EMOTIONAL SHARED EXPERIENCES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL QUALITATIVE

TRANSCENDENTAL STUDY ON THE SHARED EXPEREINCES OF TEN PASTORS IN

RURAL CENTRAL VIRGINIA DUE TO THE COVID 19 MANDATE THAT CLOSED

THEIR HOUSES OF WORSHIP

by

Earnest L. Shannon, Jr.

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors of Christian churches located in rural central Virginia due to the national COVID 19 mandate that forced them to close their houses of worship. Moreover, in the United States of America, a COVID 19 mandate was implemented that closed places of worship, which altered the American pastor's routine schedule. Therefore, the central research question explicated in this research study was, "What are the personal emotions experienced by 10 senior pastors in rural Virginia during a phenomenon, the national COVID 19 mandate, that closed houses of worship?" To note, this research study journeyed to discover if these pastors experienced spiritual injury due to this COVID 19 mandate. Furthermore, to discover the influence of the COVID 19 phenomenon that affected these American pastors, this research study implemented a qualitative research method, which utilized the transcendental phenomenological qualitative research design to research their exposure to spiritual injury and to mental health anxiety disorder due to the COVID 19 mandate that closed their churches.

Keywords: COVID 19 pandemic, mandate, pastors, spiritual injury, moral injury, mental anxiety, phenomenological, qualitative research, emotional distress disorder, cognitive appraisal theory, cognitive appraisal theory of emotions, emotional regulation, work stress, emotional disruption, worship

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, Our Heavenly Father, so that it may be used for His glory, for with Him all things are possible!

I dedicate this to my wife, who inspired me to pursue what God, Our Heavenly Father, has placed in my heart.

To Dr. Story, who has been a strong academic inspiration.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge that Jesus Christ is The Son of God, and He is my personal Savior.

I acknowledge my committee chair, the committee members, my editors, and my professors.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Officially declared a pandemic in the United States on March 11, 2020, the COVID 19 pandemic took, not only the United States by surprise, but also the world. Therefore, in an attempt to stop the spread of the COVID 19 within the country, the United States instituted a national mandate that forced the citizens of the United States, American business, and places of worship (Taylor et al., 2022; Village & Francis, 2021) to be closed. This national mandate negatively impacted American citizens, American businesses, and American Christian churches. Moreover, this national mandate drastically altered and halted in-person worship services, pastoral duties, and normal church operation activities for American Christian churches in the United States. Furthermore, due to this COVID 19 pandemic mandate, many working-class citizens experienced psychological distress leading to spiritual, moral, and emotional anxiety (Norkiene et al., 2021), and this working-class phenomena effected the working class of the American Christian pastor, especially in rural America.

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia due to the national COVID 19 mandate that forced them to close their houses of worship. In addition, these 10 pastors were forced to develop and to adapt new methods to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, perform daily operations of the church, and provide spiritual care for their parishioners. These pastors that were accustomed to in-person worship services and being surrounded by a community of believers were now surrounded by the sound of emptiness, as sanctuaries were desolate (Village & Francis, 2021). Thus, chapter one provides a thorough background of the topical problem, the historic context of the problem, the social contexts that impact the problem

currently, and briefly reports on the theoretical contexts that will guide the framework of this study. Then, the following section will provide information on the problem statement, the purpose statement, significance of the study, the central research question, the four sub-research questions, and definitions, followed by a chapter summary.

Background

This study reports on the experience of 10 pastors in rural central Virginia to the same phenomenon. This phenomenon was a national mandate that closed houses of worship for in-person service. The phenomenon forced these pastors to create new methods to minister to their parishioners. Pastors who were accustomed to having intimate liturgical services and one-on-one pastoral care had to discover new ways to fulfill their ministry calling and obligations (Crea et al., 2021; Hatchel et al. 2022; Howarth et al. 2020; Li et al., 2021; Ligo et al., 2021; Village & Francis, 2021). In addition, the pastors had to adjust personally to empty sanctuaries and the absence of in-person worship. Researchers reported that pastors had to develop new communicative outlets to care for their church members during this world health crisis (Hayes et al., 2021; Village & Francis, 2021), while spiritually and mentally ministering the needs of their parishioners. However, to adapt this national mandate, this research study provided a description of the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia due to this national COVID 19 mandate. To report on the relevant literature correlating to this phenomenon, this research study will explicate the historical context, the social context, and the theoretical context on this phenomenon. This narrative will begin with the historical context.

Historical Context

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the United States implemented restrictions on public gatherings to reduce the transmission of the disease. Iin March of 2020, the United States

declared mass gatherings in houses of worship as *hot spots* for the transmission of this disease; therefore, the government banned inperson gatherings, and, as a result, restrictions on their calling and church practices manifested, for many of their services required in-person contact (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021; Village & Francis, 2021). This mandate instituted a requirement of a physical barrier to be placed between church members and their spiritual leader that caused the absence of mass gatherings in houses of worship, which increased a sense of loneliness and depression due to the absence of their spiritual leader (Ge et al., 2021). This separation not only effected the parishioners but also their spiritual leader, the pastors. A research study reported that pastors experienced emotional disruption due to the national COVID 19 mandate that forced them to close their houses of worship, leading to psychological trauma due to isolation from their church members (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). For example, the research in the field of psychology informs that unanticipated disruptions in a worker's service routine causes great emotional risk opportunities for those workers. Pastors are the workers in the vineyard of LORD Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, studies reported that the mental health of pastors during the COVID 19 pandemic rose to elevated levels of emotional stress, vocational burnout, and emotional exhaustion (Osei-Tutu et al., 2021). These are emotional health issues. Most unfortunate, religious leaders also experienced role depletion. These restrictions on their work prevented them from fulfilling their pastoral obligations and pastoral duties, which led to social issues.

Social Context

This phenomenon the pastors' experienced affected their desire to serve continuously in the vocation of a pastor. A research study uncovered in a recent survey of pastors in the United States conducted by the research firm Barna Group revealed that 29 percent of American Christian pastors were quoted as declaring that they had considered leaving full-time ministry

due to the spiritual, emotional, and mental stresses associated with the COVID 19 pandemic mandate (Smietana, 2021). Furthermore, research conducted during the summer of 2021, the Barna Research Group reported that approximately 25% of American pastors considered retiring or leaving the pastorate due to the stresses of conducting ministry obligations during the COVID 19 pandemic. In a follow-up survey, a third of the respondents considered career options to ministry or just leaving the ministry totally because of the mental distress and spiritual decline. Like many other workers in the United States, pastors considered changing vocations.

Not prepared for the consequences of this national mandate (Snowden, 2021), pastors were forced to create new communicative methods to reach their congregations. Research supported that this challenge affected pastors spiritually, morally, and mentally, for during periods of a crisis or a disaster, pastors serve as instruments of reassurance and comfort (Levin, 2020). In addition, the constraints of these mandates made it clear that pastors would not be able to have intimate fellowship with their parishioners that they previously enjoyed but were compelled to turn to other methods to engage their parishioners (Haythorn, 2021), which caused pastors to experience spiritual injury, moral injury, and mental anxiety disorder. The separation also affected the church members, because they were not able to experience the intimate presence of their pastor. Traditionally, churches are the backbone for their community by providing support to families and to individuals in need (Ge et al., 2021). However, pastors had to make a decision to suspend public service to help slow the spread of COVID 19, so pastors felt that they deprived the people of God the access to communion and preaching the Word of God, which is extremely vital to the spiritual life of a Christian member and the Christian pastor (The Shepherds Have Not Abandoned Their Flocks, 2020).

COVID 19 had an unprecedented effect upon the United States with regards to the health of its citizens, including the socioeconomic environment. The COVID 19 pandemic interrupted the social order in the United States to stop the spread of the virus and promote safety (Sulamoyo, 2022). However, the closures of these churches during the COVID 19 pandemic forced their church members to select an in-home strategy to continue to practice their faith and Christian traditions (Ge et al., 2021). However, limited studies have emphasized how the closure of churches due to the COVID19 pandemic negatively impacted their emotional expressions of love, peace, and joy to individual church members and other pastors. Therefore, this research will report on the shared emotional experiences this national mandate affected 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia.

Theoretical Context

Insightfully, a report on the theoretical context of this research provides a brief review of literature on seminal research and scholarly conducted studies on this research topic. Most unfortunate, there has been limited research on the effects of this public mandate on pastors. However, there has been numerous research studies on the effects of this COVID 19 mandate on individuals but limited research on the effect of this mandate on spiritual workers. Therefore, this proposed research study will add important knowledge in this area of study concerning the effects of this national COVID 19 mandate on 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia.

The national mandates that closed houses of worship had a critical effect on churches in rural areas. Research reported that 29% of pastors who served in rural communities stated the impact of Covid 19 closures led key support to leave, with replacing them being difficult (Francis et al., 2021). Francis et al., a leading researcher in this area, categorized this phenomenon into nine stressors, labeling these churches that experienced this phenomenon as

fragile churches. Francis et al.concluded that pastors in rural areas were anxious about the impact closing their churches would have on their communities. Pastors felt the closure on their small church would place an undue strain on their finances. The impact of church closures was enormous and comparable to nothing that the modern world had experienced. The mandated closure of churches, which led to a prohibition of in-person worship service created a sharp divide between the parishioner and their Christian family (Parrish, 2020).The rural local church embodies a Christian history of day-to-day events, personal revelations, and biblical knowledge. The local church is a place of support and sustains worship of The King, congregational worship, personal worship, and community memories (Clark, 2007).

Problem Statement

The problem highlighted in this phenomenological study is that due to the national instituted COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship, pastors, chaplains, and spiritual care givers experienced emotional disruption. To provide an example of the impact of emotional occupational distress on pastors and other spiritual care workers in rural areas due to this national mandate, a report from a research study taken from current literature reported that the majority of African American churches in the rural central Kentucky region, including the majority White churches in the rural Appalachian region of Kentucky, were forced not to meet in person. This mandate caused the pastors to suffer emotional disruption (Williams et al., 2021). Moreover, this national mandate closed these churches and forced Black and White churches in central Virginia to close and refrain from conducting in-person service.

In addition, this national mandate revealed a deep misconception of the importance of spiritual care when times are unprecedented (Snowden, 2021). Research supported that spiritual care is often conducted in a personal one-on-one setting, the need for support, encouragement,

and collegiality were noticeably clear in recent responses from a conducted research survey among clergy (Haythorn, 2021). In various environments, counseling was desired and requested, but it was not available due to social distancing and/or closures that can be attributed to national mandates.

Furthermore, for an example on the location of this research study, due to the COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship in the United States, research identified four effects this mandate had on pastors of African American churches in a rural American location. One of these effects was entitled *ritual disruption*. Ritual disruption surfaces when the normal liturgical service of a church has been altered due to the closure of the church. Research reported that these rituals could be, but were not limited to, in-person funerals and Sunday services (Thompkins, 2020). Ritual disruption was birthed due the national mandate that closed American churches. This national mandate not only effected African American pastors, but research reported that it effected Catholic priests and other religious authorities. From the perspective of religious authorities, the COVID 19 outbreak was a period of high emotional stress, because of the restriction on the personal life, including self-isolation and social distancing (Crea et al., 2021). Therefore, this researcher will describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 American pastors in rural central Virginia. To note, emotional disruptive experiences can create spiritual injury, moral injury, and emotional anxiety disorder within the individual. Therefore, the descriptive uncovering of emotional disruptive experiences can be analyzed to determine if this event of emotional disruption may have progressed to these internal illnesses so that they can seek treatment. It is important to know what has been injured, so that an individual may discover how it can be healed.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia due to the national COVID 19 mandate that forced them to close their houses of worship. The COVID 19 pandemic and the challenges of the national mandate that demanded social distancing policies presented an enormous problem for small rural public servants (Stogner, 2020). The pastors, rural public servants, were forced to obey this government mandate and neglect their obligation to be a servant to their calling.

Significance of the Study

A research study report contended that it is critical for the researcher to begin with a personal testimony when determining a research problem to be addressed (Almahameed & Alajalein, 2021). Therefore, as a pastor of a church in central rural Virginia, the research problem I desire to research in this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia due to the national COVID 19 mandate that forced them to close their houses of worship. The stated research problem comes from a personal experience, because I was internally damaged by this national COVID 19 mandate. Even though this research project is personal, moral ethics must be maintained, along with viewing the research study with a critical lens and understanding a personal position in relationship to the research (Norquay & Sandhu, 2018).

To note, this research study is imperative to the field of higher education because many American pastors instruct future disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who will become leaders in the field of education. If pastors are not able to instruct the disciples successfully in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then Christian fundamental biblical principles taught in their places of worship

could reduce the number of His disciples attending institutions of higher learning to instruct the future generational leaders to preach and teach the Gospel of LORD Jesus Christ. The Word of God speaks, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?

And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (New King James Version, 1345/2018, Romans 10:14).

Most importantly, this research study is significant to pastors because pastors need to be aware if a specific phenomenological event caused them emotional disruption, so that they can seek help to treat and cure their emotional disruption. For, pastors are the preachers and teachers of The Word of God, and the spiritual earthly support for their church members and their community. They are needed, and their emotional health is critical to ensure they can perform their calling. Therefore, this qualitative study will investigate how the COVID 19 mandate that closed places of worship to describe the shared emotional experiences of ten pastors in rural central Virginia.

Research Questions

Due to the national mandate that closed houses of worship, pastors in central Virginia faced an unfamiliar phenomenon. These pastors had to develop new methods to provide pastoral services and pastoral care for their church members. This caused occupational emotional disruption. This research study aimed to describe how this national mandate emotionally affected these pastors.

Central Research Question

As a senior pastor of a Christian church located in rural central Virginia during the national COVID 19 mandate that closed places of worship, the central research question states, "What are the emotions experienced by 10 senior pastors due to the phenomenon, the national

COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship?" This question was developed to describe
how this lived experience produced emotional disruption in these 10 pastors. This question lays
the foundation for the purpose and the research problem that supporeds the foundational essence
of the research study. The participants of the research study to be a senior pastor in rural central
Virginia. Their response to this central research questions established attributes that supported
the research and sub-research questions. Furthermore, this question posed how this qualitative
research study established the sub-questions and qualified the research participant for the
research study.

Research Questions

As a senior pastor for a church in rural central Virginia, during the national COVID 19
national mandate that closed American churches to inperson services, what are the personal
emotions experienced during this phenomenon?

The rationale of this question is grounded in the phenomenological qualitative
interpretive framework of this research study that relates to the social constructivism used to
establish that the research participant experienced the same phenomenon.

Sub – Question One

What was your immediate response to the COVID 19 mandate that demanded you close
your church to in-person worship to ensure that you could continue to perform the pastoral
services that you were accustomed to performing?

The functionality of this research question was to establish how the national mandate
interrupted their normal church routine, which caused the pastors to experience emotional
disruption. The COVID 19 mandate which closed their house of worship was beyond the
pastor's control, so they had to comply with the mandate, or they could have been fined. Another

consequence of not complying with the national mandate, the church would have to be forced to close by local law enforcement authorities.

