

Institute for Clinical Social Work

**Veterans' Experiences of Affiliation in the American Legion**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Institute for Clinical Social Work in Partial Fulfillment  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Victoria A. Brown

Chicago, Illinois

March 2016

## **Abstract**

This qualitative study explored the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this thematic analysis resulted in five findings that emerged from fifteen in-depth interviews of nine veterans. First, affiliation offers an intimacy that is assumed due to their previous military affiliations. Second, affiliation provides an alternative society that helps remedy marginalization for those whose traditional, conservative beliefs are less respected in a society with declining social values. Third, within this alternative society, affiliation affords non-combat veterans a sense of being valued despite a simultaneous feeling of marginalization due to their lack of combat experience—although the status hierarchy associated with combat experience remains silenced. Additionally, this alternative society affirms the silencing of the status hierarchy and maintains an embittered “us vs. them” mindset that results in experiencing the Legion as being superiorly separate from main stream society. Fourth, affiliation provides transformations in the form of a reclaimed life and altered associations to life and death. Fifth, affiliation provides reparative experiences, offering opportunities to address injustices and memorialize one’s military experiences through Legion rituals. This study suggests further research that focuses on the implications of the lack of affiliation for those who have left military service.

This dissertation is dedicated to the veterans who participated in this study and to all those who are currently serving or who have served in the military.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Michelle Sweet, Jennifer Tolleson, and Dennis Shelby for their patience, wisdom, and encouragement during this arduous yet life-enhancing process.

## Table of Contents

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| <b>Abstract</b> .....   | ii   |
| <b>Acknowledgments</b> .....  | iiv  |
| Chapter   |      |
| <b>I. Introduction</b> .....  | 1    |
| General Statement of Purpose  |      |
| Significance of the Study for Clinical Social Work                                |      |
| Statement of the Problem to be Studied and Specific Objectives<br>to Be Achieved  |      |
| <b>II. Relevant Theory and Review of the Literature</b> .....                     | 11   |
| Statement of Relevant Knowledge or Theory and Review of<br>Significant Literature |      |
| Theoretical and Conceptual Framework  |      |
| Operational Definitions   |      |
| Statement of Assumptions  |      |

**Table of Contents—Continued**

| Chapter  | Page |
|--|------|
| <b>III. Methodology</b> .....  | 48   |
| Type of Study and Design   |      |
| Scope of Study, Setting, Population, and Sampling, and Sources and<br>Nature of Data |      |
| Data Collection Methods and Instruments  |      |
| Plan for Data Analysis   |      |
| Statement on Protecting the Rights of Human Subjects                                 |      |
| Limitations of the Research Plan   |      |
| <b>IV. Results</b> .....   | 55   |
| Participant Demographics   |      |
| Results  |      |
| Conclusion   |      |
| <b>V. Discussion</b> .....   | 82   |
| Literature Review on the Concept of Affiliation                                      |      |
| Discussion of the Study Findings   |      |
| Implications for Clinical Treatment  |      |
| Recommendations for Future Research  |      |
| Conclusion   |      |

**Table of Contents—Continued**

| Appendices                                  | Page        |
|---|-------------|
| <b>A. Hand-Out to the Legionnaires.....</b> | <b>98</b>   |
| <b>B. Demographic Survey.....</b>           | <b>100</b>  |
| <b>C. Informed</b>                          |             |
| <b>Consent.....</b>                         | <b>1022</b> |
| <b>References.....</b>                      | <b>106</b>  |

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **General Statement of Purpose**

This study is about the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion. The idea to form a veteran's organization first emerged in 1918 toward the end of World War I (WWI). After returning from war, many service members began making statements that expressed the need for an organization specifically designed for veterans (Wheat, 1919). George Seay Wheat, the author and historian of *The Story of the American Legion* (1919), captured just how widespread this desire was when he wrote, "No one can lay claim to originating the idea of a veterans' association, because it was a consensus among the men of the armed forces of our nation" (p. iv). Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, among others, proved instrumental in actually bringing to fruition the idea for such an organization and translating it into reality. Wheat described the thought process behind the formation of a veterans' organization as follows:

