foster & Foster, 2019).

Importance of Spirituality to US Airmen

Despite the current reduction in religiosity in Western society, findings from Layson et al. (2022) review suggest there is little evidence that low religiosity among

military personnel forms a significant barrier to utilizing chaplaincy services. Further, even people with no religious identity (self-identified as atheist, agnostic, or no religion) were just as likely as people with a religious identity to want a conversation involving religion/spirituality from care providers (Gad et al., 2022). AFH 1 (2017) mentions that the spiritual domain of CAF may or may not include religion or a distinct belief in God. A recent study concluded that 100% of 20 participants noted that spirituality played a pivotal role in their lives at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard Base in Birmingham Alabama (Nieves, 2020). Of the participants, ten participants (50%) noted that their spiritual domain of CAF was strengthened while serving at the installation. This points to the criticality of understanding the role of spiritual fitness in successful healing and optimization processes, which directly translates to readiness and resilience (Harrison, 2014; Krok, 2015; Victor & Treschuk, 2019).

The US Army has developed individual spiritual fitness distance learning modules that soldiers can voluntarily complete (Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) Program, 2009). Content from the CSF modules focused upon strengthening components of spiritual fitness and was presented from a nonreligious perspective. As part of her dissertation study, Nieuwsma reviewed the content of the modules entitled "Spiritual Support," "Rituals," "Making Meaning," "Meditation," and "Hunt the Good Stuff." (Nieuwsma 2016, 273–96). Nieuwsma concluded that the modules encouraged soldiers to focus on the positive, stay true to their core values, practice gratitude, and engage in rituals and meditation to improve their spiritual strength. Although based upon Positive Psychology tenets and developed with expert Martin Seligman, to date there is no evidence that these CSF spiritual fitness modules have improved spiritual fitness or

soldier resilience (Weizman, 2021). None-the-less, the importance of strengthening the spiritual fitness domain still remains a priority. Further, given the established role of components of spiritual fitness to overall resilience, determining the most appropriate programming to improve spiritual fitness should be a focus.

Faith-based approaches to improve individuals are well documented and have proven results across physical, mental, and social health contexts (Onyishi et al., 2021). Faith-based interventions (FBI) are interventions in an individual's life that use religiosity to enhance self-management and heighten physical, mental, and social abilities (Layson et al., 2022; Onyishi et al., 2021). Some prominent FBIs are prayer, meditation, fasting, and mindful attention (Onyishi et al., 2021). FBIs have been associated with positive improvements for one's person, behavior, and environment (Onyishi et al., 2021). Affecting the person, FBIs involve the knowledge, information, self-efficacy, coping, and symptom management skills needed for the individual to engage in FBIs (Lyles, 2019b; Onyishi et al., 2021). The behavior portion of a FBI delves into self-management, emotion regulation, dieting, and integrating overall health with spirituality (Onyishi et al., 2021). Lastly, the environment portion of a FBI is the relationship that one has with a church, general social support community, and spiritual supports that cultivates divinity (Lyles, 2019b; Onyishi et al., 2021). As synergistic elements to FBIs, the person, behavior, and environment factors led directly to improved personal satisfaction (Gad et al., 2022), physical health, health behaviors, and social support (Onyishi et al., 2021). Chaplain-ran FBI programs resulted in a 35.3% to 55.8% reduction in trauma-related symptoms and a 54.4% increase in posttraumatic growth (integrating

personal growth from the experience) stemming from chaplaincy program effectiveness and how personal religious views influence military chaplaincy (Layson et al., 2022).

The importance of spirituality of US military personnel is evident through the REBOOT Combat Recovery program. The REBOOT Combat Recovery program is a 12-week program for military members, veterans, and family members who deal with combat trauma (Knobloch et al., 2019). Recognizing the link between spirituality, readiness and resilience, the REBOOT Combat Recovery program is a resiliency-based program that incorporates Christian principles to bolster whole-person wellness (Knobloch et al., 2019). By bolstering whole-person wellness through spiritual means (Knobloch et al., 2019), the REBOOT Combat Recovery program successfully transitions members from combat and distressing mindsets back to their normal states of wellness. Findings indicated reductions in pain interference, fatigue, sleep disturbance, anxiety and depressive symptoms, and increased social participation (Knobloch et al., 2019). This study suggests that faith-based interventions are well-received and impactful for members of the military community.

Further, researchers suggest that there seems to be a need to include spiritual components to boost service members' mental health. Bussing and Recchnia (2015) suggest that military personnel's stress levels are related to specific unmet spiritual needs, such as the need to find meaning from the experience, the need to have someone pray with them, find strength in a higher power. Addressing these specific spiritual needs may prevent mental health issues and service failure. Kopacz and Connery (2015) also suggest the importance of including spirituality in the plan to strengthen mental health and reduce suicidality among military personnel. Since spiritually-based interventions also appear to

be welcomed by and beneficial to military service members (Knobloch et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2018), enhancing spiritual fitness programming seems warranted.

Components of Spiritual Fitness in CAF

Given the importance and potential impact of religion informing spiritual fitness, the construct has been broken apart into its components. A Christian worldview was applied and information was presented regarding how the components can influence overall Airman readiness and resilience, as well as the three other fitness domains.

AFI 90-5001 (2019)outlines that the spiritual domain of CAF is the ability of Airmen to harbor a set of beliefs, principles, and values that are needed to overcome distress and personal adversity. Through spiritual means, Airmen can prevail through distressing times or situations through living out their faith and holding a core set of beliefs (Blackwell, 2012; Lyles, 2019a). The components that make up the spiritual domain of CAF directly build upon an Airman's beliefs, principles, and values, thus enabling them to become spiritually fit to accomplish the mission (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). Moreover, the spiritual domain appears to have a large (Bowen et al. 2016), yet heavily understudied link to resilience in the United States Air Force, thus making the spiritual domain important to research (Nieves, 2020). The components of the spiritual domain are: (a) core values, (b) perseverance, (c) perspective, and (d) purpose. These spiritual components are discussed below.

Core Values

Core values are specific principles that an individual harbors, which are utilized to guide one's conduct and behavior (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). These core values are not to be confused with the Air Force core values of integrity first, service before self,

and excellence in all Airmen do, which are the focus markers on mission accomplishment (AFI 90-506, 2014; Bowen et al., 2016). While Airmen may incorporate integrity, service, and excellence in their core value toolbox, Airmen may also adopt other guiding principles that guide and shape their actions and conduct (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a).

The core values that guide an Airman's life are the relationship between an Airman's conduct and the outside world (AFH 1, 2017; AFI 90-506, 2014). Examples of core values taken from Christianity that apply to resilience include trusting God's sovereignty and promises to work things out for the good of those who love Him, obedience to authority figures as God's appointed, lifting others up, helping others in need, practicing forgiveness and humility, observing a sabbath to recharge, living out one's specific purpose both in the given moment as well as one's ultimate calling, and finding one's identity in Christ alone vs external circumstances. Refer to Table 2 for a presentation of representative Bible verses for each core value.

Table 2

Bible Versus on Core Values

Core Value	Representative Bible Verses
Trusting God's sovereignty and promises to work things out for the	Colossians 1:16: For Him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through Him and for Him.

good of those who love Him	Romans 8:28: And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Hebrews 11:1: Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he shall direct your paths. Psalm 115:3: Our God is in heaven: he does whatever pleases him. Romans 11:33: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, and his ways past findings out. Isaiah 61:1: The spirit of the lord God is upon me; because the lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.
Obedience to authority figures as God's appointed	Titus 3:1: Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work. Romans 13:2: Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement on themselves.

	Hebrews 13:17: Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account.
	Colossians 3:23-24: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.
Lifting others up, helping others in need	1 Thessalonians 5:11: Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.
	Ephesians 4:29: Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
	Ecclesiastes 4:12: Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
	John 6:38: For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent me.
	Matthew 6:33: But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.
Forgiveness and humility	Colossians 3:12: Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.
	2 Chronicles 7:14: If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from

	their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Luke 14:11: For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Proverbs 3:34: Surely he scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble. Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
Observing a sabbath to recharge	Exodus 20:8-11: Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and al that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Deuteronomy 5:12-13: Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. Ezekiel 20:19-20: I am the Lord your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgements, and do them. Hallow My Sabbaths, and

	they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.
Living out one's specific purpose both in the given moment and one's calling	1 Peter 2:9: But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Ephesians 2:10: For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Acts 2:23: Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death. Colossians 1:16: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or power: all things were created by Him, and for Him. Ecclesiastes 3:1: To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.
Finding one's identity in Christ alone vs external circumstances	2 Corinthians 5:17: Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new. 1 Peter 2:9: But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the

	praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Romans 8:17: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. John 15:5: I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

The biblical core values mentioned above can directly impact each of the components of resiliency: active coping efforts, having a reliable support system, making meaning from life's difficulties, and healthy emotional regulation (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011). Each are outlined below, while also integrating a discussion of the impact on other CAF components.

Active Coping Efforts. Outlined in Table 2 are specific core values that build upon one's specific principles that an individual harbors, which are utilized to guide one's conduct and behavior (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). A discussion follows with respect to how these core values can inspire active coping.

Trusting God's sovereignty and promises to work things out for the good of those who love Him is a category that affects one's outlook and faith. Isaiah 61:1 states that the "spirit of the lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse speaks to

refined mental states of followers of God and how their resilience is positively affected by following God.

Obedience to authority figures as God's appointed is the second category. Romans 13:1 states that one should "let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse can act to reassure an Airman to follow orders to carry out the mission because in doing so, it honors God.

Lifting others up and helping others in need is the third category. 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse builds upon the connectedness that individuals have with others which may aid in coping with life's stressors. Edification improves an individual morally, thus creating positive a bond between individuals.

Observing the sabbath to recharge is the fourth category. Ezekiel 20:19-20 states "I am the Lord your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgements, and do them. Hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse reminds individuals to rest and tend to their temple that God gave them, so that they can be ready to continue coping efforts. Lastly, Mark 2:27 states that Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath" (BibleGateway, 2022).

Living out one's specific purpose both in the given moment and one's calling is the fifth category. 1 Peter 2:9 states that "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of

Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse speaks on the purpose that is harbored within individuals and how one should do good onto the world by fulfilling the calling placed in front of us.

Lastly, finding one's identity in Christ alone versus external circumstances is the final category. Romans 8:17 states that "And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse speaks to the importance of aligning one's individual identity with being a Child of God and as such, being able to access God's resources to cope. Being part of the Kingdom and having access to its resources helps to build confidence that actions taken can be helpful.

The power of God and faith in Him can have a profound impact on one's life. Whether an individual is experiencing overwhelming challenges or immersed in victory, the glory one gives to God can be a tremendous motivator. Distressing times can be found in several books throughout the Bible. For instance, the book of Kings 19:4-8 outlines the story of Elijah. The trials and tribulations that Elijah faced left him tired, weak, and in a such a state of distress that he asked God to take his life (Bible, 2022). Directly aligning with the mental domain of CAF and the tenet of awareness, Elijah posited that his tribulations were so dire that he desired for his life to end, thus ascribing behaviors, motivations, and feelings about himself (AFI 90-506, 2014; Bible, 2022). Despite the temporary distress, God replenished the body of Elijah with a meal and gave him a needed nap, which eased the tremendous mental burden faced by Elijah (Bible, 2022). The grace of God replenished the soul and spirit of Elijah, thus shifting his distress

into a positive state of mind. The tenet of positive thinking can be seen here after Elijah was able to mentally rest and reflect (AFI 90-506, 2014; Bible, 2022).

The tremendous power of faith and practice of religious principles bolsters the mind, body, and spirit (Jenne, 2017). This can be seen in the book of John 14:1 where it states that people should not have to harbor worry in their hearts if they believe in Him (Bible, 2022). Faith in God has shown to have incredible motivational facets that bolster the spirits of Airmen, which may have a direct impact on an Airman's physical, mental, and social domain of the CAF framework (Nieves, 2020).

Not engaging in active coping is directly related to burnout and poor sleep quality (Yi et al., 2020). Burnout and sleep quality are prevalent maladaptive behaviors in literature which diverges from the positive strategies that individuals employ when encountering stress (Yi et al., 2020). Rather than attempting to escape or isolate during times of distress, active coping involves setting high standards for oneself, promulgating high self-esteem, and adopt behaviors that beneficial to overcoming tremendous stressors (Yi et al., 2020). Despite the impact of active coping, positively employed strategies are only effective on items that the individual can control, such as personal emotions, perceived struggles, and behaviors (Yi et al., 2020).

Reliable Support Networks. Reliable support networks are those groups of people that an individual surrounds themselves with that provide sound guidance and assistance in life's challenges (Li et al., 2021). Interactive relationships are stated to have a profoundly positive impact on an individual (Li et al., 2021). AFI 90-506 (2014) outlined that support networks are those connections that individuals make to bolster communication and social connectedness. Positive and prolonged support networks

enhance resilience and mental health (Li et al., 2021). There is an innate desire of all human beings to connect with one another (Martino et al., 2017). Even during times of separation, such as quarantine or sickness, the desire of individuals to forge reliable support networks is evident and seen in the form of electronic means (Li et al., 2021). Reliable support networks can be created between individuals in a Church or crafted through faith-based activities (Pargament, 1997). Most importantly, reliable support networks are noted as having a strong influence on the physical and psychological states of individuals (Wright, 2016). Positive behavior, family, and positive communities of people are outlined as the primary sources needed to build reliable support systems that influence the physical and psychological states of individuals (Morowatisharifabad et al., 2019; Wright, 2016). Maintaining positive and optimal support systems has a direct relationship to motivation, coping mechanisms, and stress aversion (AFI 90-506, 2014, Li et al., 2021). Further, strong support systems are documented as increasing life expectancy due to reduced stress, heightened resilience, increased physical capacity, and positive behaviors needed in challenging and distressing times (Li et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2017).

The core values of lifting others up, helping others in need, forgiveness and humility help reinforce having a reliable support network. The book of Ecclesiastes 4:12 states that though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (New King James Bible, 2022). The metaphor of a cord is representative of individuals who work together and lift each other up. A single strand can be easily broken, but multiple strands are not easily broken. The third strand is often referred to as God, so keeping God intertwined within the relationship is advisable to be

able to support one another. This verse speaks to the social and mental states of individuals who build upon each other, and God, as reliable support networks. Forgiveness and humility are also an important component of close relationships, to be able to repair any hurts and restore the relationship (Colossians 3:12: Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering).

The tremendous relationship between physical activity and reliable support systems is evident. Smith et al. (2017) outlined that individuals who do not typically engage in frequent physical fitness activities are more apt to begin to engage in physical fitness activities when their support systems are positive. Physical connectedness is noted as the connections one makes to strengthen their physical fitness through group activities (Martino et al., 2017). Social connectedness is the communication one makes to create social bonds with other individuals (Xu et al., 2021). Together, physical and social connectedness create a means for strengthening mental health (Lacks et al., 2017) and increasing physical health outcomes (Saeri et al., 2017).

As a component of reliable support networks, connectedness is outlined in numerous studies as a predictor of positive physical, mental, and social health in individuals – regardless of age or sex (Gyasi et al., 2021; Martino et al., 2017; Saeri et al., 2017). The factor of connectedness is the feeling of belonging and being associated with a group, or network, of individuals (Saeri et al., 2017). Directly relating to the CAF framework, physical and social connectedness delves deep into all four CAF domains. Most importantly, connectedness is shown have a direct relationship on CAF domain convergence (AFH 1, 2017; Gyasi et al., 2021; Martino et al., 2017).

Maintaining reliable support networks, through connectedness, is described as not only impacting physical and social well-being, but also plays a pivotal role in the mental processes of individuals (Deitz et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021). Additionally, physical and social connectedness simultaneously plays an instrumental role in developing a strong sense of purpose – one of the driving factors in the spiritual domain of CAF (AFH 1, 2017; Martino et al., 2017).

Meaning Making from Life's Difficulties. Meaning making directly contributes to individual resilience as it involves positive reactions to personal struggles, concepts on how to rebuild one's life, and psychological preventative maintenance on how to avert future tragedies (Walsh, 2020). One favorable facet of meaning making is the spiritual nature that it inherently carries for Christians, connecting to the lesson God intends for the individual in a hardship. The guidance of Air Force Chaplains, pastors, and religious servants guide individuals to make sense of their struggles, thereby enabling individuals to forge a sound path forward through their struggles (AFH 1, 2017; Copps & Plimmer, 2013). 1 Timothy 5:17 states "let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word of God and doctrine" (New King James Bible, 2022). Through personal introspection and religious guidance, individuals can traverse through struggles by internalizing God's care and explore within oneself to piece together positive mental outcomes (Copps & Plimmer, 2013; Whitney, 2019).

