WHAT IN THE WORLD IS WRONG WITH YOU?
RETHINKING DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE AMONG 18-25-YEAR-OLD SAILORS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL HEALTH

by

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I dedicate this project to my son, Benjamin.

"The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint." - Leon Bloy

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Abstract

In 2021, Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy, U.S. Public Health Service Surgeon General, published a health advisory calling attention to the urgent public health crisis of degraded mental health among youth. The U.S. Navy is seeing this unprecedented challenge in increased depression and suicide among 18-25-year-old Sailors. This paper looks at the problem of increased depression and suicide-related behavior among 18–25-year-old Sailors, known as Generation Z. It explores the problem and identifies several key demographic and societal factors. It offers a spiritual and pastoral analysis of key drivers of depression and suicide among Generation Z. Finally, it recommends a care response model that integrates spiritual and evidence-based practices to support the recovery of one's divine narrative and spiritual health. This paper argues that spiritual connection with God is the foundation for human flourishing, and an integrated approach to care is the best model to help develop that connection.

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INTRODUCTION

What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?
- Jesus in the gospel of Matthew 16:26

In 2014, as I discussed with my 10-year-old son the importance of honesty and truthfulness, his eyes widened as he proclaimed, "Oh, I get it, Dad! The truth is like life put into words." This concise insight shook me at the core. There is a profound relationship between truth, words, and life. Words spoken in truth give life and ultimate truth exists in the belief that a meaningful connection with God is the foundation of human flourishing.[1] For many, however, this truth is being suppressed.

Since the birth of our Navy, the nation has depended on healthy young men and women to serve in the armed services. There are concerns that today's 18–25-year-old Sailors are struggling with rates of depression and suicidality that present critical health concerns. Without the foundation for what is true, good, and beautiful, one's horizon is darkened and tilted toward death. This is the case for many younger Sailors in the United States Navy struggling with depression and suicide. This paper argues that spiritual health is foundational for holistic health, and an integrated care model is optimal for fostering spiritual connection. It looks at the problem of increased depression and suicide-related behavior among 18–25-year-old Sailors, known as Generation Z, and explores several demographic and societal factors.[2] It offers a spiritual and pastoral analysis of the conditions that negatively impact spiritual health. Finally, it recommends care response practices that integrate psychological and spiritual health.

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[1] Although I believe that Jesus Christ is the greatest expression of God's truth, this paper is not to arguing for specific belief in Christianity. It is directed towards U.S. Navy Chaplains tasked with caring for the spiritual and religious needs of all U.S. Navy members. Championing spiritual health, which helps reduce depression and suicidality, aligns with the Navy Chaplain Corps' core capability of facilitation and care.

[2] This paper is not offering a blanket condemnation of Generation Z. While teaching his disciples, Jesus warned not to point out the speck in someone's eye while ignoring the log stuck in their own. Previous generations lived in eras vastly different from the current one, devoid of the unprecedented challenges confronting today's generation. Also, one must remember that Generation Z is responding to the world given by previous generations.

THE PROBLEM

In 2021, the U.S. Surgeon General published a health advisory calling attention to the urgent public health crisis of degraded mental health among youth.[3] Born between 1997 and 2012, today's 18–25-year-olds find themselves within the "post-Millenial" generation, or "Generation Z (GenZers)."[4] Studies found that 25% of Gen Z respondents reported feeling emotionally distressed. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, these rates almost double the levels "reported by millennial and Gen X respondents (13 percent each), and more than triple the levels reported by baby boomer respondents (8 percent)."[5] Generation Z respondents were also "two to three times more likely than other generations to report thinking about, planning, or attempting suicide in the 12 months spanning late 2019 to late 2020."[6]

Dr. Lisa Miller's book, *The Awakened Brain,* found that over "16 percent of youth in late adolescence currently face depression, and the impact of depression on suicide accounts for *the second leading cause of death* in adolescents, rivaled only by death by auto accident."[7] This increase has been seen in militaries as well. A 2021 global study discovered that the "prevalence of depression in active military forces and veterans was 23%," and the "prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempts" was 11%.[8] This study, however, showed the highest rate of depressive

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[3] "Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory," 2021.

[4] In this paper "Generation Z" and "GenZers" will be used interchangeably. Travis Mitchell, "Early Benchmarks Show 'Post-Millennials' on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet," *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project* (blog), November 15, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/11/15/early-benchmarks-show-post-millennials-on-track-to-be-most-diverse-best-educated-generation-yet/.

[5] "Addressing Gen Z Mental Health Challenges | McKinsey," accessed April 26, 2023, https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare/our-insights/addressing-the-unprecedented-behavioral-health-challenges-facing-generation-z#?cid=eml-web.

[6] "Addressing Gen Z Mental Health Challenges | McKinsey."

[7] Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life* (New York, United States: Random House Publishing Group, 2021), p. 8.

[8] Yousef Moradi, Behnaz Dowran, and Mojtaba Sepandi, "The Global Prevalence of Depression, Suicide Ideation, and Attempts in the Military Forces: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Cross Sectional Studies," *BMC Psychiatry* 21, no. 1 (October 15, 2021): 510, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03526-2.

symptoms was among the 18-25-year-olds at 18.6%.[9] The problem is critical in the U.S. Navy, which consists primarily of 18–25-year-old white middle-class males, predominately from the southern half of the United States.[10] Of all Navy personnel, 83.7% are enlisted, and almost half (46.4%) fall under 25.[11]

With 49,449 suicide cases in the U.S. annually, suicide is a national health problem that stretches across all sectors.[12] From 2006 to 2022, the suicide rate in the Navy more than doubled. In 2021, the Navy saw 69 suicides, with 67% being by Sailors ages 17-29.[13] The top stressors cited were "relationship (47%), mental health (36%), unknown (27%), transition (26%), disciplinary (20%), and financial difficulties (11%)." The latest data is limited, but the problem remains critical, with 77 completed suicides in the Navy in 2022.[14]

Depression is among the top mental health risk factors affecting suicidal ideation.[15] The DSM-V identifies Major Depressive Disorder by the persistence of several symptoms over two weeks. These symptoms include sadness, emptiness, hopelessness, loss of interest in normal activities, weight loss or gain, insomnia, agitation, fatigue, worthlessness or guilt, decreased concentration, and reoccurring thoughts of death.[16]

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[9] Moradi, Dowran, and Sepandi.
[10] "Demographics of the U.S. Military," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 27, 2023, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/demographics-us-military.
[11] "Department of Defense 2021 Demographics: Profile of the Military Community." Department of Defense. December 2022. 40.
[12] "Suicide Data and Statistics | Suicide | CDC," August 15, 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html.
[13] "Data & Statistics," accessed August 26, 2023, https://www.mynavyhr.navy.mil/Support-Services/Culture-Resilience/Suicide-Prevention/Data-Statistics/.
[14] "Data & Statistics." It is beyond the scope of this paper, but one could argue that the Navy's sense of community, purpose, and commitment has saved more lives than it has endangered. The Navy provides care for its sailors in ways not typically available in civilian life. These lifesaving resources are available to every Sailor and can improve resiliency and health.
[15] Michael B. First, *DSM-5® Handbook of Differential Diagnosis* (American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9781585629992.
[16] First, *DSM-5® Handbook of Differential Diagnosis*.

Depression is a complex biopsychosocial-spiritual phenomenon.[17] In many cases,

depression is characterized as a spiritual and psychological response to life's difficulties. It is

often a symptomatic reaction to a deranged and painful world. As Dr. Phillis Isabella Sheppard

points out, "All that disturbs us does not originate from inside of us."[18] One may experience

deep anguish, ambivalence, and doubt, enduring the existential dread of life. As suffering

mounts, many would rather be dead than live with the pain. The avoidance of pain and its

accompanying psychological distress becomes the primary goal, even to the degree of choosing

death to escape. It is then that suicide seems like a viable option. The elimination of the self is

the ultimate act of experiential avoidance.

This is often seen in the U.S. Navy. A recent study discovered that in addition to combat

exposure, "other military-related factors, such as perceived threat during deployment, and

difficult living and working conditions, have been linked to depression, anxiety, and PTSD."[19]

This was the case onboard the USS George Washington (CVN-73), which experienced an

unprecedented streak of suicides during an extended maintenance period. After four sailors died

by suicide in April 2022, an external investigation concluded that the suicides were caused by

individual life stressors but also affected by grim living and working conditions. [20]

> **Sailor Z:** *Can I talk to you, Chaps? I hate this f---ing place and I got to get out of here!*
> *My DH hates me, I hardly sleep, I keep to myself, and nobody cares! My family is*
> *struggling back home, but I can't do anything about it. I was NJP'd after our last port*

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[17] Analyzing the source of depression as a biological illness versus a psychological response to external stressors is not within the scope of this paper. It is important to recognize that depression is often related to a complex biological condition that may require medical treatment, such as psychotherapy and medication. In those cases, chaplains should not attempt to replace medical treatment with spiritual care. Instead, they should seek to provide spiritual care within an integrated care team that includes medical providers, mental health professionals, social workers, and other care services.

[18] "Sheppard - Spiritual Care & Trauma - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," accessed April 15, 2023, https://vanderbilt.app.box.com/s/xwtbcpxfikhzvei4e5gk2ks1rd8hwkem/file/891055019082.

[19] Brienna M. Fogle et al., "The National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study: A Narrative Review and Future Directions," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11 (2020), https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2020.538218.

[20] Geoff Ziezulewicz, "USS George Washington Suicides Investigation Reveals Systemic Issues," Navy Times, December 21, 2022, https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2022/12/21/uss-george-washington-suicides-investigation-reveals-systemic-issues/.

visit due to an ARI. I've been so depressed! I want to disappear! My LPO told me to get in line. I started to cry like a baby, so he told me to talk to you. [21]

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EXPLORING THE FACTORS

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For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?
-1 Corinthians 14:8

A. Navy Life

Several environmental factors unique to Navy life must be considered. First, war sets the stage. Joining the U.S. Navy requires tremendous commitment, service, and sacrifice. The Navy's mission is to "maintain, train and equip combat-ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression and maintaining freedom of the seas."[22] This guarantees American freedom and prosperity through the projection of maritime power and success in war. With war as the backdrop, the mission presents many grueling and high-risk realities that nearly every Sailor will face in service to our nation. Sailors must embrace a warrior mindset to accomplish the mission with honor, safety, and integrity. Most adopt this mindset with a deep sense of purpose, pride, opportunity, and contentment. Others, however, experience an existential crisis as they struggle to adapt to the challenges of military life.

Second, Sailors cannot voluntarily leave. Since the end of the obligated conscription in 1973, congress has committed to maintaining an all-volunteer military force. Every Sailor swears a solemn oath to "support and defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic."[23] From that point, Sailors are legally obligated to follow all

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[21] A composite of various cases I have encountered representing this complex issue will be provided in this paper. Department Head (DH), Non-Judicial Punishment (NJP), also known as "Captain's Mast," is a form of administrative discipline for minor offenses. Alcohol Related Incident (ARI), Leading Petty Officer (LPO),
[22] "Learn About the U.S. Navy & Navy Reserve | Navy.Com," accessed August 27, 2023, https://www.navy.com/who-we-are.
[23] "Learn About the U.S. Navy & Navy Reserve | Navy.Com."

orders via the chain of command.[24] Although challenging, most adapt to this mindset in time after basic training. For others, the challenge runs deeper as they increase in existential turmoil.

The "fight or flight" response often triggers destructive behaviors, initiating a downward spiral. The first stages are usually marked by showing up late for work, showing up intoxicated, exhaustion from lack of sleep, increased dependence on energy drinks and tobacco, edginess, a disoriented or sedate demeanor, nonverbal disrespect of authorities, and going AWOL.[25] These destructive behaviors are characteristic of a deeper problem and almost always initiate corrective actions. This raises the stakes further, and the cycle intensifies into a self-fulfilling prophecy: "The Navy is awful. They're out to get me. No one cares or can help. I'm alone. I must leave." Some start to feel increasingly anxious and exhibit signs of stress, desperation, anxiety, and, eventually, depression. Resigned to their fate, many collapse even further and consider suicide as a possible means of escape.