In short, they knew that in union there is strength. And they believed, and still believe, that the problems of peace after a catastrophe such as was never before witnessed in history are so grave that they can be met with safety only by a national bulwark composed of men who won the war, so closely knit, so tightly

welded together in a common organization for the common good of all that no power of external or internal evil or aggression, no matter how allied or augmented, could hope even so much as to threaten our national existence, ambitions, aspirations, and pursuit of happiness, much less aim to destroy them. (p. 7)

The conclusion of the American Legion's preamble reads very much in line with the above sentiments, "we associate ourselves together... to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness" (as cited in Wheat, 1919, p. vi).

In March 1919, the first American Legion caucus was held in Paris. One of the first resolutions passed by the newly formed American Legion gave support to the Boy Scouts of America (American Legion, 2015a). Membership in the American Legion quickly grew to one million and today it has approximately 2.4 million members. The Legion has over 14,000 posts that are organized into 55 different departments: one for each of the 50 states, and one each in the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, France, the Philippines, and Mexico (American Legion, 2015a).

The following excerpt from the American Legion's mission statement demonstrates both the scale and values behind its goals:

The American Legion was chartered and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic veterans organization devoted to mutual helpfulness. It is the nation's largest wartime veteran's service organization, committed to mentoring youth and sponsorship of wholesome programs in our communities, advocating patriotism and honor, promoting strong national security, and continued devotion to our fellow service members and veterans. (American Legion, 2015b, para. 1)

As such, the American Legion is a wide-reaching not-for-profit organization that has political influence when advocating for veterans' rights at both the local and federal levels. Its focus is clearly on service, as it attempts to get donations in order to help veterans as well as their families in a variety of ways, one of which is to provide college scholarships (American Legion, 2015a). In addition, the American Legion offers numerous community service projects. Because the Legion's focus extends well beyond those who actually serve and also considers the family of service members as well as the extended community, there are different types of memberships within the Legion, including legionnaires, sons of the American Legion, and the auxiliary (women).

Originally, my research did not focus on the needs of veterans and the American Legion, but was instead more concerned with exploring questions of how veterans come to and continue to identify with war. My research revolved around the assumption that members of veterans' organizations often wore t-shirts and hats that identified the war in which they had served and that they spent a significant amount of time discussing their war experiences. My interest in the topic primarily came from my experiences as a clinical social worker at the Naval Station in Great Lakes, Illinois. I work predominantly with active duty service members and their families, as well as with retirees and veterans.

As my interests shifted towards retirees and veterans, the history and role of the American Legion became more important. I conducted a pilot study in order to determine whether I would be able to obtain sufficient data to perform a research study on the group. I was invited to attend the Legion's monthly meeting and was given a few minutes to explain the pilot study and its purpose. I opened by explaining what my role was at the Navy base, along with my current status as a doctoral student, and I informed them that I

would like to conduct interviews with at least three members. Through these interviews, I hoped to learn more about the American Legion's general culture, activities, personal benefits, and with which wars specific members most closely identified (my interview guide was based on my original research question). I obtained one volunteer that evening and was able to find another participant through my first interviewee. As the second participant was interested but did not have email, I was given the email address for the member's daughter, whom I contacted in order to schedule an interview time with the Legion member.

The atmosphere of the American Legion post that I observed was not what I had expected. As stated earlier, I had preconceived notions about the culture I would find. What I found instead was a fairly large crowd broken up into groups of two, sitting around a bar conversing. People greeted friends as they came in, and continued talking and laughing amongst themselves. This particular Legion post was open to the public. Many other Legion posts, however, are closed to the general public. This specific post, for example, features event nights with food specials, such as Taco Tuesdays and Fish Fry Fridays. As a consequence, one participant told me that the people who come to the bar are rather different from the people who attend meetings. The actual number of overall Legionnaires, and those who attend meetings, has dropped in recent years. This is partly due to the death of World War II (WWII) veterans. The same person informed me that most veterans who served after Vietnam did not typically join the Legion.