Sub – Question Two

What personal pastoral and ministerial services did you provide for your congregational membership prior to the COVID 19 mandated closures?

Pastoral and ministerial services are the duties that the pastors perform. They were accustomed to providing these services in person. The function of this question was to establish their pastoral and ministerial duties prior to the national mandate. Then, the pastors would have tangible information to compare if their duties changed due to this COVID 19 mandate.

Sub – Question Three

What personal in–person pastoral and/or ministerial services conducted in your house of worship was changed as a result of the COVID 19 mandates?

The function of pastoral and ministerial services during the COVID 19 national mandate was to address the pastoral and ministerial services that these pastors were forced to change due to this COVID19 mandate.

Sub – Question Four

What pastoral and ministerial services could not be performed as a result of the COVID 19 mandate?

The function of this question was to establish the services that they could not perform, so that they could describe how this emotionally affected them. The pastors understood that the services were required and must perform these duties to serve their parishioners with effective spiritual and moral counseling. However, they were unable to perform these services due to

circumstances beyond their control. The 10 pastors in central Virginia were forced to decide to obey their ministerial calling or obey the governmental national mandate.

Definitions

1. *Christian Church* – "Defined as a local assembly of believers or a congregation that meets together physically for worship, fellowship, teaching, prayer and encouragement in the faith" (Learn Religions, n. d., n. p.).

2. *COVID 19* – "COVID 19 refers to the infectious disease that results from a novel coronavirus that was not identified until an outbreak in Wuhan, China in December of 2019. Pathogens in the coronavirus family may cause acute respiratory infections and difficulty breathing. The illness resulting from the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, is marked by respiratory symptoms (congestion, cough, difficulty breathing) as well as hyperthermia and exhaustion" (Stogner et al., 2020, p. 719).

3. *Emotional Control* – "Emotional control is the ability to make decisions and convictions of choice while expressing emotions. It is an individual's personal resources that are important, their sense of control, self-effectiveness, resourcefulness, optimism, valuation, and the ability to cope with stressful events" (Malinowska-Lipień et al., 2021, pp. 1 – 2).

4. *Emotion Distress* – "Emotional distress embodies negative emotions and feelings, ranging from anxiety to depression and irritation, which is disturbing for individuals and can influence their life satisfaction" (Ionescu et al., 2020, p. 2078).

5. *Mental Anxiety Disorder* – "Anxiety disorders are associated with poor quality of life and functional impairment, disability and impairment comparable to major depressive

disorder, and poorer functioning when comorbid with other psychiatric conditions"
(Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2018, p. 889).

6. *National Mandate* – "The vested authority that a person or institution possesses to
formulate or implement a particular policy or task. The term is borrowed from the Latin
word "mandatum," which means something that is ordered or commanded" (study.com,
n. p.).

7. *Rural Community* – "Any population, housing, or territory not in an urban area" (United
States Census Bureau, 2002, n. p.).

8. *Senior Pastor* – "A Christian minister or priest having spiritual charge over a
congregation or other group" (Free Dictionary, n. d., n. p.).

Summary

The problem researched was that due to the 2020 COVID 19 national governmental
mandate that closed houses of worship, American churches were closed for in-person worship
and pastoral services. Due to this phenomenon, 10 American pastors in rural central Virginia
described their shared emotional experiences. The problem that led to their shared emotional
experiences must be addressed and resolved, so that these 10 pastors can return to serve their
parishioners with emotional purity and confidence to continue the call the LORD Jesus Christ
placed on their lives. However, to resolve an emotional problem, the emotional problem must be
identified, isolated, and gracefully resolved. The Word of God speaks, "Confess your trespasses
to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of
a righteous man avails much" (New King James Version, 1442/2018, James 5:16).

Furthermore, senior pastors are important to their parishioners, and their emotional
health is critical to serve successfully. The Word of God speaks, "How then shall they call on

Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (New King James Version, 1345/2018, Romans 10: 14). Senior pastors perform spiritual care, Biblical teaching, and pastoral counseling for the parishioners, so their emotional health is critical to ensure they can perform their calling effectively. A stressful work environment caused by an unpredictable phenomena can cause emotional disruption that can affect pastor's ability to perform their calling. This unpredictable phenomena was the COVID 19 mandate that required pastors to close their houses of worship. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe the lived experiences of 10 pastors in rural central Virginia to the nationally instituted COVID – 19 mandate that closed houses of worship. To achieve this goal, this research study will record and analyze the pastors' shared experience to this phenomenon to describe their emotional disruption This is the foundational essence of this research paper, and the purpose that drives the motivational reason for this paper.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Chapter two presents a systematic review of current empirical literature that examines and highlights cognitive emotional expressions that served as the theoretical framework for this qualitative research study. Additionally, chapter two presents literature on emotional concepts that aim to provide the reader with a report that describes the lived shared experiences of 10 pastors in rural central Virginia that experienced emotional disruption due to the national COVID 19 pandemic mandate that closed their houses of worship. Additionally, chapter two presents current related literature pertinent to the success of this qualitative research study.

Moreover, the current literature was presented to inform the reader on stress that can arise in a workplace environment due to an unexpected stimuli, as well as emotional concepts to illustrate the effects emotional disruptions can cause an individual in the workplace, especially an individual in a leadership role in an organization or company. Thus, senior pastors are employees in a leadership role that work for LORD Jesus Christ and the parishioners they serve at their houses of worship. The national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship was an unforeseen phenomena that affected employees in leadership roles, including senior pastors.

Chapter two begins with a definition of work stress followed by descriptive literature to define emotional distress, emotional interruption, emotional regulation, emotional belief, and emotional distress disorder. In addition, chapter two will report on definitions of *spiritual injury* or *moral injury* to provide information to understand if the senior pastors experienced these because of emotional disruption caused by this national COVID 19 mandate. An explanation for the reason the United States of America initiated this COVID 19 nation mandate will be presented in chapter two.

Chapter two is organized as a literature review to gain a conceptual understanding of an individual's emotional state in the workplace that arises due to an unpredictable phenomenon that creates an emotional disruption within the individual. The current literature review provides literature to define, to understand, and to recognize the individual emotional state during an emotional disruption in the workplace. There are many components that cause emotional disruption in the workplace, but this paper focuses on the national mandate that closed houses of worship in the United States. Also, this current literature review will report on the rationale for the theoretical framework that lays the foundation for this dissertation. Chapter two is composed of three sections.

The first section of the chapter presents the theoretical framework for this research study. Additionally, the theoretical framework lays the foundation for this research topic. There are two theoretical frameworks that guided this research study. These two theoretical frameworks are the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, and the Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Emotions.

The second section of chapter two records a review of current literature relative for this research topic. A review of current literature provided a better understanding of the principal topics that will guide this research topic. A review of current literature will highlight the gaps in current literature. This research study aims to fill that gap in the current literature. Furthermore, to support the theoretical framework, a literature review of current literature was explicated and synthesized to illustrate the importance of work stress, emotional interruptions, emotional regulations, emotional beliefs, emotional disorders, and emotional distress disorder to establish foundationally the emotional disruption experiences of the senior pastors.

The third section of chapter two summarized the contents of this chapter. This was accomplished by reflecting on the theoretical framework utilized in this research study along

with the current review of literature to support the need for this research study. Additionally, this section reported on a gap in the current literature. This study aimed to fill this gap in current literature. This journey begins with the theoretical framework for this research study.

Theoretical Framework

The nature of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to examine and to describe the emotional disruption 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia experienced due to the national COVID 19 mandate that closed their houses of worship. The theoretical constructive framework utilized in this research study provided a foundation to examine the emotional disruption these pastors encountered due to this COVID 19 national mandate that closed their houses of worship. Additionally, the theoretical framework utilized in this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study provided a structure to examine the emotional disruption experienced by these 10 Christian pastors and provided a platform to compare if other religious leaders in America experienced emotional disruption caused by the national COVID 19 that closed their houses of worship.

To further research how the national COVID 19 mandate that forced houses of worship to close created emotional disruption in the lives of the senior pastors, and the personal lives of their parishioners because everyone was forced into self-isolation and required to social distance (Crea et al., 2021; Terry & Cunningham, 2020), the researcher determined an applicable theoretical framework. Due to the national COVID 19 mandate that closed their houses of worship, religious leaders of all faiths reported high expressions of stress, personal burnout, and other health-related issues (Terry & Cunningham, 2020). However, the researcher contended that despite the increase in online church services that were utilized to substitute for in-person worship service, the personal intimacy that can be experienced during an in-person worship

service is not comparable to an online worship service. Thus, senior pastors and other religious leaders experienced expressions of work stress leading to emotional disruption. It is the experience of emotional disturbance by the senior pastors that highlights the importance of this research study to produce a structure for workplace stress due to an unexpected phenomena that forces a disruption in the workplace and a suitable theoretical framework to research.

The COVID 19 national mandate that closed houses of worship prohibited pastors from providing their parishioners with an in-person worship experience, in-person biblical scriptural teaching, and in-person pastoral counseling. These pedagogical components are critical to the success of an individual. However, online instructions became a substitute in many houses of worship. Biblical instructional teaching is a critical part of a pastor's vocation. As a servant of God, Our Heavenly Father, the pastor cares for the flock that God, Our Heavenly Father has entrusted to them in The Name of LORD Jesus Christ by providing them with true Biblical instructions.

Most unfortunate, a review of current research literature reports a gap in current empirical literature related to this research study topic. A gap revealed in current literature was the absence of a recorded analysis on the emotional disruption the national mandate caused religious leaders in the United States, and the impact it had on pastors' spiritual, moral, and emotional wellbeing. However, a review of current literature did report on religious leaders' desire to change vocations or leave the ministry due to the COVID 19 mandate, but remained silent on the experiences of emotional disruption. However, this gap in literature will be filled by this transcendental qualitative research study.

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study will add value to this research field of study by providing data about the emotional disruption the research participants

experienced as a result of this national mandate that closed their houses of worship. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study utilized two empirical frameworks for this research study. The two theoretical frameworks that guided this qualitative transcendental research study are the cognitive appraisal theory and the cognitive appraisal theory of emotions. These theories proved to provide the framework to examine the emotional disturbance the research participants experienced as a result of the national mandate that closed their houses of worship.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory

As a theoretical concept, the cognitive appraisal theory aims to provide an explanation on the impact an emotional stressful situation has on an individual (Ionescu et al., 2021; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). The researchers of the cognitive appraisal theory aimed to examine the individual's emotional experience, how the individual perceived the emotional experience, and the impact of the emotional situation on the individual. This assessment includes the individual's explanation of the stressful event. The individual's explanation about the outcome of the stressful situation creates a dynamic interaction between the individual and their stressful environment. This interaction develops the goal of the cognitive appraisal theory.

Researchers designated the goal of the cognitive appraisal theory was to illustrate why some individuals are able to perform sufficiently in stressful situations while some individuals fail emotionally in a stressful situation (Ionescu et al., 2021; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). The cognitive appraisal theory implies that when a person faces a stressful situation, they cognitively appraise the situation to be a threat or to be a challenge. Yet, the decision to assess the situation as a threat or a challenge depends on if the individual has the resources to deal with the

unpredictable and stressful situation (Ionescu et al., 2021). The individual's decision is important to their appraisal of the situation.

The personal assessment the individual makes is entitled the *primary appraisal* because as soon as the individual evaluates the disruptive situation, it is either being categorized as stressful, as harmful, or an obstacle, then the individual will utilize various mechanisms to manage the stressor. This stressor is called the *secondary appraisal*. As reported by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the secondary appraisal state requires that the individual determines how they will deal with the stressful situation (Ionescu et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is important to understand that every individual does not interpret every stressful event as threatening but as a challenge to increase their performance and other personal accolades.

Developed by Lazarus in 1991, the researcher of the cognitive appraisal theory aimed to examine the various emotions that can be evoked by different cognitive appraisals of the same situation, place, or object (Zheng et al., 2019); an individual's emotional disruption due to a national COVID 19 pandemic mandate is an appropriate example. Therefore, the researcher of the cognitive appraisal theory assumed that the emotional mental state of an individual is generated by appraising the relevant information associated with the phenomena. Moreover, the researcher designed the cognitive appraisal theory to explain an individual's response to various emotions to a similar phenomenon to provide a deeper analysis of how specific emotions are evoked and impact an individual's emotions.

Additionally, the researcher of the cognitive appraisal theory contended that emotions are organized as psychological reaction to a phenomenon. In other words, the person appraises their relationships with the environmental phenomenon to determine their emotional reaction to the phenomenon and the emotions that will surface follow their emotional reaction to the

phenomenon (Zhang & Borden, 2020). Additionally, the individual will establish a reliable

emotion, along with a cognitive appraisal, which suggests a close link between cognitive

appraisals and the specific emotions (Grewal et al., 2020).

Appraisal is defined as how the individual evaluates the circumstances in the

environment in relation to their specific emotional needs. Individuals can label their emotions as

negative or positive, or as highs and lows (Zhang & Borden, 2020). For example, a negative

emotion, like sadness, can be attributed to a belief that a goal or a need cannot be obtained or

there is a loss of personal control. Thus, the basic premise of the emotional appraisal theory is to

understand how emotions are caused and differentiated by an appraisal, the process where values

are determined for a number of appraisal factors, such as a goal (Moor, 2017).

Based on the type of emotional appraisal, an individual engaged in an emotional situation

can create unwanted emotions within that changes the appraisal of the phenomenon (Zhang &

Borden, 2020). Therefore, due to their emotional appraisal, the individual will process a harmful

message then assign an emotion of fear, anxiety, or sadness, to the emotional situation in an

effort to comply emotionally with the situation or gain more information about the situation. The

kinds of emotions that arise from the individual will force that person to manage unwanted

emotions and to attempt to change the appraisal of the situation.

Furthermore, the researcher of the cognitive appraisal theory emphasizes two distinct

phases. The researcher of the cognitive appraisal theory defined the first phase of the appraisal

theory as the *primary appraisal phase*. This phase occurs when an individual first evaluates the

situation to an extent on how this negative phenomenon will affect their personal well-being

(Dufour et al., 2019). The second phase of the cognitive appraisal theory is the evaluation that

the individual determines to be options and resources to help them generate a response to the

negative phenomenon. Additionally, the cognitive appraisal theory'ss assumed that an individual's appraisal is not only driven by their emotions, but it also has an impact on the individual's emotion-intensity towards the negative phenomenon (Claffey & Brady, 2019; Dufour et al., 2019)

In addition, the researcher of primary appraisal implies that when individuals face a stressful phenomenon, then the individual cognitively assesses the phenomenon as a challenge or a threat (Griner & Smith, 2000). Next, when the individual has determined whether the stressful phenomenon is causing them danger or a benefitl, then they go to the secondary appraisal process. At this stage, the individual figures out how they will manage the situation

. The combination of the primary appraisal and the secondary appraisal manifested the individual response to the phenomenon.