This was the situation on board the USS George Washington, where sailors reported feelings of "discouragement, shame, and stigma for seeking both mental and physical health care" aboard the ship. One Sailor was quoted as saying:

> I have developed mental issues that I feel I cannot resolve because I KNOW [original emphasis] my chain of command does not care, and production is what must be pushed every day to the maximum. I feel unsafe asking my leadership for help or even telling them I am going to see the psych boss, or chaplain, or whatever because, in return, they will make me stay late to complete the work I was unable to do when I was at said appointment.[26]

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[24] The chain of command refers to the line of military command authority between the Sailor and the commander. It is denoted by rank, unit structure, and operational control.

[25] AWOL means "Absent Without Leave"

[26] "Investigation Into Command Climate and Sailor Quality of Life Onboard the USS George Washington (CVN 73) Inclusive of Systemic Challenges That Impact Carriers Undergoing Extensive Maintenance or Construction in Newport News" (United States Fleet Forces Command, April 3, 2023), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jHkmCSTDhXilB_e3yRbJwWXer4jZfiQW/view?pli=1.

Third, the Navy is understaffed and overtasked. It is stretched to its limit by a zero-defect culture that seeks to minimize risk while meeting demands. Many rates and sectors of the Navy are operating below the required capacity as the Navy struggles to fill rates across the board.[27] Something is always lost when sailors are pushed to "do more with less."

This was a contributing factor aboard the USS George Washington. The Commanding Officer tasked the Command Chaplain with starting a "Command Resiliency Team Human Factors Council (CRTHFC)" designed to help and track individual Sailors who had been identified as needing more resources. The chaplain determined that "only 50 percent of department heads supported the CRTHFC requirements. Primary resistance focused on the time required to execute the program, even quarterly."[28]

Additionally, many spiritual and mental health providers are also understaffed and overtasked.[29] The USS George Washington's lead psychologist and behavioral health technician were "described as "overwhelmed,"" and one investigator noted they required "extra resources to keep up with the demand."[30] The ship reported at least "2,600 mental health encounters since January 2021, a patient load divvied up between two substance abuse counselors, the ship's psychologist, and the technician." Even as mental health providers "struggled under a relentless"

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[27] Heather Mongilio, "Navy Recruiting Increasing Work Week to Six Days to Combat Recruitment Shortages," *USNI News* (blog), June 28, 2023, https://news.usni.org/2023/06/28/navy-recruiting-increasing-work-week-to-six-days-to-combat-recruitment-shortages.

[28] Investigation Into Command Climate and Sailor Quality of Life Onboard the USS George Washington (CVN 73) Inclusive of Systemic Challenges That Impact Carriers Undergoing Extensive Maintenance or Construction in Newport News. Pg. 51

[29] Geoff Ziezulewicz, "Why Is Big Navy Mum on Mental Health Care Shortages, Long Wait Times?," Navy Times, July 14, 2022, https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2022/07/14/why-is-big-navy-mum-on-mental-health-care-shortages-long-wait-times/.

[30] "Investigation Into Command Climate and Sailor Quality of Life Onboard the USS George Washington (CVN 73) Inclusive of Systemic Challenges That Impact Carriers Undergoing Extensive Maintenance or Construction in Newport News."

patient load, a psychologist aboard the USS George Washington told investigators that leaders "don't have time" to deal with Sailor's issues and "just refer them to the mental health office."[31]

B. Considering Sailor Health

The concept of a "healthy" Sailor is broader in scope than the absence of physical or mental illness. A person's health has historically been associated with the idea of holistic well-being or harmony within one's surroundings. Hippocrates, the renowned father of medicine, stated, "If you want to learn about the health of a population, look at the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the places where they live."[32] The Hebrew word *Shalom*, usually translated as "peace," included a broader concept of well-being between oneself, one's neighbor, and God. The ancient Greeks saw health as an extension of the "balance of the elements of the soul." The historical Christian belief is that health and well-being are blessings given by God.[33] Today, the World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."[34]

A "healthy" Sailor includes the broader scope of holistic well-being or what has been called "human flourishing." Recent studies find that human flourishing includes mental and physical health but also encompasses "happiness and life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships."[35] Human flourishing is a model that sees health as a balance between physical, mental, social, and spiritual wellness. Thus, Sailor health

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[31] Ziezulewicz, "USS George Washington Suicides Investigation Reveals Systemic Issues."

[32] J. Nadine Gracia and Howard K. Koh, "Promoting Environmental Justice," *American Journal of Public Health* 101, no. Suppl 1 (December 2011): S14–16, https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300406.

[33] Mark Cobb, Prof Christina M. Puchlaski, and Prof Bruce Rumbold, *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[34] "Constitution of the World Health Organization," accessed September 3, 2023, https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution.

[35] Tyler J. VanderWeele, "On the Promotion of Human Flourishing," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114, no. 31 (August 2017): 8148–56, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1702996114.

is more than physical fitness, technical competence, or the absence of disease. A healthy Sailor is holistically healthy in mind, body, and spirit.

Navy leaders recognize this point, and spiritual health is now receiving increased attention.[36] This was echoed by General David Berger, former United States Marine Corps Commandant, who stated that "spirituality makes a positive contribution to character and resiliency, both of which are in turn critical to readiness."[37] General Berger further asserted that "[w]hile the importance of physical, mental, and social fitness are more recognizable, spiritual fitness is just as critical, and [it] specifically addresses my priority to build character and instill core values in every Marine and Sailor. Character strengthens our collective warfighting spirit."[38]

The word "spirit" comes from the Latin word *spiritus,* meaning "breath" or "wind." The Oxford English Dictionary defines spirit as "The animating or vital principle in humans and animals; that which gives life to the body, in contrast to its purely material being; the life force, the breath of life."[39] The spirit is the deepest and most fundamental inner essence. It animates the self and remains the most authentic and vital quality of being human. It is connected to, and nearly indistinguishable from, one's soul, mind, psyche, or character. [40]

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[36] The Navy Chaplain Corps recently defined spiritual readiness as "the strength of spirit that allows the warfighter to accomplish the mission with honor." David A. Daigle, Daniel V. Goff, and Harold G. Koenig, "Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy: Stoic Philosophy and Spiritual Fitness for Optimizing Warfighter Readiness," *Expeditions with MCUP* 2023 (March 31, 2023), https://doi.org/10.36304/ExpwMCUP.2023.03. The Navy Chaplain Corps has been committed to spiritual health since its birth on 28 November 1775. Navy Chaplains have been attached to every kind of command and platform, championing the spiritual and mental health of Sailors. Being fully embedded in the command structure, Navy Chaplains are present, available, and often the first to respond to Sailors in need.

[37] "Resiliency and Spiritual Fitness," United States Marine Corps Flagship, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/2433271/resiliency-and-spiritual-fitness/https%3A%2F%2Fwww.marines.mil%2FNews%2FMessages%2FMessages-Display%2FArticle%2F2433271%2Fresiliency-and-spiritual-fitness%2F.

[38] "RESILIENCY AND SPIRITUAL FITNESS."

[39] "Spirit, n. Meanings, Etymology and More | Oxford English Dictionary," accessed January 27, 2024, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/spirit_n?tab=meaning_and_use#21464538.

[40] The word "psychology" is derived from the Latin word *"psychologia,* meaning the study of the soul." Jason A. Nieuwsma, Robyn D. Walser, and Steven C. Hayes, eds., *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Bridge Psychological and Spiritual Care* (Oakland, CA: Context Press, 2016). Pg. 57.

The Journal of Palliative Medicine describes spirituality as the "dynamic dimension of human life that relates to the way persons (individual and community) experience, express and/or seek meaning, purpose and transcendence, and the way they connect to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, to the significant, and/or the sacred."[41] Drawing from these definitions, I submit that spirituality is a holistic and harmonious alignment of oneself with God, others, and the world they inhabit.

Numerous studies have confirmed that spiritual health positively impacts overall health and reduces the likelihood of mental illness. One study shows that positive spiritual health was associated with a "decreased risk for lifetime post-traumatic stress disorder," decreased "alcohol use disorder," reduced "suicidal ideation," and was "strongly linked with increased dispositional gratitude, purpose in life, and posttraumatic growth."[42] A meta-analysis of 326 studies found that 79% reported "that higher levels of religiosity/spirituality were related to greater psychological well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, and other positive emotions."[43] The same meta-analysis found that 93% of studies "reported greater meaning and purpose among those who were more involved in spiritual activities."[44]

Further, positive spiritual health has been shown to decrease depression and suicidality. A foundational 2014 reported a "90% decreased risk in major depression, assessed prospectively, in adult offspring of depressed probands who reported that religion or spirituality was highly

[41] Christina M. Puchalski et al., "Improving the Spiritual Dimension of Whole Person Care: Reaching National and International Consensus," *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 17, no. 6 (June 2014): 642–56, https://doi.org/10.1089/jpm.2014.9427.

[42] Vanshdeep Sharma et al., "Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health of U.S. Military Veterans: Results from the National Health and Resilience in Veterans Study," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 217 (August 2017): 197–204, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.03.071.

[43] Daigle, Goff, and Koenig, "Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy."

[44] Daigle, Goff, and Koenig.

important to them."[45] Another study in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* found that those who

"frequently attended religious services (i.e., ≥ 24 times per year) were more than two times

(67%) less likely to die by suicide than those who did not frequently attend religious services."[46]

> **Chaps:** *This sounds serious. Have you talked to anyone about getting help?*
> **Sailor Z:** *I went to medical, and they gave me anxiety medication, so I guess I'm crazy now. The Doc recommended that I talk to the DRC, but she can't do anything.*[47] *I just want to eliminate the problem. I talked to a corpsman who seemed cool. He thought you could help. If they kick me out, I have nothing at home! I joined the Navy to get out of that hellhole. I tried to see Psych, but they're booked until next month.*

C. Demographic Factors

Examining key demographic factors reveals a complicated issue affecting Generation Z's

ability to experience holistic health. These demographic factors impact sailor's readiness much

sooner than their first assignment. Some demographic factors include increased diversity,

financial uncertainty, and social and political progressivism.[48] Other factors impacting sailor

readiness include decreased spiritual and religious affiliation and childhood trauma.

A 2019 Pew Research study found that "48% of all GenZers were racial or ethnic minorities,

and 25% of Generation Z were Hispanic."[49] This is a significant increase compared to the

Millennial generation and Generation X. In 1987, only 30% of Generation X were racial or

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[45] Lisa Miller et al., "Neuroanatomical Correlates of Religiosity and Spirituality," *JAMA Psychiatry* 71, no. 2 (February 1, 2014): 128–35, https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2013.3067.

[46] Evan M. Kleiman and Richard T. Liu, "Prospective Prediction of Suicide in a Nationally Representative Sample: Religious Service Attendance as a Protective Factor," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 204, no. 4 (April 2014): 262–66, https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.113.128900.

[47] Deployment Resiliency Counselor (DRC) are licensed clinical counselors attached to Naval ships to provide psychological care.

[48] Mitchell, "Early Benchmarks Show 'Post-Millennials' on Track to Be Most Diverse, Best-Educated Generation Yet."

[49] Travis Mitchell, "On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far," *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project* (blog), May 14, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/.

ethnic minorities, with only 12% being Hispanic.[50] Additionally, 59% of Generation Z pursued a

college education, while only 18% worked immediately after high school. Comparatively, only

44% of Generation X pursued a college education, but 41% worked after high school in 1986.[51]

 Generation Z has also seen financial uncertainty. Growing up in an age impacted by the

Great Recession of 2008, many witnessed their parents struggle financially. They struggle to

remain optimistic and flourish without financial security.[52] They want to avoid crippling debt

and are more likely to be motivated by economic pragmatism and market security.[53] In their

lifetime, they saw college tuition rates increase by 28% from 2008 to 2014.[54] With inflation and

rising housing costs, some have given up on owning a home or securing an economic means for

a family. One study cited that the average age to marry in "2022 for the first time was 30.1 for

men and 28.2 for women, up from ages 23.7 and 20.5, respectively, in 1947."[55]

 Generation Z has also seen tremendous cultural and sociological shifts and is increasingly

aware of national and global issues impacting their future. This generation witnessed the first

Black American President, increasing diversity, increased polarization, mass shootings and gun

violence, COVID-19, racial and ethnic inequality, increased ecological anxieties, legalization of

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[50] Mitchell. Diversity is crucial for mission success as the Navy brings together sailors from various backgrounds. However, integrating diverse groups into a balanced and cohesive unit poses some challenges. Despite potential clashes, the Navy must leverage the diverse experiences of sailors to create a unified narrative for mission accomplishment.

[51] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Statistics Snapshot: Generation Z and Education," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, October 30, 2020, https://www.aecf.org/blog/generation-z-and-education.