According to one of the participants in the pilot study, the criterion for Legionnaire membership in the American Legion was serving at least one day of active duty during wartime. The Legion originally designated specific wars in which one had to

have served, but since the Gulf War (also known as Desert Storm, which officially began in August 1990), there have been no official cutoffs for membership. In other words, the United States' involvement in war has not come to an end since that date. In addition to the Legionnaires, the American Legion membership includes the Sons of the American Legion, who are men with fathers, grandfathers, or great-grandfathers who are or were Legionnaires or who are or were eligible veterans; and the Legion Auxiliary, comprised of women who are wives, mothers, daughters, sisters, and granddaughters of a Legionnaire or an eligible veteran. The distinction between the Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) and the American Legion is that VFW members served in combat, whereas Legionnaires served during a designated wartime period.

As more data came in from the pilot study, I altered my focus because the culture of the American Legion was actually quite different from what I had expected. Inevitably, I discovered that the most salient commonality, and hence the one that governed this study, is participants' attitude that they have somehow personally benefitted from being a member of the Legion. Each participant shared his own independent thoughts about how his membership, either as a Legionnaire or as a Son of the American Legion, provided him with valuable personal benefits. One of the participants told me, "I enjoy being part of something that I feel is important and that benefits other people." When I further explored the ways in which the Legion members interpret the value they get out of the organization, I often found myself asking about the connection that people developed simply because they had someone to sit and talk with; this was clearly an important aspect of the Legion for all members. For example, the

same participant who valued the sense of importance that the organization gave him also discussed its palpably real and unique communal benefit for him:

Well that's why I come in here... I can drink beer at home. But I come in here and talk with the other guys.... I'm not real close with my neighbors, and we don't have friends that we go visit back and forth, but most all my friends are from here.

He went on to share how much he came to rely on the camaraderie he felt there. He recounted how a few years ago his wife had asked him if he really had to go to the Legion and he simply said, "Yeah, pretty much." He chuckled as he shared this exchange, almost as if he were surprised by how much he had come to rely on it. The thoughts shared by this participant exemplify in an overtly manifest way the sheer importance that going to the American Legion in general held for him. It gave him something important to feel that he was a part of on a daily basis, providing him with a community to which he feels genuinely close. My goal was to interpret the manifest content in order to delve significantly deeper into the critical psychological components involved that draw people to this organization. In the above case, it is clear that the participant derived an idealistic sense of meaning and value from the organization, in addition to daily practical benefits. From his statements alone, it was clear that there was much to learn about these phenomena and why veterans come to rely on the Legion.

The sentiments of another participant, though strikingly similar to the participant above, reinforce the value and need to further study these sorts of questions. When asked what draws people to American Legion culture, he said that he had just been thinking about that precise question during a recent Legion meeting. He was looking around at the

people attending the meeting and asked himself, “Why are we sitting through this boring meeting—why I mean literally just this week I’m asking myself—it’s like why would somebody do this?” He further elaborated:

For me to look at them not knowing where their heart, where their mind is to keep them coming it’s kind of interesting... who wants to sit through a boring meeting but they come out of it, “Oh man we made some good decisions today. We had the meeting.” Oh, OK.... So I see it’s rewarding to them that they’re able to make decisions like right now they’re selling, uh, POW/MIA balloons.

As he was describing this balloon sale project to me he finally said, “They find it rewarding to be able to reach out to veterans like that.” Another participant focused on the fact that his membership in the American Legion helped him feel accepted and respected by the community. This response again speaks to the Legion’s double sense of value in terms of not only granting individuals a familiar sense of community, but also of allowing them to participate in something meaningful that is larger than themselves.