Drawing meaning from life's difficulties can be seen in Romans 5:3-4 (Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope) and 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So

we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal). Combined with Romans 8:28 (And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose), these verses serve as a reminder that God has a purpose for each difficulty faced, and a person has to trust in that promise and look for the meaning to be found.

Directly relating to psychological preventative maintenance, meaning making is also stated to have a profound impact on mental health outcomes (Kopacz et al., 2019). Individuals suffering from mental health issues experience severe difficulties in life, thereby disrupting effective meaning making and prolonging or inhabiting distress (Kopacz et al., 2019). According to New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), the devastation of mental health outcomes spans a variety of psychological experiences, such as simple anxieties to more serious long-term conditions (Copps & Plimmer, 2013). The most serious long-term conditions of mental health outcomes may affect one's overall personality, psychosis, eating disorders, nightmares, avoidance, and hyper-vigilance (Copps & Plimmer, 2013). Meaning making averts deviations to positive mental health through God and His guidance in one's life (Walsh, 2020).

Concluded from the literature, the aversion of negative mental health outcomes, as life difficulties, may rest on positive meaning making (Hartog et al., 2020). Personal goal creation and individual expectations, like living a Christ-like life, create meaning behind an individual's quality of life (Sharma et al., 2017), thereby constructing a mental representation of positive things, events, and relationships (Hartog et al., 2017). In crafting a sound mental representation of positive things, events, and relationships,

individuals apply psychological first aid (AFH 1, 2017). Psychological first aid is directly connected with meaning making as it focuses shifting negative mental health outcomes into more positive ones through shared experiences, goal creation, and relationship building with the intention of increasing quality of life (AFH 1, 2017; Copps & Plimmer, 2013; Hartog et al., 2017). Indeed, Greenberg and colleagues (2021) studied individuals with military combat trauma and found higher levels of post-traumatic growth to be related to better mental health and quality of life. Further, spiritually-related meaning making has been found to be related to reduced military-related PTSD symptoms among Veterans (Bormann et al., 2011) and active-duty military members (Wood et al. 2017).

Healthy Emotional Regulation. Core values also contribute to healthy emotional regulation (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018). In emotional regulation, a person rethinks a challenging situation to find the good, focuses on resources that can aid in the situation, and processes feelings in a manner that involves realistically accepting areas that may be beyond their control (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018). Healthy emotional regulation is the conscious act of functioning and behaving in a manner that is conducive to improving one's personal, professional, and academic life (Katana et al., 2019). Specifically, living in the promises that God is working everything out for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28) and knowing that God is sovereignly orchestrating personal growth in hardships (Romans 5:3-5) help a person to process difficulties in a healthy way. Further, partnering with a sovereign God (Philippians 4:13) and fellow believers (Ecclesiastes 4:12) helps fuel confidence by expanding one's personal coping arsenal. Finally, verses such as the battle is not yours, but God's (2 Chronicles 20:16) or Be still and know that I

AM God (Psalm 46:10) help Christians to maintain the perspective that certain things in life are beyond personal control but God will be working on their behalf.

It is well documented that healthy emotional regulation has an indirect, but measurable impact on spiritual fitness (Akbari & Hossaini, 2018). As a basic principle in initiation, healthy emotion regulation foregoes maladaptive behaviors in favor of adaptive behaviors, such as excitement and enthusiasm (Akbari & Hossaini, 2018). The regulation of one's emotions is outlined as a conscious act to ensure that individuals are functioning and behaving in an appropriate manner (Katana et al., 2019). Healthy emotion regulation also mediates the relationship between self-compassion and mental health (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018). As a mechanism of change, healthy emotional regulation enables a systematic suppression of dysregulated emotions and promotes personal well-being, forges a positive mental mindset, and enables individuals to engage in high-quality relationships (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018; Roth et al., 2019). Most importantly, healthy emotional regulation combats interpersonal challenges, thus strengthening mental health and promoting positive well-being (Katana et al., 2019; Roth et al., 2019).

Coinciding with meaning making, healthy emotional regulation incorporates the benefits of the mindfulness-based intervention (MBI) (Guendelman et al., 2017). Body awareness, physical activities such as yoga, and psychoeducation are critical factors of MBI, which influence healthy emotional regulation (Guendelman et al., 2017). These facets of healthy emotional regulation combat the negative psychological and physical outcomes of distress and debilitating challenges (Cloitre et al., 2019; Guendelman et al., 2017).

Impact on Physical, Mental, and Social Fitness. Core values are paramount to forging sound spiritual fitness through the regulation of one's conduct and behavior (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019a). Additionally, positive core values have a direct impact on one's willingness to engage in physical activities (AFI 90-506, 2014), improve mental health (Lyles, 2019a), and increase interpersonal relationship formulations (Lyles, 2019a). The component of core values, within spiritual fitness, intersects with all other CAF domains, thus making this study on Airman spirituality especially salient.

Below is a discussion of spiritual fitness's components of perseverance, perspective, and purpose, as how these aspects influence the other CAF domains.

Perseverance

Beyond core values, the second component of spiritual fitness is perseverance. This component is focused on the steady persistence of an individual to work towards a goal, action, purpose, or state of mind (AFI 90-506, 2014). The core beliefs that apply to perseverance include trusting God's sovereignty and promises to work things out for the good of those who love Him, obedience to authority figures as God's appointed, living out one's specific purpose both in the given moment as well as one's ultimate calling can fuel an individual's perseverance. Noah is prime embodiment of perseverance as he focused on building the ark and accomplishing the goal set forth by God. Noah persevered over the span of 100 years through merciless ridicule for building a giant ark on dry land, but his unrelenting faith allowed him to accomplish the mission God called him to do.

Perseverance is also a principle of war. The perseverance principle of war is the patient and resolute pursuit of national interests and goals for however long it takes to

achieve them (AFH 1, 2017). Alike the principle of war, the individualized component of spiritual fitness focuses on trusting God by obeying the chain of command and fulfilling one's specific purpose in the given moment as part of the team (AFH 1, 2017; AFI 90-506, 2014).

Further, the feeling of accomplishment of a goal or purpose, through perseverance, further reinforces an Airman's confidence in themselves and their unit, and encourages both continued active coping and life purpose. Perseverance, as the resolute focus on goals, purpose, and state of mind, is the precursor to overcoming personal struggles, developing concepts on how to rebuild one's life, and refinement of psychological maintenance (AFI 90-506, 2014; Walsh, 2020). Necessary for the constructs of spiritual fitness, perseverance is the gateway to personal goal creation and individual expectations, thus creating purpose behind an individual's life, thereby constructing a mental representation of positive things, events, and relationships (Hartog et al., 2017).

As an example of perseverance, earning a college degree carries immense spiritual formations and personal effort. While being able to practice one's beliefs, earning a college degree takes time and tremendous effort, which may draw upon one's spiritual formations. This long-term goal enables individuals to forge a sound religious foundation, navigate their personal struggles, and eventually aid others in their lives toward betterment through literature contribution and actions (AFH 1, 2017; Copps & Plimmer, 2013). Earning a college degree is a long-term form of perseverance, thus allowing the internalization of God's care and to explore within oneself to piece together

positive mental outcomes in literature and practice (Copps & Plimmer, 2013; Whitney, 2019).

As a component of spiritual fitness, perseverance transcends across all four domains of CAF. Aligning with the other three domains of CAF beyond the spiritual domain, perseverance affects one's physical nature, mental health outcomes, and social connectedness (AFH 1, 2017; Hartog et al., 2017). Perseverance also affects these outcomes through continually striving for excellence to achieve the desired end-state (Hartog et al., 2017; Kopacz et al., 2019). The tremendous capacity of perseverance, as a component of spiritual fitness in the CAF framework, has not been fully explored to exploit the potential of spirituality.

Perspective

As the third component to spiritual fitness, perspective is exactly how Airmen view situations or facts and how they judge its importance for application or discussion (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). Especially prevalent in a military context, perspective is required for pre-exposure preparation, psychological readiness, and social connectedness to share experiences (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). Due to the severity of situations that an Airman may face, perspective is necessary to view situations and facts as positive as possible to combat negative experiences and discuss experiences with spiritual leaders or others (AFH 1, 2017). The following core values help inform perspective: trusting God's sovereignty and promises to work things out for the good of those who love Him, living out one's specific purpose both in the given moment as well as one's ultimate calling, and finding one's identity in Christ alone vs external circumstances.

A primary example of trusting God reshaping perspective is prevalent in a religious story of the two farmers in a drought. Two farmers were experiencing a drought and were desperate for rain. One farmer chose to do naught, as he perceived that the drought would never end. The second farmer, a man of God who had the perspective that God will answer his request for rain, prepared his field for rain despite the drought. This perspective enabled the farmer to overcome stressors associated with the lack of rain and have hope in otherwise hopeless circumstances. Further, the religious guidance and strong faith in God impacted the second farmer's physical ability to prepare his fields and his social well-being by communicating with his friends and faith leaders. The second farmer's perspective successfully altered his mental processes through faith (Deitz et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021).

One important perspective is the concept that each person has worth as a Child of God (Galatians 3:26), independent of their accomplishments or other people's opinions. Life can be grueling and the worldly perspective would have individuals simply view themselves as only having worth to the extent that they earn it. However, God values each person as evidenced by the fact that He died for them (John 3:16). To the extent that an Airman can replace any self-destructive thoughts of worth with God's view that each individual is a treasure uniquely designed by Him helps maintain a positive self-image, which is important for maintaining positive mental health.

Individuals seeking faith-based drug addiction counseling is a prime example of perspective. Individuals have the opportunity to visualize how to best live out their purpose and live in the identity of Christ through the promulgation of religious values, biblical teachings, and connecting with others who are dealing with similar drug concerns

(Deitz et al., 2020). Reforming one's perspective in a faith-based setting is the purest form of perspective – altering negative behaviors and habits through religious teachings and group connectedness (Deitz et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2021).

Situations that an Airman may face may be ambiguous and require a malleable mind to comprehend and understand from more tenured individuals or spiritual leaders to uncover the spiritual basis behind the situation or circumstance (AFI 90-506, 2014; Li et al., 2021). Supportive others can remind the Airman of the bigger picture or the hope that exists in the situation (Li et al., 2021). Air Force Chaplains and Chaplain-led support groups provide Airmen a means to refocus their perspective on positive areas that bolster resilience and an Airman's religious foundation (VanderWeele, 2018).

As a component of spiritual fitness, perspective connects one with optimism for physical, mental, social, and spiritual outcomes (Martino et al., 2017). In particular, the positive nature of perspective creates an avenue to connect with others and listen to their points of view. In connecting with others and listening to their points of view, an individual can possibly expand their physical ability to exert energy, mental health outcomes through a reframed mindset, and social ability to build strong support systems (AFH 1, 2017). Perspective also sharpens one's interpersonal skills and bolsters a greater understanding of the world through other individuals' lenses (Gyasi et al., 2021; Martino et al., 2017).

Purpose

As a foundational element of spiritual fitness, purpose is the exact reason or reasons why an Airman exists (AFI 90-506, 2014; Lyles, 2019b). This ties directly to living out one's specific purpose both in the given moment as well as one's ultimate

calling. One of the main elements of purpose is the understanding of others and self to create a purpose that is conducive to the betterment of humanity (Lyles, 2019b). In spiritual fitness, purpose is the act of living the cultural, religious, and spiritual beliefs, such as living through the gospel or dedicating oneself to serve others and God. Purpose has shown, throughout literature, that individuals need to harbor their purpose to reduce distress, support self-perseveration, and discourage behaviors that may lead to self-harm (AFH 1, 2017; Kopacz & Connery, 2015; Lyles, 2019b). Romans 8:28 states that "we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (New King James Bible, 2022). This verse speaks to the purpose one exhibits and how that purpose is tied to the will of God.

An Airman who views the task placed in front of them as an opportunity to fulfill their specific purpose in the moment, or one's ultimate calling, helps inspire commitment to carry it out to completion. Further, harboring a positive purpose in life can inspire a person to have a more optimistic perspective as they traverse through negative emotions and circumstances (Ozcan et al., 2021). Purpose is the cornerstone in stimulating psychological adjustments to stress, stress-related growth, increased hope (Dolcos et al., 2021; Mahamid & Bdier, 2021), decreased depression, and decreased anxiety (Ozcan et al., 2021). Purpose inspires the development of one's innerness, interconnection, transcendence, commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment (Krok, 2015; Villani et al., 2019). Innerness is achieved through the inner self-reflections one takes to glean their importance in life and to others (Krok, 2015). Interconnection is the strong bonds forged between one and God, one and members who pray together, or a combination thereof (Kork, 2015). Transcendence is the state of mind that one attains

after critical self-reflections, thereby making their existence known and salient (Villani et al., 2019). In-depth exploration is the journey one takes to uncover their moral and ethical compasses, and how to live a more faith-based life (Kork, 2015). Lastly, reconsider of commitment is the prioritization of more important facets of life to glean happiness and a heightened relationship with God (Villani et al., 2019).

As a prevalent topic in literature, purpose and its related constructs have been shown to have drastically positive results if effectively framed (Wood et al., 2017). If framed correctly, the component of purpose may underpin strong social support through strengthened relationships, increased internal optimism through a reframed mindset (Wood et al., 2017), and sharpened prosocial behavior by internal awareness of actions and behaviors (Krok, 2015). Multiple studies showcase the component of purpose and its impact on one's mental health, coping mechanisms, stress management, positive emotions, well-being, happiness, hope, optimism, meaning, purpose, self-esteem, sense of control, and positive character traits (Koenig, 2012; Krok, 2015; Sterner & Jackson-Cherry, 2015; Villani et al., 2019).

An example of purpose is the calling of raising family on religious fundamentals. In raising a family in the word of God, an individual creates a sense of meaning and connectedness throughout the members of family by recognizing life choices, differentiating between right and wrong, and being empathetic to others (Torralba et al., 2021). The inspirational and positive aspects of family and religion transcend into positive internal shifts that bolster one's meaning and drives purpose to transform the self and others (Koenig, 2012; Villani et al., 2019).

As a component of spiritual fitness, purpose is a driving factor in shaping behaviors and actions. Purpose is noted as the most inspirational and positive aspect of human nature that enables positive internal shifts (Koenig, 2012). Not only does purpose connect with those constructs of spiritual fitness, but it also navigates one's cognitive and attitudinal mechanisms in very secularized environments through innerness, interconnection, transcendence, commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment (Krok, 2015; Torralba et al., 2021; Villani et al., 2019). Purpose spans all domains of the CAF framework. Coupled with the constructs of spiritual fitness, purpose creates the pathway to heightened well-being, thereby enabling individuals to overcome personal challenges, stressors, or internal struggles (Koenig, 2012). In deriving meaning and purpose in life, one can successfully internalize the physical, mental, social, and spiritual facets of life (Villani et al., 2019).

Summary

The extensive literature review for this qualitative case study illustrates the importance of spirituality. The components of the spiritual domain, alongside its related spiritual constructs, uncovered numerous facets concerning all four pillars of CAF and its effects on overall Airman readiness and resilience. AFI 90-506 (2014) outlined that the four main CAF pillars are: (a) physical, (b) mental, (c) social, and (d) spiritual. Each CAF pillar is paramount to overall Airman readiness and inextricably linked to readiness and resilience skillsets. Additionally, main CAF pillars contain components which enable the researcher to strategically craft questions to pinpoint connections between and within the CAF domains to identify strengths and degradations to overall Airman readiness and resilience skills.

Using spiritual fitness as the main thrust of the study, critical information gleaned from research participants may provide defense leaders and policymakers a means to better maintain a ready and resilient military force (Bowen et al., 2016; Junor, 2017). Further, existing military studies have shown that readiness, regardless of military branch, remains a key focus. Understanding areas that enhance or degrade spiritual fitness may provide insight on how to sustain Airman readiness and resilience (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Chapter 2 presented literature obtained from topic searches of peer reviewed articles, dissertations, books, AFIs, and Air Force publications to broaden the understanding of spiritual fitness and its impact on the other CAF on active-duty military members. The current status and incomplete application of the CAF framework poses questions about overall readiness and resilience, through the CAF domains and its components, on active-duty Airmen. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to examine perspectives regarding the potential connections between the spiritual domain and the remaining three domains of CAF on active-duty personnel living near and serving on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard Base in Birmingham, Alabama. Additionally, areas on spiritual programming for the spiritual domain were explored. The case study method identified with real-life spiritual phenomenon from a sample of 20 active-duty Air Force members serving on the Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard installation through a semi-structured interview process Chapter 2 covered the spiritual fitness, the components to the spiritual domain, and the constructs to spiritual fitness. These facets of spirituality are paramount on how they create a ready and resilient Airman to accomplish the Air Force mission. Additionally, this chapter presented a

framework that is comprised from relevant theories by situating and contextualizing formal theories (Adom et al., 2018) in readiness, resiliency, stress management, and coping theory.