[52] "Hamman - Play-Informed Chaplaincy - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," accessed October 16, 2023, https://vanderbilt.app.box.com/s/jjkymm64j9es905hz8c77bel9y00csnf/file/866953937402, 17:40.

[53] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "What Are the Core Characteristics of Generation Z?," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, January 13, 2021, https://www.aecf.org/blog/what-are-the-core-characteristics-of-generation-z.

[54] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Social Issues That Matter to Generation Z," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, February 14, 2021, https://www.aecf.org/blog/generation-z-social-issues.

[55] US Census Bureau, "Census Bureau Releases New Estimates on America's Families and Living Arrangements," Census.gov, accessed November 24, 2023, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/americas-families-and-living-arrangements.html.

gay marriage, and cultural shifts concerning the LGBTQ+ community.[56] Generation Z is

familiar with cultural shifts and the social strife often associated with them.

Many GenZers broadly accept these changes as normative. They tend to be politically

progressive and socially active and believe that the government should be actively involved in

public life. Paradoxically, many GenZers are also suspicious of the government and wary of

authoritative political claims and promises. [57]

These cultural shifts have occurred within the family unit, and more GenZers grew up in

households without married parents. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Panel "found that 55% of

Millennial parents…have had children before getting married."[58] A 2016 study found that "over

40% of births are to unmarried mothers,"[59] and a 2019 Pew Research Center study found that

almost a quarter (23%) of children in the US "live with one parent and no other adults."[60]

Another study found that "More than 20% of children born to married couples will experience

a divorce by age 9 and more than 50% of kids born to cohabiting couples will experience parental

breakup, according to some estimates."[61]

While many children of single-parent households become healthy adults, there are some

harmful effects related to single-parent households. Single-parent families are "more likely to live

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[56] Travis Mitchell, "Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues," *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project* (blog), January 17, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/.

[57] Mitchell.

[58] For Your Marriage Staff and ASSOCIATES, "Millennials Who Marry Before Having Children More Likely to Thrive Financially," accessed November 24, 2023, https://www.foryourmarriage.org/blogs/millennials-who-marry-before-having-children-more-likely-to-thrive-financially/.

[59] Susan L. Brown, J. Bart Stykes, and Wendy D. Manning, "Trends in Children's Family Instability, 1995–2010," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 78, no. 5 (October 2016): 1173, https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12311.

[60] Stephanie Kramer, "U.S. Has World's Highest Rate of Children Living in Single-Parent Households," *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed November 24, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/12/12/u-s-children-more-likely-than-children-in-other-countries-to-live-with-just-one-parent/.

[61] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Child Well-Being in Single-Parent Families," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, August 1, 2022, https://www.aecf.org/blog/child-well-being-in-single-parent-families.

in poverty compared to married-parent households."[62] Consequently, children growing up in

poverty "are more likely to have physical, mental and behavioral health problems, disrupted brain

development, shorter educational trajectories, contact with the child welfare and justice systems,

employment challenges in adulthood and more."[63] Another outcome of single-family homes has

been an increase in loneliness among this generation. Approximately 56% of Generation Z

reported feeling "lonely at least once or twice a month during their childhood."[64]

Many GenZers are redirecting their identity and belonging away from traditional

structures and turning toward internet technology and social media. These platforms are almost

omnipresent and omniscient, and Generation Z is plugged in nearly all day. Whereas millennials

pioneered the internet and social media evolution, GenZers are considered the first social media

natives. They were "born into a world of peak technological innovation — where information

was immediately accessible and social media increasingly ubiquitous."[65]

Recent studies find that GenZers watch about "7.2 hours of videos per day, bounding

from TikTok to YouTube to Netflix."[66] Especially during COVID-19, screen time doubled

among children with streaming services like Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc. In 2021,

GenZers spent more time on social media and streaming platforms, with the top three downloads

being TikTok (94 million), Instagram (64 million), and Snapchat (56 million). GenZers also

tended to spend more time on video game platforms at 11-13 hours per week.[67]

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[62] Foundation.

[63] Foundation.

[64] "The Childhood Loneliness of Generation Z - The Survey Center on American Life," accessed November 24, 2023, https://www.americansurveycenter.org/the-lonely-childhood-of-generation-z/.

[65] Foundation, "What Are the Core Characteristics of Generation Z?"

[66] "30+ Average Screen Time Statistics for 2023 | SlickText," accessed March 27, 2023, https://www.slicktext.com/blog/2023/01/30-key-screen-time-statistics-for-2022-2023/.

[67] "30+ Average Screen Time Statistics for 2023 | SlickText."

Generation Z has seen tremendous shifts in their local and global world. The institutions that once played the primary role in providing meaning and identity continue to change rapidly. These changes have caused some to be cautious and suspicious concerning what is reliable, trustworthy, and authoritatively true.

> *Chaps: You've been through a lot. You sound somewhat hopeless and desperate. Have you been thinking about suicide?*
> *Sailor Z: Yes! I mean…not really…sort of. That's partly why I went to medical. I just keep having these thoughts that everything would go away if I just disappeared. I don't think I'll do it. I have too much to live for, plus I can't do that to my mom.*
> *Chaps: Okay…I'm glad you went to medical and got help. Since you're safe today, let's keep talking. What stood out about the corpsman at medical?*
> *Sailor Z: I don't know. We both grew up in the same kind of neighborhood in the same state. He just gets me. There are so many annoying people on this ship. Everyone's out for themselves. It's cool to find someone like you who actually cares. Plus, we're both gamers. I don't know. Basically, ship life sucks, and I got to get out of here.*

D. Religion and Spirituality

Defining religion is essential for analyzing Generation Z's religious characteristics. The Protestant theologian Paul Tillich referred to religion as the object of one's "ultimate concern."[68] According to this view, everyone is "religious" to some extent, as their ultimate concern shapes their religious orientation. William James defined religion as "the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto."[69]

The religious makeup of Generation Z has shifted significantly compared to previous generations. In 1958, 62% of all Americans belonged to mainline protestant churches and, adding in Catholicism and Southern Baptist churches, "well into the high 80th percentile" of all Americans were Christian.[70] Since that time, research shows that Christianity has steadily

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[68] "The Dynamics of Faith," by Paul Tillich. 127 Pp. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1957. $2.75," accessed October 9, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1177/004057365701400213.
[69] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (Longmans, Green and Co, 1902), 53.
[70] "Hudnut-Beumler - Religious Identity - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," accessed April 2, 2023, https://vanderbilt.app.box.com/s/1304xn2wg7x4wuor5lwb1nuihcgvv644/file/881137771211.

decreased in importance. A recent poll taken in 2022 shows that 75% of all Americans believe
Christianity will continue to lose influence in American society.[71]

Research shows a dramatic decrease in GenZers' religious affiliation. Generation Z is on
track to be the first generation in which "the nones clearly outnumber the Christians," and the
rate of GenZers who have no religious affiliation increased by 9% between 2016 and 2021.[72]
Another study found that the percentage of unaffiliated 18–29-year-olds increased from 10% in
1986 to 36% in 2020.[73] Similarly, another article showed that while the oldest American adults
comprise "72% Christian and 18% none," GenZers account for "36% Christian and 48%
none."[74] Research shows various reasons for this religious shift. Of the top reasons cited for the
unaffiliated, 60% said they have many questions about religious teachings, 49% said they have
problems with churches' sociopolitical positions, 41% said they have issues with religious
organizations, and 37% cited no belief in God.[75]

According to a recent study conducted by the Barna Group, at 13%, the rate of atheism
doubled among Generation Z compared to the rest of the U.S. population.[76] This same study
cited the problem of evil as the primary cause of religious disbelief. It stated, "It appears that

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[71] Gallup Inc, "Religion," Gallup.com, June 8, 2007, https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/Religion.aspx.

[72] "Nones" are those who typically mark "nothing in particular" on religious surveys. Gregory A. Smith Alper Patricia Tevington, Justin Nortey, Michael Rotolo, Asta Kallo and Becka A., "Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), January 24, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/.

[73] PRRI, "The 2020 Census of American Religion," July 8, 2020, https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/.

[74] "Gen Z and Religion in 2021," *Religion in Public* (blog), June 15, 2022, https://religioninpublic.blog/2022/06/15/gen-z-and-religion-in-2021/.

[75] 1615 L. St NW, Suite 800 Washington, and DC 20036 USA202-419-4300 | Main202-857-8562 | Fax202-419-4372 | Media Inquiries, "Why America's 'Nones' Don't Identify with a Religion," *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/. It is noteworthy that the top reason for the religious unaffiliation is not disbelief in God or a transcendent order. By comparison, 89% of atheists described 'no belief in God' as their primary reason for religious unaffiliation.

[76] "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z," Barna Group, accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/.

today's youth, like so many throughout history, struggle to find a compelling argument for the existence of both evil and a good and loving God.[77]

The religious makeup of the U.S. military has become increasingly diverse as well. In 2019, the Congressional Research Service published a report indicating that "Other/Unclassified/Unknown" combined with "Atheist/Agnostic" made up 26.7 of all active-duty component personnel. This was the second largest religious demographic following "Christian-no denominational preference" at 32.5%.[78] According to recent U.S. Air Force Armed Forces Chaplains Board data, 31.6% of all active-duty Navy personnel consider themselves "no preference or no religion." [79] This number surpassed the second-highest religious demographic in the Navy, 26.4% "Christian – no preference."[80] One article showed that there are "more U.S. military personnel who claim to be Pagans than claim to be either Jewish or Muslim. There are three times as many humanists as either Pagan or Jewish personnel and seven times as many humanists as Muslim personnel."[81]

It appears Generation Z has doubts about traditional institutionalized religion and struggles to find compelling reasons to affiliate with religious organizations. Yet, many are still searching for spiritual meaning. In her book *Strange Rites: New Religion for a Godless World,* Tara Burton argues that young people are disconnecting from religious institutions but searching for "a sense of meaning in the world and personal purpose within that meaning, a community to

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[77] "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z."

[78] Kamarck, Kristy N., "Diversity, Inclusion, and Equal Opportunity in the Armed Services: Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, June 5, 2019. Adding Catholic (19.9%), Christian-Protestant (17.9%), and Christian - no denominational preference (32.5%), Christianity is by far the largest religious demographic at over 70%.

[79] "Active Duty by ServiceFiltered by Religious Faith, All Pay Plans and Mar-2022," Data Pull from US Air force Armed Forces Chaplains Board, n.d.

[80] "Active Duty by ServiceFiltered by Religious Faith, All Pay Plans and Mar-2022."

[81] Ed Waggoner, "Taking Religion Seriously in the U.S. Military: The Chaplaincy as a National Strategic Asset," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 82, no. 3 (2014): 702–35.

share that experience with, and rituals to bring the power of that experience into achievable, everyday life."[82] She argues that most reject religious institutions but elevate intuition as the primary measurement of what is spiritually true. An article on gay and lesbian spirituality found that while many young people feel disconnected from institutional religion, they still seek some form of transcendent meaning in their lives. They see "that nature, family, art, and sex can be occasions of an experience of the spiritual. They speak of these as spiritual experiences but are unwilling to assign any particular kind of religious context to them."[83]

Burton refers to this phenomenon as "the *Remixed*" religion. This is not a newly organized religion with creeds, hierarchical structure, and clear boundaries. It is a religious "awakening," distinctly American, and primarily associated with younger people. It is a religion of the fully optimized self, supercharged by the internet and consumer capitalism and reliant upon intuition-based morality. Many GenZers pull from diverse sources, designing a spiritual profile that works for them.[84] For example, one may mix family religion with ethnic veneration, yoga, mindfulness, the spirituality of *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter*, social justice activism, universal energy, health and wellness, political tribalism, internet affinity groups, the deification of the self, positive intuition, eastern mysticism, self-help guruism, and nature worship.

Burton breaks remixed religion into a combination of three complex groups: spiritual but not religious (SBNR), "faithful nones," and the "religious hybrids."[85] Although difficult to ascertain, Burton conservatively estimates the number of remixed religious people comprises

[82] Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World*, First edtion (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020), p. 10.

[83] James L Empereur, "Healing: The Focus of Gay/Lesbian Spirituality," *Liturgy* 22, no. 3 (2007): 58.

[84] Burton. pgs 239-245.