This perspective makes intuitive sense to a certain extent, as the structure and content of the American Legion meetings often replicates military rituals and traditions, including the hats worn by the members, the recitations of traditional sayings, and even the saluting. Hanging out with friends at the bar, attending the “boring” meetings, being respected, respecting veterans, and getting a start in community involvement are all facets that intermingle with this familiar experience. Together, these are some of the personal benefits shared by the participants. In addition to these important benefits, however, there is clearly some connection with a deeper sense of collective meaning. How can we better understand the kinds of value that members derive from their Legion membership and the

different functions that membership serves for veterans in such a way that both the practical benefits and deeper psychological needs become clearer?

### **Significance of the Study for Clinical Social Work**

The social work profession is known for its special concentration on people and their complex relationship with their environments and one another. One's membership in a group, whether it is via family, friendship, treatment, or a social group, automatically provides certain personal benefits. This study focused on the various functions that group membership in the American Legion serves for military veterans.

I have worked with the military for 17 years, predominantly the U.S. Navy, but I have also provided clinical treatment for active duty service members in the Army, Marine Corps, and the Air Force. In addition to this, I have worked with numerous people who are both retired from the military and are veterans (both active duty and those who have separated from the military). As a consequence, this population has become particularly special to me, personally and professionally. Prior to working with the military, I would have described myself as being disconnected from wars and the service men and women who fought in them, but now I have become intimately tied to many of the men and women who defend our country. I have had the opportunity to advance and enhance my education regarding the military and veteran population since the Institute for Clinical Social Work (ICSW) now offers a specialization in this area. This opportunity has been valuable to my clinical work as it has deepened my knowledge of this population. This background has made investigating the value of service organizations for veterans all the more important, as it is imperative not only to

understand both what they feel they already get out of institutions like the Legion, but also what they would like to get out of them.

What does it mean to be a veteran? It seems that each veteran would answer this question with some points of similarity and some points of difference. Veterans comprise a very large population in this country and there is a large range amongst their ages, which speaks to the fact that they do in fact present themselves differently in numerous types of clinical settings. Learning more about how and why veterans choose to describe their experience as a veteran in a particular way can assist clinicians in treating them and providing for their needs. The more that clinicians know about how veterans come to identify themselves and their needs, the fuller and more complete clinical treatment can be specifically designed for and provided to them.

Active duty military members are also part of structured groups that are layered in various ways. For example, the branch they serve in is taken as one large group, a specific component of the branch is a smaller group, and a person's specific unit or division is an even smaller group. When a member eventually leaves service as a veteran, whether they separate from the military entirely or retire, they typically continue to feel a sense of connection to these structured groups and their absence becomes a noted presence in their lives. As was observed in some of the sentiments of the participants above, filling this need is one of the perceived benefits of the American Legion.

### **Statement of the Problem to be Studied and Specific Objectives to Be Achieved**

What is the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion and how do veterans experience their affiliation? What does it mean to be a member of

the American Legion and in what ways does this membership relate to the individual's military experience? The first objective was to develop a nuanced understanding of the nature of the relational ties that comprise group affiliation. The second objective was to look at the ways in which this affiliation relates to a member's previous military experience and to explore that connection. The final objective was to discover the ways in which affiliation contributes to a veteran's life in an ongoing way.

## **Chapter II**

### **Relevant Theory and Review of the Literature**

#### **Statement of Relevant Knowledge or Theory and Review of Significant Literature**

Because the central focus of this study was concerning membership in a group and the kind of functions it serves for military veterans, a review of the relevant literature on group psychology, shared narrative and identification and identity, altruism and giving back, support groups, and *Band of Brothers* is presented in order to provide a foundation for the ways of thinking about group formation and what it means to people both inside and outside of the military.

#### **Group psychology.**

In “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego” (1953), Sigmund Freud described the differences between individual and group psychology. He found that individual psychology is generally concerned with “instinctual impulses” (Freud, 1953, p. 2) because individuals are predominantly in relationships with others, which presumes a social psychology. Freud stated:

Group psychology is therefore concerned with the individual man as a member of a race, of a nation, of a caste, of a profession, of an institution, or as a component

part of a crowd of people who have been organized into a group at some particular time for some definite purpose. (1953, p. 2)

Group unity, according to Freud, assumes that there is some form of a bond that creates a sense of solidarity, and this is inherently the defining “characteristic of the group” (1953, pp. 3–4).