Chapter 3 outlines the research method and design along with its appropriateness in this study. Chapter 3 also provides rationale for instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter 3 details the criticality of trustworthiness and ends with a summary on how this study employed strategies that controlled bias and strengthened trustworthiness.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perspectives of active-duty United States Air Force military members serving on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard installations on CAF and its impact on readiness and resilience. Additionally, areas on spiritual programming for the spiritual domain were explored. The field test was conducted to validate the data collection instrument by examining the appropriateness of the interview questions before conducting the actual interviews on the 20 participants. Chapter 3 begins with a review of the research questions, the research methodology, and then a description of the research design. Participant criteria and instrumentation and measurement are also outlined to describe the participant factors and how participant responses were utilized. This chapter ends with an in-depth discussion on data collection, data analysis, delimitations, assumptions, limitations, trustworthiness of the design, and a summary.

Research Questions

According to Creswell et al. (2007), after selecting an interpretive paradigm, the researcher crafts research questions which informs the design in qualitative research to collect and analyze the data. This study was informed by its central research question and sub-questions (Fusch et al., 2018), which are:

RQ1: How does Airman spiritual fitness bolster readiness and resilience?

SQ1: What role does spirituality play on an Airman's overall fitness to serve?

SQ2: What role does spirituality play in an Airman's physical fitness?

SQ3: What role does spirituality play in an Airman's mental fitness?

SQ4: What role does spirituality play in an Airman's social fitness?

SQ5:   What role does spirituality play in overall Airman readiness?

SQ6:   What role does spirituality play in an Airman's resiliency skills?

RQ2:   What could be added to the Air Force's efforts to bolster Airman spiritual fitness?

SQ1:   What could be done to ensure that strengthened spiritual fitness has multi-domain effects?

SQ2:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it related to an Airman's core values?

SQ3:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it related to an Airman's perspective?

SQ4:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it related to an Airman's perseverance?

SQ5:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it related to an Airman's purpose?

Research Methodology

A qualitative case study is an approach in research that facilitates the exploration and understanding of an occurrence or phenomenon within its natural context which ensures that the issue is explored through a variety of lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In exploring an issue through a variety of lenses, multiple facets of the phenomenon can be revealed, interpreted, and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This qualitative case study was rigorous and explored the bounded phenomenon pertaining to a specific program, process, unit, or person (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Yin (2003) documented that a qualitative case study should be utilized when it falls under one or more of the four contextual conditions. Those conditions are: When the focus of the study aims to answer how or why questions, when the behavior of research participants is not manipulated, when a researcher wants to cover contextual conditions due to the belief that those conditions are relevant to the study, and when the boundaries are unclear between the phenomenon and the context (Yin, 2003). This descriptive case study was explored on the how and why questions (Yin, 2003) relating to those active-duty Airmen serving on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base and their real-world experiences pertaining to CAF and its impact on readiness and resilience. Further, this descriptive qualitative case study of active-duty Airmen serving on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard Base provided an avenue for data collection, pinpointing specific convergences between CAF domains, and whether overall Airman readiness and resilience is affected (Yin, 2011). While exploring the phenomenon, at least two contextual conditions were met in this descriptive qualitative case study which are the research questions that focused on answering how and why questions and the behavior of research participants not being manipulated (Yin, 2003).

A qualitative method is the preferred methodology for this study due to the reliance on the real-world experiences from the research participants as credible data sources. The qualitative method also provides a researcher to ask open-ended questions to generate themes, subthemes, moral underpinnings, and patterns which ensure that the issue is explored through a variety of lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In generating themes, subthemes, moral underpinnings, and patterns with a qualitative method, a researcher is more apt to visualize and exact areas of importance that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Leung (2015) supported that position and asserted that the qualitative method utilizes themes, subthemes, and patters to develop of a meaningful picture of the studied issue without compromising richness and dimensionality. Themes, subthemes, and patterns in a qualitative method promote richness and dimensionality by inextricably coupling human sense and subjectivity through nonnumerical information and real-world experiences (Leung, 2015).

In this descriptive qualitative case study, the researcher implemented rigorous procedures for data collection and analysis, with a heavy emphasis on trustworthiness in triangulating data (Fusch et al., 2018). In gathering data from two participant groups, *ADht* and ADlt, a wide range of perspectives were gleaned from different Air Force experiences, tenures, and ages. One approach to mitigating bias in the qualitative method is the process of triangulation, which utilizes multiple sources of data to add depth to the information collected (Fusch et al., 2018). Data was triangulated from the sequence and depth of questions answered by the 20 participant interviews. Moreover, the qualitative method utilizes a philosophical approach to empirical observations and interview techniques to address research questions to emerge, uncover, unfold, move, connect, and diverge information (Baskarada & Koronios, 2018). The researcher applied the process of data triangulation in this qualitative case study to enhance the trustworthiness of the research study and enable data saturation through multiple external data collection methods (Fusch et al., 2018).

While exploring issues from a variety of lenses in the qualitative method (Baxter & Jack, 2008), a researcher interpreted the worldviews of participants (Baskarada & Koronios, 2018). The researcher considered exploring the facets of the qualitative

method: (1) What sampling techniques should be used on the targeted population and knowing when saturation has been achieved, (2) observe and document participant uncertainty and concerns, (3) use the triangulation process to define and interpret unclear phenomena (Fusch et al., 2018), (4) plan participant interviews for data collection, (5) participant, empirical literature, and scholarly literature engagement, (6) determine whether observation is a suitable technique alongside participant interviews, (7) weigh and assess the various computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software applications to aid in data analysis, and (8) transcribe the data into a reportable form and present the findings.

Research Design

The purpose of a qualitative research design is to assist in retrieving answers to the problems raised in the research study and to aid in defining the case (Gaus, 2017). Further, the research design is stated to focus on the discovery, insight, and understanding of participant perspectives applicable to the research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Thus, the underlying philosophical foundations of the research must be valid and manageable while aligning with the proposed study to provide details of the inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The qualitative research design chosen for this study is a case study design. Astalin (2013) defined a case study design as the analyses of individuals, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other holistically studied systems. Creswell et al. (2007) supported that assertion and added that the case study design uses an analytic approach involving a detailed description of the case, the setting of the case, and the contextual conditions of the case. Yin (2003) stated that the case study design is

particularly useful in building an in-depth, contextual understanding of the case. In understanding the case, the researcher relies on multiple data sources rather than a single source of information, such as individual stories (Yin, 2003).

Yin (2009) outlined that the case study qualitative design studies a current phenomenon within its natural setting. In this study, active-duty Airmen were studied at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama. The phenomenon explored are the real-world experiences and perspectives of those active-duty Airmen on CAF domains and overall readiness and resilience. The case and units of analysis have been explored through appropriate units of measurement and what is already known about the problem based on the participant interviews and other sources of literature (Yin, 2009).

Participants

The population of participants are those active-duty members that are currently serving on the Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard installation in Birmingham, Alabama (Baxter & Jack, 2008). With an approximate total of 130 active-duty unit members, an adequate participant sample is approximately 15 percent, thus making the total participant count 20 members. However, if more than 20 participants are needed to reach data saturation, recruitment will continue until data saturation is met. The sample has been divided into two separate categories: Active-duty members with high tenures (AD*ht*), which are members in the rank of E-6 to E-9 and officers O-4 to O-10, and Active-duty with low tenures (AD*lt*), which are those active-duty members in the ranks of E-5 and below and officers in the ranks of O-3 and below. This separation is appropriate for the

study being that Ad*ht* and Ad*lt* equally account for the entire population of the unit, thereby making it particularly useful for studying the phenomena (Ye, 2010).

Participants were interviewed individually via passcode-required Zoom meetings, enabling participants to address the interview questions in private, thereby ensuring participant confidentiality in their responses (Lune & Berg, 2017). All participants belong to a single Commander within a restricted military installation. The permission to use premises (PRN) form signed by the approval authority is provided an Appendix D. Additionally, the Department of Defense Human Resource Protection Program (DoDHRPP) is form that ensures uniformed military confidentiality and safety (See Appendix E). The PRN and DoDHRPP forms have been approved prior to officially conducting any participant interviews (see Appendix D and E). Additionally, after a thorough review, Liberty University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study to be conducted.

Figure 3

Active-Duty Sample Based on Tenure

**Active-Duty High Tenure (AD*ht)*
(10 Participants)

Enlisted: E-6 to E-9
Officer: O-4 to O-10

**Active-Duty Low Tenure (AD*lt)*
(10 Participants)

Enlisted: E-1 to E-5
Officer: O-1 to O-3
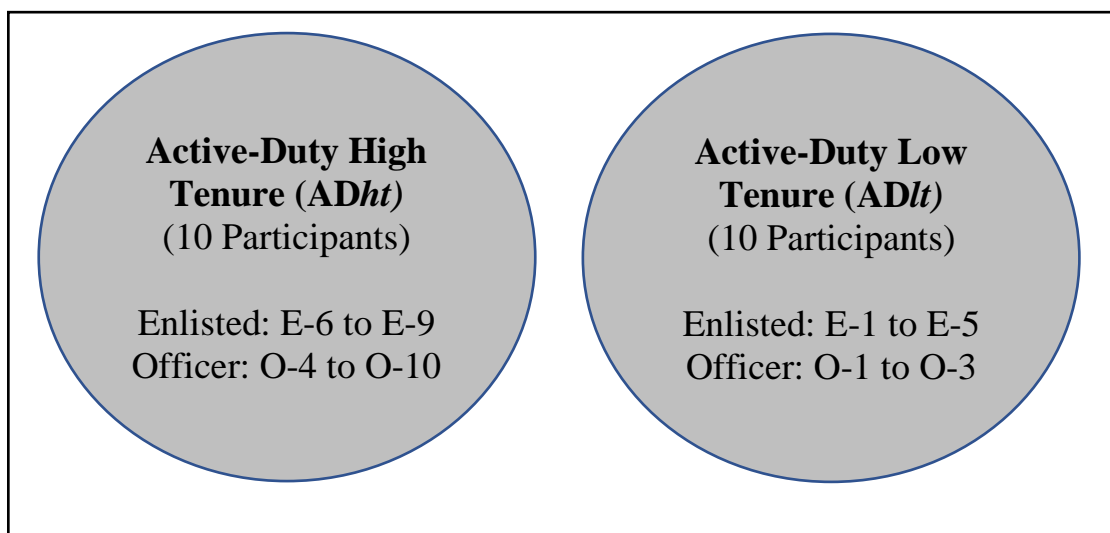
Instrumentation and Measurement

The primary instrument employed for this qualitative case study are face-to-face interviews, taking approximately thirty minutes each to complete. The interview questions, crafted from the research questions, inquired about the perspectives of those active-duty Airmen regarding the studied phenomenon (See Appendix A). The interview questions have been screened for brevity and openness while avoiding questions that seemed double-barreled or complex (Lune & Berg, 2017). The interview questions, as the primary instrument, solicited perspectives of active-duty Airmen stationed at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama regarding CAF convergences with the spiritual domain as the focal point. The interview questions also focused on overall Airman readiness and resilience in order to pinpoint which specific areas in CAF are affected, if any, and how it affects overall Airman readiness and resilience.

Field notes have been taken during participant interviews which aided in coding verbal exchanges, documented patterns and themes, and outline any connections between exchanges (Lune & Berg, 2017). Further, the participant interviews were audio recorded which assisted the researcher in tracking and organizing collected data (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Recruitment commenced solely on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama. The researcher briefed the squadron during a Commander's Call that a study will be occurring and how to volunteer as a participant. The researcher shared his personal phone number to all Airmen and instructions on how to volunteer in their respective grade-based category, AD*ht* or AD*lt*, without publicly declaring interest in

participating in the study. Having Airmen volunteer for the study ensures that the researcher does not purposefully select Airmen, thereby eliminating the illusion of selection bias within the research study (Lune & Berg, 2017). Government communication systems were not used by the researcher to solicit participants for the research study being that the study is not sponsored by the Department of the Air Force. Rather, this study is posited to aid Department of the Air Force leadership in visualizing CAF in new ways, stemming from the results from the participant interviews.

The risks and benefits were presented by the researcher to the potential research participants, thus enabling the potential participant to make an informed decision on whether to participate in the research study or not (Nusbaum et al., 2017). Informed consent to participate in a research study was received in writing which strengthens ethical considerations and informs the participant of the study without deception (Donovan et al., 2016). Directly before each interview began, the informed consent forms were emailed to each potential participant (See Appendix F). The researcher reviewed the consent document with each person and addressed any questions before asking participants to sign.

Participant interviews were conducted on portable communications devices. Participant confidentiality was secured by participants messaging the researcher to volunteer, eliminating public declaration in volunteering (Surmiak, 2018). Prior to the participant interviews, the researcher ensured that the participant is in a private location, free from outside influence or knowledge of participation.

Participant Interviews

The interview process enabled the researcher to understand why Airmen feel and how Airmen think about the studied phenomenon (Sutton & Austin, 2015). AD*ht* and AD*lt* enabled the researcher to ask Airmen their opinions on the interconnectedness of CAF and its impact on readiness and resilience, while reporting on that data in two categories. The separation enabled the researcher to report findings between two grade-based categories to glean a well-rounded perspective on areas that may affect CAF, resilience, and readiness while serving on an Air National Guard installation (Bowen et al., 2016).

The interview questions are as follows:

IQ1: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say that you have a guiding set of principles or beliefs, and why? (if 0, skip questions 2 and 3) (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ2: What are the top contributors to or sources for your guiding set of principles or beliefs and how much does each of these contribute to your guiding set of principles or beliefs (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ3: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say you draw strength from a set of guiding principles or beliefs, and why (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ4: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you maintain a healthy perspective in your life, and why?

IQ5: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

IQ6: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to see purpose in your life, and why?

IQ7: Does your spirituality/religion/faith help you do things to boost physical fitness?

If yes: How do you use spirituality/religion/faith to maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and why

IQ8: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to recognize, tolerate, and modify strong negative emotions, and why?

IQ9: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to have the ability to think clearly and problem solve, and why?

IQ10: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to be able to manage stress in your life, and why?

IQ11: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to identify and lean on others who will positively influence your well-being and ability to achieve optimal performance, and why?

IQ12: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you meet the demands of your assigned mission(s), and why?

IQ13: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you become resilient, and why?

IQ14: Does God play a role in your spirituality?

If Yes: How much does God impact your spiritual fitness?

IQ15: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened through your core values, and why?

IQ16: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened to help you maintain a healthy perspective in life, and why?

IQ17: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened to help you to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

IQ18: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened to help you to see purpose in your life, and why?

IQ19: What can be done to strengthen spiritual fitness, which will also impact an Airman's ability to meet the demands of their assigned mission(s)?

Official DoD and Government Sources

Department of Defense and other official government websites were utilized as a supplement of information for this study. According to the University of South Carolina (2019), domain suffixes ending in .gov are official government sites that disseminate information from all branches of government such as census statistics, congressional hearings, and Supreme Court rulings. Additionally, domain suffixes ending in .mil are solely used for information disseminated from all five branches of the Armed Forces (University of South Carolina, 2019). Official government websites were utilized for pooling data related to areas surrounding information on CAF initiatives, areas that bolster resilience, and how Airman readiness is currently being strengthened.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

</div>

For the purpose of analyzing data in this qualitative case study, the researcher utilized the NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software manufactured by QSR International. The use of NVivo 12 is instrumental in arranging, reassembling, and managing data collected. NVivo 12 aided in transcribing audio recorded data and coding interview and field note data in a semantically meaningful way. Themes, subthemes, and patterns have been identified to build a sound conceptual framework for understanding areas that may affect CAF.

The data analysis phase of this qualitative case study consisted of a thorough review of transcripts from the participant interviews, field notes, and audio recordings to further provide an understanding on how the CAF domains may converge with one another. Data transcripts were transcribed in the NVivo 12 software application. Audio files were converted to text and all field notes were inputted into NVivo 12 to further generate themes, subthemes, and patterns (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017; Rosenthal, 2016). All audio transcripts have been thoroughly reviewed alongside the participants audio file to ensure accuracy of the transcript for data analysis and findings purposes. All collected data were then effectively analyzed, with the assistance of NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to understand Airman perspectives and support the intent of the research study (Harwood et al, 2015).