[85] Burton. pgs. 18-22

50% of the American population. She adds, "At least half of America—and likely far more—is either a faithful None, an SBNR, or a religiously flexible hybrid."[86]

Remixed religion is not new or unique to America. What is new in this religious awakening is the erosion of trust in traditional institutions, the rise of the internet, and hyper-consumer capitalism. Against this complex and fluid background, remixed religion moves the religious fulcrum from the "institution to the intuition." Burton sums it up succinctly:

> The result has been a cornucopia of antiauthoritarian, anti-institutional American religious traditions. Some, even most, take liberal autonomy to the extreme. They accept as gospel the idea that there is nothing and nobody more reliable than one's self and that there is no ontological good more pressing than the care, cultivation, and perfection of that existence.[87]

The outcome is an aversion to institutional truth claims and a flattening of religious landscapes. One becomes the center of one's religion; the "self" is the sole judge, consumer, and object of one's "ultimate concern." This is the subjective "live your truth" standard by which many remixed religious truth claims are measured. The ultimate goal is that the universe might become "harmoniously adjusted" unto oneself. Burton adds:

> We do not live in a godless world. Rather, we live in a profoundly anti-institutional one, where the proliferation of Internet creative culture and consumer capitalism have rendered us all simultaneously parishioner, high priest, and deity. America is not secular but simply spiritually self-focused.[88]

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[86] Burton. pg 25. SBNRs might hold onto spiritual elements of their earlier religion but have scrapped religious orthodoxy. An SBNR may attend Christmas Eve Mass but not believe in the divinity of Christ. Nevertheless, many lean into their earlier religious background as a source of meaning-making, purpose, and community. Faithful nones may believe in a higher power but do not see "themselves as belonging to a religious community or having a religious identity in any way." They may maintain a spiritual sense of the world but have an aversion toward institutional religion. Religious hybrids formally identify with a religion but feel free to "disregard elements that don't necessarily suit them, or to supplement their official practice with spiritual or ritualistic elements, not to mention beliefs, from other traditions." A religious hybrid Christian may exchange the traditional teachings of eternal hell for the Buddhist belief of reincarnation.

[87] Burton. p. 244.

[88] Burton p. 242.

E. Showing up With Trauma

Many Generation Z Sailors are showing up to the Navy having experienced significant childhood trauma. Statistics reveal the enormity of the problem. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes "adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)" as the "potentially traumatic experiences" that occur between birth to 17.[89] In the United States, "61% of adults had at least one ACE and 16% had 4 or more types of ACEs."[90] Common examples of ACEs include childhood violence, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, neglect, witnessing family or community violence, or having a loved one die by murder or suicide. The CDC specifies that "at least 1 in 7 children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the past year in the United States." Regrettably, the number is much higher throughout childhood, and the CDC further reveals that "(t)his is likely an underestimate because many cases are unreported."[91]

Adults who have had ACEs experience higher levels of adverse health outcomes. Some common harmful effects include depression, mental health problems, heart disease, cancer, substance abuse, and the perpetuation of destructive relationships. Furthermore, ACEs negatively impact one's ability to thrive in the community, education, and profession.[92]

As described earlier, the Navy is comprised of mostly younger enlisted Sailors. Given the demographic data, many young Sailors arrive with prior trauma experiences, significantly impeding their ability to train, adapt, and thrive in the Navy. It is difficult to determine the exact amount. Still, a recent article found that "85% of participating veterans reported experiencing at

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[89] "Fast Facts: Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect |Violence Prevention|Injury Center|CDC," May 31, 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/fastfact.html.
[90] "Fast Facts."
[91] "Fast Facts."
[92] "Fast Facts."

least one category of ACE before the age of 18, while nearly half of veteran participants (46.0%)

reported experiencing four or more categories."[93]

Dr. Phillis Isabella Sheppard defines trauma as the "debilitating and destabilizing effect

of an experience, environment, memory or historical legacy."[94] Dr. Sheppard explains that the

effects of trauma can be "psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual" and permeate

throughout one's individual and communal life.[95] She breaks trauma into three categories.

Intimate trauma is when violence is inflicted in a relationship of trust or where trust can

reasonably be expected.[96] Intimate trauma disrupts one's ability to trust others and even oneself.

Tragically, those closest to the victim may be unable to help due to this disruption, and those put

into positions of trust, such as one's military unit leaders, cannot help until trust is re-established.

Cultural trauma takes place in connection "to one's cultural groups, values, and practices"

and intersects with "language, cultural values," and "racial and ethnic sources of meaning-

making."[97]   This form of trauma disrupts one's reliance upon group identity and purpose.

Sailors suffering from cultural trauma may struggle in ways that affect their sense of identity,

morality, and commitment.

Spiritual trauma "impedes and/or disrupts the previously meaningful spiritual values,

practices, and communities."[98] Spiritual trauma disrupts one's sense of transcendent order in the

world. In spiritual trauma, one loses trust in foundational sources of spiritual meaning, purpose,

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[93] Christina Laird and Patricia Alexander, "Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences Among Veterans," *Clinical Social Work Journal* 47 (December 1, 2019): 1–10, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-019-00703-5.
[94] Sheppard, Phillis. "Spiritual Care & Trauma." VDS Doctor of Ministry Program. November 10, 2021. Video, 2:00.
[95] Sheppard. "Spiritual Care & Trauma." Video, 15:07.
[96] Sheppard. "Spiritual Care & Trauma." Video, 6:03.
[97] Sheppard. "Spiritual Care & Trauma." Video, 7:06.
[98] Sheppard. "Spiritual Care & Trauma." Video, 13:00.

and hope. Spiritual trauma may take place when one wrestles with questions of evil or experiences trauma within a religious community. [99]

> **Chaps**: *Well, it's important to stay connected. Have you called home?*
> **Sailor Z**: *Like I said, my family is just…we don't talk that much. My childhood wasn't the greatest. Plus…I don't want them to think I'm a loser. I wasn't a good kid and I got into a lot of trouble. I had a teacher who helped me out in high school, and then I left that hellhole and joined the Navy. I kind of want to just leave it there. But I can't stay here either. Can you help me get out of here?*

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS

> *Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied,*
> *"My name is Legion; for we are many."* -Mark 5:9

Disconnecting from spiritual and community foundations has heightened levels of depression and suicidality. Having explored critical environmental and sociological factors, I will now provide a spiritual analysis focusing on two primary drivers of depression and suicide: neoliberalism and the internet, which have infected the soul.

A. The Cry of the Soul

Many GenZers sense that something is wrong in the world, and their soul bears witness to this misalignment, crying out for the world as it should be. Dr. Bruce Rogers-Vaughn's article, "Blessed are Those Who Mourn: Depression as Political Resistance," looks at depression from a psycho-spiritual perspective and identifies depression as a form of political resistance in the age of "neoliberalism." He argues that depression is not merely a "brain problem" as much as it is a "cry of the soul" in a deranged, external reality preset by neoliberalism. [100]

Dr. Robers-Vaughn defines neoliberalism as the system of political and economic practices "that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual

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[99] Sheppard. "Spiritual Care & Trauma." Video, 13:00.
[100] Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, "Blessed Are Those Who Mourn: Depression as Political Resistance," *Pastoral Psychology* 63, no. 4 (August 2014): 503–22, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0576-y.

entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong

private property rights, free markets, and free trade."[101] The practices and structures of this

economic market are all-pervasive, infused into every element of human worth and interaction.

Like a powerful force, this pervasive market enters our psyche and silences other sources of

community and identity.

       Dr. Rogers-Vaughn identifies six effects of neoliberalism—inequality, consumerism,

individualism, erosion of self, social alienation, and loss of meaning—that negatively impact

relationships and human worth. In the all-pervasive market, human beings are separated,

compressed, and reduced to units of exchange. One's measurement of happiness is determined

by their "accumulation of wealth and capacity to consume."[102] Incapable of resisting this drive,

people constantly compare themselves with others, doing whatever is necessary to attain higher

levels of success. They maintain their status at all costs. All relationships and exchanges pass

through and are divided by the internal rules of the neoliberal market. It monetizes and drives

relationships, leading people further toward comparison and separation.

       Under this structure, people desperately search for ways to become more authentic,

extraordinary, and happy. They exchange deep relationships for a multitude of "contacts" or

"networks." This leads to an erosion of self as one becomes increasingly fluid, "uniquely

capable of plugging into the next promoted product or service." They no longer stand on solid

ground and lack definite boundaries. They become "fully saturated" in the market, further losing

their sense of self.

       One becomes further cut off from deep connection and the principal institutions that once

provided community, meaning, and identity. This intensifies the "breakdown of community,"

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[101] Rogers-Vaughn.
[102] Rogers-Vaughn.

where people lose the capacity for empathy, "the basis on which all human relationships are made possible."[103] A final casualty is the loss of meaning as one loses the ability to make sense and "narrate one's existence, both individually and corporately."[104]

The fight against depression is more profound than the material world. Two analogies are helpful to understand this perspective. In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul warns that the actual battle is not against "flesh and blood" but against the "principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."[105] The neo-liberal market is like this world's allusive ruler, principality, and power. It is an ever-present force with a voracious appetite for one's imagination, loyalties, and even deepest concerns. The battle takes place in the landscape of one's soul but points upwards toward the "heavenly realms."

Neoliberal market themes can also be identified in the popular film *The Matrix*. The matrix divides and reduces human beings into units of exchange, producing a sum of energy that fuels and promulgates the matrix. People lose their sense of self, becoming like pods and commodities for the matrix. Like The Matrix, the market is intensely powerful and unambiguously interested in capturing and securing one's imagination. It permeates every element of our collective being, demanding allegiance and even one's "ultimate concern."[106]

Against this backdrop, the soul cries out in the form of depression. Dr. Rogers-Vaughn described the soul as an "aspect of self, namely the capacity, or better, the *activity,* of self-transcendence." The soul is the active relationality, the transcendent dialogue, of the deepest inner self that relates to oneself. He argues that under the neoliberal system, the soul, or "the

[103] Rogers-Vaughn.
[104] Rogers-Vaughn.
[105] "Eph 6 | ESV | STEP | Children, Obey Your Parents in the Lord, for This Is Right.," 6, accessed November 18, 2023, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Eph.6&options=VNHUG.
[106] "Paul Tillich Resources," accessed September 11, 2023, https://people.bu.edu/wwildman/tillich/resources/review_tillich-paul_dynamics_of_faith.htm.

activity that holds individuals in relation with self, others, and God, has all but disappeared."[107]

In the pervasive neoliberal world that values consumers and producers above all else, people

become increasingly isolated, objectified, and disparate. They grow increasingly closer to

becoming a "thing" or a "brand."

Out of this chaos, depression sets in as the final cry and, "paradoxically, as a symptom of

hope."[108] As Dr. Viktor Frankl once said, "An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is

normal behavior."[109] In this sense, depression as the final cry of the soul is the most logical

outcome in an abnormal world in which people inhabit. Dr. Rogers-Vaughn elaborates further:

> "It constitutes, as it were, the last outpost of the autoimmune system of soul. It is the
> visceral, orgasmic response of soul to a world no longer fit for human habitation…And
> because soul denotes the inseparability of self, from others, the world, and the Infinite, it
> bemoans not only the imminent demise of self, but that of the other, the world, and the
> Eternal. It is, in brief, an expression of existential grief, the anguished sigh of lost
> love."[110]

In many cases of depression in the Navy, it is important to recognize that depression may

be a normal reaction to an abnormal world. It is the last-ditch protest, an act of resistance against

the totalizing effects of neoliberalism and, paradoxically, a sign of hope. Whether realized or

not, the soul speaks through whimpers, a cry, or a prophetic utterance for a world as it should be.

Still, many will do whatever it takes to feel normal again. Dr. Rogers-Vaughn describes

them as "normotic" people who act "abnormally normal."[111] This person avoids the stigma and

shame associated with a wounded soul. One will conform to expectations, even at a further loss

to the self. Something feels off-center, disconnected, but one will repeatedly say, "I'm living the

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[107] Rogers-Vaughn, "Blessed Are Those Who Mourn."
[108] Rogers-Vaughn.
[109] Viktor E. Frankl, "Man's Search for Meaning : An Introduction to Logotherapy / by Viktor E. Frankl ; Translated by Ilse Lasch ; Preface by Gordon W. Allport. - Vanderbilt University," accessed January 24, 2022, https://catalog.library.vanderbilt.edu/discovery/fulldisplay/alma991016563319703276/01VAN_INST:vanui.
[110] Rogers-Vaughn, "Blessed Are Those Who Mourn."
[111] Rogers-Vaughn.

dream" or "Just another day in paradise." They look convincingly happy, often stoic, unusually

upbeat, and usually have a winning attitude. Still, something inside is not alright, and cracks are

starting to form in their denial armor. They are losing their soul but act like they "feel fine."[112]

Normative behavior is necessary for the high-risk, high-stakes life of the military.