Within his work on group psychology, Freud referenced the work of Le Bon (1895) who believed that once individuals become part of a group “collective mind,” it causes them to “feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation” (as cited in Freud, 1953, p. 3). As a result of this collective mind, a person’s individuality is “obliterated” by the group mind, and the individual inevitably acts as if he were in a hypnotic state (Freud, 1953, p. 3). Freud defined “psychological groups” as having formed from “heterogeneous elements” (1953, p. 3) that are put together and that show different characteristics than if they were from a single person. He believed that people in a group are unified, but it is the “bond” (Freud, 1953, p. 4) that is actually the group characteristic. In order to explain the source of this bond, Freud utilized the concept of the libido to explain its presence and role in group psychology. He explained that libido, or love, aims at far more than sexual dimensions and can reference self-love, friendship, and even “love for humanity, and also devotion to concrete objects and to abstract ideas” (Freud, 1953, p. 12). He believed that this kind of love is the “essence of the group mind” (Freud, 1953, p. 13).

Freud’s (1953) hypothesis about group psychology is two-fold: (a) that a group is bonded together by love, and (b) that an individual in a group succumbs to a kind of

“suggestion” for the purpose of being in “harmony” with the group rather than opposing them (p. 13). Of the various types of groups that Freud explored, he specifically focused on the church and the army, describing them as “highly organized, lasting and artificial groups” (1953, p. 13). An artificial group of this type, according to Freud, is one that would only “disintegrate” by means of an external source (1953, p. 13). He found that there were many similarities between the church and the army, but the most crucial was the nature of the causes that both institutions served. Both have family-like structures and bind people together through a shared sense of value and a shared cause that gives the group meaning. Freud also believed that these group members were not only tied to their leaders in the libidinal sense described above, but that they were also tied to one another as group members. He found that vital and meaningful outcomes occur when “in cases of collaboration libidinal ties are regularly formed between the fellow-workers which prolong and solidify the relation between them to a point beyond what is merely profitable” (Freud, 1953, p. 18). Thus, by sharing a common goal, group members shift from a state of “egoism to altruism” (Freud, 1953, p. 18).

Freud (1953) further described the nature of libidinal ties within psychoanalysis in a discussion of identification, calling it “the earliest expression of an emotional tie with another person” (p. 19). He went on to explain object cathexis and its difference from the libidinal kind of identification. He stated that libidinal identification describes the type of identification that a little boy has for a father he would like to emulate, versus object cathexis, which describes the kind of object that the same little boy would want to possess (Freud, 1953, p. 19). With reference to group psychology, Freud believed that the type of connection was libidinal:

The mutual tie between members of a group is in the nature of an identification of this kind, based upon an important emotional common quality; and we may suspect that this common quality lies in the nature of the tie with the leader.

(1953, p. 20)

Freud (1953) further explained these concepts as he described the ego ideal. He described it within the context of group psychology, stating: “A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego” (Freud, 1953, p. 24). Freud believed that regressing to one of the earliest stages of libidinal identification is an essential component of group membership (Freud, 1953, p. 25).

As Freud (1953) drew a more detailed picture, he also emphasized other seemingly less positive features inherent to a group, including “the weakness of intellectual ability, the lack of emotional restraint, the incapacity for moderation and delay, the inclination to exceed every limit in the expression of emotion and to work it off completely in the form of action” (p. 25). Given these group psychology characteristics, Freud concluded, “the group appears to us as a revival of the primal horde” (1953, p. 28). The primal father loves his “children” equally, and the children know that if they are disciplined, then this will also be an act of equality. As a consequence, the children also fear the father equally.