Cognitive Appraisal Theory of Emotions

Researchers reported that emotions can be defined as an individual's conscious state of subjective feelings that are often accompanied by physiological, cognitive, and behavioral changes experienced by the individual (Sambrano et al., 2021). A detailed picture of emotion categorically divides them into two distinct components. These two distinct components are valence and arousal. *Valence* is the intrinsic attractiveness of an emotion. *Arousal* is the readiness of the individual to address the stimuli, and an individual's emotional response is processed in two states, primary emotions and secondary emotions. Primary emotions influence the individual's initial emotional response towards the stimuli, while secondary emotions influence their intention to respond against the stimuli (Dufour et al., 2019).

The cognitive appraisal theory of emotions contends that an individuals' emotions differ from each other based on their cognitive assessment of the situation (Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Sambrano et al., 2021; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). In addition, the cognitive appraisal theories of emotions supports that a specific emotional marker relies on how the individual appraises the situation consciously (Cancino-Montecinos et al., 2018). The cognitive appraisal theory of emotions declares that cognitive appraisals of a phenomenon cause specific emotional responses from an individual (Sambrano et al., 2021). According to the cognitive theory of emotions, a stressful phenomenon, and the result of the outcome of the phenomenon, is a dynamic relationship between an individual and their environment. The cognitive theory of emotions explains why some individuals can perform well in a stressful environment while others fail to do well in the same environment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984; Sambrano et al., 2021).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) informed that there are two distinct levels of appraisal. They suggested that one level of appraisal is called the *primary appraisal*. Primary appraisal is defined as the event or situation that caused the emotional disruptive situation. The next level of appraisal is entitled *the secondary*. The secondary responds to an individual's internal mechanisms to handle the emotional disruptive situation (Khan & Sethi, 2020). Furthermore, an individual appraisal of a situation creates a natural human response along with previous emotional experiences. Therefore, as it relates to this theory, an individual recognizes the disruptive event or situation as a stimuli, and responds to the stimuli through human appraisal, human coping followed by a final reappraisal of the situation.

Furthermore, the cognitive appraisal theory of emotions proposes that emotions have components that are caused and distinguished by an appraisal of the phenomenon as meeting or failing to meet their goals and expectation (Moor, 2017). The individual experiences a loss of

control, or a situation that they cannot control, that is caused by others or a circumstance created beyond their control.

Conducted in 1960, the cognitive appraisal theory of emotions began as the work of Arnold and continued by other researchers (Moor, 2017). For example, researchers Ellsworth (2013), Frijda (1986), Lazarus (1991), Ortony et al. (1988), Roseman (2013), and Scherer (2009) continued in further research built upon the foundation of Dr. M. A. Arnold (Moor, 2017). Additionally, the foundation principle of the cognitive appraisal theory is that emotions are caused and separated by the appraisal of the situation. This process occurs when the value of the phenomenon is determined and then assigned a number of appraisal factors, like goal expectation, goal agreement, goal compliance, goal expectation, goal nonexpectation, and goal control, with the agent responsible.

The cognitive appraisal theory of emotions was utilized to guide the research questions, data analysis, and reporting results. The cognitive appraisal theory aims to explore how the dynamics of the phenomenon effected the cognitive emotions of the pastors to determine if some adapted well to the national mandates, and if some did not, which caused them to experience emotional discomfort leading to spiritual injury and/or moral injury. Next, this qualitative research study will report current literature on emotional manifestations and emotional drive to illustrate the foundational context of these theories.

Related Literature

An individual's emotional response to unforeseen situations within common environments are the foundational principles in the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), and the cognitive appraisal of emotions (Arnold 1960; Ellsworth 2013; Frijda 1986; Lazarus 1991; Ortony et al. 1988; Roseman 2013). Additionally, the historic context of

these theories illustrates how emotional theories have progressed from a statement of emotional characteristics to a tool to access emotional appraisal in the context of social interaction due to a disruptive stimulus (Moor, 2017). The disruptive stimulus was the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship. Emotional disruption was the emotional characteristics illustrated by the senior pastors due to the disruptive stimulus.

In summation, due to an unexpected stimulus, for example the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship, an individual employee's cognitive appraisal aims will generate various emotions that come to the surface, command an appraisal, then effect the individual emotional response to the stimulus. The 10 pastors experienced the stimulus of the national COVID 19 mandate that closed their houses of worship. This stimulus was an unexpected phenomenon that produced an emotional appraisal that affected them emotionally. To support the utilization of these theories, this qualitative research paper presents current related literature topics, beginning with work stress.

Work Stress

A review of current literature reported that *work stress* is defined as stress associated with a vocation that causes nervousness and/or anxiety (Wang & Dong, 2022; Di et al., 2022; Caillier, 2021). Work stress can have an adverse effect on an individual's purpose for work (Caillier, 2021). The researchers added that work stress involves the presence of a stimulus that interrupts an individual's emotional state or causes an individual to experience physical and/or mental equilibrium (Beer et al., 2021; Di et al., 2022; Caillier, 2021).

Additionally, a current review of literature defines that *work-related stress* as a strenuous task that can be exacerbated by an individual's vocation. Therefore, work-related stress includes the tension that arises in the physical, mental, and emotional components of their vocation (Arén

et al., 2022; Falatah, & Alhalal, 2022). Work stress is composed of various components of a vocation known to be a factor that causes stress, for example workload, occupational conflict, family factors, and the work environment (Di et al., 2022). Work stress has been associated with causing damaging physiological and emotional responses.

Globally, work stress has become an issue in the majority of workplaces. Most unfortunate, the COVID 19 pandemic added to this common work-related issue (Di et al., 2022; Caillier, 2021). Research added that work-related stress increased 38% in 2019 (Alrashidi, et al., 2022). In addition, there was an increase in anxiety and depression due to the increased challenges that arose from working from home and high job losses due to the COVID 19 pandemic. Furthermore, the daily stress level within the workplace in the United Sates increased 57% and unfavorable emotions, such as uncertainty, stress, anger, and depression, have increased globally in the workplace. The COVID 19 pandemic mandate that closed businesses and houses of worship increased stress in the workplace.

Work stress creates an emotional or physical condition that is often preceded by stressful conditions that can have a long-term effect on an individual's physical and emotional health (Alonso et al., 2020; Di et al., 2022; Wang & Dong, 2022). Furthermore, work stress can lead to the development of emotional mental disorders, as the researcher defined *work stress* as an individual's cognitive assessment of environmental events and their ability to adapt to them (Wang & Dong, 2022). Work stress is a subjective and individual phenomenon that an individual can experience in the workplace (Di et al., 2022; Ladegaard et al., 2019).

The researchers contended that work stress caused emotional mental disorders among employees and/or employers (Sofyan et al., 2022; Di et al., 2022). Work stress has been a global concern for many years. The unfavorable outcome of work stress is that it can affect an

individual employee's emotional and/or physical health. Additionally, work stress is generated after the interaction between an individual and the working environment and a stressful factor and/or stressful factors are introduced within the work environment that causes work related stress (Wang & Dong, 2022).

An interaction that created work stress for the research participants in this study was the COVID 19 pandemic mandate that closed their houses of worship. This COVID 19 pandemic mandate was the stress factor that entered the workplace of the pastors that caused them to experience emotional interruption, which can lead emotional disruption. Therefore, this national mandate created an environment of work stress.

Emotional Interruption or Emotional Disruption

In this qualitative research study, it was necessary to explicate the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic had on the emotional health of the general population because within the general population are pastors. In addition, the effects of the media reporting and the information reported on social networks about the COVID 19 pandemic damaged the psychosocial health of the American population due to much ambiguity within their reports (Akca & Ayaz, 2022). Furthermore, research reported that COVID 19 lockdowns affected the physical and the mental health of the general population. (Hassnain & Omar, 2020).

To narrow the general population to a specific demographic population about the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on the population, a researcher reported that females were more anxious about the health of their loved ones than themselves (Wiseman, 2016). Also, an individual had to maintain working norms and career responsibilities despite the emotional state of an individual during the COVID 19 pandemic. The mandate to social distance, to isolate, and

to close houses of worship had an immediate emotional impact on every member of society ,
including American pastors.

Moreover, it is obvious that isolation is a concept specific to a social situation that is
more than just, for example, living alone, being reclusive, or loneliness, but also being mandated
to depart socially. Isolation can be used to describe a lack of connection to social networks or
having few or no social ties. The social distancing mandates put in place to flatten the curve were
appropriate to protect public health. However, these orders did not consider the impact on
vulnerable demographics, especially older adults, and individuals that rely on spiritual support
(Nari & Naylor, 2022). The dramatic social changes in the lives of individuals due to the COVID
19 pandemic were a source of tremendous stress for individuals. Insightfully, the most
researched and frequently effect of the COVID 19 pandemic was depression (Kassaeva et al.,
2022).

However, researchers added that social support is the most prominent contributor to
emotional well-being caused by emotional disruption. Social support provides the individual
with a source of positive interruption of the unfavorable emotional disruption (Sweeney et al.,
2020). Additionally, social support creates relationships outside of oneself and presents a
platform for an individual to express their concerns and worries within a community.
environment. Furthermore, social relationships can produce an atmosphere of joy. Therefore, the
national mandate that demanded social distancing challenged the availability to obtain social
community support and introduced the creation of an environmental setting that called for social
support. It is community physical proximity that adds to the feeling that someone is relational
with another. The emotional benefits of a personal pat on the back, a hand on your shoulder, or a
loving two arm embracing is hard to quantify but certainly noticed when they are not available.

Emotional Regulation

The researcher of *emotional regulation* defines it as the processes by which an individual's power and the intensity of felt emotions is controlled, helping an individual create and sustain positive relationships during a specific event that causes emotional disruption to normal positive relationships (Krifa et al., 2022; Scandurra et al., 2022). Emotional regulation relates to the emotional influence factors an individual possesses within, when they possess these emotional influence factors, and how the individual experiences emotions and express their emotions (Zhou et al., 2022). Emotional regulation application aims to predict the various emotional regulation strategies that create various consequences for how an individual feels, thinks, and acts in the present and in the future; emotion regulation is a way to manage emotional distress (Slanbekova et al., 2019). An individual effort to choose a cognitive emotion regulation strategy, which is to have certain thoughts about themself, others, or the stressful situation, to regulate the emotional distress will impact the individual emotion in the future. The system of emotional regulation creates a prognosis that generates a forecast that the various emotional strategies have outcomes that are independent based on how a person feels, thinks, and acts immediately or an extended period of time (Zhou et al., 2022).

A cognitive aspect of emotional regulation is reappraisal (Vestad et al., 2021). *Reappraisal* is defined as a controlled process that directs and cleanses the perception of a stimuli to produce a positive outlook on an unfavorable stimulus. Reappraisal aids the individual with the cognitive ability to reappraise an unfavorable stimulus to change it into a favorable stimulus. This process has been known to help an individual regulate an unpleasant emotional environment.

There are two types of emotional regulation strategies. The two types of emotional regulation strategies are reappraisal and suppression. The researcher defines *reappraisal* as a cognitive change, which is developed by reconfiguring the negative emotional stimulus to help the individual that encountered the stimuusi to remain clear minded, uncover positive attributes, and find different options to act toward the stimuli (Zhou et al., 2022). Therefore, the negative emotional impact of a stimulus can be reduced as an individual shifts their perspective and begin to perceive the stimulus as positive. However, the suppression of the stimulus by an individual correlates to an inner negative feelings illustrated by a positive or neutral response that will decrease an individual's behavioral expression, but it will fail to decrease the emotional experience. Thus, an individual's utilization of emotional regulation initiates a vital protection factor so that they can maintain adequate personal emotional mental health (Krifa et al., 2022).

To understand the implementation of emotional regulation, research follows the model proposed by Gratz and Roomer. The model presented by Gratz and Roomer describes the concept of emotion regulation as a multidimensional construct composed of four sub models. The first sub model describes emotional regulation as an emphasis on the perception of an emotion appraisal that will help the individual understand their present emotional state and help them understand their emotional state to a particular situation (Scandurra et al., 2022). The first sub model also assists an individual to accept their emotional appraised status of the particular situation. In addition, this appraisal helps the individual become aware of their emotions and helps them understand their emotional state.

The second sub model of the emotional regulation extends to an individual the ability to manage their spontaneous emotional reactions to a stressful environment (Scandurra et al., 2022). Their emotional response allows the individual to have the ability to control impulsive

emotional behaviors in a stressful situation. This allows the individual to maintain personal emotional control over unfavorable situations.

The third sub model of the full model presented by Gratz and Roomer (Scandurra et al., 2022) of emotional regulation helps an individual to have the ability to implement congruent emotional strategies to an unfavorable situation to create emotional strategies that will adjust the strength and time of the emotions used to achieve the objective of the situation. Therefore, it will allow the individual the ability to reduce emotions or hide emotions to a favorable stimulus.

Based on the model presented by Gratz and Roomer (Scandurra et al., 2022), the fourth sub mode of emotional regulation begins with the individual willingness to accept the effects of their negative emotions . Their acceptance of these emotions to a negative situation will allow the individual to continue with their life goals. However, a deficiency in one or more of these sub models indicate difficulties in emotional regulation.

Furthermore, a study uncovered that emotional regulation assists an individual to recover faster from a critical stress fulfilled environment (Krifa et al., 2022). This research information suggested that during the COVID 19 pandemic, emotional regulations served as a protector important to create within the individual. In addition, research records that emotion regulation consists of cognitive and affective processes involved in monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions to experiences (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Katz et al., 2018). Emotion regulation strategies affect an individual's ability to deal with emotional stressors that they experience in their vocation (García-Batista et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to understand that an individual's emotion regulation strategies are a valuable tool because they serve as an indication on how the individual manages the stressful situation can be examined.

Additionally, emotion regulation is one of the most influential theoretical proposals that outlines the mechanisms by which an individual uses to adjust their emotions (García-Batista et al., 2021) due to an emotionally disruptive situation. Research reports there are two types of regulation strategies that surface due to an emotionally disruptive situation. The first type of emotional regulation strategy is to reassess the emotional situation, so that the emotional impact will be changed.

The next type of emotional regulation is emotion suppression. *Emotional suppression* is a form of emotional response to an unfavorable situation that involves restraining the emotional behavior of the current emotion (García-Batista et al., 2021). Based on these researched definitions of emotional regulation, this researcher concludes that when an individual experiences a stressful situation, emotional regulation surfaces to provide an emotional response to stimuli. Emotional regulation is the process an individual uses to create emotional adjustments to unfavorable stimulusi to make it a favorable stimulus for them.

The research participant's ability to regulate their emotions in the face of the COVID 19 pandemic mandate that closed their houses of worship was crucial for the survival of their houses of worship. This COVID 19 mandate forced the research participants to reappraise the situation and emotionally respond to ensure that their houses of worship remained operable, so that they could continue to preach, to teach, and provide spiritual support to their church members. The inability to reappraise the situation to create a positive emotional posture could be disastrous for them and their church members because the church members could become scattered, and the church could face financial difficulty that would force them to close their doors. However, their ability to reappraise the situation to make it more beneficial will contribute to the regulation of the unpleasant situation and help their emotional belief about the situation (Vestad et al., 2021).