However, normotic behavior may not allow warfighters to slow down and analyze their soul. It

may help them keep their heads in the fight, but there are signs that they are silently bearing their

soul injuries.

> *Chaps: How do you care for yourself? Do you have some friends you can talk to?*
> *Sailor Z: People only care about themselves. I go on Instagram and I just get sick! They're out living their best life…making money, going to college…But I'm stuck on this boat! My Chief's always like, "Suck it up…shipmate," or, "Embrace the suck!" But you know what Chaps, I know so many people who hate it here too! Trust me, everyone here is so fake. But I'm the one that's crazy?! The meds don't work, and counseling doesn't work! I have got to get out of here!*

B. The Tree of Knowledge and the Path of Separation

Another driver of depression and suicide is the impact of the internet.[113] The internet

produces "god-like" insight into both the good and evil of society. However, this supposed

illumination casts a dark shadow on the human soul. Comparing the internet to the biblical

narrative of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil provides insights into the internet's impact

on spiritual health.

In the biblical creation story, Adam and Eve are created by God and perfectly harmonious

with God, themselves, and creation. They are open and naked before God yet feel no shame, for

they are in perfect peace. God offers the garden's abundance, including fruit from every tree

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[112] Rogers-Vaughn.

[113] This paper is not attempting to condemn the internet, which is neither intrinsically morally good nor bad. Most would say internet technology has positively impacted society in ways equal to, or greater than, the Guttenberg printing press.

except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God forbids them from eating from this tree, warning them of the certain death that would follow.

The serpent deceives Eve by saying the fruit will cause her to "be like God, knowing good and evil."[114] Eve sees that the tree is good for food, pleasing, and desirable for gaining wisdom. She eats the fruit, and Adam does the same. Upon consuming the fruit, their eyes were opened to good and evil. Realizing immediately they are naked, they cover their genitals with fig leaves and hide from God. God asks, "Who told you that you were naked?" Searching for justification, they blame each other and the serpent. Sadly, "the mortal and immortal planes are irrevocably separated as Yahweh forsakes the earth."[115] Their harmonious peace with God, themselves, and their world was broken. God pronounces curses on the serpent and judgment on Adam and Eve. They are driven from the garden to scratch through the world in toil and pain.[116] Their children will know suffering, death, and the continued need for sacrifice.[117]

Regardless of whether it was an act of hubris, one must consider that Adam and Eve likely did not intend to commit evil. Perhaps they thought they were doing something useful as they saw that the tree was pleasing to the eyes, suitable for eating, and valuable for gaining wisdom.[118] However, their desire for certainty deposed trust in God, positioning themselves at the center of the universe with equal knowledge:

> Originally created in God's image (*Imago Dei*), humankind strives for sicut Deus—to be like God—placing ourselves at the center of the proverbial garden. Whereas God was originally

[114] "Gen 2:4-3:24 | ESV | STEP | These Are the Generations of the Heavens and the Earth When They Were Created, in the Day That the Lord God Made the Earth and the Heavens.," accessed November 25, 2023, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Gen.2.4-Gen.3&options=VNHUG.

[115] Ronald S. Hendel, ed., *Reading Genesis: Ten Methods* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 60.

[116] "Gen 2:4-3:24 | ESV | STEP | These Are the Generations of the Heavens and the Earth When They Were Created, in the Day That the Lord God Made the Earth and the Heavens."

[117] Hendel, *Reading Genesis*.

[118] Knowledge and data are not the same as wisdom. Dr. Hamman describes wisdom as "the ability to foresee consequences while navigating life according to ultimate concerns." Jaco J. Hamman, *Pastoral Virtues for Artificial Intelligence: Care and the Algorithms That Guide Our Lives* (Lanham, United States: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2022), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/vand/detail.action?docID=7102976.

the source of life, humans now rely on the self, including our own arbitrarily constructed judgment of what is right and wrong. Unfortunately, fusing with our own knowledge of good and evil—judging, evaluating, and labeling—leads to separation from God in that God is replaced with our own desire to be at the center of existence.[119]

In desiring and consuming the certainty of knowledge like God, Adam and Even now have "an awareness of division between God, the world, and one another."[120] They become self-consciously aware of their nakedness, but they lack the wisdom to navigate accordingly.[121] In their self-consciousness, they are ashamed and insecure. They hide, conceal, avoid, blame, and seek self-justification. [122]

Humans are not meant to have all "knowledge of good and evil" like God. However, the internet is characteristic of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Like our first parents, we consume its fruit daily, revealing a similar path of avoidance and separation. Every day, our eyes consume the knowledge of the world, along with its chaos, destruction, and awareness of evil. We immerse ourselves in boundless knowledge and become aware of our vulnerabilities and those of others.

One prominent example is 24/7 news platforms that constantly show calamities and disasters to gain viewership. This level of knowledge seems useful at first, but studies show it ultimately leads to degraded psychological health as one experiences increased stress, fear, anxiety, separation, and despair. [123] Looking for ways to protect their vulnerability, those consuming this news media daily become increasingly fearful, enclosed, judgmental, and cynical. They

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[119] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg 32.
[120] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 32.
[121] "The Social Psychology of Adam and Eve on JSTOR," accessed November 26, 2023, https://www.jstor.org/stable/657910.
[122] A deeper analysis into this question is beyond the scope of this paper. For more see "The Social Psychology of Adam and Eve on JSTOR."
[123] "Media Overload Is Hurting Our Mental Health. Here Are Ways to Manage Headline Stress," https://www.apa.org, accessed December 3, 2023, https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/11/strain-media-overload.

underestimate its impact, but "'doomscrolling," "headline anxiety," and "headline stress disorder"' ultimately erode meaningful connections and health.[124]

If the internet is like the tree of knowledge of good and evil, artificial intelligence (AI) is like its forbidden fruit. Many positive advancements and benefits result from AI platforms. However, Dr. Jaco Hamman warns that AI's false claims of objectivity and neutrality can lead to unintended suffering.[125] AI inserts knowledge into our psyche under the supposed guise of human progress. However, AI production has embedded biases that lean toward enhanced output and efficiency but simultaneously degrade human flourishing.[126] Dr. Hamman calls for a closer look at the values that guide AI and argues that AI production must implement "pastoral virtues" that enhance human flourishing. One clear example is in the consideration of ChatGPT, which is an incredibly effective AI writing and learning tool. Yet, educational institutions acknowledge that many students use this platform for cheating and plagiarism. Academic experts warn that platforms like ChatGPT will ultimately lead to degraded societal learning and productivity.[127]

The comparison of the internet to the tree of knowledge of good and evil might seem like paranoid superstition. However, three areas of online consumption help make the connection. There has been an explosion of sexual content inundating the minds of Generation Z. A 2023 report found that "73% of teen respondents age 13 to 17 have watched pornography online—and more than half (54%) reported first seeing pornography by the time they reached the age of

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[124] "Constant exposure to negative news on social media and news feeds could take the form of "doomscrolling" which is commonly defined as a habit of scrolling through social media and news feeds where users obsessively seek for depressing and negative information." Seydi Ahmet Satici et al., "Doomscrolling Scale: Its Association with Personality Traits, Psychological Distress, Social Media Use, and Wellbeing," *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 18, no. 2 (2023): 833–47, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-022-10110-7.

[125] Hamman, *Pastoral Virtues for Artificial Intelligence*.

[126] Hamman, *Pastoral Virtues for Artificial Intelligence, pg. 169*.

[127] Tim Fütterer et al., "ChatGPT in Education: Global Reactions to AI Innovations," *Scientific Reports (Nature Publisher Group)* 13, no. 1 (2023): 15310, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-42227-6.

13."[128] A 2023 article found that online pornography exposure resulted in increased "stressful experiences, anxiety, and depression." It concluded that "conflicting emotional experiences as well as identity problems significantly increase vulnerability to addictive sexual behavior and pornography consumption."[129] With just a click away, it is clear that the magnitude of psychological damage from online pornography surpasses anything seen in previous generations.

Since the beginning of time, humans have had an infatuation with violence.[130] Young people are seeing the worst of society through online violence, and it is affecting their health. From music, streaming video, first-person gaming, virtual reenactment, or extreme depictions of violence in film, there are endless new ways to consume violent content through the internet. Since the advent of television, studies have cited the effects of media violence exposure. A 2000 study found that consistent media violence caused increased feelings of hostility, desensitization, intensification of fear, and "higher levels of antisocial behavior."[131] Referencing the image of "eating," a recent 2022 study concluded:

> Exposure to violence across a variety of media, operationalized as one's violent media "diet," appears to be related to engaging in seriously violent behavior in adolescence and adulthood, even beyond one's propensity to respond to situations with anger, having peers who are engaging in behaviors that could get them in trouble with the police, being exposed to caregiver spousal abuse, and engaging in violent behaviors as a child.[132]

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[128] Common Sense Media, "New Report Reveals Truths About How Teens Engage with Pornography," accessed November 29, 2023, https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/new-report-reveals-truths-about-how-teens-engage-with-pornography-301717607.html.

[129] "Pornography Consumption and Cognitive-Affective Distress : The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease," LWW, accessed November 29, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000001669.

[130] As I write this paper, I stationed in Italy and live across the street from the "Flavian Amphitheatre" in Pozzuoli, Italy, a nearly 2000-year-old amphitheater designed for gladiator combat, executions, or other spectacles of violence. "Roman Amphitheatre - Wikipedia," accessed November 30, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_amphitheatre.

[131] Joanne Cantor, "Media Violence," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27, no. 2, Supplement 1 (August 1, 2000): 30–34, https://doi.org/10.1016/S1054-139X(00)00129-4.

[132] Michele L. Ybarra, Kimberly J. Mitchell, and Jay Koby Oppenheim, "Violent Media in Childhood and Seriously Violent Behavior in Adolescence and Young Adulthood," *The Journal of Adolescent Health : Official Publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine* 71, no. 3 (September 2022): 285–92, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2022.03.003.

This same study concluded that "exposures to video games and television also appear to be associated with violent behavior over time; similar linkages are suggested for music."[133] Consequently, a fight in public today will cause many young people to pull out their phones to capture video rather than call for help.

Another area of apparent psychological and spiritual damage is social media's proliferation.[134] These platforms push the promotion and perfection of the self as the only source of meaning and happiness. During his recent *Alliance for Responsible Citizenship* (ARC) conference, Dr. Jordan Peterson said, "Here's something psychologists discovered in the last 20 years: There is no technical difference between thinking about yourself and being miserable."[135] A recent article by the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that numerous "studies show that higher levels of social media use among children and adolescents are linked to adverse effects, including depression and anxiety, inadequate sleep (which can disrupt neurological development and lead to depression and suicidal behaviors), low self-esteem, poor body image, eating disorder behaviors and online harassment."[136]

In the same ARC conference, Dr. Jonathan Haidt reported that the sudden increase in depression and anxiety among teens is directly related to the proliferation of smartphones and social media use starting in 2012. He argued that social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter are wildly pernicious and "should never be accessed by children until they're 18."[137]

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[133] Ybarra, Mitchell, and Oppenheim.
[134] For more see Hanna Reinikainen, Jaana T. Kari, and Vilma Luoma-aho, "Generation Z and Organizational Listening on Social Media.," *Media and Communication* 8, no. 2S1 (April 15, 2020): 185–97, https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i2.2772.
[135] *This Is Easily the Most Important Speech Jordan Peterson Has Ever Done*, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mTS57hkAUk, 17:50.
[136] The Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Social Media and Teen Mental Health," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, August 10, 2023, https://www.aecf.org/blog/social-medias-concerning-effect-on-teen-mental-health.
[137] *Smartphone Addiction and Gen Alpha | Jonathan Haidt, Social Psychologist*, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1SyCZwMqfY.