The primary role of NVivo 12 in this qualitative case study was to organize the three concurrent flows of action, which are data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification (Lune & Berg, 2017). Additionally, as a prominent computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software in qualitative studies, NVivo 12 provided findings and interpretations in a digital mind map through effective coding to develop a system of meaning in the research study. A digital mind map is stated as a linking of information or unidirectional arrows to suggest connections in the analyzed data (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). The researcher's role in analyzing the data is critical in mitigating potential bias and influence (Galdas, 2017). For this study, the researcher utilized a field test and a scholarly review to ensure the neutrality of the interview questions and has presented the research findings as they were derived from the participants without artificial filtering (Galdas, 2017).

Themes and subthemes were uncovered through two methods, grouping and categorizing field notes and the assistance of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software allows a researcher to uncover potentially hidden themes and subthemes that may not have been noticed without software assistance (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Patterns are defined as similar or different elements that group together (Buetow, 2019). The researcher grouped similar elements from participant interview responses to then create themes and subthemes (Buetow, 2019).

Triangulation occurred as the researcher combined the collection of data alongside the perspectives of the Airman participants to provide a fuller, more in-depth picture of the phenomenon (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017).

The data analysis phase of this qualitative case study consisted of a thorough review of transcripts from the participant interviews, field notes, and audio recordings to further provide an understanding on how the CAF domains may converge with one another. Data transcripts have been transcribed in the NVivo 12 software application. Audio files were converted to text and all field notes were inputted into NVivo 12 to further generate themes, subthemes, and patterns (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017; Rosenthal, 2016). All audio transcripts have been thoroughly reviewed with the participants interview audio file to ensure accuracy of the transcript for data analysis and findings purposes. All collected data can then be effectively analyzed, with the assistance of NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to understand Airman perspectives and support the intent of the research study (Harwood et al., 2015).

The researcher followed a strict, five-step thematic data analysis process with this qualitative case study:

Step 1: Transcribe audio recorded data and organizing field notes collected during the participant interviews (Watkins, 2017).

Step 2: Revisit transcribed data. Continually read the transcribed data collected during the participant interview. The researcher immersed in the data to relive each interview and started making meaning connections in the data. An applied thematic analysis (ATA) occurred to assist the researcher in purposeful and systematic planning and preparation to mitigate bias (Mackieson et al., 2018). ATA requires three levels of analysis which includes preliminary interpretations, word-by-word analysis, multiple iterations of the coding development, and interpretation of the results (Mackieson et al., 2018). Applied properly, the researcher implemented ATA which focused on that data and ensured that the findings are reported as they were derived or synthesized without eliminating main elements in the responses from the participants (Mackieson et al., 2018).

Step 3: Compile field notes and transcribe data into the NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) supported this step by stating that data should be segmented and divided into themes, subthemes, and patterns to draw connections, see relationships, and make meaningful assertions about the data.

Step 4: Emergent themes and redundancy were identified. Two concurrent flows of action, data display and data reduction, were implemented (Lune & Berg, 2017). Data reduction eliminates excessive and repetitive data which sharpens the focus of the

research study (Lune & Berg, 2017). Emergent themes were then be captured and reported, aligning with the study's research questions and purpose.

Step 5: The last concurrent flow of action, draw conclusions and verification, were visited to officially report on the meaning and understanding of the analyzed data (Lune & Berg, 2017).

For this qualitative case study, the data has been organized and analyzed using a semantic inductive thematic approach (Heath et al., 2018). Conventional content analysis calls for the analyzation of data that has been directly and inductively derived from raw data itself (Lune & Berg, 2017). Analyzing and reporting the perspectives from active-duty Airmen stationed on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama has been clear, concise, and aligned with the overall focus and purpose of the study.

Confidentiality

In this qualitative case study, the researcher ensured participant confidentiality by assigning a pseudonym to the research participants. Pseudonyms in qualitative research is a practice that confers anonymity (Allen & Wiles, 2016). The 20 participants' names were input into a private, random generator and assigned a pseudonym (Airman 1 – Airman 20). Assigning these pseudonyms to the participants from the two study groups (Ad*ht* and Ad*lt)* without distinguishing members of the groups, has ensured a level of confidentiality and portrays that all research participants were communicative equals in the formal study (Allen & Wiles, 2016).

The researcher kept personally identifiable information for Zoom or FaceTime timeslots confidential (Lune & Berg, 2017). Additionally, all interview information, field

notes, and audiotapes are kept in a locked, secure location that is inaccessible to anyone other than the researcher (Surmiak, 2018). Storing and safely reporting on collected data ensured that no personally identifiable information was negligently disclosed in the research study (Allen & Wiles, 2016). All information containing personally identifiable information will be destroyed, via crosscut shredding, following three years after the study.

<div align="center">**Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations**</div>

Limitations within this research study are evident on the narrow pool of participants available for the research study. Military Chaplains will not be utilized as participants, thereby potentially missing valuable insight. A purposeful sampling strategy was utilized to avert any sense of skewed selections solely for the purpose of gaining guided insights that benefit the research study (Siggelkow, 2007). Further, since qualitative research studies focus upon a small subset of the population, the generalizability of the findings is limited (Wiersma, 2000). The behavior of one unit of analysis within this case study may not reflect the behaviors of similar entities, thereby limiting the ability to generalize in subsequent studies (Simon & Goes, 2013). Differences in units of analysis can change throughout time as due to personnel shifts or changes in the operational environment (Simon & Goes, 2013).

As a limitation, the faith inhabited by the researcher carries the potential for bias in research. Additionally, the researcher conducted research on active-duty Airmen, which touched slightly on the spiritual domain of CAF. The prior research, strong belief in God, and belief that the God and religion has a strong influence on the other CAF domains further elevate concerns of bias. Despite the concerns of bias, the researcher

remained completely neutral, ask the interview questions as written, and report the findings in their entirety – even if those findings diverge from the beliefs of the researcher.

Delimitations of the Study

This study has been confined to active-duty Air Force members serving on Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama. This installation has been selected due to the accessibility to the population and the stability of the phenomenon. The active-duty unit, the 99th Air Refueling Squadron, has been a tenant unit within the 117th Air Refueling Wing at Sumpter Smith for over ten years. Additionally, the researcher has full access to the restricted location due to holding a Common Access Card, required for installation entrance.

Another delimitation of this study is that the tenets of the physical, mental, and social domains were not explored. Only those three domains themselves were explored, using the spiritual domain as the focal point of questioning, to derive participant data. Participant interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Assumptions of the Study

The researcher assumed that all Airman participants have been forthcoming with responses to interview questions regarding areas affecting the CAF pillars. To ensure that participants were forthcoming in their responses, Airman were reassured of their confidentiality in the study while ensuring that the interview questions align with the research questions and the empirical and theoretical constructs that guide this study (Wolgemuth et al., 2017). Neutral, open-ended questions have been afforded to the participants which were objectively based on the study's problem and purpose to solicit

subjective participant responses to inform on the studied phenomenon (Wolgemuth al., 2017).

Further, assumptions were made that Airmen were also honest in their answers regarding individual readiness and resilience. To aid honest participant responses, transparency about the purpose of the study and strong adherence to ethical and confidential principles have been addressed to the participants (Davidson et al, 2017). Further, assuring transparency about the study while mitigating bias through a neutral line of questions, participants were able to speak freely and privately without the fear of reprisal from their responses.

It is assumed that the location for the study is sufficient to solicit rich, in-depth responses to interview questions. Additionally, it is assumed that the private location chosen would encourage Airmen to speak freely without fear of reprisal in the responses solicited. The selected location maximized the political and social constructions that inform the research process due to the exclusivity of the room during the participant interview (Palaganas, et al., 2017). Moreover, the private and exclusive nature of the interview location better enabled deep responses due to the assurance of noninterrupted responses and the distraction-free nature of the location, which further enabled the researcher to utilize participant experiences to construct their realities (Palaganas et al., 2017).

Trustworthiness

Korstjens and Moser (2018) outlined three areas that are not suitable to judge the overall quality of qualitative research, which are: (a) internal generalizability, (b) trustworthiness, and (c) objectivity. Instead, the trustworthiness in qualitative research is

achieved when positive responses are afforded to the question as to whether the findings of the research can be trusted (Korstjens and Moser, 2018).

Participant confidentiality is the ethical approach that was taken seriously to further strengthen trustworthiness within the research study (Surmiak, 2018). This section addresses four key areas used to strengthen the trustworthiness of this qualitative case study which are: (a) transferability, (b) confirmability, (c) dependability, and (d) authenticity.

Within the four key areas used to strengthen trustworthiness in research studies, two subcomponents are utilized to strengthen each key area. The two subcomponents used to heighten research trustworthiness are: (a) journaling and (b) protocol. Journaling is one subcomponent to which researchers plan and journal the research study (Amankwaa, 2016). Journaling involves the utilization of paraphrasing peer-reviewed literature to support assertions. Additionally, journaling begins when a researcher makes the decision to conduct the research and ends when the researcher has completed the study (Amankwaa, 2016).

The second subcomponent to trustworthiness is protocoling. Protocol impacts all four key areas of trustworthiness and involves researchers establishing a timeline for each related research activity (Amankwaa, 2016). Timelines created for the research study should be commensurate to each related research activity to cement an organized, aligned, and sound method and approach for the successful completion of the research study (Amankwaa, 2016).

Transferability

The potential for transferability of this research study can be achieved in numerous future research areas. Studies relating to the CAF framework or individual CAF domains, readiness of individual military members, resilience of military members, and military members serving in geographically separated locations are examples of the transferability of this study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Specifically, this study can transfer to studies revolving around Total Force Association (TFA) units or other units whose Major Commands (MAJCOM) differ from that of the host unit (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Attaining thick descriptions is a method to strengthen the means of research transferability (Amankwaa, 2016). Thick descriptions involve retrieving extended participant responses from properly planned interview questions, effectively interviewing research participants to obtain robust responses, and asking open-ended questions that elicit detailed responses (Amankwaa, 2016). Thick responses can be achieved by asking research participants a set of robust interview questions (See Appendix A) elicited more than a yes or no response. Rather, Stahl & King (2020) noted that the palpability of participant responses are rich when the descriptions of the phenomena are detailed and robust.

Confirmability

In qualitative research, confirmability is the state of neutrality or the degree in which the study's findings are consistent and could be repeated (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability strengthens research trustworthiness in qualitative studies by ensuring that researchers base their findings from accurately represented and wholesome data. Korstjens & Moser (2018) outlined that by representing the data in whole, rather than

targeting spliced segments, the researcher avoided confirmation bias and research subjectivity.

The main thrust of confirmation bias is avoiding the researcher's subjective input, favoring the truthful and objective representation of data and findings through neutrality in research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To increase confirmability in this research study, the data gleaned for the study, the methods utilized to elicit data, and research findings were reported on in a neutral manner to ensure data consistency and repeatability (Connelly, 2016).

Dependability

Connelly (2016) outlined four key areas of dependability that were utilized in this research study, which provided stability of this qualitative case study: (a) notes, (b) progress logs, (c) researcher decisions, and (d) debriefing information. The achieve a level of dependability, field notes collected by the researcher are documented and represented in this research study as observed without manipulation (Amankwaa, 2016). Further, the researcher provided the research participants an opportunity to review transcribed audio transcripts for a detailed review and accuracy in participant statements. Connelly (2016) detailed that the accurate representation of field notes and transcription reviews by research participants provide a firm foundation for research dependability.

Authenticity

Authenticity in qualitative research is the degree in which researchers honestly and completely detail the realities of research participants through effective questioning (Connelly, 2016). Authenticity has been achieved in this research study by engaging in

positive research strategies, journaling, and qualitative protocols (Amankwaa, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As another means of achieving research authenticity, research participants were afforded the time to address the interview questions without interruptions or time limitations. Time limitations and interruptions may detract from authenticity by not allowing research participants the time to collect their thoughts and build upon their given responses (Amankwaa, 2016). As another means of attaining research authenticity, the researcher avoided research satisficing by affording research participants an opportunity to review audio transcriptions for accuracy. The review of transcripts provides a firm foundation of research authenticity by representing participant data that has been screened, reviewed, and approved by the participants themselves (Jentoft & Olsen, 2017).

Summary

The intent of this qualitative case study is to explore how active-duty Airmen from the 99th Air Refueling Squadron at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama perceive how their spiritual domain of CAF domains impacts the other CAF domains, its impact on their overall readiness and resilience, as well as ways to improve spiritual fitness. The data analysis and findings of the study are reported in the succeeding chapters in this study. Chapter 4 includes data analysis and the research findings, to include both field testing and formal research findings. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings, research implications, limitations, and recommendations for continued research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study is to fill critical gaps in the literature by understanding an Airman's view of spiritual fitness, how spiritual fitness contributes to overall fitness, resilience, and readiness, and what steps could be taken to improve Air Force spiritual fitness programming. Uncovering strengths and weaknesses in the spiritual fitness CAF domain can give Air Force leaders a more developed insight into strengthening Airman readiness and resilience. These efforts can directly contribute to developing a stronger understanding of how to bolster Airman readiness and resiliency skillsets. Further, leadership insight from this study may lead to a more developed Air Force enterprise understanding of how to increase Airman readiness and resilience. Leaders must know what affects Airmen even if they do not directly work with them. This study may provide Air Force leaders insight into unit-level active-duty perspectives on CAF, readiness, and resilience.

This study was guided by two central research questions and 11 sub-questions. The first central research question (RQ1) was: How does Airman spiritual fitness bolster readiness and resilience? This central question had six sub-questions (SQ1 to SQ6), which were: What role does spirituality play on an Airman's overall fitness to serve? What role does spirituality play in an Airman's physical fitness? What role does spirituality play in an Airman's mental fitness? What role does spirituality play in an Airman's social fitness? What role does spirituality play in overall Airman readiness? What role does spirituality play in an Airman's resiliency skills?

The second central research question (RQ2) was: What could be added to the Air Force's efforts to bolster Airman spiritual fitness? This central question had six sub-questions (SQ1 to SQ5), which were: What could be done to ensure that strengthened spiritual fitness has multi-domain effects? What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's core values? What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's perspective? What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's perseverance? What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's purpose?

A qualitative methodology and a descriptive case study design were utilized to explore the real-world experiences pertaining to the Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF) framework. The method and design aided the researcher in uncovering real-life and current perspectives on the studied phenomena. Additionally, the method and design proved vital to deriving meaning and impact on an Airman's readiness and resilience from members serving in the 99th Air Refueling Squadron contained within Sumpter Smith Air National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama.

Chapter 4 starts with descriptive results which outline participant criteria, such as demographic and tenure-based figures, in greater detail. The descriptive results also outline religious-based measures, which were instrumental in dissecting and displaying information gleaned from the participant interviews. The participant interviews have also been outlined alongside thematic analyses, major study findings, themes and patterns, and a chapter summary.

Descriptive Results

A total of 22 Airmen desired to volunteer as an interview participant. Two AD*ht* Airmen volunteered later than others and were placed in a stand-by status but not interviewed.

Upon completion of all participant interviews, the interviews were transcribed in NVivo computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. The researcher conducted a thorough review of all 20 interview transcripts, alongside the audio recordings of the interviews. With a reported 80% accuracy rate of audio-to-text transcription services, the systematic review of interview transcriptions enabled common transcription errors to be corrected. The thorough researcher review of the interview transcripts confirmed the validity of the research data before the data analysis phase occurred. Zero research participants expressed interest in reviewing the post-transcription interview transcripts, therefore no changes or further edits to the transcripts were required.

The demographic and religious information of the participants are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Demographic Information

	Tenure-Based Category	
Demographics	Active-Duty Low Tenure	Active-Duty High Tenure
Mean Age (SD)	27.9 (3.2)	34.7 (2.0)
Gender		
Male	90%	100%
Female	10%	0%

Race

White/Caucasian	60%	80%
African American	10%	0%
Hispanic	20%	10%
Prefer Not to Say	10%	10%

Religious Affiliation

Catholic	30%	20%
Christian	30%	50%
Baptist	20%	10%
Agnostic	0%	10%
No Religion	20%	10%

As noted in Table 3, the active-duty low tenure (Ad*lt*) group was on average 27.9 years old and mostly consisted of White/Caucasian, Catholic males. The active-duty high tenure (Ad*ht*) group was on average 34.7 years old and mostly consisted of White/Caucasian, Christian males. One of the participants (5%), Airman 1, outlined that while they may not inhabit a strong sense of God, they still believe that there is a higher power. Both AD*lt* and AD*ht* categories had 80% of participants who have a distinct belief in God and 20% of participants had no belief or agnostic beliefs.