Emotional Beliefs

An individual's emotions are strongly related to an individual's belief system, and the beliefs that an individual possesses about their emotional state has a valuable impact on their emotional well-being (Crawford et al., 2021; Veilleux, 2021; Vestad et al., 2021). Emotions are a vital component of the life of every person (Crawford et al., 2021). Emotions influence thoughts, goals, motivation, and behaviors of an individual. Therefore, emotional beliefs are often expressed as evaluated emotional models that can prove to be problematic to an individual's emotional beliefs and/or be a representation of a wider lens of emotional beliefs (Veilleux, 2021). The researchers support that an individual's negative emotional beliefs can arise from a stressful situation that causes emotional distress (Predatu, et al., 2020).

An individual's emotional beliefs illustrate and present an evaluation that relates to their emotional experiences, emotional adaptivity, or their emotional control of a situation (Goodman et al., 2021). In other words, emotional beliefs are a systematic process of emotional response by an internal emotional reaction to a favorable or unfavorable situation. However, it is important to establish that current research supports that an individual's emotional beliefs vary according to their social outcomes (Crawford et al., 2021). The researcher contends that social outcomes include symptoms of depression, social support, their ability to engage in an emotional regulation strategy, and emotional cognitive well-being.

The state of an individual's emotional beliefs, whether they are positive or negative, plays a vital role in the direction of their emotional progression (Daniel, 2020; Koç & Uzun, 2022). The composition of an individual's emotional belief system determines if the individual will emotionally progress positively or negatively to a favorable or unfavorable phenomenon. The individual's emotional progression through a difficult event extends to the perception that

their emotional beliefs responses can be fixed, can be permanent, or can just be a suggestion. An individuals' emotional motivations tend to lead them to embrace a form of emotional regulation (Daniel, 2020). Therefore, developing an appeal to their emotional belief. An individual emotional belief system plays a critical role in the success of their emotional regulation. Most unfortunate, the success or failure of their emotional regulation based on their emotional belief system can have a long-term effect on the individual's emotional outcomes, such as cognitive well-being and emotional health.

Researchers categorized the study of emotion belief by various concepts that are characterized by an individual's belief about their emotions (Daniel, 2020; Goodman et al., 2021). Additionally, an individual's emotional beliefs are a significant factor to arrive at the stages of their emotion regulation process (Goodman et al., 2021). An individual's emotional beliefs can be influenced by their choices to either regulate their emotional beliefs or not to regulate their emotions belief based on the situation they encounter. Therefore, an individual develops and implements emotional strategies to control their emotional beliefs. These strategies are implanted to create an emotional decision that will help them cope with the situation so that their emotional response to situation will generate a successful emotional response to the emotional situation they are facing. However, an individual's emotional response to a situation, whether favorable or unfavorable, can lead them to experience emotional distress disorder. Thus, a literature review of emotional distress disorder is necessary to gain a better understanding of the impact the COVID 19 national mandate had on the pastors in rural central Virginia.

Emotional Distress Disorder

Emotional distress disorder highlights the negative emotions that range from anxiety, to depression, then to irritation. In addition, for an individual, emotional distress disorder distributes

emotions that can influence an individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction to life's circumstances (Ionescu et al., 2021). The researcher of emotional distress disorder reports that an individual experiences emotional distress disorders when they encounter elevated levels of negative emotions in their daily routines. In addition, they face difficulty engaging emotion regulation (Hua et al., 2021; Ionescu et al., 2021). The researcher reports individuals that experience these elevated levels of negative emotional distress disorders ponder their ability to successfully engage positive emotions in a stressful environment that is designated to be crucial to their survival (Barrick, 2021).

The human race enjoys face-to-face interaction, because human interaction is an essential function of social information, giving each individual the ability to address and to perceive each other accurately, which is crucial to social success (Barrick, 2021). Face-to-face interaction allows individuals to identify familiar people from strangers and communicate with them. Face-to-face interaction provides nonverbal cues during social interactions that aid the success of a conversation. The lack of face-to-face interaction leads to social decline (Barrick, 2021; Cheeta, 2021).

Furthermore, current review of related literature highlights that researchers define two emotional distress disorders that an individual encounters. The two emotional distress orders are *loneliness* and *depression* (Barrick, 2021; Cheeta, 2021). These two emotional distress orders independently can cause an individual to experience a disruption in emotions when they attempt to process social information due to an emotional distress stimulus. In addition, emotional distress disorder interrupts skills that are crucial for effective communication, adequate social fellowship, and to maintain positive interpersonal relationships.

Current literature reports that emotional distress disorder relates to loneliness and contends that loneliness is associated with an increased perception of emotional threats. These emotional threats may lead to a heightened perception of negative and threatening emotional motives (Cheeta, 2021). Furthermore, emotional distress disorder has been shown to be attributed to an individual's relationship between their past traumas, former depression, and current anxiety (Cheeta, 2021; Chung et al., 2018).

The relationship between an individual's past emotional disorders creates a correlation between their emotional distress disorder and their emotional suppression disorder. Research supports that it is important to note that emotional suppression surfaces from traumatic experiences that have a distinct effect on the way people control their emotions and manage their emotional stress (Chung et al., 2018) because the suppression of traumatic events produces spiritual injury within an individual, created by emotional distress disorder. The concept of spiritual injury will begin with an explication of spirituality.

Spiritual Injury

It is important to note that the concept of spirituality is deeply embedded in the American culture (Schultz, 2018). *Spirituality* is defined as the process an individual implements to achieve personal direction, understanding the mysteries of life, and to find purpose in their lives (Goldberg et al., 2022). Additionally, spirituality is the pathway an individual uses to express their relationship to other humans and how to relate to a power greater than them. Therefore, when there is an injury to a person's spirit, it causes spiritual distress within the individual because the individual experiences a loss of meaning and peace in their life, and in their belief system.

The researcher stated that spiritual injury surfaces as a form of spiritual distress within the individual that arises when there is a breakdown in the relationship between the individual and their respective authoritative higher power (Goldberg et al., 2022). Research supports those individuals who experience spiritual injury encounter poor health outcomes. For example, when an individual faces a difficult life event, such as a diagnosis of cancer, the individual most often relies on their spiritual beliefs and spiritual system to help process and deal with the unfamiliar experience.

Spiritual injury is a component of spiritual distress, which has been ascribed to the experiences of combat veterans (Goldberg et al., 2022; Starnino et al., 2019). Spiritual injury arises when there is a disconnect between the individual and their respective higher power (Goldberg et al., 2022). Individuals who experience spiritual injury understand that they have violated God's law or some other religious commandment. This leads the individual to experience emotions of abandonment and alienation from the greater religious system that gave them meaning and purpose. Spiritual injury creates emotions of shame, anger, sadness, despair, guilt, a loss of purpose in life, fear of death, a desire to be punished by their actions because they believe they cannot be forgiven.

Researchers define *spiritual injury* as a personal response to an event or situation caused by oneself, or an event that is beyond their control (Kopacz, 2019; Schultz, 2018). This event damages their relationship with God, themselves, and others. The event that caused spiritual injury is known to alienate the individual from the source that gives their life meaning and hope. In addition, a review of literature contends that spiritual injury contributes to personal depression, the use of illegal substances, and increase in suicidal thoughts (Battles et al., 2019).

Based on the definition of *spiritual injury* recorded in this research study, the COVID 19 pandemic led to spiritual injury among many Americans, including American pastors. Due to fear and the uncertainty of the COVID 19 virus, spiritual distress rose in individuals. Then, the United States announcement of national mandates that closed houses of worship left many Americans to experience a disruption of emotional blissfulness, which leads to spiritually injury.

The COVID 19 pandemic mandates that closed houses of worship provided the arsenal to damage the spirit of many Americans, especially American pastors. As a result of the definition of spiritual injury, clearly, the COVID 19 pandemic meets the criteria to cause spiritual injury within an individual. However, this research study aims to examine if spiritual injury surfaced in American pastors by determining the magnitude of their spiritual injury through an assessment. This research study will report the findings to determine if the research participants experienced spiritual injury.

Moral Injury

Moral injury was a term developed in the 1990s based on the circumstances surrounding the mental health treatment for American veterans who fought during the Vietnam War (Boudreau, 2021). Moral injury was later popularized in the mid-2000s when the suicide rate among veterans was skyrocketing in the latter years of the United States' occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. The development of the concept of moral injury is credit to United States Veteran Affair psychiatrist, Johnathan Shay.

Johnathan Shay, PhD, a long-time Veterans Affairs psychiatrist, was the first researcher to give birth to the conception of moral injury in the 1990s (Starnino et al., 2019). The concept of moral injury was based on his work with military veterans returning from combat. His work highlighted that there exist two types of moral injury that service members may experience. The

first type stresses a sensation of feeling betrayed by doing 'what is required' in an intense combat

environment 'by legitimate authoritative figure;' for example, a leader of a military unit .

Furthermore, Shay stated that the second type of moral injury is when an armed service member

commits an act while serving their country in combat that violates their morals, worldview, or

ethics. According to Shay, this violation of an individual's inner belief system is comparatively

disruptive to them.

Moral injury, a term developed by Shay and colleagues, is grounded in the numerous

personal narratives expressed by their military veteran patients from the injustice perceived as a

product of malpractice by military leadership (Carey et al., 2016). Shay emphasized that the term

moral injury has three components. The first component is the betrayal of what is the morally

right thing to do within a local context. The second component Shay expressed is a command

that is given by an official who has legitimate authority, then gives a command that must be

completed. Finally, the third component is that this command is spoken in a hostile environment.

Additionally, the phenomenon of the term *moral injury* has witnessed significant rapid increase

during the last decade (Carey et al., 2016; Zerach & Levi-Belz, 2021).

A researcher reported that moral injury results from a betrayal of what an individual

believes to be morally right by someone that holds legitimate authority in a high-stake

circumstance which embraces moral emotions (Dufour et al., 2019; Pyne, 2019; Starnino, 2019).

Moral emotions surface when an individual witnesses a violation or a threat to their personally

held moral standard or moral philosophy (Dufour et al., 2019). It is an individual's moral

emotional compass that drives them to act morally correctly or to act morally incorrect. For the

morally injured individual, an immoral event has deeply penetrated their personal moral belief

that is engrained in the heart of an individual. This violation of deeply held moral belief results in

shame, guilt, and self-condemnation. The sum of these experiences led to community disengagement (Pyne, 2019).

Therefore, a moral injury event occurs when an individual's deeply held moral belief is violated by an unexpected outcome. The result of this experience leads to shame, guilt, unfavorable self–examination, a loss of meaning for life, alienation, and disconnection from society (Pyne, 2019). Furthermore, moral injury surfaces from an act of transgression that creates discourse and conflict. An injury to an individual's morality produces a violation of their assumptions and their beliefs about what is right, what is wrong, and their personal righteous convictions (Pyne, 2019; Starnino, 2019). Moral injury can be damaging to the emotional cognitive state of an individual.

Moral injury leads to shame, guilt, loss of confidence in individuals, social disconnections, and community isolation (Starnino, 2019). Moral injury can produce other social imperfections within an individual; for example, moral injury can generate difficulty in forgiving others, a loss of purpose for life, personal psychological disorder, and personal pessimistic views about self and others. Moral injury can surface from the actions of self or from the actions of others, including from demands given from a person of higher authority that an individual must comply. Individuals who experience the trauma of moral injury rely on their faith, spirituality, and support from others that share their faith in their personal times of distress.

In addition, moral injury has the potential to cause an individual to experience internal spiritual destruction. Moral injury has the capability to affect an individual's character, their personal ideals, their goals, and personal relationships (Starnino et al., 2019). Furthermore, moral injury can create obstacles that can change relationships and reduce the effectiveness of relationships. Furthermore, moral injury can cause confusion in relationships, and make it

difficult for an individual to develop trust in a relationship. Therefore, when trust in a relationship is broken due to moral injury, it can be replaced with thoughts of hurt, embarrassment, and discontent. This can leave room to allow shame to develop within the individual. Additionally, it can cause an individual to result in fighting, experience isolation, and withdrawal from relationships and society. Moreover, moral injury can cause individuals to be emotionally affected. When affected emotionally, the individual can develop internal untruths, create personal changes, and produce fake narratives that assist them to diverge from the truth.

COVID 19 National Mandate That Closed Houses of Worship

The COVID 19 pandemic was an unprecedented global phenomenon that drastically caused changes in individuals' social life, individuals' freedom, and their involvement in global economic activities (Grant, 2021; Kaine et al., 2022; Perry et al., 2020). The COVID 19 pandemic changed the lives of Americans and forced them to face obstacles to overcome, in order to gain access to adequate education, in-person banking, in-person working environment, public transportation, and other essential services and products (Grant, 2021). However, the growing concerns of the COVID 19 pandemic led the United States to implement a national mandate to restrict travel. Therefore, the United States introduced policies to reduce virus transmission and deaths that included remain at home orders, the closure of restaurants, gyms, and beauty salons (Abouk & Heydari, 2021; Spiegel & Tookes, 2021). The United States implemented these policies to reduce the spread of COVID 19, hospitalization, and death (Abouk & Heydari, 2021). Additionally, this United States national COVID 19 national mandate prohibited visitation to nursing homes, public recreation facilities' closures, and limits on the number of individuals gathering together in a building (Spiegel & Tookes, 2021).

This COVID 19 national mandate that began in March 2020 (Grant, 2021; Perry et al., 2020) restricted human movement in their neighborhoods and the reason an individual could leave their residence (Grant, 2021). This national mandate closed schools, many state and local governments, but demanded that non-essential employees remain at home. Additionally, research reported that globally, stay-at-home orders referenced mandates that were imposed on nonessential business, public events, and mass gatherings, along with travel restrictions (Bestetti et al., 2022), but the United States enforced even stricter mandates that forced non–essential businesses to remain closed (Bestetti et al., 2022; Grant, 2021; McCafferty & Ashley, 2021). The theoretical rationale for the national mandate was to close houses of worship and non–essential business to reduce the transmission of the COVID 19 virus. Thus, by mandating their closures, there would be a reduction in the mortality of Americans (McCafferty & Ashley, 2021). Most unfortunately, this mandate affected houses of worship, as they were classified as non–essential businesses.

Most unfortunate, due to the COVID 19 pandemic, the United States became entrenched with prejudicial culture disagreements between political parties concerning the national mandate that closed houses of worship (Perry et al., 2020). Research polls suggested that Americans on the political left agenda were likely to uphold the national mandate. They felt the need to protect younger, older, and populations with severe medical conditions by closing social activities and business transactions, to shelter at home, and to wear masks. However, the Americans that subscribed to the political right felt that the mandates should be removed. They felt that individuals had the right to decide. Yet, the United States implemented a national mandate that closed houses of worship.

More extensive research presents evidence that there can be a positive relationship between political parties, religion, physical health, and mental health that will help an individual endure the hardship of pandemic lockdowns (Shapiro, 2021). The shutting down of religious, social, and business activities produced psychological and emotional disorders that affected Americans (Perry et al, 2020; Shapiro, 2021). Furthermore, research adds that studies analyzed during the COVID 19 pandemic illustrated meaningful elevated levels of stress, emotional health, mental health, and social disconnection due to social distancing among Americans caused by the national lockdown mandates (Claudia & Floricica, 2022).