He cautions that these platforms are actively harming the health of Generation Z and warns that "TikTok and Twitter are incredibly dangerous for our democracy," while adding that "Instagram is the worst for girls' mental health."[138]

Christ warned, "The eye is the lamp of the body."[139] The internet opens one's eyes to a crushing reality: god-like knowledge illuminates one's vulnerability, nakedness, isolation, and shame. One instinctively seeks self-justification and, like Adam and Eve, hides, covers, judges, makes excuses, divides, and avoids God at all costs. The soul bears witness to this awful fate, but one must keep acting normal. One cannot bear the thought as the soul recedes further into concealment, hiding, and separation. One's body bears the mark in the form of despair, depression, and disease.

Consuming more of the internet "fruit" for the numbing and avoidance effect leads further into the path of despair. Yet, the path further erodes our sense of wholeness with ourselves, others, and God. Many conclude that the world outside and within is inherently evil and needs to be destroyed. Without a light of truth breaking in, suicide seems more like a viable option. Something or someone deserves judgment, but one is powerless over the world. The only thing that can be judged in defiance against chaos is the self. It is the ultimate act of avoidance, rejection, and judgment of a broken and deranged world. Without a renewed life-giving narrative, this loss of trust degrades their sense of wholeness and harmony with "the unseen order." It is no wonder many young people are resigned to further collapse into themselves. They are losing hope and the soul cries out in the form of depression.

Chaps: You sound pretty hopeless. Do you ever pray or practice faith at all?

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[138] *Smartphone Addiction and Gen Alpha | Jonathan Haidt, Social Psychologist*, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1SyCZwMqfY, 9:30.

[139] "Mat 6 | ESV | STEP | "Beware of Practicing Your Righteousness before Other People in Order to Be Seen by Them, for Then You Will Have No Reward from Your Father Who Is in Heaven.," accessed November 30, 2023, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Matt.6&options=NVHUG.

Sailor Z: *No…I don't go to church. My grandparents are Catholic, my mom and her boyfriend are born again, and my dad's like…whatever. Some of my friends are into energy and karma. I say, do whatever makes you happy. No offense, but there's way too much evil in the world. If God existed, he doesn't care. I'm just so sick of this place, sick of everyone, sick of the world, sick of these thoughts! I feel doomed, and going to church won't help!*

C. The Infection of the World

The infection of worldly problems is wrong with many 18-25-year-old Sailors. The emergence of hyper-capitalism and the pervasiveness of internet-based media have made many of them psychologically and spiritually sick. Depression is the last symptom of the soul's "resistance" to being further divided. The lines of infection are traceable. Many have lost trust in a positive and cohesive life narrative centered on institutions like family, society, and religion. They are increasingly anxious about impending ecological disaster, nuclear war, and financial doom and have nearly lost all confidence in a safe and happy future. Others show up traumatized and abused by the very communities intended to care for them. Many feel disillusioned by religion, choosing instead to pursue hedonistic claims. Many are addicted to their smartphones, social media, online violence, and internet pornography, which further erodes their sense of self. All have been spellbound by neoliberalism and the ever-present market embedded in their soul.

From the age of 13 until high school graduation, many Generation Z recruits show up to Navy boot camp, having already consumed nearly 12,000 hours of screen time. During that period, they have internalized hundreds of thousands of corrupting, profane, desensitizing, self-focused, and soul-crushing messages, amplified through neoliberalism and internet ubiquity. Like a spiritual parasite, it is the broken and deranged world that has been absorbed into them. Yet, depression is a symptom that, paradoxically, shows up as the last cry of resistance. Many

are unaware of the hope within, and they look to suicide as a permanent solution to a temporary

problem. The 'world' is wrong with their soul, but they do not know a way forward.

There are symptoms of loss associated with this infection. The first is the loss of "sight" and

"hearing." Blinded by the cataracts of neoliberalism and media consumption, Generation Z

struggles to "see" what is good or true as their "vision" becomes increasingly dull, cynical, and

hopeless. They suffer from poor spiritual health because they cannot see a cohesive vision of

truth, morality, and God. The spiritual imagination produces hope and resilience through life's

difficulties. However, one can hope only to the extent that their spiritual imagination envisions

the possibilities of a transcendent order. [140]

Similarly, others have lost their ability to "hear." They listen to the cacophony of noises but

no longer hear the harmonious sound of truth. They are spiritually tone-deaf and suffer from

psychological vertigo; their minds grow dizzy without a baseline of truth. The world is relentless

with its unfamiliar tones of disharmony; many will remain ill-prepared for the battle over their

souls.[141] Many feel helpless and consider ways to block out the noise without a cohesive sound.

Another symptom is the weakening of the "corporate body."[142] Depression and suicide

are illnesses that often invoke stigmatization. Society often opposes one's illness and strives to

scapegoat one from the collective body. Consequently, chronic diseases like cancer or

depression are made more severe as the sick persons face shame and the perception of weakness

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[140] "Hamman - Play-Informed Chaplaincy - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," accessed October 16, 2023, 31:40.
[141] "For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? "1Cor 14:8 | KJV | STEP | Follow after Charity, and Desire Spiritual Gifts, but Rather That Ye May Prophesy.," accessed January 26, 2024, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=KJV|reference=1Cor.14&options=NVHUG.
[142] Dr. Bruce Morill describes the "market" as the backdrop that continually reinforces the values of profit, material gain, and functional value. As this paradigm permeates every aspect of medical treatment, institutions, and practitioners design practices based on market standards. Unfortunately, under the market-based and mechanical approach, people are left with healing practices controlled by profit margins or "quick fixes." "Morrill - Healing, Bible, Ritual - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," accessed December 9, 2023, 8:20. Citied in Mark A. Torres, "Module Response Paper on "Morrill: Theology of Healing: Biblical and Ritual Perspectives," Vanderbilt Divinity School, DIV 8038-01 D.Min. Research Proj. Sem.II (2023F)

associated with these illnesses.[143] The sick often feel excluded, resulting in a prolonged, or even

prohibited, healing.[144]

The loss of "voice" is another symptom. The historic and essential sources for identity and

meaning—family, community, faith—are suppressed, and one can no longer communicate with

meaning. They lose articulation of the self as they become increasingly fluid, flowing into

whichever narrative serves market pursuits. Paralleling their online profiles, their world

becomes inward-focused, and they lose their ability to relate authentically with others. They

become "voices" of others, like "TikTok brain," which responds solely to immediate and

incremental stimuli.[145] Like Gollum in *The Lord of the Rings*, many GenZers have lost their

voice as they cannot even remember their "name."[146]

Dr. Jordan Peterson warned Generation Z, "If you don't have a well-developed and integrated

vision, you can't have any hope. And the reason you can't have any hope is because hope

signifies movement toward a valuable goal."[147] Sadly, many 18-25-year-old Sailors show up to

boot camp spiritually infected by a deranged world. Without a vision of hope, self-awareness,

and conscious expression, the likelihood of suicide increases. Depression gives the sign that

something is not alright within. It is the final "cry of the soul" and, paradoxically, a sign of hope.

Chaps: I hear you about religion, church, and evil. Those are some difficult problems. It seems like your more 'spiritual but not religious.' But what about your inner spirit? Have you thought about your spiritual nature?

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[143] "Morrill - Healing, Bible, Ritual - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," 15:00.
[144] Dr. Morrill references the biblical story of a woman hemorrhaging blood, highlighting the connection between physical sickness and corporate belonging. Although the woman is seen as "unclean" because of her illness, Jesus physically heals the woman, restoring her holistically within her social, religious, and economic context. "Morrill - Healing, Bible, Ritual - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," 45:00. "Morrill - Healing, Bible, Ritual - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box," accessed December 9, 2023, 8:20. Cited in Mark A. Torres, "Module Response Paper." December 10, 2023.
[145] "TikTok Is Killing Your Brain, One Short-Form Video at a Time," *Social Media Psychology* (blog), August 18, 2022, https://socialmediapsychology.eu/2022/08/18/tiktok-is-killing-your-brain-right-now/.
[146] *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, Action, Adventure, Drama (New Line Cinema, WingNut Films, Marzano Films, 2001).
[147] *WATCH: Jordan Peterson's Message to Gen Z,* 6:34.

Sailor Z: *Inner spirit? Sounds kind of new-age Chaps. What do you mean?*
Chaps: *Spirit comes from the idea of inner breath or 'the breath of life.' It's the idea that your spiritual core breathes life or animates you. Who is the spiritual self that breathes life into you? Is it something deeper, wider, even boundless, and more than just your thoughts?*
Sailor Z: *Deeper, wider, boundless…Oh you mean like "The Force!?"*
Chaps: *Um…Imagine you can step outside yourself and look into yourself. What do you see?*

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone.
-French philosopher Blaise Pascal[148]

This paper considered the problem of depression and suicidality among 18-25-year-old Sailors and examined the importance of spiritual health as an essential component of holistic health. It considered key demographic and societal factors that present unique challenges and offered a spiritual analysis that identifies drivers of depression and suicidality. The "infection" of the world, supercharged by pervasive neoliberal market values and ubiquitous internet technology, presents symptoms of loss, and depression is the last cry of the soul against this totalizing force. This complex problem requires a comprehensive and integrated care approach. This approach must help identify stressors and develop strategies to build spiritual health. Referencing the story of the Magi, I will offer strategic recommendations to strengthen spiritual health. This story provides a framework to help Navy Chaplains guide Sailors toward a profound, community-based, and transformative spiritual journey. The model is captured in three movements: *Get Away, Go Deep, and Connect.*

In the gospel of Matthew, the Magi from "the East" see a star leading them toward a path of spiritual discovery.[149] They gather together, leave their dwelling, and embark on a life-changing

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[148] Oliver Burkeman, "This Column Will Change Your Life: Just Sit down and Think," *The Guardian*, July 19, 2014, sec. Life and style, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/jul/19/change-your-life-sit-down-and-think.
[149] "Mat 2:1-12 | ESV | STEP | Now after Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem of Judea in the Days of Herod the King, Behold, Wise Men from the East Came to Jerusalem," accessed February 13, 2024, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Matt.2&options=HNVUG.

journey. The star leads them along a series of epiphanies as they advance deeper toward the

"place where the child was."[150] They rejoiced exceedingly, and "going into the house,

they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him."[151] They offer

Jesus gifts of "gold and frankincense and myrrh." Being warned in a dream "not to return to

Herod," they depart for their own country "by another way."[152]

A. Get Away

Many Generation Z Sailors are inundated and infected by the world surrounding them. Amid

pervasive neoliberal values and addictive internet algorithms that perpetuate the message, 'You

can have it all and be like a god,' many have nearly lost touch with their core selves. They are

spiritually unconscious and are left increasingly blinded and voiceless by the world. Others are

so enraptured in the market that they function abnormally normal, living out projections of their

idealized selves according to standards of success. Some outcomes are avoidance, separation,

isolation, and disconnection with self, God, and others. Paradoxically, depression arises as the

final cry of the soul that something is not right within. Herein lies the opportunity for Navy

Chaplains: "Depression potentially may present itself, then, as a distinctively *religious* problem,

a loss not just of self but of *soul*."[153]

Like the Magi who leave their world together to embark on a spiritual journey, Navy

Chaplains must help Sailors "get away," disconnect, and unplug from market-based values. A

"getting away" period can help reset and reimagine their sense of identity and belonging. If even

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[150] "Mat 2:9 | ESV | STEP
[151] "Mat 2:11 | ESV | STEP
[152] "Mat 2 | ESV | STEP | Now after Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem of Judea in the Days of Herod the King, Behold, Wise Men from the East Came to Jerusalem,."
[153] Rogers-Vaughn, "Blessed Are Those Who Mourn."

briefly, getting away can help diminish the neoliberal market voices who say, 'You are only as good as your functional output.'

This includes disconnecting from the tyranny of daily routines, workspace environments, relationships, commercialization, social media, and, especially, one's phone. This may seem nearly impossible at first, but it is essential. Whereas getting away for a brief period can increase spiritual reconnection, bondage to the tyrants of neoliberalism can lead to even greater risks of destructive behaviors.

Like the Magi, Navy Chaplains can accompany the Sailor on this journey and facilitate spaces to help reclaim one's spiritual identity. Environments for getting away include sanctuary spaces, counseling rooms, integrated spiritual and psychological health support groups, mindfulness groups, nature-based events, groups formed around spiritual missions, spiritual retreat centers, and meditative spaces. These are designed to create spiritual epiphanies and lead one toward the form of the true, good, and beautiful. They resist the totalizing effect of the market and help one reclaim one's authentic self. Journeying together through these experiences creates a sense of connectedness, validation, and cohesion.