Table 4

Tenure Group Comparisons of Preference for Spirituality Term and the Role of God in Spirituality

	Tenure-Based Category	
	Active-Duty Low Tenure	Active-Duty High Tenure
Preferred Spirituality Term		
Spirituality	50%	30%
Religion	20%	20%
Faith	20%	50%
Spirituality and Faith	10%	0%
Role of God in Spirituality		
Major	50%	60%
Moderate	30%	10%
Minimal	0%	10%
None	20%	20%

Table 4 outlines that the majority of AD*lt* participants chose the term spirituality as their preferred term for spirituality and indicated that God plays a major role in their spirituality. The majority of AD*ht* participants chose the term faith for spirituality and indicated that God plays a major role in their spirituality.

Regarding God having an impact on spiritual fitness, Airman 2 stated:

> I would say completely [God having an impact on spiritual fitness]. Honestly, to me, if there was no God, there would be no purpose.

Similarly, Airman 5 also noted that God has an instrumental role in their spiritual fitness by stating,

> So, I try to attend church every Sunday with my wife and kids. Everything I do,

whether it's running, whether it's my wife and I about to read the Bible, we try to include God in every facet of our lives.

One noteworthy input about God impacting one's spiritual fitness, was from Airman 17 when they stated:

[I would say that God impacts my spiritual fitness about] 80%. The other 20% is my work on reaching Him.

Airman 15 stated:

God impacts my life more and more, but sometimes I fall short in that aspect. But I try, every night before I go to bed, to say a prayer and just pray about the obstacles that I have in my life and things that I have going on. And so I try to lean on him as much as I can.

Conversely, four interview participants (20%) outlined that God does not have an impact on their spiritual fitness.

Finding one's identity in Christ alone versus external circumstances was another key area of discovery from the participant data. Both AD*lt* and AD*ht* grade-based categories had seven out of ten participants (70%) outlining that they're continually finding their identity in Christ. Out of 20 participant interviews, 14 participants (70%) speak about biblical teachings and explicitly state that God and the Word directs their actions, behaviors, motivations, goals, and life trajectory. Airman 14 stated:

A lot of times, I feel like I'm alone in this world. I feel like people don't understand me. Just talking to God and reading the Bible, it relieves a lot [of life's challenges]. It helps me stay focused because sometimes I can lose focus, but if I just talk to Him and I just breathe and relax when I lose focus.

Research Question Findings

The participant interviews were analyzed to procure a meaningful insight, guided by the study's research questions and sub-questions. The formal interview findings and the researcher field notes are outlined below. A systematic approach was taken to present findings from the 20 formal interviews. This section highlighted patterns, themes, and subthemes generated from the objective line of questioning. The results are presented and structured around the research questions.

Spiritual Fitness Components

Core Values

Core values are known as a guiding set of principles or beliefs that guide an Airman. All 20 interview participants were asked, "Using a scale of 0, which is not at all, to 10, which is completely, to what extent would you say that you have a guiding set of principles or beliefs, and why?" The average of all scores was 8.75 (SD=1.14). The lowest recorded score was a five from one interview participant and nine participants (45%) noted a score of 10. Airman 5 stated:

> I would say probably a nine. I definitely stick to a guideline in my life. A lot of structure; some of this comes from my normal life, some from the military, but a lot of it has come from my religious affiliation. There's a lot of things that I've grown up around that have basically dictated how I feel I should operate in life and I like to keep true to myself and things pretty black and white for me.
>
> Similarly, Airman 4 noted, "Well, for myself, absolutely a 10. If there's an easy way and the right way, I'm going to choose the right way. That's just the way I am."
>
> One participant (5%), Airman 12, noted a score of five, the lowest recorded, and

stated, "I will say about a five. I have to make a conscious effort to do the right thing versus just going with my instincts of whatever else helps me the most."

Further exploring the core values of participants, another question asked, "Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say you draw strength from a set of guiding principles or beliefs, and why?" The average of all scores was 8.95 (SD=1.32). The lowest recorded score was a five from one interview participant and half of the participants (50%) noted a score of 10. Airman 14 stated:

I'm going to say 10, because life happens and the Bible gets me through a lot. The things I [experienced when I] grew up; [the] things I experienced gets me through a lot. I will probably be lost without either. So, in order for me to get through challenging times and understand whether things are good or bad, I use my experiences and the Bible.

Similarly, Airman 2 stated, "For me, my Christian belief, it guides every aspect of my life; how hard I work when I'm at work. It [my Christian belief] guides what kind of husband I am and what kind of father I am."

One participant (5%), Airman 12, noted a score of five, the lowest recorded, and stated:

I would say the 5. And I draw strength from the Christian religion because that's the one that aligns the best with the way that I feel about things. I know there's a higher power. You need to be merciful; you need to be forgiven. Again, that goes back to putting others in front of yourself.

Interview participants were also asked what their top contributors to or sources for their guiding set of principles or beliefs. Surprisingly, two dominant patterns arose

through the variety of responses, which were: (a) Religion (35%) and (b) upbringing (25%). Of the participant interviews represented, both patterns were utilized. Airman 2 stated, "The top source is definitely my religion and the foundational set of principles and values that my parents gave me as a child." The remainder of participant interviews contained scattered responses to which patterns were not derived. Airman 7 stated, "First and foremost would be my religion, my upbringing, and church."

Airman 5 stated:

I think probably the biggest contributor [to my guiding set of principles and/or beliefs] is religion. Also, it's my family. My feeling to stick with my principles and beliefs really stem from any situation I'm in. I look at myself and think, 'how would God feel about this?

Perspective

Of the 20 interview participants, 17 participants (85%) outlined that their spirituality, religion, or faith enabled them to harbor a healthy perspective in their lives. Two primary patterns arose as contributing factors for bolstering an Airman's perspective, which were: (a) Leaning on religion or faith and (b) internalizing right versus wrong.

Almost half of the interview participants (45%) highlighted that the use of God and biblical teachings to maintain a positive perspective. Airman 2 stated:

For me, it's because I have to understand that bad things happen and there's nothing you can do about it. And to me, I lean on the fact that my Bible says that all things work together for the good of those who love God. So I just have to hold on to the fact that I believe my God loves me and he's always there.

Several participants (30%) mentioned the phrase 'right versus wrong' or 'doing the right thing' in terms of how they navigate their perspective before taking action or reacting to a situation. Airman 20 stated, "I compare everything to my faith as my standard, where I might even be a part of that culture of right and wrong. And so I would resort back to my faith, and that would keep me grounded."

One participant (5%) outlined that spirituality, religion, or faith had no impact on their perspective. Airman 10 noted, "It [religion] hasn't really helped me out that much."

Another noteworthy area: all four interview participants indicating that God does not play a role in their lives outlined that their spirituality, religion, or faith bolstered their individual perspectives. Airman 7 stated, "Going back to the Bible, living by the Word, and doing what the Bible says shows why spiritual fitness is huge. If you're not getting what you need spiritually, then you're going to be weak, you're going to falter, and you're going to fail."

Perseverance

Of the 20 interview participants, an overwhelming 19 participants (95%) outlined that their spirituality, religion, or faith help them persevere in achieving their personal and/or mission-oriented goals. Two prevalent patterns arose across participant interviews, which are: (a) faith in God for motivation and (b) mental toughness. The remainder of the participant responses were scattered to which patterns were not derived.

Despite the plethora of participant responses, 25% of Airmen outlined their faith in God for motivation, which illustrated that several participants inhabit the belief that God fuels and guides them toward becoming the best versions of themselves. Airman 8 stated:

I would say that trusting and having faith in the Lord has helped me realize that

I'm not doing it [persevering toward goals] on my own. Even when I feel alone,

He is always there with me to push me along and guide me. And that's gotten me

to the point I am now.

35% of Airmen outlined their mental toughness in accomplishing their desired

goal, task, or state. Airman 16 noted:

Well, there are several instances where there has been negative aspects where I

was not able to reach my goals. And that affected me to start pushing harder to go

about doing things a different way. So that [spirituality] led me to dive deeper into

my core values, rely on those people around me, and start figuring out what would

be the best way to go about certain things. So, all these past experiences have led

me, even the negatives, towards a better way doing things.

Only one interview participant (5%) noted that their spirituality, religion, or faith

has not helped them persevere in achieving their personal and/or mission-oriented goals.

Airman 9 outlined, "I don't feel like it has. I don't feel like my religious beliefs help me

persevere in that aspect. I don't think it helps."

Alike the findings from perspective, all four interview participants that outlined

that God does not play a role in their lives outlined that their spirituality, religion, or faith

had a significantly positive effect on their perseverance.

Purpose

Of the 20 interview participants, 16 participants (80%) outlined a positive

connection between spirituality, religion, or faith to purpose, two participants (10%) were

unsure or neutral, and two participants (10%) outlined no impact. Three dominant

patterns arose, which are: (a) supporting and serving others (50%), (b) seeking God (40%), and (c) Living an utmost/engaged life (25%). As a key area of discovery, three domains of CAF framework (social, spiritual and mental) are seen here converging together to aid Airmen in visualizing their purpose.

Spanning the majority of participant interviews, with the themes often intersecting, supporting and serving others outlines the significance of social connectedness between Airmen.

As an example of supporting others, Airman 19 stated:

So for me, my faith is all based on what I can do to help others to see God through me. And so my purpose in life, above all else, is simply just to share the love of God and to do that in how I work, how I live and how I interact with people. That means that sometimes I have to take a step back from myself so that someone else can step up and be put in the spotlight. That's just what I feel like my job is as a Christian.

Seeking God was outlined by several participants. For example, Airman 20 stated, "So separate God from anything and everything that I do, there's no purpose. At the end of the day, it's not all just about me. It all ties back to the Creator."

As an example of living an utmost/engaged life, Airman 18 stated, "Faith is my guiding principle. So, I mean, you draw from that purpose as far as being a good steward, being a good person, helping people out, and just being the best in every aspect."

Of the four nonreligious Airmen, three of those Airmen participants outlined a positive connection between spirituality, religion, or faith and purpose. One Airman was unsure or neutral, but still stated that helping others provides life purpose, Airman 17

stated, " I think that provides a lot of meaning if you have something big picture like that, that you're working towards terms of contributing to the community, the society, and in general make the world a better place than I think that provides you with a lot of meaning."

Outlining a neutral or unsure impact, Airman 14 mentioned, "Do I know my purpose? No, I do not know my purpose. But what I try to do is spread the good word and try to spread how can I say it"

Two interview participants (20%) noted that they had no connection between their spirituality, religion, or faith on seeing purpose in their lives. Airman 10 stated: "Religion really has not made me see a purpose in my life."

Spirituality's Impact on Physical Fitness

Of the 20 participants, 14 participants (70%) outlined a positive connection between spirituality, religion, or faith to their physical fitness. Of the participants that outlined that their spirituality, religion, or faith impacted their physical domain, three dominant patterns emerged, which are: (a) a healthy body is part of a spiritual discipline, (b) Air Force requirements, and (c) treating the body as a temple.

Several Airmen (60%) indicated that having a healthy body is part of a spiritual discipline. Airman 18 stated:

Going back to faith, it's part of it, it bleeds over into your body. You must keep the body healthy. Again, being a good person and knowing your body and treating your body with respect, faith bleeds over into that.

Twenty-five percent of Airman participant stated that their desire to live healthy lives also coincides with Air Force requirements on fitness.

Speaking towards Air Force spirituality, we have to be fit to fight in the Air Force. So rather than being afraid to leave my career for not being physically fit due to failing Physical Testing, I want to give off a positive image to the people I serve with and who serve under me.

Lastly, a few Airmen (35%) outlined that God has informed them that they must treat their body as a temple and indulge in healthy eating or fitness habits.

Airman 19 stated, "I think it's that whole idea of your body is Jesus's temple and, if you put good things in it and you treat it well, it will be taken care of."

Two participants (10%) were neutral in believing that spirituality, religion, or faith has an impact on one's physical well-being. Airman 3 stated, "I don't necessarily know if diet, exercise, and fitness really play into that overall [faith], other than just trying to be healthy. And really I would say it's wanting to be healthy for myself so I can be there for my children and watch them grow up and live."

A total of four interview participants (20%) noted that spirituality, religion, or faith did not have a direct impact on their physical wellbeing. Airman 9 stated, "I don't feel like religion has played a part in my nutrition and diet."

Spirituality's Impact on Mental Fitness

Ability to Recognize, Tolerate and Modify Strong Negative Emotions. A significant area of discovery has been made as all 20 interview participants (100%) noted a positive relationship between spirituality, religion, or faith to recognize, tolerate, and modify strong negative emotions. One key area of discovery was the fact that God and biblical teachings guided the internal conduct and actions of Airmen interview participants. Trusting in God's promises or assistance, and taking a moment to analyze

the situation were predominant patterns among Airmen who noted that God plays a role in their spiritual fitness.

Many Airmen (35%) mentioned trusting God for something good during difficulties as being helpful for their mental health. Airman 6 stated:

> [I] Just to keep that mentality that there's a reason I'm going through what I'm going through when there are bad times. So instead of beating myself up and getting down on myself, I got to keep faith that there's a lesson to be learned through this. And that happened many times. And looking back, I know why I went through what I went through.

Relying heavily on faith and God for perspective, guidance and strength, Airman 8 stated:

> Being in my faith, I've learned more about it [mental domain] and dug into it more. I have learned and developed that throwing anger directly out as the first step isn't the right step to take. Taking a step back, analyzing and visualizing what's actually going on and how to go about it, and asking the Lord for forgiveness. And if it's something I've done or forgiveness for whoever has done it to me, [faith] has helped me realize that everyone makes mistakes. Getting to that point, if you have faith, you're going to get through it.

Several Airmen (60%) stated that their spirituality provides a perspective to help them reassess the situation. Airman 1 stated, "I think my spirituality helps me keep a level head and understand that it goes back to my guiding principles. My perspective just helps me let negative things kind of roll off, see things from an outside perspective, and just prioritize situations that are more important."

Think Clearly and Problem Solve. Of the 20 interview participants, 18 participants (90%) outlined that spirituality, religion, or faith helped them to navigate their abilities to think clearly and problem solve. With an array of participant responses, two emerging patterns arose: (a) Using spiritual fitness to prioritize and assess situations and (b) collaborate spiritually with others.

The most prevalent emerging pattern, as outlined by 60% of the participants, was using spiritual fitness to prioritize and assess situations. Airman 1 stated, "Being able to look at things from several perspectives allows me to prioritize and assess what is important, what's less important, and it helps me ultimately problem solve and tackle challenges."

As the second emerging pattern, the ability to collaborate spiritually with others was outlined by numerous participants (25%). Airman 3 noted:

> Not too long ago during a deployment, I literally talked to one of my pastors and we were reading through a book about how God makes sense. On my last deployment, I was able to help a lot of Airmen get through. Because I was able to help my Airmen because of my faith, just keeping a steady head, and trying to keep them centered, I felt good in that and I felt purpose in that.

Four Airmen had strictly secular approaches in their abilities to think clearly and problem solve. Airman 11 stated, "It's kind of taking the time to give it full thought of what is being stressful and what can be done to resolve."

Managing Stress. Out of 20 interview participants, 19 participants (95%) outlined a positive or significant impact that spiritualty, religion, or faith has on their ability to manage stress. The themes that emerged for managing stress include: (a)

spirituality as a focal point to maintain a positive perspective (b) taking a step back before reacting to stressors.

Half of the Airman participants (50%) identified spirituality as a focal point to maintain a positive perspective when combating stress. Airman 13 stated, "Without spirituality, everything will stress you out eventually if you just let it pile up. So again, beliefs and principles that work for me, make me get up, and do these things."

Similarly, Airman 15 stated:

When I'm talking to friends or family or whoever about spirituality, it's always coming from like a positive outlook and trying to put a positive spin on things. So, if I'm ever stressed, I use it [spirituality] in that way just to put a positive swing on it. I do not dwell on the negativity that's causing that stress, but the positive things that can come from it.