A review of current literature contends that the COVID 19 pandemic was an aggressive event that claimed the lives of millions globally. The individuals who recovered from COVID 19 were susceptible to develop serious long-term symptoms (Henein, 2021) despite this national mandate. Therefore, due to this COVID 19 national mandate, this qualitative phenomenological study described the shared experiences of 10 pastors in rural central to examine how emotional disruption experienced by the implementation of this national mandate led them to experience spiritual injury and/or moral injury.

Personally, the COVID 19 national mandate that led to many houses of worship closing their doors for extended periods of time was witnessed. The order of service was forced to change, along with the work schedule of many church employees. There was continued long-term effect on houses of worship. Most unfortunate, after two years many churches in rural central remained closed or had permanently closed their doors forever. Furthermore, not only did the COVID 19 pandemic claimed the lives of many American churches, but it also caused emotional disruption among numerous American workers. The COVID 19 pandemic has caused serious long–term symptoms, affected employees and employers. Thus, the COVID 19 pandemic

changed the landscape of American houses of worship and the American workforce. To reference the damage done to the employee in the American workforce, it can be concurred that one of these employees in the American workforce was the American pastor (An et al., 2021).

To reference the research data recorded in this research study about the COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship, this qualitative research study examined the cognitive emotional behaviors of ten pastors in rural central Virginia who experienced spiritual injury, moral injury, and emotional stress disorder due to this national mandate. Due to this national mandate, American pastors were faced with governmental mandates that forced lockdowns, the wearing of masks, and congregational limitations within their worship services. Even though current research reports that the United States lockdowns and business closures do not report any correlation between new COVID 19 infections and deaths caused by COVID 19 in the short term and data on the ban of mass gathering and school closures (An et al., 2021), but this research study will examine the emotional disruption of 10 American pastors as a result of the national mandate that closed houses of worship.

To note, the COVID 19 pandemic was the first-time since the Spanish flu pandemic in 1918 that pastors in America were faced with such a significant disruption in their church worship services. A current review of empirical literature has illustrated the emotional expressions that can surface as a result of an unfavorable situation that affects an individual emotionally. Ten American pastors experienced an interruption of in-person congregational worship. An interruption in the workplace can cause emotional distress disorder, which can lead to spiritual injury and/or moral injury. This qualitative research study examined if the senior pastors became a member of the affected group of individuals due to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship.

An individual's health is not limited to their physical well-being but also to their spiritual and their moral well-being (Yıldırım Üşenmez, et al., 2022). Therefore, based on the definition of moral injury and spiritual injury recorded in this review of current literature, this qualitative research study aimed to examine this phenomenon to discover how it touched the emotional wellbeing of 10 senior pastors in central rural Virginia. This researcher would examine this phenomenon to uncover if it led the pastors to experience moral injury, spiritual injury, and/or emotional distress disorder. For, each pastor was faced with the dilemma to betray what was morally right, to continue to serve faithfully their parishioners, or to obey the national mandate that demanded that they close their houses of worship, which would lead to an interruption in service to their parishioners. These pastors were faced with the dilemma to obey the authoritative mandate and/or to submit to a local authority that holds legitimate governmental power to enforce fines and/or jailtime. The threat of these options would cause any employer to experience emotional disruption personally, especially within a pastor that is responsible for leading a congregation in the worship of God, Our Heavenly Father, at all costs.

Summary

Worship can be defined as the manner an individual seeks to express meaning and purpose to God. Worship to God, Our Heavenly Father, LORD Jesus Christ is the way an individual express and experience their connectedness to God. Worship can be expressed alone and through cooperate worship with others in formal or non-formal environments. However, the COVID 19 national mandate that closed houses of worship disrupted formal cooperative worship, and this review of current literature reported on emotional cognitive behaviors that arise from emotional disruption caused by an unfavorable stimulus. Most unfortunate, a current review of literature uncovered a gap that exists in current literature. This gap is research on the

emotional state of the pastors prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, and a review of current literature did not report if the COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship caused emotional disruption among American pastors. Furthermore, this research study utilized valid and practical cognitive theories to support the foundational framework to help the reader understand effects on the emotions of an individual due to an unfavorable stimulus.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia due to the national COVID 19 mandate that forced them to close their houses of worship. This qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study will describe, examine, and report on the shared lived emotional experiences of the 10 pastors to determine if these pastors experienced spiritual injury and/or moral injury. Therefore, a research method must be determined. For example, a qualitative phenomenological research study aims to "emphasize an understanding of a phenomenon issue from the perspectives of participants" (Tomita et al., 2021, p 145). The participants were the 10 rural central Virginia pastors, and the COVID19 pandemic mandate that closed their houses of worship is the shared phenomenon.

Insightfully, the rationale to implement a qualitative research method is based on the characteristics of the qualitative research method. The qualitative research method is to serve purposely a research method that provides verbal and visual descriptive communication of the desires and necessities of a workspace individual (Orel & Mayerhoffer, 2021). The workspace individual in this research study were the pastors. Another characteristic of the qualitative research method is that it permits researcher scholars to observe, record, and capture the changing attitudes related to a selected subject; for example, the continual changes in the place of worship the pastors faced due to mandates enforced by local governments. Furthermore, a characteristic of qualitative research is that it fleshes out the details of the phenomenon in a real-world setting (Pearse, 2021). Moreover, the researcher will utilize the qualitative method with a phenomenological approach to the research.

Research records that phenomenology, as a qualitative research method, closely aligns to the goals of what the researchers desire, which is to achieve the goal to understand the participants' core response to the phenomenon that they experienced (Tomita et al., 2021). Now, as a method of qualitative research design, phenomenology "focuses on describing the participants' experiences from their own perspective" (p. 145). The nature of phenomenology in this research is to examine personal lived experiences, the phenomenon of public and national mandates, caused many American pastors to experience general anxiety disorder and emotional stress disorder leading to their discussion to leave the ministry. However, the Word of God speaks, "A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (New Kings James Version, 764/2018, Proverbs 17: 22). With understanding how the spirit has been crushed, an individual can learn how to regain a cheerful heart in the Name of Lord Jesus Christ.

Research Design

This research study aims to describe the emotional condition of 10 pastors in rural central Virginia experienced due to the national COVID 19 pandemic mandate that demanded they close their houses of worship. These 10 pastors, as the research participants, are senior pastors from various Christian churches in rural central Virginia. The research participants were not limited to gender, race, or ethnicity. However, it was limited to ten pastors that preside over a Christian denomination. In addition, the number of members that attend the church was not a determining factor for the selection of the 10 pastors. Moreover, the goal of this research study was to describe the emotional influence of the COVID 19 national mandate on these pastors to report if their emotional experience during this phenomenon led to emotional disruption.

To research this phenomenon, a research design must be selected and implemented. A research design is simply a plan to conduct a research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The

research design for this research study is transcendental phenomenology. A succinct history and application of this research design follows.

The transcendental phenomenology research design builds upon the research conducted and the data analytical procedures recorded in the *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology* (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The transcendental phenomenology research and data analysis process were instrumentality conducted by the researchers Van Kaam (1966), and Colaizzi (1978). The procedures of this transcendental phenomenology design were illustrated by Moustakas (1994), consists of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out the individual's experience, and collecting data from several individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, the researcher analyzed the data by reducing the information to reflect significant statements or quotes. Finally, the researcher combined them into similar themes.

This research study utilized the qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design. The rationale and nature for a qualitative phenomenological research design is that it is concerned with "what are the experiences like" (Williams, 2021, p. 369). Furthermore, the qualitative phenomenological research design is centered on the experiences an individual encounters and is expressed in witness and spoken stories, which is the main focus of the phenomenology (Aguas, 2022). This researcher explored what the experiences were like for the 10 American pastors who were demanded to close their houses of worship or face severe consequences. Each participant experienced the same phenomenon, and each research participant shared the same vocation, an American pastor. As an American pastor, they led a church in America, and they were forced to adhere to mandates instituted by the United States of America

that closed their church. Furthermore, the phenomenological research design study were categorized as transcendental phenomenological qualitative.

The utilization of the transcendental phenomenology method for this research method is necessary. A transcendental phenomenological qualitative research method permits the researcher to discover how the phenomenon affected a defined population. This research method singles out an individual's experience, then offers data from several other individuals who experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, transcendental phenomenological research expresses a dimension of an individual's experience that shapes or forms the experience that everyone encountered (DeRoo, 2021). Therefore, to uncover what the experience of the COVID 19 mandates on the research participants supports that the qualitative phenomenological research framework was sufficient for this research study. Next, this research presented answers on the four research questions that provided the framework for this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research methodology.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

As a senior pastor of a Christian church located in central Virginia during the national

COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship, what are the emotions experienced during the

phenomenon, the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship?

Sub – Question One

What was your immediate response to the COVID 19 mandate that demanded you close your

church to in person worship?

Sub – Question Two

What personal in person pastoral and ministerial services did you provide for your

congregational membership prior to the COVID 19 mandated closures?

Sub – Question Three

What personal in person pastoral and/or ministerial services conducted in your house of

worship was changed as a result of the COVID 19 mandates?

Sub – Question Four

What pastoral and ministerial services could not be performed as a result of the COVID

19 mandate?

Setting and Participants

This section will report on the research setting and the research study participates. This

research study examined the shared experiences of ten Christian pastors concerning the COVID

19 mandates that closed their churches. This section will begin with the research setting,

including a description of the geographic location where the survey will be conducted. Then, this

section will be followed by a description of the research participants. The profile of the research

participants for this qualitative phenomenological research study will be described.

Site

The site for this study was the churches of the senior pastors. These sites were located in

central Virginia. These senior pastors were each the leader of their church, followed by a church

board comprised of deacons and elders. Due to the size of their churches, this was the hierarchy

of their churches. To note, these churches were congregational, which implies that the

parishioners vote on the elected senior pastor.

The locations of the research sites were the senior pastors' churches. These settings were

selected because these were the locations where the pastors cared for their members and the sites

that were affected by the mandates, where the pastors had to determine how to send out their

message each Sunday in an empty environment. To note, as the participants were interviewed,

pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities.

Participants

The research participants in this study were 10 senior pastors of a Christian church

located in rural central Virginia. The number of church members was not a determining factor

for the senior pastor to be a research participant nor the membership of the congregation. In

addition, the research study participants were not restricted to age, ethnicity, gender, or to a

specific protestant denomination.

<div align="center">

Researcher Positionality

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The Word of God speaks, "Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and

supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of

God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"

(New King James Version, 1396/2018, Philippians 4: 6 – 7). The following section addresses the interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions, axiological assumptions, and the researcher's role within the study's framework.

It is important to understand that each researcher enters a research study with a diverse catalog of life experiences that shape their personal philosophical views. These experiences influence how the researcher observes, views, and reasons reality. These observations aid to formulate personal and spiritual beliefs and values, and they help to conceptualize known and unknown bias, informing the worldview or lens in which one lives, perceives normality, judges ethics, and understands as their personal journey unfolds.

While it is impossible to suspend all philosophical views and beliefs, a researcher must access grace and empathy to understand how a differing viewpoint can be valuable. To do so, the researcher must cultivate an authentic understanding of another's experiences and how those experiences have informed the other's experiences and perspectives from that of their own. The transcendental phenomenological qualitative research design is the platform for seeking such understanding, and grace is its driving force.

The spiritual foundational thought for the theoretical framework provided by a theological focus on God, Our Heavenly Father. The theoretical framework was supported by a Biblical Scriptural foundation. The Word of God speaks, "Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (New King James Version, 1396/2018, Philippians 4: 6 – 7). This Biblical scriptural foundation served as the conscious support for the implementation of the two theoretical frameworks for this research study. This researcher

examined how American churches experienced a decline in Christian pastors, due to the COVID–19 pandemic, and American Christian pastors were the research group.

Furthermore, researchers supported that there was a disruption of normal personal worship service that was conducted within houses of worship (Kroesbergen-Kamps, 2019). This was a result of the demand for social distancing due to a legalized national mandate. This forced a legitimate ceasing of congregational worship in a house of worship. This mandate may have influenced an emotional disruption of these pastors. The closure of houses of worship forced pastors to alter a command spoken in The Word of God. The Word of God speaks, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some, but exhorting so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (New King James Version, 1738/2018, Hebrews 10: 24 – 25).

Interpretive Framework

As a senior pastor of a church in rural central Virginia during the national mandate closed houses of worship, this was a personal experience shared with the 10 research participants; thus I aimed to understand the emotional effect of this new world we were forced to live in (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the interpretive framework that was instituted is social constructivism. Furthermore, social constructivism requires that "the researcher look for the complexity of views rather than the narrow meaning of a few categories or ideas" (p. 24).

The interpretive framework was social constructivism. However, as a senior Christian pastor, the central focus lens through which the interpretive framework was viewed was a biblical worldview that was supported by a Biblical scriptural promise spoken by God, Our Heavenly Father in His inspired Word. The foundational Biblical scripture for this research study was "Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let

your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of

God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"

(New King James Version, 1396/2018, Philippians 4: 6 – 7). This foundational Biblical scripture

gives spiritual foundational support for the implementation of the two theoretical frameworks for

this research study.

It was the COVID 19 mandate that closed these senior pastors' houses of worship;

however, The Word of God reminds pastors not to be anxious for anything, but to be in prayer

and rest in the peace of God that He has everything in control. Yet, these mandates may have

caused pastors to experience emotional disruption. It was important to determine if the 10 pastors

experienced emotional disruptions.

This study was approached from the theoretical concept that due to the COVID 19

governmental mandates that restricted places of worship from holding in-person gatherings

emotionally affected ten pastors in rural central Virginia who experienced spiritual injury, moral

injury, and mental anxiety disorder. To gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon that

effected American pastors, research was conducted on this phenomenon based on a proven

theoretical framework.

Philosophical Assumption

Philosophical assumptions search the internal beliefs of the researcher to uncover deeply

ingrained views about the types of problems that need to be researched, the research questions

that need to be asked, and the method the researcher will utilize to secure data (Creswell & Poth,

2018). Furthermore, philosophical assumptions utilize a researcher's belief system to guide the

research action (Mazandarani, 2022). It is "a cluster of beliefs that dictate what and how a

researcher should study and interpret the data" (p. 218). The current rationale that drives the

researcher is a desire to uncover the emotional effect of this national mandate on the Christian

pastor. The researcher is a Christian, and the researcher believes and acknowledges that Jesus

Christ is The Son of God, and LORD Jesus Christ is the researcher's personal LORD and Savior.

Furthermore, the researcher is a senior pastor of a Christian church in central Virginia and

experienced the hardship to preach, to teach, and to minister to a congregation in response to the

national mandates that closed the pastor's church.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumption reflects the concept of various realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Referencing the phenomenological research design of this research study, ontological

assumptions indicate the unique experience of each individual to the shared phenomenon. Even

though the researcher experienced the same phenomenon as the research participants, the

researcher's personal ontological assumptions must be set aside while collecting and analyzing

the research data, so that the participant's reality and perspective can be reflected in their own

experience without input from the researcher. The goal of the researcher is to create an unbiased

study in which the researcher will not be relevant to the process or the outcomes.