Perhaps a more ideal space is nature itself. Whether on a ship or in an installation workspace, Sailors are surrounded by fortified, metallic, and industrialized environments. Getting into nature provides a powerful reminder of life beyond the ship. Frequently, being in nature or sacred space dislodges one from the tyranny of the industrialized world as one begins to reevaluate life outside of market values.

Here, Navy Chaplains can provide a space to listen, offer hope, and witness to the soul's plight. This listening process helps uncover "existing desires that oppose the desires of the

market."[154] The spiritually discerning chaplain creates a space for the soul to reclaim its voice,

resist the totalizing effects of the market, and rediscover its narrative of meaning.

B. *Go Deep*

Chaplaincy "is the invitation to go deep."[155] Like the Magi, spiritual health follows a series

of epiphanies, leading deeper toward spiritual truth. Many young people are unaware that they

have an inner "spirit" or "soul." Navy Chaplains can lead Sailors to look inwardly toward their

interior, consider the depth of their being, and reawaken their spiritual awareness.

Going spiritually deep seems obvious, but some Navy Chaplains stay on the surface,

reducing spirituality to demonstrated external behaviors.[156] This mechanical model expects

spirituality to improve with an adequate infusion of information. It is entrenched in a neo-liberal

and biomedical approach to health. The underlying assumption is that spiritual health means a

"virtually pain-free life," demonstrated by secondary values such as motivation, happiness, and

mission success.[157] It often looks like the "be better, do more, death-by-PowerPoint" training

modules aligned with outcomes-based, prosperity culture. This reinforces the pattern of

experiential avoidance and deprives one of the profound opportunities to go spiritually deep.

Spiritual deepening is intense, laborious, and, at times, painful. It often involves processing

through suffering, grief, and loss. Herein lies the opportunity for deep spiritual work: Rather

than go along in experiential avoidance, Navy Chaplains invite one to turn toward suffering as a

pathway to spiritual awareness. Paradoxically, turning toward one's pain rather than avoiding it

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[154] Rogers-Vaughn, 520.

[155] "Hamman - Play-Informed Chaplaincy - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box." 2:54.

[156] There is a growing shortage and increased demand on Navy Chaplains. Some Navy Chaplains risk burnout as they attempt meet competing demands like promotion, warfighter readiness, self and family care, and the spiritual care of others. It is a struggle to maintain a balance and some lose sight of their primary purpose. Navy chaplains must remain focused on their primary purpose: strengthening the spiritual health of those under their care. Gregory N. Todd, "The Navy Needs More Chaplains," Religion News Service, May 15, 2023, https://religionnews.com/2023/05/15/the-navy-needs-more-chaplains/.

[157] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 28.

provides a path toward self-reflection, authenticity, meaning, and hope. Without going deep, "(t)hese unfortunate souls are abandoned, left to interpret their sufferings as signs of personal failure…They are ashamed. They do not have adequate narrative resources at hand to understand, to "make sense of," their sufferings."[158] In their journey, Navy Chaplains can help Sailors transform unbearable psychological suffering into deep spiritual awareness.

Navy Chaplains may use evidence-based practices, like Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), to process through pain, facilitate psychological flexibility, and deepen spiritual awareness. Through acceptance and mindfulness practices, "ACT aims to help individuals simply be aware of and observe their thoughts in a manner that is empowering but does not lead to entanglement and argument with cognitive content."[159] In doing so, ACT "does not seek to fix aspects of our human nature but instead accepts these aspects of our humanness, and in doing so creates new possibilities for being fully human in intentional and meaningful ways."[160]

ACT is an effective model to identify where and how a Sailor may be experiencing psychosocial-spiritual inflexibility. ACT starts with the conclusion that human psychological pain is inevitable and normal. However, unbearable suffering is detrimental to health and often a sign of attachment to thoughts, causing compounded grief. One experiences magnified suffering through psychological fusion to thoughts that persist beyond the traumatic event. In other words, one becomes fused with the thoughts: "I am weak, and nobody likes me." One doubles down further into more profound types of a conceptualized self to rid oneself of this psychological pain: "I'm not weak. I'm amazing, and everyone likes me!" This conceptualized self is not sustainable. Painful events and additional experiential avoidance ensue, which causes more

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[158] Bruce Rogers-Vaughn, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age.*, New Approaches to Religion and Power (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Pg. 126.
[159] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 14.
[160] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 14.

"shame, judgment, and inaction to love."[161] The vicious cycle leads to more isolation, separation, suffering, and harm.[162] This is manifested through intensified life-avoiding patterns: "I AM WEAK! Nobody cares. There is no way out!"

At the intersection of ACT and spiritual deepening is mindfulness and increased conscious awareness. One is in contact with the present moment and one's conscious self as an observer of one's thoughts. In other words, one observes oneself thinking: "I am thinking that I'm weak." Through deepening mindfulness strategies, one grows in self-awareness and defuses further from one's thoughts: "I'm noticing that I'm having the thought that I'm weak." This simple yet profound movement has enough power to unlock deeper awareness and connection to one's transcendent self: "If I'm the one observing my thinking, then I'm neither the thoughts nor the thinker. I must be something bigger. Who am I?" Ongoing mindfulness practices expand one's conscious awareness deeper, which reveals a more expansive, boundless, relational, and transcendent self.

One discovers something genuinely profound and transformational. They are not the sum of their thoughts, emotions, or mistakes. Their most genuine and substantial self is seated as the observer, expansive, irreducible, transcendent, and somehow more significant than their thoughts. Individuals contact a "deeper sense of self that can serve as the context for experiencing ongoing thoughts and feelings. This is the flexibility process most closely tied to spiritual experience."[163]

Through ACT, deepening spiritual awareness provides many resources one can draw from to harmoniously align all other aspects of human life: mind, thoughts, emotions, relationships,

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[161] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 25.
[162] Mental Health and Chaplaincy, *1.4.3: Applications of ACT Within Chaplaincy*, 2014, 3, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzsZzO-HHDA, 1:58.
[163] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 49

body, and behaviors. One learns to be more consciously aware, accepting thoughts as thoughts and is further positioned toward meaningful action.

C. *Connect*

Within the framework of mindful awareness, one rediscovers and reconnects with something genuinely extraordinary: one's spiritual self. Spirit is the inner relationality and animation of self, connected to, and nearly indistinguishable from, one's soul, mind, psyche, or character. One discovers that the spirit remains the most authentic and vital force; its transcendent quality precedes and is foundational to all other elements of being human. When all these elements are harmoniously aligned, one can be described as whole, fully integrated, and united with oneself. They are, as Jesus once explained, "the pure in heart," for they are fully integrated and whole within.[164] One regains spiritual sight and hearing in the harmonious restoration of the self. They see the path of truth before them and hear wisdom's call again. Reclaiming themselves, they reengage with being fully human, not merely as brands, or outcomes of corporate voices.[165]

ACT can help one harmoniously realign oneself within their world. One gains deeper conscious awareness as the observer self expands beyond thoughts, emotions, and even the thinking self. One experiences a sense of "ineffability and transcendence." This deeper consciousness expands beyond "time, place, and person" and connects "this aspect of awareness to a sense of boundlessness (not being limited by time or place) and a sense of interconnection or belongingness (being part of humanity as a whole). Considered all together, this fosters also a

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[164] "Mat 5:8 | KJV | STEP | And Seeing the Multitudes, He Went up into a Mountain: And When He Was Set, His Disciples Came unto Him:," 5, accessed February 11, 2024, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=KJV|reference=Matt.5&options=HNVUG.

[165] Similarly, the demon-possessed man in the gospel of Mark was possessed and tortured by a legion of unclean spirits. The man had lost his self-agency and ability to belong. After Jesus heals him, the townspeople find the man dressed, sitting, and "in his right mind." "Mar 5 | ESV | STEP | They Came to the Other Side of the Sea, to the Country of the Gerasenes.," accessed February 13, 2024, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Mark.5&options=HNVUG.

sense of oneness."[166] In other words, one experiences that they are relational beings and not alone. They belong to a transcendent reality more fundamental than thoughts, words, and experiences. They are meaningfully connected with their transcendent self. They are regaining their "selves" and can now begin to "see" others once again.

The most transforming experience in ACT is the deepening spiritual journey toward God. The Magi followed the star until it led them to the Christ-child, the ultimate expression of God's spoken word through Jesus. Overwhelmed with joy, "they fell down and worshiped him." As one goes deeper into self-as-context, one explores the self in relation to divine connection. As Jesus described, they are "not far from the truth." They are beginning to know the infinite within experientially.[167]

One experiences a sense of transcendence within mindful awareness, "or the sense that an experience and awareness goes beyond our everyday, usual, and ordinary understanding."[168] By journeying deeper, one transcends ordinary time and space and experiences a sense of spiritual enlargement or deepening beyond usual categorization. This provides "both a sense of divine presence that is omniscient, and a sense of hope and safety as the limits of the material world are seen from the perspective of oneness."[169]

In the deepening sense of oneness, one experiences a sense of boundlessness, the experience of having "no edges," or a vastness of self that is not "restricted by space and time."[170] One experiences the paradoxical nature of being; they are beyond dichotomies in their most profound spiritual nature and are starting to see the unbounded transcendence within.

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[166] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 52.
[167] "Mar 12:34 | ESV | STEP | "The Greatest Commandment" accessed April 11, 2022, https://www.stepbible.org/?q=reference=Mark.12|version=ESV&options=NHVUG.
[168] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 53
[169] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 53.
[170] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 53.

Delving deeper into conscious awareness reveals a profound realization: a transcendent order exists to which one is connected but lies beyond comprehension and categorization. This is a "sense of the eternal and the infinite."[171]

This leads to the third dimension of deepening consciousness, interconnectedness, or the underlying sense of unity with others and the world. One observes that "I and you are defined relationally – they are interconnected."[172] One gains deeper conscious awareness and sees that "awareness is shared with others."[173] This gives a sense of meaningful connection with others.

Deepening conscious awareness leads to a series of spiritual epiphanies and brings one closer to the reality of the divine. The profound feeling of connection within oneself, with others, and with the sacred is a deeply spiritual encounter. One experiences what Christianity teaches as being "children of God" or being "one body."[174]

Having been warned in a dream about Herod, the Magi went home "by another way."[175] ACT encourages acceptance through mindfulness "combined with commitment and behavior changes strategies to increase psychological flexibility."[176] One has received an epiphany of the kingdom of heaven; they are more fully integrated and can now commit to actions aligning with their deepest values. In journeying together, the group reinforces the warning against "returning to Herod." They urge one another in the spiritual journey, avoiding the old pitfalls, distractions, and detours imposed by worldly tyrants. In their collective strength, the participants regain their capacity to perceive and understand, helping one another regain their collective identity. This process strengthens trust and rebuilds a sense of belonging and unity.

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[171] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 53.
[172] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 54.
[173] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes. Pg. 54.
[174] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 54.
[175] "Mat 2:11 | ESV | STEP
[176] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 52.

> *Sailor Z: Sounds great and all Chaps, but…I'm stuck here on this ship. How could I strengthen my spirit and what difference would it make?*
> *Chaps: That is true. But…I've been running a small group discussion that uses mindfulness and looks at suffering from a spiritual and mental health perspective. Perhaps a deeper spiritual experience can provide just the right shift in perspective to help you maintain just a little while longer. Also, there are Spiritual Health Retreats offered by CREDO[177] that could be helpful. These Spiritual Health Retreats usually have a mental health provider present so you can talk to one there if you need to. Would you be interested in going when we return?*
> *Sailor Z: I don't know, maybe…yeah that can help. I guess that could work. I still hate it here, but sure I'll try. What time is your mindfulness small group thing? And can you get me on that spiritual retreat? That actually sounds pretty cool.*

D. An Integrated Spiritual Retreat

The Magi saw the star and embarked on their journey together. Navy Chaplains have unique opportunities to facilitate sacred and community-based spiritual journeys. As described earlier, many 18 to 25-year-old Sailors are suspicious of organized religion and prefer remixed forms of spirituality. Instead of resisting this impulse, Navy Chaplains should embrace it and organize integrated spiritual health retreats. These retreats move beyond parish-style ministry and provide deepening spiritual and connection opportunities.[178]

Spiritual health retreats shift away from an outcome-based, market-driven spirituality towards a deepening journey of the spiritual self. Fostering a deeper awareness of the spiritual self is crucial to reclaiming one's sense of wholeness in a deranged world that seeks to divide. Merely touching spiritual consciousness can ignite the flame of life, particularly for young people who are often unaware of their spiritual essence. While using ACT in the context of a spiritual retreat may not produce complete spiritual transformation, it can initiate this process of heightened spiritual awareness, offering glimpses of wholeness, connectedness, and hope.