Several Airmen (35%) outlined the use of spirituality, religion, or faith to help them take a step back before reacting to stressors. Airman 8 stated:

Being in my faith, I've learned more about it, dug into it more, and have learned and developed that throwing anger directly out as the first step isn't the right step to take. Taking a step back, analyzing visualizing what's actually going on and how to go about it, and asking the Lord for forgiveness, if it's something I've done or need forgiveness for whoever has done it to me, has helped me realize that everyone makes mistakes. Getting to that point, if you are faithful, you're going to get through it.

One participant (5%) noted that their spirituality, religion, or faith does not aid in stress management. Airman 10 noted that, "Religion has not really helped me with

stress."

The four non-religious Airmen participants noted differing responses, ranging from relying on family to navigate stress, a refined perspective to overcome challenges, and taking time to rethink mental obstacles.

Spirituality's Impact on Social Fitness

Another surprising area of discovery is the impact that spirituality, religion, or faith has on an Airman's social fitness; another domain within the CAF framework. Of the 20 interview participants, 19 participants (95%) noted a strong and positive impact that spirituality, religion, or faith has on their social fitness. Three overarching patterns arose, which are: (a) experiencing a team mentality, and (b) relying on others for support and to hold them accountable to their ideals.

A vast majority of interview participants (60%) noted that experiencing a team mentality increased their abilities to strengthen their social fitness. Airman 7 stated:

Christians build off Christians. It's just kind of like a sports team. They build off each other's energy. So, the ones around me, the ones that have the same faith as me, that believe in me; we build off each other.

Another dominant theme was the fact that a vast majority of religious Airmen (55%) noted that they relied on others for support and to hold them accountable to their ideals. Airman 11 stated:

I would say when it comes to religion or faith, you tend to notice or recognize other people that have a similar view or way of thinking. I've been around different types of people and I've noticed that the majority of people that I interacted with that had some sort of spiritual grounding or faith grounding.

[Those with a spiritual] grounding tend to be more positive than those [My faith] definitely reinforces the idea of turning to the Word. I think it's a positive thing.

Airman 6 also outlined a positive impact that spirituality, religion, or faith provides a means for personal accountability and stated, "I surround myself with others that are of the same faith that will hold me accountable, lift me up, and help me to be a better version of myself."

Diverging from the majority, Airman 10 was the sole outlier (5%) to which they stated: despite outlining practicing religion, that "Religion really hasn't helped me with that [social fitness] either."

Spirituality's Impact on Readiness

Sixteen participants (80%) noted that spirituality, religion, or faith has had a positive impact on their abilities to obtain a positive state of readiness to conduct the Air Forces mission of flying, fighting, and winning. Interestingly, of the four non-religious Airmen, three Airmen stated that spirituality, religion, or faith has a positive impact on their readiness and one Airmen was unsure or neutral about spirituality, religion, or faith's impact on their individual readiness.

In understanding how spiritual fitness affects an Airman's readiness, three dominant patterns emerged: (a) Excellence through Christ, (b) inner purpose to motivate, and (c) living by the Word.

The vast majority of participants (70%) noted that their desire to pursue excellence in the mission, through Christ, bolsters their individual readiness abilities. Airman 7 stated:

Again, it's just going back to leaning on Jesus. Like he says, he'll never put more

on us than we can handle. And sometimes you think, in the military with deployments and being gone from your family, that you can't get it done, but through Him you can. At least for me, I know that through Him, I'm going to get the mission done and my family is going to be all right. I'm going to come back home to them. That's how I'm able to get through stuff like that is through my faith.

65% of Airmen also reported spirituality provides the inner purpose to motivate successful mission accomplishment. Airman 20 stated, "My faith gives me purpose and motivation. It enables me to persevere through all things. Without my faith, I wouldn't be able to do my job, complete the mission, and complete the mission well."

Lastly, participants (35%) noted that living by the Word of God propelled them in achieving personal readiness through scripture and bible lessons. Airman 14 stated, "I know he's [God] not going to leave me somewhere where I'm not supposed to be. I just live by faith and by the Word."

Two participants (10%) assumed a neutral or unsure stance and two participants (10%) outlined a "no impact" stance on spirituality, religion, or faith affecting their abilities to obtain a positive state of readiness to conduct the Air Forces mission.

Airman 9 outlined a no impact stance on spirituality, religion, or faith affecting their abilities to obtain a positive state of readiness to conduct the Air Forces mission by stating, "I don't consider religion when it comes to missions at work or having anything to do with the military."

Spirituality's Impact on Resilience

Regarding resilience, 18 interview participants (90%) outlined that their spirituality, religion, or faith has either helped or drastically improved their abilities to become resilient. Two dominant areas arose in uncovering why Airmen have higher resiliency abilities through spiritual fitness, which are: (a) perspective and (b) finding strength in God's word.

Many Airmen (40%) indicated that faith provided the perspective needed to be resilient. Airman 3 stated, "I would say I have become more resilient than my prior self [due to religion]."

Alike Airman 3, Airman 12 noted, "My spirituality helps me bounce back. Just knowing that things are temporary, not every bad thing that's happening is going to stick forever."

In addition to perspective, many Airmen (30%) outlined that finding strengthen in God's word helped strengthen their resilience. Airman 14 stated, "Sometimes I felt like I didn't have anyone there to help me, but just talking to God and once again, just reading the Bible and looking back on a lot of things that I've already overcame and things that he's already brought me through, that helps me to get through other things and just bounce back and get up whenever I fall."

One outlier is Airman 10, who stated that they practice religion but mentioned: "Religion has not really helped me with stress [resilience]."

Suggestions for Strengthening Spiritual Fitness

Strengthening Core Values

Of the 20 participants, 19 participants (95%) gave recommendations that fall within three areas of discovery: (a) Truly embracing and inhabiting the Air Force core

values, (b) holding a stronger faith in God, and (c) reinforcing the need to live up to personal core values.

As an overwhelming response from participants (55%), the first area of discovery for strengthening spiritual fitness through core values was truly embracing the Air Force core values. Airman 1 stated:

> I think that the core values are a really important part of spiritual fitness and everyday life. Before I joined the Air Force, I was introduced to the core values of integrity, service, excellence [Air Force core values]. It didn't mean as much to me as they did after I joined and I really started to internalize what they mean. And they can be strengthened because integrity and service are critically important to me. And they are things that I lean on when I'm in a challenging situation. And then service [Service Before Self core value], I think it is important, even for someone who is not religious like me, to have something bigger than yourself. Service to our country, to the Air Force, and to humanity really drive me. It's a really strong driving force and important for resiliency, because if it's just all about you or it's all about the individual, then I don't think things have as much meaning.

Similarly, Airman 15 stated, "If you take like the Air Force core value of Service before Self, and you actually apply that day-to-day, I think that gives you a sense of purpose again. You are doing something for a greater cause and it's very selfless knowing that you're not doing stuff for yourself – you are doing for others."

Several Airmen (50%) endorsed inhabiting a stronger faith in God as a means to strengthen spiritual fitness through core values. Airman 19 outlined, "I think it comes

back to faith. Having faith in God allows me to take risks. I do not think that I would have the strength to do it and the mental strength to take risks [without God]."

As the third area of discovery for strengthening spiritual fitness through reinforcing the importance of keeping personal core values was outlined by 30% of Airmen. Airman 15 stated, "I try to tie everything in my life back to just being overall a good person, a good human being. I know that if I live by mine [core values] that it will make me a better person and I will be more spiritually fit."

One interview participant (5%) was an outlier response. Airman 10 stated: "I do not think my spiritual fitness could be strengthened through my core values."

Strengthening Perspective

Of the 20 interview participants, 19 participants (95%) noted that spirituality, religion, or faith has propelled them to obtain a stronger and healthier perspective on life. In analyzing the range of responses, two patterns emerged, which are: (a) Cognitive reframing and prioritization (40%) and (b) doing good for others (30%).

Outlining cognitive reframing and prioritization, Airman 17 stated, "If you're spiritually fit, you have a lot more tools in your toolbox to deal with certain obstacles and to have that positive perspective. So, if you're spiritually fit, then you know how to take a step back and deal with those things."

Airman 12 outlined the criticality of strengthening perspective by doing good for others by stating, "It goes back to doing good for others will bring good for you eventually. The more good I do for others, that eventually helps me out. Doing good for others helps me spiritually."

As an outlier, one interview participant (5%) did not have any suggestions to

improve spiritual fitness through perspective. Airman 10 stated: "I don't think spirituality can [be strengthened] at all because spirituality can get in the way of certain situations."

Strengthening Perseverance

All 20 participants were asked about what can be done to bolster spiritual fitness to aid in persevering an Airman to accomplish their personal or mission-oriented goals. Of the 20 participants, 19 interview participants (95%) gave recommendations that fall in four areas of discovery: (a) intentional self-reflective moments, (b) greater religious accommodation/more Chaplain interaction, (c) greater devotion to developing spiritual fitness, and (d) inspiring a stronger reliance on others/accountability.

Many Airmen (40%) identified intentionally setting aside time for self-reflection would bolster perseverance. Airman 4 stated, "More time for self-reflection. If you had every Airman that, you see some positive change."

Touching on the second area of discovery on perseverance, many Airman (35%) outlined the need for more abundant religious accommodations or religious servant communications. Airman 12 stated, "I deal with my own personal struggles myself. But in order to persevere and achieve personal or mission-oriented goals [Airmen need to] have the Chaplains at their disposal whenever you need them to help you work through some things."

Many Airmen (25%) specified the need to utilize more of their off-duty time to strengthen their spirituality, religion, or faith. Airman 15 stated, "I think I could help mine [perseverance] by just going to church more, talking to talking to other people about their spiritual fitness, and trying to find motivation. So going to church and then also learning from other people who have similar beliefs [would be beneficial to

perseverance].”

Sixty-five percent of Airmen reported the importance of encouraging stronger reliance on others for accountability to persevere in their personal and mission-oriented goals. Airman 18 stated:

It [perseverance] all has to do with your teamwork and how your leadership enables you to persevere in situations, instead of holding you down. You have the backing of friends, family, and leadership. I think that helps you push and persevere through goals, hardships, or anything.

One interview participant (5%) did not have a recommendation for perseverance bolstering spiritual fitness. Airman 10 stated: “I do not think spiritual fitness will help in my perseverance.”

Strengthening Purpose

All 20 participants were asked about what can be done to enhance spiritual fitness to help an Airman see purpose in their lives. Of the 20 participants, 18 interview participants (90%) provided specific recommendations. The three areas of discovery were: (a) Loving other people and creating shared values and goals, (b) bringing a unique perspective to everyday situations, and (c) continually working on one’s spirituality.

As the predominant area of discovery, loving other people and creating shared values and goals was outlined as a focus on how an Airman strengthens spiritual fitness. Airman 5 stated, “Spirituality gives you something larger yourself, something that you can believe in, that so many believe in. So, it changes your focus from yourself to really serving others.”

A second area of discovery on spiritual fitness and purpose was bringing a unique

perspective to everyday situations. Airman 2 stated:

> I believe that the Bible is specific in our purpose, which is to be the arms and the feet of God, and to go where people usually wouldn't want to go. The Bible is very specific on what my purpose is and I take that purpose very seriously. It allows me to take what my core values are and take what I believe about resiliency and my faith, and put that into my everyday life. And it gives me purpose to just do better every day.

A third area of discovery on spiritual fitness and purpose was continually working on one's spirituality. Airman 7 stated, "I'm here for a reason. I have a purpose in my service. But as long as I continue to work on my spirituality, I know my purpose will be met."

Conversely, one interview participant (5%) noted that spiritual fitness did not need to have an impact on their purpose. Airman 10 outlined: "I have other means of helping people see purpose in their lives."

Strengthen Spiritual Fitness to Boost Readiness

When asked about what can be done to strengthen spiritual fitness with the idea of increasing readiness for all Airmen, the 20 interview participants (100%) gave numerous recommendations. Four emerging patterns arose, which are: (a) Listening to and understanding other Airmen and their plights (55%), (b) educating the force more on spiritual fitness and the spiritual domain of CAF (25%), (c) spending more time in working on self-development in spiritual fitness (20%), and (d) authenticity (20%).

Focusing on the first area of discovery, Airman 16 promulgates the importance of listening to and understanding other Airmen and their plights, by stating, "I would say be

more open. If we get everybody together that knows that there's an actual 100% open-door policy, to lean on each other, then there's really nothing we cannot do."

Focusing on the second area of discovery, Airman 14 outlined the criticality of educating the force on spiritual fitness to bolster readiness, by stating:

I would say that we do need more education on spiritual fitness at the [leadership level]. It's not so much for us [leaders], but it's needed in order to recognize the struggles and challenges of our peers and subordinates. It helps you understand yourself, but it's more of a tool for you to understand others because you can't just cookie cut for everyone needing your support. You can't treat everyone in the same way. They [Airmen] all have different needs. They all have different levels of spiritual fitness. So, I do think we need more education when it comes to that.

Focusing on the third area of discovery, Airman 17 outlined the need of spending more time working on self-development in spiritual fitness, by stating:

It's putting in the time. So, for someone religious, I may be praying and going to church and being consistent with it. And for someone that maybe isn't as religious, but spiritual, maybe putting in the time and taking those ten minutes a day to meditate or do some yoga. I guess maybe a way to connect to whatever it is that allows them to be spiritually fit is going to help strengthen their spiritual fitness for them to be able to meet the needs in their lives.

The fourth area of discovery, Airman 14 outlined the criticality of being authentic with Airmen to bolster their readiness by stating. "The truth. Just giving people the truth and showing them, these are the things God did for me."

Participant Interview Field Notes. Throughout the formal interview process,

field notes were captured by the researcher. The purpose of field notes was to document critical areas, such as: (a) vocal intonation, (b) engagement level, and (c) patterns between interviews. Field notes have also been placed within the NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software for data analysis and thematic finding purposes.

Interestingly, the vocal intonations and enthusiasm in responses were on par with that of most interview participants who did state that they inhabited a distinct belief in God. One outlier is Airman 10 who stated that they believe in God, but practices religion minimally. Airman 10's responses were short with uninterested vocal intonations.

Despite the potential religious underpinnings of the interview questions (see Appendix F), 19 interview participants (95%) were enthusiastic. Of the 16 interview participants who expressed that God has an impact on their daily lives, 15 of those interview participants (75%) were positively engaged and gave animated responses to the interview questions. Another noteworthy area is the fact that all 20 interview participants (100%) outlined the fact that they help others, take pride in the developmental efforts of other Airmen, and/or value shared initiatives for the betterment of self and others.

Although four interview participants (20%) indicated that God does not impact their spirituality, religion, faith, or spiritual fitness, all 20 participants (100%) indicated that spirituality, religion, faith, or spiritual fitness plays a role in their personal, professional, and academic lives. Interview question 19 procured the most noticeable effect with all 20 participants (100%) giving more animated and deep responses when speaking about strengthening spiritual fitness for Airmen and their ability to meet the demands of their assigned missions.

Summary

Airmen reported that spiritual fitness had a moderate impact on physical fitness and readiness, and a substantial impact on resiliency, as well as mental and social fitness. Spirituality encourages Airmen's physical fitness through the idea that a healthy body is part of a spiritual discipline, the idea that it is part of Air Force requirements, and the idea of treating the body as a temple. Spirituality contributes to mental fitness through trusting in God's promises, providing perspective to reassess situations, and providing a focal point to maintain positivity. Spirituality contributes to social fitness by serving as a source of people who provide a team mentality, support and accountability. Spirituality contributes to readiness by providing strength/excellence in Christ, inner purpose to motivate to action, and living by the Word. Spirituality contributes to resilience by individual perspective and finding strength in God's word. Airmen suggested four areas to strengthen core values, which were truly embracing and inhabiting the Air Force core values, holding a stronger faith in God, and reinforcing the need to live up to personal core values. Airmen noted that cognitive reframing and prioritization, and doing good for others as methods to aid in strengthen a healthy perspective. In strengthening perseverance, Airmen outline four key areas, which were intentional self-reflective moments, greater religious accommodation/more chaplain interaction, greater devotion to developing spiritual fitness, and inspiring a stronger reliance on others/accountability. Recommendations to strengthen purpose were loving other people and creating shared values and goals, bringing a unique perspective to everyday situations, and continually working on one's spirituality. Lastly, three key areas were uncovered in strengthening spiritual fitness, which will also impact an Airman's ability to meet the demand of their

assigned missions. Those areas were: Listening to and understanding other Airmen and their plights, educating the force more on spiritual fitness and the spiritual domain of CAF, spending more time in working on self-development in spiritual fitness, and authenticity.

Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the key findings, implications of the findings for theory and practice and conclude with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The ability of Airmen to be healthy, in a sound state of readiness and resilience, and positively contribute to the Air Force mission is the cornerstone of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness (CAF) framework. The CAF framework is inextricably linked to individual Airman readiness and resilience, and contains four critical domains, which are: (a) physical, (b) mental, (c) social, and (d) spiritual. As a capabilities-based, holistic approach to Airman readiness and resilience, the CAF framework is the foundation for ensuring that Airmen encompass individual and warfighting capabilities.

Chapter 4 detailed the data analysis and reports the findings that spiritual fitness has on how Airmen view spiritual fitness, how spiritual fitness contributes to overall fitness, readiness and resilience, and what steps could be taken to improve Air Force spiritual fitness programming. Uncovering strengths and weaknesses in the spiritual fitness CAF domain can give Air Force leaders a more developed insight into strengthening Airman readiness and resilience. This was accomplished by soliciting a population of twenty active-duty Airmen at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard base in Birmingham, Alabama, through interview questioning, to better explore Airman fitness and overall Airman readiness and resilience. Data analysis involved both manual and frequency coding to uncover patterns, themes, and subthemes to effectively group data for addressing the research questions that guided this study.

Chapter 5 includes an overview of how the findings relate to the literature and make a contribution to the field. Chapter 5 will also address study limitations and will end with recommendations for future research and a chapter summary.

Summary of the Findings

Across 20 participant interviews, it was uncovered that 16 (80%) participants inhabit a distinct belief and practice of God in their daily spiritual lives. Conveniently, 80% of AD*lt* and Ad*ht* participants fall within this category. Despite the belief in God, or lack thereof, for 12 (71%) of the 17 non-numerical interview questions, the majority of Airman (90%) indicated that spiritual fitness positively impacted their lives. Specifically, 90% of Airmen across both tenure-based categories stated that their spiritual fitness impacted their resiliency, as well as mental and social fitness. Spirituality was found to contribute to resiliency through perspective and living by God's word. Spirituality was found to contribute to mental fitness through trusting in God's promises, providing perspective to reassess situations, and providing a focal point to maintain positivity. Airmen stated spirituality contributes to social fitness by serving as a source of people who provide a team mentality, support and accountability. Eighty percent of Airmen indicated spiritual fitness positively influenced their readiness via mechanisms such as providing strength, inner purpose to motivate them to action, and living by the Word. Fewer Airmen (70%) stated that spirituality, religion, or faith aided them in maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. But, spirituality was found to encourage Airmen's physical fitness through the idea that a healthy body is part of a spiritual discipline, the idea that it is part of Air Force requirements, and the idea of treating the body as a temple.

Additionally, Airmen had several suggestions for techniques to boost the components of spiritual fitness. The emerging patterns for strengthening core values were: (a) Truly embracing and inhabiting the Air Force core values, (b) holding a

stronger faith in God, and (c) reinforcing the need to live up to personal core values. The participant patterns for strengthening perspective were: (a) Cognitive reframing and prioritization (and (b) doing good for others. Strengthening perseverance had four emerging patterns, which are: (a) Intentional self-reflective moments, (b) greater religious accommodation/more Chaplain interaction, (c) greater devotion to developing spiritual fitness, and (d) inspiring a stronger reliance on others/accountability. Lastly, strengthening an Airman's purpose had three emerging patterns from participant interviews, which were: (a) Loving other people and creating shared values and goals, (b) bringing a unique perspective to everyday situations, and (c) continually working on one's spirituality.

Aligning with Resilience Theory

The components of resilience are active coping efforts, reliable support networks, meaning-making from life's difficulties, and healthy emotional regulation. Each component will be addressed in light of the findings that coincide with them.

Active Coping Efforts

Active coping involves engaging in cognitive and behavioral efforts to combat stress. The successful employment of active coping involves maintaining a positive perspective that a person has the required coping repertoire, enacting perseverance, and revising the plan as needed (Crane et al., 2019, O'Leary, 1998).

Airmen highlighted several areas in which they use spiritual fitness to promulgate active coping: trusting in God, taking a moment to analyze situations, refining one's perspective, and rethinking mental obstacles. Comprehensively, religious and non-

religious Airmen across both tenure-based categories utilize spirituality to bolster their active coping abilities.

As a stressful occupation, the United States serviceman or servicewoman experiences a vast plethora of stressors. Contributing to literature on active coping, understanding how Airmen employ the ability to adapt and Airmen reframe situations to avert stress can expound upon the studied phenomenon. This study provides valuable participant insight on adaptability and cognitive reframing on active coping from military servicemembers.

Reliable Support Networks

Reliable support networks are those interpersonal relationships that one forms with others to receive sound guidance and assistance to aid in challenges in daily life. These relationships propel individuals to overcome mentally distressing circumstances or situations while bolstering social connectedness (Li et al., 2021; Martino et al., 2017).

As a prevailing pattern across the 20 participant interviews, Airmen participants overwhelmingly rely on others and seek social connectedness. A whopping 19 interview participants (95%) outlined that their spirituality, religion, or faith helped them to identify and lean on others who positively impacted their well-being and provide accountability to achieve optimal performance. Despite the significant finding, one participant (5%) outlined that they find do not use spiritual fitness to aid in relying on others and seeking social connectedness.

This study highlights the criticality of connectedness and developing strong social bonds with others. Moreover, connecting with others spiritually was a significant finding due to spiritual accountability and leaning on others for assistance in times of need. The

findings within this study align with current literature and may provide insight on high-stress, high tempo occupations.

Meaning Making from Life's Difficulties

Meaning-making is linked with individual resilience as it enables the creation of concepts to rebuild one's life by formulating a way that a hardship has allowed personal growth or resulted in an unanticipated benefit.

Meaning-making from life's difficulties can be seen in all 20 of the participant responses to interview questions. As a dominant subtheme, the utilization of God for 16 interview participants (80%) was stated on multiple occasions to see purpose in life, achieve personal and spiritual goals, overcome troubling life and spiritual challenges, defeat stress, and strive to become a better person and Church member.

Healthy Emotional Regulation

Healthy emotional regulation is a prominent pattern also seen across all 20 participant interviews. As a mechanism for rethinking a challenging situation or circumstance, healthy emotional regulation is the systematic processing of thoughts and feelings prior to making an action or vocalizing (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018).

Across all 20 participant interviews (100%), Airmen utilized spirituality, religion, or faith to recognize, tolerate, and modify strong negative emotions. Spanning all religious and non-religious Airman participants, the reliance on religious leaders (Chaplains or Chaplain Assistants), rethinking situations, and cognitive reframing were instrumental in their healthy emotional regulation. Further, all 20 interview participants (100%) also noted their regulation of emotions in the questions of stress, problem solving, and/or ability to become resilient through spiritual fitness.

Aligning with literature on healthy emotional regulation, participants within this study stated that the way in which potential stressors or challenges are framed were indicators of thought processes. Additionally, participants outlined that spirituality played a role in their abilities to think clearly through various situations. This study may inform healthy emotional regulation literature through real-world experiences of United States Air Force Airmen.

Airmen Implications on Reviewed Literature

Numerous suggestions were outlined by Airman participants on how to strengthen spiritual fitness. In strengthening core values, Airman noted three areas, which were: (a) Truly embracing and inhabiting the Air Force core values, (b) holding a stronger faith in God, and (c) reinforcing the need to live up to personal core values. Strengthening perspective had two dominant areas, which were: (a) Cognitive reframing and prioritization and (b) doing good for others. Strengthening perseverance contained four emerging areas, which were: (a) Intentional self-reflective moments, (b) greater religious accommodation/more Chaplain interaction, (c) greater devotion to developing spiritual fitness, and (d) inspiring a stronger reliance on others/accountability. Lastly, strengthening purpose contained three areas, which were: (a) Loving other people and creating shared values and goals, (b) bringing a unique perspective to everyday situations, and (c) continually working on one's spirituality.

Differences arise in the United States Army's employment of their Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF). The Army recognized the need to expand spiritual fitness efforts to bolster spiritual fitness, to which CSF was overhauled to incorporate spirituality, faith, and purpose into training processes and command

structures. Within the CSF framework, Master Resilience Training (MRT) was incorporated within the program, levying spiritual fitness responsibilities onto noncommissioned officers as part of their responsibilities. Encompassing religious and non-religious approaches, MRT encompasses methods to ensure Soldiers promulgate resilience through individualistic methods. Unlike the CSF framework, the United States Air Force has a loosely applied CAF framework with no additional training or responsibilities levied upon enlisted leadership to ensure Airman are satisfying their CAF domains. Throughout the CSF and CAF frameworks, there appears to be room for a heightened focus on religious and faith-based approaches to resilience.

Based on the Airman suggestions and comparison against the CSF framework, areas of incorporation must be explored to promulgate the effects of a successful framework. Active coping efforts, reliable support networks, meaning making in life's difficulties, and healthy emotional regulation are four instrumental areas the encompass many of the participant patterns outlined, and also encompass instrumental areas of training and knowledge needed to promote the successful employment of the CAF framework. Lastly, the incorporation of a stronger focus on faith-based approaches to Airman readiness and resilience would match or exceed the effectiveness of the CSF framework.

Contributions to the Field

The findings suggest that spiritual fitness plays a major role in Airmen resilience, and mental and social fitness, and does contribute to physical fitness and overall readiness. The suggestions that Airmen had to boost spiritual fitness indicate that the intentional use of faith-based content is welcome, and there are ways to include general

non-faith-based content. The ideas shared encompassed areas such as holding a stronger faith in God, greater devotion to developing spiritual fitness, living by God's word, and using spirituality as a focal point to maintain a positive perspective.

This study informs upon the field of Industrial and Organizational (I/O) Psychology through the understanding of how individual utilize spirituality to bolster readiness and resilience. Further, this study achieved an understanding of how spiritual fitness is utilized in an Airman's physical, mental, and social states. The factor of spiritual fitness informs upon I/O Psychology through visualizing how individuals use spirituality to think clearly, become resilient, mitigate stress, and cope with unique stressors. Information gleaned within this study have vast implications for the field of I/O Psychology.

Relationship to Biblical Foundations

This qualitative case study sought to explore the impact that the spiritual domain has on the CAF framework as a whole, readiness, and resilience. As a tertiary discovery, the religious nature of the majority of Airmen participants encompasses at least one of the seven religious core values seen on Table 2 in Chapter 2.

Humility was outlined as a subtheme of this study as an overwhelming majority of participants outlined their reliance on others, being authentic, need to listen to others regardless of their individual beliefs, and placing trust in one another. Luke 14:11 states: For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. Further reinforcing forgiveness and humility, Philippians 2:3 states, Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Lifting others up and helping others in need was another tremendous area of discovery. All 20 interview participants (100%) outlined that their spiritual fitness aids them to help others. The responses align with the biblical core values of helping others and doing right in the eyes of God. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 states, therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. Additionally, Ephesians 4:29 outlines, do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Finding one's identity in Christ alone versus external circumstances was another key area of discovery from the participant data. Both AD*lt* and AD*ht* grade-based categories had seven out of ten participants (70%) outlining that they're continually finding their identity in Christ. In 14 participant interviews overall (70%), Airmen speak about biblical teachings and explicitly state that God and the Word directs their actions, behaviors, motivations, goals, and life trajectory. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, is states therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new. Aligning with finding one's identity in Christ, John 15:5 says, I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

Living out one's specific purpose both in the given moment and one's calling is another biblical core value that has proved to be profoundly impactful to the Airmen participants. Explicitly stated in the line of questioning about purpose and throughout other interview questions, a wide majority of Airmen stated that God drives their purpose in life. Being a better parent, being a better person, contributing to the Air Force, serving

the Church, practicing religion, and family were among the top contributors for this biblical core value. The Ephesians 2:10 Bible verse states, For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Outlining our creation and thrust for religious purpose, Colossians 1:16 states, For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or power: all things were created by Him, and for Him.

Limitations

Throughout the study, several limitations occurred which potentially limited more comprehensive findings. Limitations within this research study are evident in the narrow pool of participants available for the research study. With only an approximate population of 130 Airmen within the 99th Air Refueling Squadron, this posed a limitation on career-field, ethnic, and experienced-based areas. According to the Congressional Research Service (2022), 73% of the United States military follow a distinct belief in God. This study outlined that 80% of the participants follow God. Although close, a limitation arose in understanding the level of religiosity of Airmen in the United States Air Force to compare against the sample utilized for this study.

Another limitation was the fact that military Chaplains were not utilized as participants, thereby potentially missing valuable insight. This limitation may have provided this study with valuable information on spiritual fitness, the CAF framework, and strengthening efforts on individual Airman readiness and resilience. Chaplains and Chaplain Assistants are the focal points for elevating spiritual fitness throughout the entire installation.

Additionally, this qualitative study focused upon a small subset of the population, thus the generalizability of the findings is limited. Utilizing only a sample of 20 Airman participants, generalizing the Air Force population would be difficult without a larger unit of analysis. Moreover, the behavior of one unit of analysis within this case study may not reflect the behaviors of similar entities, thereby limiting the ability to generalize in subsequent studies (Simon & Goes, 2013). Differences in units of analysis can change throughout time due to personnel shifts or changes in the operational environment (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Finally, the faith inhabited by the researcher is a limitation and carried the potential for bias in research. Despite efforts to remain objective throughout non-pointed interview questions and abiding by a strict interview script, the potential for perceived bias exists. To alleviate any concerns with this limitation, the researcher remained objective throughout the research study and represented the participants' data as stated and without manipulative changes to sway the findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative case study showcased numerous areas of discovery, significant patterns, themes, and subthemes. Of the main areas of discovery, it is recommended that future research focus on the theoretical underpinnings of how spiritual fitness impacts the theories of stress and coping in greater detail, such as the specific elements of stress and coping. The elements of stress which could be further understood are: (a) Individual differences, (b) allostatic load, and (c) allostatic balance. In exploring the spiritual fitness on all facets of stress and coping, literature would encompass a better understanding of how one's spiritual basis reforms their psyche into a more positive one.

Moreover, it is recommended to conduct a compare and contrast-based study on resilience, where half of the participants are religious and half are not religious. Being that this qualitative study was overwhelmingly religious, understanding the differences on how individuals become more resilient may lend insight to future theoretical developments.

Another recommendation for future research would be to conduct a similar study to this qualitative case study but using quantitative metrics. Now that a foundational understanding has been gleaned, it would be beneficial to create a quantitative study using an online questionnaire to reach a far greater number of participants. In doing so, a wider population could be reached across the entire Air Force enterprise rather than a single location. This will ensure that that enterprise, regardless of race, religion, or creed, has an opportunity to address the questionnaire and better inform the Department of Defense on spiritual fitness.

As more information is gathered, future work will be needed in the development, implementation, and assessment of programming to boost Airmen spiritual fitness. There may be ways to integrate faith-based content as well as non-faith-based content to address the same issues. Further, an evaluation of faith-based content on religious and non-religious Airmen may lend insight on the similarities and differences on its overall effect for Airmen readiness, resilience, physical fitness, mental fitness, social fitness, and spiritual fitness.

Lastly, being that spiritual fitness has shown to positively impact the physical, mental, and social domains of the CAF framework, it is recommended to conduct three separate studies that hyperfocus on the extent to which the spiritual domain impacts those

domains. Using the spiritual domain, exploring the physical, mental, and social domains, and their associated tenets, may lend insight into exactly how spiritual fitness affects those domains. Military readiness and resilience may be greatly impacted by understanding how specific tenets interact, build, or degrade one another.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In this qualitative case study, 20 active-duty Airmen were solicited to address how spiritual fitness impacts their CAF domains, readiness, and resilience. Significant areas of discovery were uncovered as all 20 Airmen utilize spirituality in various facets of their readiness, resilience, and to strengthen their CAF domains. Most importantly, significant discoveries were made on how Airmen utilize God and biblical teachings in those facets. From the findings, it is clear that spirituality does influence an Airman's CAF domains. Spiritual fitness also plays a critical role in an Airman's readiness and resilience abilities.

This study outlined critical aspects that showcase how spiritual fitness impacts on Airman's personal and professional lives. Despite the efforts made within this study, there are still outstanding deficiencies in knowledge on the extent to which spiritual fitness impacts this study's theoretical framework in greater detail. As outlined, utilizing the recommendations for future research may lend instrumental insight into the specifics of spiritual fitness and the relationship that spiritual fitness has on CAF domain tenets, resilience, and readiness. Understanding these items in greater detail may aid Department of Defense and Air Force leadership broad insight on how to maintain a ready and resilient force for tomorrow.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

IQ1: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say that you have a guiding set of principles or beliefs, and why? (if 0, skip questions 2 and 3) (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ2: What are the top contributors to or sources for your guiding set of principles or beliefs and how much does each of these contribute to your guiding set of principles or beliefs (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ3: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say you draw strength from a set of guiding principles or beliefs, and why (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ4: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you maintain a healthy perspective in your life, and why?