In Freud’s (1953) postscript, he returned to his example of the army and church in order to explain the delineation between “identification of the ego with an object and replacement of the ego ideal by an object” (p. 33). In the case of the army, the soldier

identifies his or her ego with the object of the leader as well as the other group members. In the case of the church, the latter is the case and the object replaces a person's ego ideal.

Freud's (1953) work on group psychology was innovative and groundbreaking. He was able to provide invaluable information on the dynamic psychology of groups, and he clearly showed that it reflects a complex process. Group psychology does not simply concern the people who comprise a group, but rather focuses on the significance of what it is that actually binds the group together.

In an article entitled "Group Dynamics: A Re-View" (1952), Wilfred R. Bion similarly provided his own clinically based descriptions and theories on group dynamics. Referencing his clinical work, Bion described certain mental activities that occur within a group. He believed that one important characteristic of a group is that it is aim oriented where an activity or a goal needs to be achieved; he called this kind of group a Work Group (Bion, 1952, p. 1). Another characteristic has more to do with the mental activities of "emotional drives," which can also become cohesive if they come from "basic assumptions common to all the group" (Bion, 1952, p. 1). The kinds of assumptions that Bion discussed include dependence, pairing, and fight-flight. Within each of these assumptions, there is always an assumed leader component such that there is a dependence, pairing, and fight-flight leader (Bion, 1952). Bion stated, "Participation in basic assumption mental activity requires no training, experience or mental development. It is instantaneous, inevitable and instinctive" (1952, p. 1). The individual who does this has what Bion called "valency," meaning a "capacity for instantaneous involuntary combination of one individual with another for sharing and acting on a basic assumption"

(1952, p. 1). Although Bion distinguished between the work group and the one with shared assumptions stemming from emotional drives, he still believed that both can and do coexist in every group.

Specifically with reference to the military, Bion (1952) described the role of panic in group dynamics, and he explicitly linked the idea with military groups by using his own experience in the military. Bion chose the word *panic* because he “had reason to think that the emotional experience bore a sufficiently close resemblance to my military experiences to deserve the name panic” (1952, p. 8). He believed that panic is very closely associated with fear and rage since it often occurs when there is no outlet for these emotions.

Like Freud, Bion (1952) also believed that an individual loses his “distinctiveness” within a group setting (p. 10). However, Bion pursued the idea that one possible repercussion of this loss of self may be a splitting off of the individual’s aggression that gets projected back onto the leader. He suggested that the leader must address this issue in the group setting.

William Fairbairn, in *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* (1952), echoed elements from both Freud and Bion when he described his own theories on social groups. He stated that there are two “fundamental principles” that are the foundation for “all sociological developments” (p. 235). The first has to do with libido, and he agreed with Freud that, “it is the libido which binds members of a group together” (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 235). The second principle, like Bion, involves aggression. Fairbairn found that it is ultimately aggression that causes group disintegration, and he provided an explanation by describing the “historical evolution of social groups” (1952, p. 235). He described the

family as the “original social group,” explaining that the connectedness of the family is based on the two basic principles listed above, which essentially suggest that libido needs to exist and aggression needs to be absent in order for a group to sustain itself (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 235).

Eventually, these familial units form into the next social group, which Fairbairn (1952) referred to as the *Clan* (p. 236). The clan is comprised of many families, but it is ruled by a *Chief* who represents the patriarch of the clan, as opposed to any one family (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 236). These clans, in turn, form a third group known as the *Tribe* (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 237). The tribe is made up of many clans, yet it is still structurally organized like the family. The ruler of the tribe is typically a king “whose authority is supported by religious sanctions” (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 237). Out of the tribe, the concept of the *Nation* is developed, which represents the fourth stage in the evolution of social groups. According to Fairbairn, the development of the nation occurs because there is a weakening of the clans and the tribes. Despite that weakening, he emphasized, “the family as a social group has hitherto resisted extinction during the course of social evolution” (Fairbairn, 1952, p. 237). Ultimately, Fairbairn believed that it is important that the libido becomes more “expansive” with the evolution of the social groups since this inevitably causes the group to become “correspondingly more comprehensive” (1952, p. 238).