Epistemological Assumption

To report on the epistemological assumption, a definition of this term was established.

Epistemological assumption describes the researcher's attempt to get close to the research

participants in their environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, the researcher

acknowledges that the current research participants' experiences to the shared phenomenon and

environment was shared by the researcher's experience. This allows the researcher and the

participants to have a solid knowledge of the subject, compassion, and experiences. The research

participants were the experts in their field. Therefore, their interpretations shed a bright light on the experience of the phenomena and their shared experience.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption characterizes qualitative research. For, "the inquirers admit the value – laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value – laden nature of the information gathered" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). As a senior pastor that experienced the same phenomena, the researcher was empathic with the research participants. However, the researcher remained at a distance in influencing, recording, and reporting the responses from the research participants .

Researcher's Role

The researcher is a senior pastor at a church in rural central Virginia. However, the researcher was not affiliated with any of the churches or church denominations associated with the researcher participants. The researcher was responsible for contacting the senior pastors in central Virginia via a phone call to schedule an appropriate interview time and date. The researcher insisted that the research participants secure their office or another location in their church for the interview. Even though the researcher experienced the same phenomenon as the research study participants, the researcher did not illustrate bias, or report their experience about the experienced phenomenon to the research study participants.

Procedures

In the following procedural section, the researcher will outline the steps to which this research study was conducted so that necessary replication of studies like this or literary gaps may have a baseline study for which to derive their own research. Here, the researcher has included the necessary Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval provided in Appendix A, site

permission, how participants were solicited, techniques for data collection, data analysis, and rationale for how the findings were triangulated in this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study.

Permissions

When the researcher received IRB approval from Liberty University, the researcher administered permission forms to the research study participants. These signed documents were recorded in the appendices.

Recruitment Plan

For this research, participants recruited 10 senior pastors from churches located in rural central Virginia. To note, the senior pastor were members of the organization entitled *The Louisa County and Vicinity Ministers Conference*, which was located in Louisa County, Virginia. The researcher was a member of the organization where he met the senior pastors. The researcher contacted the senior pastor to schedule an interview time. The researcher briefly explained the essence of the interview and ensured that they are comfortable with the interview. Each research participant was informed that their response to the research study would be anonymous.

Data Collection Plan

This researcher did not collect any data from human participants until the necessary IRB approval requirements had been secured. To collect data for this research study, the researcher selected three data method collections. The three data collection methods that were selected are as follows: 1) individual interviews 2) focus group and 3) questionnaires. The research began with an individual personal interview with the 10 research participants. The interviews were held at the pastor's office. The researcher scheduled an appointment time for the research participant.

Individual Interviews Data Collection Approach

The researcher conducted structured personal interviews and recorded the data on a password secured laptop computer with the selected pastors in Central Virginia, the research participants. This was the most secure method to collect data on the research participants who were exposed to the research phenomenon. Each research study participants were asked identical research questions. This researcher collected data on the study participants' response to 12 questions via the personal secured interview at their church. Each research participant was asked 12 questions. Each interview was scheduled for up to two hours.

Interview Questions

1. As a Christian pastor of a Christian church in located in rural central Virginia, how would you describe your emotional response to national mandate that demanded you close your house of worship?

2. Describe your emotional condition to the adjustments you made in response to the national mandate?

3. Did you have to cease all worship services, and describe the emotions that surfaced based on this decision?

4. How did the national mandate produce emotional discomfort?

5. How did the emotional distress affect you spiritually?

6. How did the emotional distress affect you morally?

7. What emotions surfaced as a result of creating a new daily pastoral schedule?

8. What changes did you have to implement to conduct worship service and serve the needs of your congregation?

9. What pastoral and ministerial services did you provide for your congregational membership prior to the COVID19 pandemic?

10. Describe your emotional condition about the church's worship experience prior to the COVID19 pandemic mandate.

11. Describe your emotional condition about the church's worship experience during the COVID 19 pandemic mandate.

12. Describe your emotional state concerning the church's worship experience post COVID19 mandates that forced your church to close for ministerial services and pastoral services.

Question one asked the research participant to articulate their emotional response to the national COVID19 mandate that closed their house of worship (Cones & Foley, 2021; Crea et al., 2021). Question two asked the pastors to describe what meaningful liturgical services had to be moved to an online platform and how did this change in venue affect them emotionally, because they had to adapt to a new type of worship experience (Cones & Foley, 2021). Question three asked them to reflect on the personal journey of their emotions to this mandate that demanded they cease in person worship to determine their emotional disruptive experience (Desjardins et al., 2021). Questions four, five, and six asked them to describe the emotional disruption due to the national mandate, which could lead to other internal disruptions, such as spiritual injury and moral injury, which are emotional phenomena that were not related to this research study. Questions seven, eight, and nine correlated to the change in their liturgical services to compliance with the national mandate. Question ten, eleven, and twelve asked questions about their emotional state during the worship service prior to the COVID–19, during the COVID19 mandate, and post COVID19 mandate (Lantz, 2021).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Each research participant was required to respond to each interview question, collecting the answers as data. Their responses to the interview questions were entered into a word document on the researcher's personal laptop computer. The laptop computer was a password secured personal laptop computer, and each research participant's response to the interview questions were assigned a unique identifier composed of letters and numbers. Furthermore, the researcher recorded each research participants response in a secured location, which was the church of the research participant. The researcher examined each participants 'responses to the interview questions and recorded them in a secured excel spreadsheet on a personal computer. Each research participant was assigned a unique identification that was composed of a numeric number and a letter of the alphabet to classify the research participants. The data was analyzed by the researcher through a comparison of the responses to the interview questions to determine congruent responses and/or opposite responses.

Focus Group Data Collection Approach

This researcher utilized a focus group with the 10 pastors in a cooperative environment to grasp certain general disruptive emotional behaviors the pastors experienced as a result of this phenomenon. The focus group was asked one question, "What would you like to contribute to this study on the emotional disruption you experienced as a rural pastor during the COVID 19 mandate that closed your church?" The focus group responses to this question were guided by an impromptu conversation. The researcher recorded common concerns this national mandate created and common emotional disruptions they experienced due to this phenomenon. The focus group response to this question was videotaped and the conversation recorded. The focus group

conversation was recorded on a password secure laptop. Only the researcher had access to the password for this secured laptop computer.

Focus Group Question

The focus group participants will be asked to respond to the following question:

1. "What would you like to contribute to this study on the emotional disruption you experienced as a rural pastors to the COVID 19 mandate to close your church?" This question requires that each participant in the focus group reflect personally on the emotional disruption they encountered due to this COVID 19 mandate. The question allows for a corporate discussion on the emotional disruption this national mandate caused in each research participants.

Focus Group Data Collection Analysis Plan

The data collected from a focus group was recorded on a secure password laptop computer to record the groups responses to basic conversations about their personal experiences that caused emotional disruption due to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship. The collective responses from the focus group were recorded and analyzed based on the research participants' responses. Each participant's data was analyzed to determine comparable trends in their responses.

Questionnaire Data Collection Approach

The researcher provided the research participants with a questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered verbally in a secure location at the pastor's church. The researcher provided the research participants with the questionnaire, but the researcher verbally administered the questionnaire. The research participants recorded their responses to each item in the questionnaire. The research participant's responses to the questionnaire were scanned into a

secure laptop computer with a password that allowed accessibility only to the researcher. Each research participant was asked the same questions.

Questionnaire Questions

1. As the primary decision maker for the church, what was the most difficult decision you had to make as a result of the COVID 19 national mandate that closed the house of worship?

2. If any, what emotional disruption did you experience as a result of this decision?

3. As a result of this decision, if any, what violation of morality do you think may have occurred?

4. As a result of this decision, if any, what violation of spiritual well-being do you feel may have surfaced?

5. What further individual emotional consequences, in any, could develop based on your decision?

Question one was asked to establish that the research participant was the major decisionmaker for their house of worship. Question two was to determine what types, if any, emotional disruptions they experienced. Question three was to examine if the senior pastor may have experienced a disruption in their moral values. Question four was to examine if they may have experienced a disruption in their spiritual being. Question five was to examine if they feel they would experience extended emotional disruption.

Questionnaire Data Collection Analysis Plan

The responses to the questionnaire were scanned to a secure password laptop computer. The responses were coded with an assigned combination of letters and numbers that were only knowledgeable to the researcher. The researcher analyzed each response to highlight key

emotional descriptive words and phrases that the research participants had in common. The researcher analyzed the research participants' responses to determine similar responses to the primary decision they had to make during the national mandate that closed their house of worship. After the analysis of the questionnaire by the researcher and the data entered into a secure laptop computer, the questions were shredded.

Data Synthesis

To analyze the synoptic theme in the data collected for this research study, this researcher carefully analyzed and recorded each research participants' response to each question in the individual interview questionnaire. This was conducted to determine if any specific themes or responses were similar in the research participants responses. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the data collected were conducted to determine the similarities between the research participants' responses to the individual interview questionnaire.

Furthermore, to analyze the data collected from the focus group discussion, this researcher intently listened to the discussion to establish how they closely shared the same responses to the question. The researcher recorded a detailed synopsis of the discussion to determine similar emotional experiences to determine if an individual experienced emotional disruption and their response to this phenomenon that closed their house of worship. This data was synthesized to report on reoccurring types of emotional disruption collectively based on each research participants' response.

In addition, to synthesis of the data for the questionnaire, the researcher followed the procedure outlined to analyze the data in the individual questionnaire. However, an analysis of this data was conducted to analyze individually if the research participant experienced emotional disruption that negatively impacted their spiritual wellness and/or moral values based on the

national mandate that closed their house of worship. This analysis was conducted to record similar responses to determine collectively if the pastors experienced the same emotional disruptions that caused damage to their personal spiritual wellness and/or their personal moral value.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that there are four criteria that establish trustworthiness with the parameter of human nature. They are credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Gill et al., 2018). In addition, there exist a variety of other parameters that guide qualitative research, "While a variety of other guidelines exist for qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba's criteria remain convincing and popular in organizational studies" (). Therefore, a qualitative scholar's continued use of their bases lays the foundation for trustworthiness and establishes the related criteria for qualitative research, for it is a functional origin for creating a framework to increase the transparency of research studies. The researcher journeyed to great lengths to ensure that the conditions to achieve all four of these trustworthiness criteria, along with ethical considerations were accomplished in this research study.

Credibility

Credibility in this study followed the research conducted by Eisner's (1991) interpretation of credibility. Eisner's (1991) interpretation of credibility is designed to produce credibility through the application of secure observations, secure conclusions, and secure interpretations (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). Furthermore, the credibility in qualitative research is important because it assures that the results of the data represented in the study from the research participants is from an honest perspective of their experience (Ahmed & Muhammad,

2018), which allows the qualitative researcher to report the honest descriptions of the participant's responses to the research questions . In this study, the research achieved credibility in three ways; 1) authenticity, 2) research participant debriefing, and 3) interviews.

Confirmability

Confirmability highlights the extent that researchers in all academic fields journey to establish the validity of their research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Additionally, confirmability is attentive to the data and the interpretation of the analytical findings to ensure that the research findings are not a personal imaginative interpretation of the researcher, but a true interpretation of that which represents the data. This researcher has presented descriptions of the procedures, an accurate description of the research data, and recorded accurate data reporting. This researcher has honestly reported the research study findings that has proven by valid research designs. The techniques that were utilized for establishing confirmability included: (a) confirmability audits; (b) audit trails; (c) triangulation; and (d) reflexivity.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the solidity of the research discoveries over a period time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In addition, dependability involves an evaluation of the research participants' results, an accurate interpretation of the results, and solid recommendations for the research that is supported by the conclusive findings that are recorded from the research study participants. For this transcendental qualitative research study, dependability was accomplished through an inquiry audit, which at Liberty University occurs with a thorough review of the process and the products of the research by the dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director.

Transferability

Transferability is the level to which the results of qualitative research can be conveyed to various contexts or settings with a variety of researchers (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It is the researcher who orchestrates the transferability option to a potential researcher through thorough description of the research. Transferability not only explains the behavior and the experiences of the research, but also the surrounding conditions of the research as well, so that the atmosphere surrounding the behavior and experiences can become valuable to another reader. Most importantly, the researcher can only create the environmental conditions for transferability. This research cannot assure that transferability will be accomplished because judgment on this research study can only be interpreted by the reader of the research study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research study was achieved through a written application to the Liberty University IRB. Then, a written consent to participate in this research study was provided for every research participant. Furthermore, researched data was secured in a password locked laptop computer that was stored in a safe location.

Summary

Due to the COVID 19 national mandate that closed houses of worship in central Virginia, this study described 10 individual pastor's emotional condition as a result of this national COVID 19 mandate. In addition, this research study embarked on a journey to discover the emotional effect of the national COVID 19 pandemic mandate created in the spirit of these 10 pastors. Moreover, this study hypothesized that due to the COVID 19 national mandate that closed their churches, these 10 American pastors have experienced emotional disruption. This study utilized valid and practical theories of the cognitive appraisal theory and the cognitive appraisal theory of emotions. However, current literature does report on how COVID 19 may

have influenced emotional disruption by American pastors. Furthermore, a gap exists in the literature relating to the emotional state of the pastors prior to the COVID 19 pandemic. In addition, recent literature does support that COVID 19 played a significant role in American pastors feeling emotional distress.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia due to the national COVID 19 mandate that forced them to close their houses of worship. To conduct this research, the researcher engaged 10 eligible research participants, who were senior pastors of a house of worship in central Virigina during the COVID 19 pandemic. The data was collected and scanned into a password secured computer. In addition, the researcher utilized a digital voice recorder device to record the data obtained during focus group interviews, the research participants' responses to the questionnaire, and their responses to 12 interview questions. The data recorded via digital voice recorder was collected, analyzed, and the device was stored in a password secured personal safe. To note, during the administration of the focus group, the questionnaire, and the interview questions, the researcher recorded personal notes on each research form to describe the research participants' emotions during the administration of these forms. These notes include the research participants' feelings during the focus group, the interviews, and personal information they wanted to share with the researcher.

The 10 research candidates that met the criteria documented in the invitation letter were administered a consent form to sign to participate in this research study. This research study began with a focus group. Five research participants were a part of the focus group and contributed responses to the focus group question. The focus group conversation was conducted in a secure area, and a digital voice recorder was utilized. The data on the voice recorder was secured by a password only known by the researcher. Furthermore, this process was duplicated

with ten research participants with the administered questionnaire, including a series of interview questions. All data was collected and analyzed.

Participants

The participants were 10 senior pastors from various Christian church denominations located in central rural Virginia. However, there were only five research participants in the focus group. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of participants and locations.