IQ5: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

IQ6: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you to see purpose in your life, and why?

IQ7: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped to maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and why?

IQ8: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to recognize, tolerate, and modify strong negative emotions, and why?

IQ9: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to have the ability to think clearly and problem solve, and why?

IQ10: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to be able to manage stress in your life, and why?

IQ11: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you to identify and lean on others who will positively influence your well-being and ability to achieve optimal performance, and why?

IQ12: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you meet the demands of your assigned mission(s), and why?

IQ13: How has your spirituality/religion/faith helped you become resilient, and why?

IQ14: Does God play a role in your spirituality?

    If Yes: How much does God impact your spiritual fitness?

IQ15: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened through your core values, and why?

IQ16: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened to help you maintain a healthy perspective in life, and why?

IQ17: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened to help you to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

IQ18: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened to help you to see purpose in your life, and why?

IQ19: What can be done to strengthen spiritual fitness, which will also impact an Airman's ability to meet the demands of their assigned mission(s)?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

[Ensure that Informed Consent Form is signed and received prior to beginning this interview script]

Good morning/afternoon. First, thank you for volunteering to participate in this interview. As a reminder, your identity will be kept confidential and zero personally identifiable information will be shared with anyone or published in the final study. Only the content of your responses may be captured in the final report. Also, this interview will audio recorded. Your responses will be transcribed, and you will have the opportunity, if desired, to review the audio transcript.

Prior to beginning the interview, please allow me to ask you four quick questions.

- **What is your age?**
- **What is your gender?**
- **What is your religious affiliation?**
- **What is your race?**

Thank you for that information. Now, we will begin the interview starting with Interview Question #1. Please answer honestly, which may include saying that the question does not really apply to you, or you have no specific answer. That is still a valid answer that is helpful to know and provides valuable information.

IQ1: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say that you have a guiding set of principles or beliefs, and why? (<u>if 0, skip questions 2 and 3</u>) (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ2: What are the top contributors to or sources for your guiding set of principles or beliefs and how much does each of these contribute to your guiding set of principles or beliefs (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ3: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say you draw strength from a set of guiding principles or beliefs, and why (Bowen et al., 2016)?

The next set of interview question revolve around spiritual fitness. When referring to aspects of spiritual fitness, do you prefer to use the term spirituality, religion, or faith? [Circle and only use the term they prefer; if no preference is given, *spirituality* is the default]
IQ4: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you maintain a healthy perspective in your life, and why?

IQ5: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

IQ6: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you to see purpose in your life, and why?

IQ7: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped to maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and why?

IQ8: How has your [spirituality/faith/religion] helped you to recognize, tolerate, and modify strong negative emotions, and why?

IQ9: How does your [spirituality/faith/religion] help you to have the ability to think clearly and problem solve, and why?

IQ10: How does your [spirituality/faith/religion] help you to be able to manage stress in your life, and why?

IQ11: How does your [spirituality/faith/religion] help you to identify and lean on others who will positively influence your well-being and ability to achieve optimal performance, and why?

IQ12: How does your [spirituality/faith/religion] help you meet the demands of your assigned mission(s), and why?

IQ13: How does your [spirituality/faith/religion] help you become resilient, and why?

IQ14: Does God play a role in your [spirituality/faith/religion]? (If No, skip second-part question. If Yes, ask second part question).
How much does God impact your spiritual fitness?

The Department of the Air Force defines core values as specific principles that guide an individual's internal conduct (AFH 1, 2017). The next set of questions are referring to spiritual fitness, a domain within the Comprehensive Airman Fitness framework, which is defined as stated to be the ability of Airmen to adhere to beliefs, principles, or values that are needed in times of distress or personal adversity (AFH 1, 2017).
IQ15: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened through your core values, and why?

The Department of the Air Force defines perspective as how Airmen view situations or facts and how they judge this information's relative importance (AFH 1, 2017).
IQ16: How can spiritual fitness help you maintain a healthy perspective in life, and why?

The Department of the Air Force defines perseverance as the steady persistence toward an action, purpose, or state (AFH 1, 2017).

IQ17: What can be done to bolster spiritual fitness to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

The Department of the Air Force defines purpose as the reason(s) for which an Airman exists (AFH 1, 2017).
IQ18: How can spiritual fitness help you see purpose in your life, and why?

- **IQ19: What can be done to strengthen spiritual fitness, which will also impact an Airman's ability to meet the demands of their assigned mission(s)?**

This concludes the interview. Thank you very much for taking time to participate. For your confidentiality, I kindly ask that you do not share your participation in this study. Thank you again and I hope you have a great day.

APPENDIX C: IQS LINKED TO RQS

RQ1: How does Airman spiritual fitness bolster readiness and resilience?

IQ12: How does your spirituality help you meet the demands of your assigned mission(s), and why?
IQ13: How does your spirituality help you become resilient, and why?
IQ14: Does God play a role in your spirituality? (If No, skip second-part question. If Yes, ask second part question). If so, how much does God impact your spiritual fitness?
IQ17: What can be done to bolster spiritual fitness to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

SQ1: What role does spirituality play on an Airman's overall fitness to serve?

IQ5: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?
IQ17: What can be done to bolster spiritual fitness to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

SQ2:   What role does spirituality play in an Airman's physical fitness?

IQ7: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped to maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and why?

SQ3: What role does spirituality play in an Airman's mental fitness?

IQ8: How does your spirituality play in helping you to recognize, tolerate, and modify strong negative emotions, and why?

SQ4: What role does spirituality play in an Airman's social fitness?

IQ9: How does your spirituality play in helping you to have the ability to think clearly and problem solve, and why?
IQ11: How does your spirituality play in helping you to identify and lean on others who will positively influence your well-being and ability to achieve optimal performance, and why?

SQ5: What role does spirituality play in overall Airman readiness?

IQ5: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

IQ17: What can be done to bolster spiritual fitness to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

SQ6:   What role does spirituality play in an Airman's resiliency skills?

   IQ12: How does your spirituality help you meet the demands of your assigned mission(s), and why?
   IQ13: How does your spirituality help you become resilient, and why?
   IQ10: How does your spirituality play in helping you to be able to manage stress in your life, and why?
   IQ14: Does God play a role in your spirituality? (If No, skip second-part question. If Yes, ask second part question). If so, how much does God impact your spiritual fitness?

RQ2:   What could be added to the Air Force's efforts to bolster Airman spiritual fitness?

   IQ19: What can be done to strengthen spiritual fitness, and why?

SQ1:   What could be done to ensure that strengthened spiritual fitness has multi-domain effects?

   IQ7: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped to maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and maintain a healthy lifestyle, and why?
   IQ8: How does your spirituality play in helping you to recognize, tolerate, and modify strong negative emotions, and why?
   IQ9: How does your spirituality play in helping you to have the ability to think clearly and problem solve, and why?
   IQ10: How does your spirituality play in helping you to be able to manage stress in your life, and why?
   IQ11 How does your spirituality play in helping you to identify and lean on others who will positively influence your well-being and ability to achieve optimal performance, and why?

SQ2:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's core values?

   IQ1: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say that you have a guiding set of principles or beliefs, and why? (if 0, skip questions 2 and 3) (Bowen et al., 2016)?
   IQ2: What are the top contributors to or sources for your guiding set of principles or beliefs and how much does each of these contribute to your guiding set of principles or beliefs (Bowen et al., 2016)?
   IQ3: Using a scale of 0 (Not at all) to 10 (Completely), to what extent would you say you draw strength from a set of guiding principles or beliefs, and why (Bowen et al., 2016)?

IQ15: How can spiritual fitness be strengthened through your core values, and why?

SQ3:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's perspective?

IQ4: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you maintain a healthy perspective in your life, and why?
IQ16: How can spiritual fitness help you maintain a healthy perspective in life, and why?

SQ4:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's perseverance?

IQ17: What can be done to bolster spiritual fitness to persevere in achieving your personal or mission-oriented goals, and why?

SQ5:   What can be done to boost spiritual fitness as it relates to an Airman's purpose?

IQ6: What are some ways that your [spirituality/faith/religion] has helped you to see purpose in your life, and why?
IQ18: How can spiritual fitness help you see purpose in your life, and why?

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION FORM

Dr. Jared Ulises Nieves
Liberty University Doctoral Candidate
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Dear Dr. Jared Nieves

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *Rethinking Readiness and Resilience: An Exploration of the Spiritual Domain on the Other Comprehensive Airman Fitness Framework Domains for Active-Duty Airmen Serving on Air National Guard Installations – A Qualitative Case Study*, I have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study using 99 Air Refueling Squadron Airmen at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard Base in Birmingham, Alabama.

☐ I grant permission for Dr. Jared Nieves to recruit 99 Air Refueling Squadron Airmen for them to participate in his research study.

☐ I grant permission to Dr. Jared Nieves to collect identifying information with the understanding that personally identifiable information WILL NOT BE published in the final report – aligning with the Department of Defense Human Resource Protection Program (DoDHRPP).

☐ I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

_____
[REDACTED], USAF
Commander, 99 ARS

APPENDIX E: DOD HUMAN RESOURCE PROTECTION PROGRAM FORM

Department of Defense Human Research Protection Program

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DOD) INDIVIDUAL INVESTIGATOR AGREEMENT

General Instructions to Institutions and Unaffiliated Investigators

•   This form is a tool that can be used when a collaborating investigator is not part of an institution with a federal assurance. Contact your DoD Component Headquarters office (or DoD sponsor) for guidance if you want to submit an equivalent agreement or want to alter this form.

•   Contact your DoD Component Headquarters office (or DoD sponsor) for guidance if you have questions.

•   Follow your DoD Component Headquarters office (or DoD sponsor) instructions for paper or electronic submission.

•   This agreement is applicable only to the research listed in the Scope (Part 1C) and does not apply to other research in which the institution or unaffiliated investigator may be involved.

•   Part 4, B. Acknowledgement by Investigator's Employer: The unaffiliated investigator should follow his/her institution's policies for identifying the appropriate official to acknowledge this agreement. The official is acknowledging that their employee is entering into this agreement with another institution.

•   Part 4, C. Institutional Official of the Assured Institution: This is the person who signed the federal assurance as the Institutional Official.

•   The unaffiliated investigator should not be engaged in the research until this agreement is complete.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE (DOD) INDIVIDUAL INVESTIGATOR AGREEMENT

Part 1 AGREEMENT INFORMATION

This DoD Individual Investigator Agreement describes the responsibilities of the individual researcher who is engaged in human subject research, not an employee of the assured institution, and is associated with the assured institution for the purpose of conducting research. This Agreement also describes the responsibilities of the assured institution. This Agreement, when signed, becomes part of the engaged institution's Federal Assurance for the Protection of Human Research Subjects approved by DoD (and may become part of the Federal wide Assurance (FWA) approved by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)).

A. Name of Investigator:

B. Institution with the Assurance

>   Name:
>   DoD Assurance Number:
>   DHHS FWA Number [if applicable]:

C. Scope

This Agreement applies to all research performed by this investigator in collaboration with the institution with the assurance, unless specified below.

Limitation of Scope (if applicable): N/A

This Agreement is applicable only to the research listed above and does not apply to other research in which the investigator may be involved.

D. Effective Date

This Agreement is effective as of the date of the last authorized signature and will remain in effect indefinitely or until rescinded. It may be amended by consent of all parties at any time.

Part 2 INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

As the Investigator named in Part 1A above I:

A. Have reviewed: a) *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*; b) the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) regulations for the protection of human subjects at 32 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 219 (32 CFR 219) and DoD Directive 3216.02; c) the assurance of the institution referenced above; d) the DoD Component policies identified in Part 3 of the DoD Assurance (if applicable); and e) the relevant institutional policies and procedures for the protection of human subjects.

B. Understand and accept the responsibility to comply with the standards and requirements stipulated in the above documents and to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research conducted under this Agreement.

C. Will comply with all other applicable federal, DoD, international, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies that provide protections for human subjects participating in research conducted under this Agreement.

D. Will complete any education and training required by the institution and the Institutional Review Board(s) (IRB) prior to initiating research covered under this Agreement (attach documentation).

E. Will abide by all determinations of the IRB designated under the institution's assurance and will accept the final authority and decisions of the IRB, including but not limited to directives to terminate my participation in designated research activities.

F. Will not enroll subjects or engage in research activities under this Agreement prior to the protocol review and approval by the IRB and the institution.

G. Will comply with requirements from the IRB when responsible for enrolling subjects, to include obtaining, documenting, and maintaining records of informed consent for each such subject or each subject's legally authorized representative as required under DoD regulations at 32 CFR 219.

H. Acknowledge and agree to cooperate with the IRB for initial and continuing review, report for the research referenced above, and provide all information requested by the IRB or institution in a timely fashion.

I. Will seek prior IRB review and approval for all proposed changes in the research except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects or others.

J. Will report immediately to the IRB: a) unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others and b) serious or continuing non-compliance.

K. Will comply with recordkeeping requirements for research protocols referenced above.

L. Will make all other notifications as specified by the IRB and the institution.

M. Acknowledge my primary responsibility for safeguarding the rights and welfare of each research subject, and that the subject's rights and welfare will take precedence over the goals and requirements of the research.

Part 3 ASSURED INSTITUTION'S RESPONSIBILITIES

This institution will apply the terms of it's assurance to the Investigator and the research as specified in the Scope of this Agreement, Part 1.

Part 4 AGREEMENT BETWEEN AN INVESTIGATOR AND AN ASSURED INSTITUTION

The investigator or an official of the assured institution may unilaterally terminate this agreement upon written notification to other signatories.

A. Investigator

I understand my responsibilities as described in this Agreement and the policies referenced in Part 2A above. I acknowledge and accept my responsibility for protecting the rights and welfare of human research subjects and for complying with all applicable provisions of the institution's assurance**.**

Signature: Date:
Name: Rank/Grade:
Telephone number:
Title:
FAX number:
Mailing Address:
Email address:

B. Acknowledgement by Investigator's Employer (or DoD Supervisor if DoD Employee)

I am aware that my employee is entering into this agreement.

Signature: Date:
Name: Rank/Grade:
Telephone number:
Title:
FAX number:
Mailing Address:
Email address:

C. Institutional Official of the Assured Institution

Acting in an authorized capacity on behalf of this institution and with an understanding of the institution's responsibilities under the institution's assurance, I will provide oversight of the Investigator and the research conducted under this Agreement.

Signature: Date:
Name: Rank/Grade:
Telephone number:
Title:
FAX number:
Mailing Address:
Email address:
4

APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: Rethinking readiness and resilience: An exploration of the spiritual domain on the other Comprehensive Airmen Fitness framework domains for active-duty airmen serving on Air National Guard installation – A qualitative case study.
Principal Investigator: Dr. Jared Nieves, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be at least 18 years of age and a uniformed active-duty Airman in any rank from E-1 to O-10 serving at Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to examine Airmen's views of spiritual fitness, how spiritual fitness contributes to overall fitness, readiness and resilience, and what steps could be taken to improve Air Force spiritual fitness programming. Uncovering strengths and weaknesses in the spiritual fitness CAF domain can give Air Force leaders a more developed insight on strengthening Airman readiness and resilience.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
>   Participate in an interview. The interview will consist of 19 questions and will be audio-recorded for transcription purposes. The interview is expected to last about an hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society may include a deeper insight on and strengthening of the spiritual domain, which may have a profound impact on the physical, mental, and social domains of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness framework. Additionally, benefits to strengthening the spiritual domain of the Comprehensive Airman Fitness framework may also increase Airman readiness and resilience.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. The researcher is bound by the Department of Defense Human Resource Protection Program, thus ensuring that participant responses will be kept confidential. All hard-copy information and transcribed recordings will be kept in the researchers safe at his personal residence. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym (Airman 1 to Airman 20). Interviews will be virtual, using Zoom or FaceTime. Participants will have the option of utilizing the private conference room in Building 141 or their residence for the interview.

- Digital data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. All data will not be removed from the researcher's residence. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher **does not** have any conflicts of interest as he does not lead or supervise any Airmen from the 99th Air Refueling Squadron.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study **is** voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Sumpter Smith Joint National Guard. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Dr. Jared Nieves. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at: Cell: ▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Natalie Hamrick, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____

Printed Subject Name

_____

Signature & Date