In *The American Handbook of Psychiatry* in 1959, Abram Kardiner updated a chapter from his 1941 book, *The Traumatic Neuroses of War*, linking aspects of group psychology specifically to the military. In this chapter, which shares its name with the title of his book, Kardiner shared a clinical treatment approach that he used when

working with combat soldiers. Regarding the stress that wartime experiences have on individuals, Kardiner (1959) stated, “This includes the whole psychophysical apparatus, the capacity to withstand hardship of infinite variety, the ability to be a member of a team, and the ability to have affection for and cooperate with one’s fellows” (p. 246). Over the course of his explanation, Kardiner described the fundamentally necessary components of being part of a military unit, which suggest that the individuals in the unit must form a group.

As Fairbairn’s (1952) analysis indicated, for most people, the first group to which many individuals belong is the family unit. This familial membership provides their first experience of social interaction. Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (1993) described this process as essential for well-being during infancy: “Other human beings are essential for the physical and psychological well-being of infants” (p. 36). In order to justify their claims, they applied the work of Rene Spitz (1945) and used his observations of infants who were not only institutionalized, but were also separated from others—essentially having minimal human contact. Spitz found that many of these infants died because they were significantly more prone to infection. When he observed those who had lived, he found that they had in fact been impacted in a profound and devastating manner, both physically and psychologically. Galatzer-Levy and Cohler concluded from Spitz’s work that social interaction is essential for survival: “Other people, in a psychological sense, are essential to the baby’s survival” (1993, p. 37).

Membership in groups continues to evolve and expand, and groups are generally a normal part of life throughout the life cycle at every developmental phase: toddlers are part of play groups, children are involved in group sports, adolescents are typically part

of friendship groups, young adults are part of intimate relationship and work or military groups, adults are involved in many different types of groups, and older adults are part of friendship groups. Yet it remains the case that the most common group throughout all of the developmental phases is the family group. In addition to the groups listed, there are also often religious or faith-based groups, clinical treatment groups, and a variety of other groupings.

This sheer variety of groups speaks to the fact that humans are inherently social beings. As social work clinicians, we keenly observe behavioral changes in our own clients, both for the better and for the worse. When a talkative, outgoing client becomes somewhat sullen and isolated, it causes concern. On the other hand, when a quiet, introverted, lonely client slowly becomes more socially interactive, we may interpret this as a loosening of defenses—a movement towards improved mental health. The key factor here is that social engagement is clearly a way to measure and evaluate health.

Interestingly, people who have a shared trauma also form groups. For example, there are groups of sexual abuse survivors and combat veterans. What is the benefit for the individuals in these groups? Bessel van der Kolk (1987) wrote about the role that a group dynamic plays in surviving traumatic experiences, emphasizing the need to defend oneself from a perceived threat: “When faced with an external threat, people tend to band together in groups to protect themselves against external enemies” (p. 155). He referenced Luchterhand regarding concentration camp survivors to demonstrate the ways in which they formed relationships with other prisoners (Van der Kolk, 1987). Even given the extreme conditions, people still fundamentally rely on group formation, “the

inmates formed stable pairs, companions were quickly replaced when one partner died or was removed” (Luchterhand, 1971, as cited in Van der Kolk, 1987, p. 156).

Although it may not seem obvious, gang membership is often considered another example of group membership based on shared trauma. One’s early traumatic experiences have been shown to clearly play a role in a person’s eventual membership in a gang (Tolleson, 1996). Tolleson described the effect of the gang on individuals who have experienced trauma: “Research has indicated that group belonging is indeed a powerful mediator of trauma, and in fact, appears to effectively diminish traumatic hyperarousal” (1996, p. 83).