Pastor Lee

Pastor Lee was a senior pastor at a Christian church located in rural central Virginia, as well as residing in central Virginia. Pastor Lee had served as a senior pastor for seven years, all at this Christian church. However, Pastor Lee served 10 years as an associate pastor before becoming a senior pastor. Pastor Lee was the senior pastor at this Baptist Church during the COVID 19 mandate that closed their house of worship. Pastor Lee confessed, "I know that we had to adhere to the mandate, but I was very angry." Pastor Lee's church had a church staff of three and had a congregational membership of approximately 50 members.

Pastor Jordan

Pastor Jordan was the senior pastor at a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. as well as a resident of central Virginia. Pastor Jordan had served as a senior pastor for 14 years, not all at this Christian church. Pastor Jordan had served as a senior pastor at other Christian churches. Pastor Jordan had been the senior pastor at this church in central Virginia for approximately five years and was the senior pastor of this church during the COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Jordan expressed, "I felt anxiety trying to balance the mandate and what God has called me to do." Jordan expressed sincere love for the people of

God. Pastor Jordan had a church staff of 5. Jordan's church had a congregational membership of approximately 300.

Pastor Jamal

Pastor Jamal was the senior pastor at a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. However, Pastor Jamal was a resident of Richmond, VA. Jamal had served as the senior pastor at this Baptist Church for 5 years and was the senior pastor during the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Jamal stated, "When I heard the mandate, I felt anxiety, because I did not know how I would care for the flock." Jamal illustrated great love for the people of God. This was Pastor Jamal's first assignment as a church senior pastor. Pastor Jamal had a church staff of 3 and a congregational membership of approximately 100.

Pastor Aaron

Pastor Aaron was the senior pastor at a Christian church located in rural central Virginia, and a resident of central Virginia. Pastor Aaron had served as the senior pastor at this Baptist Church for 4 years. Aaron served as the senior pastor of this Christian church during the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Aaron spoke, "The decision to close the church was the hardest decision I ever had to make as a pastor. I really felt sad. I did not know how the congregation would respond. I did not know what was next." Aaron's church had a staff of two and a congregational membership of approximately 25.

Pastor Michael

Pastor Michael was the senior pastor at a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. However, Pastor Michael was a resident of Richmond, VA. Pastor Michael had served as the senior pastor at this church for 6 years, but Pastor Michael had served in the capacity of senior pastor for 15 years. Pastor Michael had served as the senior pastor of this Baptist church

during the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Michael stated, "The national mandate that closed our house of worship brought a lot of discomfort." Pastor Michael's church had a congregational membership of approximately 100 members and a church staff of three volunteers.

Pastor John

Pastor John was the senior pastor at a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. John was a resident of rural central Virginia. Pastor John had served as the senior pastor at this church for 9 years. Pastor John was the senior pastor of this church during the national mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor John quoted, "When I heard the mandate, I was very sad. I did not know what we were going to doing." Pastor John's church had a congregational membership of approximately 300 members and a church staff of 10.

Pastor Matthew

Pastor Matthew was the senior pastor at a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. Matthew was a resident of rural central Virginia. Pastor Matthew had served as a senior pastor at this Christian church for 8 years. Pastor Matthew was the senior pastor of this church during the national mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Matthew stated, "Even though the national mandate allowed me more time to study The Word of God, I felt very disappointed because I could not be with my church family. I was extremely disappointed in this governmental decision." Pastor Matthew added, "However, we had a biblical command to comply." Pastor Matthew's church had a congregational membership of approximately 200 members and a church staff of five.

Pastor Luke

Pastor Luke was the senior pastor of a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. Luke had served as a senior pastor for 11 years, but had been the senior pastor of this Christian church for seven years. Pastor Luke was the senior pastor of this Christian church during the national mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Luke stated, "I did not understand a lot about COVID 19, or the national mandate, but as a church family we were determined to not lose our joy!" Pastor Luke's church had a membership of approximately 75 members and a church staff of two volunteers.

Pastor Paul

Pastor Paul was the senior pastor of a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. Pastor Paul had served in the office of senior pastor at this Cristian church for ten years. Paul was the senior pastor at this church during the national mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Paul stated, "Even though I felt disappointed by the mandate. However, God gave me a vision to stay open, so I immediately began to look for a PA system to have worship service outside." Paul's church had a congregational membership of approximately 100 members and 3 staff members.

Pastor Joseph

Pastor Joseph was the senior pastor of a Christian church located in rural central Virginia. Pastor Paul had served as a senior pastor for approximately 20 years, not all at this Christian church. Pastor Joseph was the senior pastor of this Christian church during the national mandate that closed houses of worship. Pastor Joseph stated, "When I heard the national mandate, I felt disappointed and sad, but I know we had to stay open. We had to develop a strategy to remain open." Pastor Joseph's church had a congregational membership of approximately 300 and a church staff of 4.

Table 1

Senior Pastors

Senior Pastor	Years as a Senior pastor	Church Membership
Lee	7	Approximately 50
Jordan	14	Approximately 300
Jamal	5	Approximately 100
Aaron	4	Approximately 25
Michael	15	Approximately 100
John	9	Approximately 300
Matthew	8	Approximately 200
Luke	11	Approximately 75
Paul	10	Approximately 100
Joseph	20	Approximately 300

Results

In this section of Chapter Four, the researcher will present the analytical results from the data for this research study. The analytical data was obtained from the focus group, the questionnaire, and the individual interview questions. The results from the analytical data for this research data showed that the research participants experienced emotional disruption. Based on the research participants' responses to the focus group, the questionnaire, and the individual interview questions, the analyzed data will report themes in the research study.

Emotional Disruption Due to Anxiety

The pastors exhibited a great passion to care for their parishioners. However, due to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship, the pastors consistently expressed that they

experienced anxiety. They agreed that when they heard the national mandate to close houses of worship, they immediately felt anxiety because they did not know how to respond to a directive from the federal government that demanded they cease in-person worship and close their houses of worship. Ten pastors experienced a journey into the unknown. Pastor Michael stated, "For the first time in history the government told American churches what to do. I was faced with the decision to close, but how do I do what God has called me to do, care for His flock." Pastor Luke stated, "During the closure of our church, I could not do what God called me to do, so I felt despair, discouragement, and anxiety." The nine pastors agreed that they had to turn to God, Our Heavenly Father, to deal with this extreme anxiety, awful discouragement, and depressing despair. In addition, Pastor Paul provided this comment, "When they decided to come back into the building, some wanted to return to normal church worship service, and some wanted to wear mask, some wanted to stay close, trying to find a middle ground brought anxiety." The ten pastors wanted their church members to feel comfortable returning to in-person worship service, but to develop a strategic plan that would satisfy all the church members produced the emotion of anxiety.

Emotional Disruption Due to Fear

Due to the national mandate that closed houses of worship, a theme among the research participants was *fear*. This fear arose due to fear of the unknown duration of the national mandate, how long the pandemic would last, and the effect the pandemic would have on their congregation. Nine research participants concurred that they experienced fear because they did not know how long the national mandate would be implemented, or how long the pandemic would affect the United States and the world. In addition, there was the fear of how to lead their congregation through this mandate and the pandemic. The fear to discover new methods to

provide for the spiritual needs of the congregations, fear of the spiritual health and physical health of their congregation, and the fear of how they would remain financially stable through the closure of their church, so that they would not have to close permanently.

The Fear of Government Control

A Pastor Aaron stated, "I became fearful of the reach of the government". Pastor Lee added, "As a Christian pastor, I must respect the government, but I must follow LORD Jesus Christ." Pastor Jamal quoted, "The mandate brought a fear that the government could close us permanently. I felt that the government should not have this much control of the churches in America." Nine pastors that experienced the emotion of fear due to the national mandate that closed houses of worship attributed 90% of that fear to governmental control. They explained that, if the United States government could issue a national mandate to close a house of worship, what could stop the United States government from instituting a decree that would close houses of worship for an extended period of time or close them permanently.

Emotional Disruption Due to Discouragement

Due to the national mandate that closed their house of worship, seven pastors agreed they felt very discouraged before and after the national mandate. They felt discouraged because the participants perceived that the government did not give accurate information about the COVID 19 virus; for example, there were numerous governmental rebuttals about how the COVID 19 virus was transmitted and if wearing a mask would protect from getting the COVID 19 virus. Furthermore, the pastors felt discouraged because they did not know how long the national mandate would last, how long the COVID 19 pandemic would last, or how long they would have to preach from an empty sanctuary. Pastor Jordan, "Preaching to an iPad, could not being with flock, I became very discourage. Also, after we went to an online format the people got

comfortable staying home." Pastor Jamal stated, "Did not make me angry, but it made me frustrated, which led to discouragement. The government should have asked us to close, not demanded that we close." Pastor Aaron stated, "They people got comfortable staying home. This made me feel very discouraged. Now, I was faced with the challenge to develop a plan to get them back in church." Most unfortunate, this was an emotional disruption that seven of the pastors faced after the national mandate was lifted. To note, the national mandate that closed houses of worship did substantial spiritual damage to the pastors.

Spiritual Injury Caused by Emotional Disruption

Nine of the ten pastors agreed that they experienced spiritual injury as a result of the national mandate that closed their house of worship. The pastors expressed that they felt spiritual injury due to anxiety, fear, and discouragement. The pastors shared that these emotions arose within them due to the national mandate, which led them to experience spiritual injury. They cried that they were wounded in the inner core of their spiritual being because they could not perform the calling LORD Jesus Christ had placed upon their lives. They could not conduct in - person worship, engage in corporate fellowship, or experience intimate contact with the people of God who they were assigned and entrusted by God, Our Heavenly Father, to care for due to this national mandate. Pastor John stated, "I felt depressed within my soul. I was so depressed that I could not prepare to preach or to teach on an online format. I long for the people of God." Pastor Luke stated, "I had to perform funerals for individuals that passed away due to COVID 19. I could not give the family members a hug to comfort them in their time of lost." Pastor Luke added, "It was hard to care pastorally for the families that experienced the lost."

Emotional Disruption Led to an Injured Spirit

Pastor Michael expressed, "I had church leaders go behind my back to try to close the church for the duration of the national mandate. I informed them that this would not happen because people are lonely. This decision hurt me deeply." The decision to close or not to close due to the national mandate that closed their house of worship spiritually injured nine pastors. An analysis of the data conducted in this research study showed that nine pastors were clearly injured within their spirit. They expressed that biblically knew they had to comply to the national mandate, but this meant that they had to develop new methods to continue normal pastor services and/or close their house of worship for an unknown time frame, and how would either decision affect their church members and them personally.

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Research Question Responses

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In this section of Chapter Four, the researcher will provide concise answers to the central research question and the four research sub-questions.

Central Research Question

As a senior pastor of a Christian church located in central Virginia during the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship, what are emotions experienced by 10 senior pastors in rural Virginia due the phenomenon, the national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship?

Due to the experienced phenomenon, the COVID 19 national mandate that closed their houses of worship, nine of the ten research participants experienced the emotions of anxiety, fear, and discouragement. These emotions contributed to the research participants experiencing emotional disruption. Pastor Michael spoke, "I still fill emotionally scars due to everything we

experienced during the shutdown. This really hurt the body of the Church of Jesus Christ, but we will overcome this pain."

Sub – Question One

What was your immediate response to the COVID 19 mandate that demanded you close your church to in person worship?

The ten pastors agreed to adhere to the national mandate, but each developed different strategies to adhere to the national mandate. Each pastor strategically developed a plan that they felt would be feasible for their church. Pastor Matthew stated, "When we heard about the national mandate, leaders of the church met to develop a strategy to maintain worship integrity. Some church leaders wanted to close, and some wanted to remain open. It was difficult to make a decision." Pastor Lee spoke, "I did not experience any emotional disruption, but I knew that I had to develop a plan to adhere to the national mandate and continue our worship experience."

Sub – Question Two

What personal in-person pastoral and ministerial services did you provide for your congregational membership prior to the COVID 19 mandated closures?

All the pastors agreed that they performed normal pastoral and ministerial services; for example, Pastor Joseph spoke, "We preached and taught The Word of God and provided pastoral services." Pastor Matthew responded, "Prior to the COVID 19 mandate, our church was growing, and we were having a wonderful time in church, then COVID 19 pandemic, next the COVID 19 mandate followed. The mandate created a big hurt to our church." However, Pastor Michael stated, "We were having problems within the church, and the COVID 19 mandate made it worst."

Sub – Question Three

What personal in person pastoral and/or ministerial services conducted in your house of worship was changed as a result of the COVID 19 mandate*?*

As a result of the COVID 19 mandate, the pastors that kept their houses of worship open developed new strategies to preach, to teach The Word of God, and to care for their parishioners. The pastors who closed their houses of worship for a short period of time also developed strategies to preach and to teach The Word of God, and to care for their parishioners. Pastors utilized media internet social outlets, for example, Facebook Live and YouTube. Those churches that did not have adequate internet service utilized the conference phone call apparatuses to preach and to teach The Word of God and provided pastoral care. Pastor Luke concluded, "We had to develop a means to reach the people. We tried Facebook Live, but it do not work, so we utilized conference calling to reach our parishioners." Pastor Paul stated, "We did not close when we heard the mandate, so we held church service outside, practiced social distance, provided We provided masks and provided a hand sanitation station."

Sub – Question Four

What pastoral and ministerial services could not be performed as a result of the COVID 19 mandate?

As a result of the COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship, the pastoral and ministerial service that could not be performed was in-person worship service. The church members could not gather together inside the church, visit the parishioners who were sick and shut-in, visit hospitals, or perform adequate funerals for those who lost their loved ones. The pastors expressed that they were unable to intimately care for them with the love of God. Pastor John spoke, "I had a long-standing church member pass away with COVID 19. Due to fear of

COVID 19, I had to perform pastoral care via a phone call." Pastor John continued, "At the funeral, we had to social distance, and I could not embrace the family of this great church member. This was extremely hard on me."

Summary

Nine of the ten pastors in this research study experienced emotional disruption, due to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship. Emotional disruption was manifested in the form of discouragement, anxiety, and fear. The pastors had to develop strategies to adhere to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship. Most unfortunate, nine of the ten pastors experienced spiritual injury, and one pastor expressed that a scare still remains.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the shared emotional experiences of 10 senior pastors in rural central Virginia due to a shared phenomenon. This phenomenon was the national COVID 19 mandate that forced pastors to close their houses of worship due to COVID 19 pandemic. Therefore, in chapter five, the researcher will discuss interpretations and ideas that will refine the findings in this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study. Chapter Five will consist of five sections to highlight the interpretations and ideas of this research study. The sections are as follows: (a) interpretation of findings, (b) implications for policy and practice, (c) theoretical and methodological implications, (d) limitations and delimitations, and (e) recommendations for future research.

Discussion

In this section of chapter five, the researcher will discuss the research study's findings in light of the developed themes in chapter four. These findings in this research study will be discussed in a manner to highlight the voice of the researcher and to support the interpretations of findings with empirical and theoretical sources, along with hard evidence from this research study. A discussion on the study's findings will begin with a succinct interpretation of those findings.