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[177] CREDO is the acronym for "Chaplain Religious Enrichment Development Operation." It is a Navy Chaplain Corps program designed to enhance spiritual and personal resiliency through training programs, activities, workshops, and retreats.
[178] See Appendix A for a suggested Spiritual Health Retreat using ACT components.

The retreats should occur at wilderness camping retreats, spiritual retreat centers, or monasteries. Ideally, they would be executed with Mental Health providers as either a co-facilitator or care provider support. This would emphasize the connection between mental and spiritual health, which has shown to be vital to Generation Z. A pre-retreat spiritual health assessment can set a baseline and help establish expectations for the retreat. In the military community, which includes both religious and non-religious members, a spiritual health scale must be tailored to accommodate diverse beliefs, including the lack of religious beliefs. The "SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale," which measures both "vertical" and "horizontal" spirituality, presents an ideal spiritual health tool for this purpose.[179]

The curriculum can center around the core components of the ACT Hexaflex: Acceptance, defusion, present moment, self-as-context, values, and committed action.[180] These actions would help Sailors increase psychological flexibility and deepen their spiritual awareness. The retreat should open with a discussion on human flourishing, emphasizing mental and spiritual health connections. The chaplain should address the importance of integrated spiritual health, the impact of neoliberalism, the internet, and media use. The retreat should deepen spiritual awareness through mindfulness and other integrated activities. Some activities that are shown to improve spiritual health include guided discussions, journaling, sacred scripture reading, values assessments, gratitude inventories, physical activities (i.e., hiking, team-building events), mindfulness activities, prayer walks, sacred art and music therapy, spiritual

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[179] David William Alexander, Zainah Abulhawa, and Joshua Kazman, "The SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale: Measuring 'Vertical' and 'Horizontal' Spirituality in the Human Performance Domain," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: JPCC* 74, no. 4 (December 2020): 269–79, https://doi.org/10.1177/1542305020967317.
[180] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*. Pg. 62.

chronologies, and altruism missions. Chaplains could use Community Relation Projects (COMREL) to facilitate discussions on empathy, compassion, connectedness, and gratitude.[181]

Toward the end of the retreat, participants draw their spiritual portrait or spiritual crest and share it with the group. Another recommendation is to invite members to describe what they gained from the retreat. Conclude with a ceremonial event highlighting spiritual awareness, transformation, and committed action. Give the members a token of spiritual deepening and offer them parting guidance.   Facilitate a post-retreat SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale to identify areas of spiritual strengthening.

Several key factors are necessary to maximize the retreat's positive outcomes. First, address the problem of neoliberalism, the internet, and social media directly. Honest disclosure will help engender trust, and many GenZers are aware that media presents significant challenges to personal growth.

Second, manage expectations. Choose a setting that enhances spiritual connection, like a wilderness camping, monastery, or spiritual retreat center. This shifts expectations from a "resort" style vacation to an intentional spiritual retreat. Focus on general spiritual strength, which has been shown to reduce depression and suicide-related behavior. A disclaimer regarding religious or political proselytizing should be included to ensure inclusiveness and respect for diverse beliefs.[182] Registration forms can also be used to set expectations and generate commitment from participants.

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[181] COMRELs are integral to the Navy Chaplain Corps, often associated with civil-military affairs aimed at fostering positive public or host nation relations. However, chaplains can leverage COMRELs for morale and spiritual development opportunities.

[182] As indicated earlier, an integrated spiritual retreat falls under the "facilitation" and "care" capability of the Navy Chaplain Corps. Faith-specific spiritual retreats may be added in coordination with installation chaplains.

Third, use a team approach. Incorporate a Mental Health co-facilitator to demonstrate essential connections within holistic health. Add adequate Religious Ministry Team staff to identify and respond to critical needs that may arise. Remind participants that Chaplain and Mental Health care are available throughout the retreat. Use ACT or another mindfulness-based curriculum that integrates psychological flexibility and spiritual deepening.

Fourth, sacramental-like activities should be integrated with evidence-based practices. Sacrament has been defined as "the visible form of an invisible grace" or "a sign of a sacred thing."[183] Instead of relying solely on didactic methods like PowerPoint presentations, Navy Chaplains can use interactive spiritual-formation activities proven to yield spiritual benefits. Navy Chaplains can refocus these activities to embody sacramental principles, emphasizing external actions that deepen spiritual connections. Chaplains could incorporate guided meditation, reflective journaling, nature walks, or experiential ceremonies that foster meaningful connections.

CONCLUSION

The Navy depends on healthy young men and women, but depression and suicidality among Generation Z poses significant challenges. This paper considered the problem of increased depression and suicidality among 18-25-year-old Sailors, examining critical demographic and societal factors. It offered a spiritual analysis of factors negatively impacting spiritual health and proposed integrated care practices as a model of holistic spiritual care.

The ultimate life-giving truth is that connection with God is the foundation of human flourishing. However, many have been infected by a deranged world that suppresses this truth. They are becoming the voices of pervasive neoliberalism and internet media ubiquity. Out of

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[183] "Sacrament | Religion, Meaning & Definition | Britannica," accessed March 23, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/topic/sacrament.

this chaos, the soul cries out in the form of depression and, paradoxically, the final act of resistance against the totalizing force of neoliberalism. Like Adam and Eve, many turn to daily consumption of the internet "tree." This appears initially useful and pleasing, but like the forbidden fruit, it illuminates human vulnerability and separation. This cycle further leads to blaming, judgement, scapegoating, and the continued need for self-justification.

In this sense, "the world" is what is wrong with many who show up to their first assignment. Yet, many are still searching for spiritual meaning, community, religious truth, transcendence, belonging, and beauty. Herein lies an opportunity for Navy Chaplains. Depression, experiential avoidance, and suicidality are as much spiritual problems as they are medical ones, emphasizing the need for an integrated approach to foster spiritual connection. In this sense, suffering and pain serve as an invitation and catalyst for a profound and deepening spiritual journey.

Spiritual health retreats can aid in this endeavor. They shift away from an outcome-based, market-driven spirituality towards a deepening journey of the spiritual self. Fostering deep spiritual awareness is crucial to reclaiming one's sense of wholeness in a deranged world that seeks to divide. Merely touching spiritual consciousness can re-ignite the flame of life for young people who are often unaware or indifferent of their spiritual essence. While a spiritual health retreat may not produce complete transformation, it can initiate this process of heightened spiritual awareness, offering glimpses of wholeness, connectedness, and hope.

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Appendix A

<div align="center">

"Get Away, Go Deep, Connect"
A 3 Day Spiritual Health Retreat for Sailors

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*Limit participants. Registration includes retreat guidance, command signature authorizing three days of no-cost TAD, and personal commitment signature.
*Retreat setting options: wilderness camping/cabins, monastery, or spiritual retreat center
* Team: (1) Lead facilitator, (1) Chaplain/co-facilitator, (1) RP/co-facilitator, (1) MH provider/co-facilitator
*Invite members to relinquish or turn off phones and electronic devices during the retreat
*Give out spiritual journal beforehand
*ACT components italicized

Day 1 [Look in the Past]

1700 Welcome/Announcements/Unplug.
       *Purpose is to strengthen spiritual health.
       *Disclaimer concerning religious or political proselytizing.
       *Chaplain and Mental Health care available throughout the retreat.
       *Journaling – "Looking within my spirit, I see…"

1720 Implement and collect the SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale

1730 Connection Activity – "I am grateful for…I am grateful to"
       *Members are invited to share with the group *[Values and Self-as-Context]*

1800 Discussion on spiritual nature, deepening spirituality, and spiritual health

1830 Spiritual chronologies and milestones
       *Create a spiritual road map/timeline
       *Invite members to share their timelines
       *Journaling

1900 Dinner

2000 Solitude or Nature Activity
       *Nature walk, star gazing, or silence in nature *[Present Moment]*

Day 2 [Be Open to the Present]

0800 Breakfast

0900 Discussion on impacts of media overuse
       *Evidence-based impacts on psychological, spiritual, physical, and social health
       *Fusion of thoughts and compounded suffering *[Defusion]*

       *Group discussions
       *Journaling

1030 Discussion on Mindfulness
       *Evidence-based, therapeutic, and spiritual potential
       *Mindfulness, observing thoughts, defusion *[Present moment, Acceptance, Defusion]*

1115 Mindfulness practices
       *Leaves on a stream, clouds in the sky, characters on a movie screen *[Defusion and Acceptance]*

1200 Lunch

1300 Guided Nature Activity with Mindfulness
       *Guided Nature Activity with Mindfulness – Discuss acceptance, connectedness, gratitude, spiritual insights *[Present Moment, Self-as-Context, Values]*
       *Journaling – the contours and the center of the spiritual self

1500 Engage Sacred Texts on suffering, growth, and gratitude
       *Guided discussion on spiritual insights *[Acceptance, Self-as-Context, Values]*
       *Journaling – How to go from unbearable suffering to livable disappointment

1630 Intentional Rest
       *Sleep, solitude, contemplation, journaling

1900 Dinner

2000 Bonfire
       *Discussion on spirituality, music, reflection, and connection

Day 3 [Awareness of Self, Others, and God]

0800 Breakfast

0900 Discussion on Mindfulness – Open and expanded awareness of self
       *The observing self and the thinking self *[Present moment, Acceptance]*
       *Exploring the deepening self through mindfulness practices
       * Defusion from thoughts and self-as-context *[Defusion]*
       * Group discussions and journaling

1000 Discussion on Mindfulness *[Self-as-context]*
       *The observing self – transcendence, unboundedness, and connectedness
       *Spiritual connection with self, others, and the divine
       *Group Discussion and journaling

1045 Mindfulness practices in nature

*Prayer walk, gratitude walk, journaling, observe your self-thinking

1115 Discussion with a partner on deepening awareness with others
    *Share with the group
    *Journaling

1145 Bag lunch and movement to COMREL

1300 COMREL[184] – Work and play at COMREL venues like an orphanage, soup kitchen, school, homeless shelter, hospital, etc. *[Present moment, acceptance, values, committed action]*

1630 Circle discussion on connectedness, empathy, gratitude, and spiritual insights *[Values, Committed Action]*

1700 Intentional Rest - Sleep, solitude, contemplation, journaling

1900 Dinner

2000 Bonfire
    *Discussion on spirituality, reflection, connection, journaling

Day 4 [Focus on the Future]
0800 Breakfast

0900 Mindfulness Practices *[Present moment, Self-as-Context]*
    *Leaves on a stream, clouds in the sky

0930 Values Assessment *[Values]*
    *Values flash cards, group discussions, and sharing

1015 Spiritual Self-portrait, four-quadrant spiritual crest/seal *[Values, Committed action]*
    *What will your spiritual self look like in the future? Draw a spiritual self-portrait or a spiritual four-quadrant crest
    *Invite members to share their portrait or crest with the group

1130 Culminating Ceremony *[Committed action]*
    *Present a bracelet, coin, or other symbol of spiritual health

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[184] Dr. Hamman's *Play Informed Chaplaincy* considers "play" as an essential framework for doing chaplaincy work. Play is a manner of interacting with the world that creates possibilities for creativity, meaning, and problem solving. The "Play" framework is reminiscent of the ACT psychological flexibility model, or the manner of holding one's thoughts and emotions lightly as an alternative to cognitive fusion. Play and psychological flexibility naturally create balance between boundaries and flow of interactive thought. This balanced approach is necessary as one moves toward greater levels of human flourishing. Additionally, play helps enliven compassion and meaning, help reduce secondary trauma and burnout. It creates a space for the other and greater levels of mutual transformation, or "human-being." This is the miracle of play; within it, both become greater expressions of God's design. Torres, Mark, Module Response Paper, DIV 8037-01 D.Min. Research Seminar I (2023S), September 29, 2023, Vanderbilt Divinity School, Div8038. "Hamman - Play-Informed Chaplaincy - Lecture.Mp4 | Powered by Box." 22:00.

      *Journaling – "Based on my values, I commit to…"

1150 Parting Guidance: 1) Deepen inter-connectivity, 2) Practice mindfulness, prayer, or other deepening spiritual practices, 3) Commit action toward your values

1200 Post-retreat SOCOM Spiritual Fitness scale and retreat evaluation

1215 Lunch

1300 Departure