Interpretation of Findings

Due to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship, an interpretative analysis of the pastors experienced emotional disruption manifested in emotional anxiety, emotional discouragement, and emotional fear, this reported data was the result of an analysis of the

thematic findings. Furthermore, a thematic finding that arose in this research study was the presence of spiritual injury due to emotional disruption caused by these emotions. Based on the analytical data, the researcher determined the research study discovered that totality of the internal exposure to emotional disruption caused the pastors to experience spiritual injury.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The 2020 national COVID 19 mandate that closed houses of worship caused nine of ten pastors in rural central Virginia to experience emotional disruption due to experiencing the emotions of anxiety, fear, and discouragement. The interpretations of the thematic findings in this research study will support these interpretations.

Anxiety Caused Emotional Disruption

The phenomenon, the national mandate that closed houses of worship, caused the research participants to experience anxiety. Nine of the ten research participants agreed that when they initially heard about the national mandate, anxiety surfaced immediately. This research study utilized cognitive appraisal theory as the theoretical framework. This theoretical framework aimed to provide an explanation on the impact an emotional stressful situation has on an individual (Ionescu et al., 2021; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). The aim of the cognitive appraisal theory is to examine the individual's emotional experience, how the individual perceived the emotional experience, and the impact of the emotional situation on the individual. When the research participants encountered the stressful phenomenon, emotional disruption surfaced in the form of anxiety. Anxiety created emotional disruption within the pastors because they knew they had to adhere to the phenomenon, but they understood that they had the authority to create an alternative strategy, yet still adhere to the national mandate. Thus, this research study contends that emotional disruption is the byproduct of the impact of the emotional effect of a unknown for

unforeseen phenomenon on an individual. This unknown or unforeseen phenomenon led the pastors to experience fear, which caused emotional disruption.

Fear Caused Emotional Disruption

Emotional disruption due to the phenomenon, the national mandate that closed houses of worship, caused the research participants to experience fear. Based on an analysis of the data, the researcher concluded that nine of the 10 research participants agreed that when the national mandate was initially announced, the announcement created fear within. The emotional fear was a manifestation of the unknown. The research participants confessed that they did not know how long the national mandate would last, the fear of being in the unknown because they had never experienced anything like the COVID 19 pandemic or the national mandate. They were fearful that they may lose parishioners to the COVID 19 disease. They were fearful of how to develop a worship experience void of parishioners. They were fearful of the government. The observed emotional experience supported that the phenomenon created fear causing emotional disruption. Most unfortunate, the fear the pastors experienced due to an unknown or unforeseen phenomenon manifested discouragement within the pastors.

Discouragement Caused Emotional Disruption.

The phenomenon, the national mandate that closed houses of worship, caused the research participants to experience discouragement. Nine of the ten research participants agreed that trying to develop a strategy to comply with the national mandate created the emotion of discouragement. They were in uncharted territory and did not have a model to follow for this type of unfavorable situation. Discouragement surfaced due to push back from certain individuals in leadership and membership about when to wear a mask, when not to wear a mask, how the church would implement social distancing, how the church would create a media

platform to preach and teach The Word of God. All these factors created discouragement that led to emotional disruption. Emotional disruption led to the pastors to experience spiritual injury.

Emotional Disruption Caused Spiritual Injury

The internal manifestation of anxiety, fear, and discouragement led to spiritual injury. Nine of the ten research participants agreed that they experienced spiritual injury. They admitted that the anxiety, the fear, and the discouragement grieved them within their soul. The totality of the national mandate, the adjustments, and the emotional disruption caused spiritual injury. They felt alone, abandoned, and not able to reach out to anyone for help because of the social distancing and the closure of their houses of worship. They expressed how the absence of in person worship added to the damage within.

Implications for Policy

Based on this research study, there are implications for local and national governmental policies. The analytical data from this research study contends that governmental policies directed to keep houses of worship open during a pandemic, or any perilous times, should become law. The closure of houses of worship damaged the hope and the spiritual essence of human encouragement during times of uncertainty. Within the walls of a house of worship, the parishioner has the opportunity to experience emotional peace, unity, and love.

Implications for Policy

The implication for policies for this research study should be directed to local and national governmental entities. Based on the analytical data in this research study, local and national entities must introduce legislation that will make it a law to keep local houses of worship open during a national pandemic, a national emergency, or a national disaster. In times of national disasters, national pandemics, and national emergences, the citizens of the United

States need to be able to attend a sacred place of worship of their choice where they can pray, feel at peace, and enjoy the in-person presence of others. This recommendation can be accomplished by introducing laws to local and national legislatures that forbid the closure of houses of worship during a national pandemic, a national disaster, or a national emergency.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

This research study confirms the theoretical implication that an individual's emotional response to unforeseen situations within common environments are the foundational principles that support the cognitive appraisal theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and the cognitive appraisal of emotions (Arnold, 1960; Ellsworth, 2013; Frijda 1986; Lazarus, 1991; Ortony et al., 1988; Roseman, 2013). Furthermore, this research study supports emotional theories that illustrate how an individual may progress from a statement of emotional characteristics to a tool to access emotional appraisal in the context of social interaction due to a disruptive stimulus (Moor, 2017).

The disruptive stimulus was the national mandate that closed the pastor's house of worship. Thus, this research adds to the field of cognitive appraisal by adding that an unpredictable outside stimulus can cause an individual to experience an emotional disruption that can lead to spiritual injury. Therefore, any unpredictable stimulus, if applicable, must be examined to determine how it can be reduced, adjusted, or eliminated before it progresses to create emotional disruption within an individual. For example, before a national governmental mandate is instituted, there must be an assessment on the emotional cognitive effect of that mandate on the spiritual well-being of a member in society. This research study highlighted the effect of a national mandate on leaders of a spiritual community that was charged by LORD Jesus Christ to care spiritually for their individual assigned parishioners.

Limitations and Delimitations

The researcher elected to utilize the qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study for this research. The researcher selected this methodology because it "emphasizes an understanding of a phenomenon issue from the perspectives of participants" (Tomita et al., 2021, p. 145). However, limitations exist in this research study. The absence of a research study on a pastor's desire to change careers, due to the national mandate, because they were not equipped to adjust to the pastoral demands caused by national mandate. In addition, research was limited on the effect of the closure of public gathering places, such as the gym, the movie theater, and other places of gathering, so that a pastor could enjoy time to relieve personal stress. Furthermore, research was absent on the correlation of a pastor's tenure service to their ministerial plan for the national mandate.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher recommends three areas for future research. Based on demographics, for example, the age of the pastor, the location of the house of worship, and the pastor's tenure as a senior pastor, this researcher recommends that research be conducted to determine how these demographics affected the pastor's decision to remain open during the COVID 19 pandemic, or to remain closed until the national mandate was lifted. Furthermore, another area for research the researcher recommends is the effect of this national mandate on rural African American churches. During the collection of data for this research, the researcher discovered that many rural African American churches closed and remained closed. Finally, based on the research conducted by this researcher, it is understood that this mandate had a tremendous effect on the spiritual well-being of these pastors. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological research study

would be a sufficient method to examine the loneliness pastors experienced during the national mandate that closed their house of worship.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological research study examined the shared experiences of ten pastors in rural central Virginia due to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship. This research study concluded that the pastors experienced emotional disruption caused by this national mandate. It has been determined that the research participants in this research study experienced emotional disruption in the manifestation of anxiety, discouragement, and fear, due to the national mandate that closed their houses of worship, the phenomenon. The research participants were faced with the decision to adhere to the phenomenon and keep their house of worship closed until the national mandate was lifted, or adhere to the national mandate but develop new methods to provide pastoral services and care to their parishioners. Faced with these options, the demand to decide led the pastors to experience emotional disruption manifested in anxiety, discouragement, and fear. These components of emotional disruption led to spiritual injury within the pastors. Most interesting, the fear the research participants experienced was not attributed to the COVID 19 pandemic, but the pastors feared of the power the United States government. During the COVID 19 pandemic, the United States government had the power to close and open public and private entities as they pleased. Therefore, based on the analytical data in this research study, the researcher recommends that United States citizens become proactive to ensure the nation encounters a national pandemic, or national emergency, there are laws to keep houses of worship open.

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Appendix A

Appendices

The appendices must include a variety of artifacts. The appendix must include the IRB

application (replace with the approval letter for the complete dissertation), informed

consent/assent forms, surveys/questionnaires/instruments, protocols (interviews or observations),

sample transcripts of interviews, theoretical memos, and other documents used to establish an

audit trail. Any identifying or personal information (names, schools, districts, phone numbers,

email addresses) should be eliminated. If numerous types of artifacts are included as appendices,

each type should have a section labeled as Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. Each appendix must be

addressed in the narrative text. The appendix title should be capitalized, bold, and centered.

Appendix B

Trustworthiness Section Example

This appendix offers an example of a comprehensive trustworthiness section. This example may be slightly beyond the expectations of what most doctoral candidates will achieve, particularly during the proposal phase of the dissertation process. This section is fabricated from a faculty member's dissertation and adapted to meet the Liberty School of Education Qualitative Template. This section was done well after the study was completed and after the faculty member had advised over 30 candidates on their trustworthiness sections.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) responded to criticism from positivists about a perceived lack of rigor, reliability, and objectivity by conceptualizing parallel terms for these characteristics of qualitative research, specifically, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This section describes the measures taken to assure a rigorous study through the lens prescribed by Lincoln and Guba. While these terms are, in many cases, synonyms for terms used in quantitative scholarship, these have different meanings and implications for the quality and rigor of a qualitative study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which the study's findings accurately describe reality, at least according to the perceptions of participants, as a proximation of the truth of the phenomenon in question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I achieved credibility in three ways: (a) triangulation, (b) peer debriefing, and (c) member-checking.

Triangulation

In this study, I undertook triangulation of qualitative methods, data collection methods, sources, and theories to explore the stories told by student veterans Bout their success. The methods included aspects of life history (Polkinghorne, 1995) narrative inquiry (Chase, 2005) a hybrid method created for this study in which I did not seek the entire life history of student veterans, but their influences from their military service on their experiences in college and I assumed the role of narrator for the veterans' stories as they may not be prepared to tell their own stories (Chase, 2005). Data collection methods triangulation was achieved through using individual interviews of veterans, their success influencers, and focus groups of veterans. Source triangulation was achieved through using the veterans and their staff or faculty success influencer's perspectives on the phenomenon of student veteran success. Theory triangulation was achieved through the use of Astin's (1980) I-E-O theory and Vacchi's conceptual model of student veteran support (Vacchi & Berger, 2014) as both organizing frameworks and analysis frameworks.

Peer Debriefing

A technique I used frequently during this study was peer debriefing (Marshall & Rossman, 2015) which allowed me to discuss emergent findings with colleagues to ensure my analyses were grounded in the data. Ideally, I would have had military veteran scholars triangulate results during this study through peer debriefing, but I did not have ready access to those kinds of peers. Still, there are some data available in the modest literature that provided some corroboration for my findings, in addition to peers in my academic program who are familiar enough with my research to provide important perspectives that helped elucidate my study's findings.

Member Checking

Having undergone many of the same experiences and transitions myself that student veterans experience before and during college gave me an insider's connection with my participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). This insider's, or *emic* perspective, which Rossman and Rallis (2016) suggest can be an advantage for researchers, allowed me to reflect back the meaning of the participants' words during the interviews; this immediate member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was important because, during the interviews, I confirmed some concepts by asking questions from various perspectives to ensure I captured the essence of an experience. After transcription, I clarified specific elements of data with the participants, thus ensuring I accurately reflected their stories of success, which can also serve as member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Still, I was wary of falling into the trap of believing that I automatically understood what participants meant and forced myself to explain some concepts in participants' words I already understood. For further member checking, I provided willing participants a copy of their transcript, which they reviewed for accuracy. I also provided a copy of what I believed to be the main points of each participant's interview that participants also checked for accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability is showing that the findings may have applicability in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which is achieved through the use of thick descriptions when describing research findings (Geertz, 1973). The descriptions I used to describe the experiences of student veterans at one public, and one private research university painted a robust picture of what success in college meant for my participants. The alignment of participant testimony across these two institutions was so similar as to suggest that the specific context of a college setting may not be the primary factor in what contributes to student veteran success. While a single

institution of each type does not necessarily facilitate transferability of findings, the literature

offers no insights into factors influencing veteran degree attainment, so this study may offer an

exploratory first step toward an improved understanding of student veteran success.

Dependability

Dependability is showing that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Lincoln

& Guba, 1985). Descriptions of my procedures, particularly the adaptation of the study once I

discovered the significance of the success influencer, were comprehensive enough that this study

could be replicated. Specifically, descriptions of the method I developed to undertake this study

are straightforward and supported by the literature, in addition to being fairly simple enough to

repeat for student veterans, but this study could be replicated for any population. My committee

thoroughly reviewed these procedures and deemed them sufficient to demonstrate proficiency in

the method as I designed it.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are

shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba,

1985). I employed three techniques to ensure the confirmability of this study. First, I created a

detailed audit trail through which my procedures, raw data, analyzed data, and the final report

could be transparently tracked if necessary. Second, I employed the numerous aspects of

triangulation described above, and finally, I was reflexive in the undertaking of this study.

Reflexivity is an attitude of attending systematically to the context of knowledge construction,

especially to the effect of the researcher, at every step of the research process (Cohen &

Crabtree, 2006). To achieve reflexivity, I drafted numerous memos comprising a reflexive

journal of sorts. Memoing in this way helped to bracket my bias in this study, which was not

difficult as my undergraduate experience was not as a student veteran, so I merely had to bracket

my perspectives that veterans are successful and be open to contributing factors to their success.

The fact that the success influencer emerged during data collection, and I changed the study to

include the voices of these influencers, reflects that I had no preconceived notion of the

contribution of these success influencers.

Appendix C

Research Question Examples

Phenomenological Research Questions:

Central Research Question

How do students with disabilities in grades four through eight experience an inclusion classroom?

Sub-Question One

How do students with disabilities experience acceptance in the inclusion classroom?

Sub-Question Two

What are the academic learning experiences of students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom?

Phenomenological Research Questions:

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of K-12 teachers with virtual education?

Sub-Question One

How do elementary teachers foster student success in virtual education?

Sub-Question Two

How do elementary teachers foster a cohesive virtual classroom environment?

Sub-Question Three

How do online elementary school teachers describe their professional development experiences?

Case Study Research Questions:

NOTE: According to Yin (2018), case study research questions should start with *How* or *Why*.

Central Question

How effective is online education at technical colleges?

Sub-Question One

How do faculty at technical colleges adapt their instruction techniques to the virtual environment?

Sub-Question Two

How do faculty at technical colleges foster student success in their e-learning classrooms?

Sub-Question Three

How do faculty at technical colleges convert residential curriculum to virtual curriculum?

Case Study Research Questions:

Research Question One

How do high school teachers assign final course grades?

Research Question Two

Why do high school teachers adjust final course grades?

Research Question Three

How does subjectivity factor into the final course grades for high school teachers?

Grounded Theory Research Question(s):

Grounded theory research questions are not developed until the study is completed. A question that guides the research is used instead to guide the study and data collection. A grounded theory guiding question might ask, "What is veteran friendliness?" If the study results in a viable theory, then the research question would be:

What is the theory of veteran friendliness?