Another type of group closely related to trauma that has great importance for social work in general is the clinical treatment group. Many of the dynamics are similar to those already mentioned, but some are strikingly different due to many factors. Siegfried Foulkes wrote a paper entitled “On Group Analysis” (1946) in which he elaborates on his knowledge of group treatment, or *group analysis*, as he calls it (p. 1). He began by defining a group as about seven to eight people who are called together by a “conductor or director” in an informal setting (Foulkes, 1946, p. 1). In Foulkes’ specific example, the patients are being treated for neuroses and the leader is their therapist. The focal idea is that group members use language as a means to deal with their problems. Over time, “special and dynamic relationships soon begin to form between the individuals and the conductor and between themselves, as well as between the assembly as a whole and any of its members” (Foulkes, 1946, p. 1). In addition, the members will slowly begin to see themselves as a whole and will often “live, feel, think, act and talk more in terms of ‘we’ than in terms of ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘he’” (Foulkes, 1946, p. 1). Once

this kind of community has some organization and structure behind it, Foulkes deemed that it could officially be labeled a group.

In Malcolm Pines' paper entitled "Group Analysis and the Corrective Emotional Experience: Is it relevant?" (1990), he attempted to integrate his experiences with and knowledge of psychoanalytic and group analysis. Pines (1990) mentioned the influence that Foulkes' personality development had on him, "which situates the human being intrinsically in his social matrix" (p. 2). He noted several critical concepts that grew out of group analysis, including the sense of the group as a whole, resonance, mirroring, coherency, the perspectival world, and affirmation (Pines, 1990).

Pines (1990) underscored the transformative value of the concept of the group as a whole: "In group analytic therapy a rather deep and powerful effect seems to arise from the experience of 'the group as a whole'" (p. 2). Moreover, he found that "powerful corrective emotional experiences seem to take place" (Pines, 1990, p. 3). On the topic of resonance within the analytic group setting, Pines explained the dynamic effect that group members have on one another, also noting the role of the therapist:

Faced with the actions, life situations, emotions of fellow group members, each person responds in his or her own way, resonating to the other person, to the group theme that knits together each session. Thus, each person is exposed to a range of human experience and has to respond. The defensiveness, openness, sensitivity, empathy, dissociation with which the response is made gives information both to the subject, to the other members, and to the therapist of their emotional makeup and of the solutions which they themselves have made to the issue brought by the other members. (1990, p. 6)

Pines' use of the word *coherency* refers to how it “characterizes the parts that make a whole,” and he chose it because he felt that it is a more complex process than that of cohesion (1990, p. 7). His concept of the perspectival world emphasizes the fact that individuals have to know themselves prior to being able to experience other selves, and this functions as a sign of developmental maturity.

Ellen Singer, in her article “The Dialectics of Relational Psychoanalysis and Group Psychotherapy: Commentary on Paper by Robert Grossmark” (2007), also underscored the essential benefit and need of social formation in response to Robert Grossmark's *The Rhythm of the Group* (2007). Singer stated that all attachment research has shown that individuals require a connection to others as a matter of survival. She isolated this as a trend across much of the research focusing on group psychology: “Historically, the great theoreticians in the field of psychoanalysis, including Freud, Bion, Sullivan, Fairbairn, Fromm, and Kohut have recognized the important impact of group membership on our lives” (Singer, 2007, p. 1).

It is clear from the variety of approaches and nuanced focuses of all of the authors discussed here that the psychology of groups and group membership is a complex and diverse topic. While many different types of groups have been mentioned, a common theme that runs through them is Freud's notion of libidinal ties as essential for group psychology—the relational ties between members (including the leader) work to create the positive and potentially corrective experiences of group membership. As such, we might expect to find that the relationships between members of the American Legion are one of the key benefits that they receive from membership.

### **Role of a shared narrative and identity.**

Having established that being a member of a group is a necessary and beneficial part of one's life, we must now ask how we can understand these benefits in a more in-depth manner. People within groups relate to one another as well as to the leader, if one exists. We have already concluded that it is often the relational bonds that make group membership helpful and possibly even transformative for some people. What dynamic occurs that creates this beneficial outcome and what might the process look like? Many groups are comprised of people who have lived a similar experience or are having similar issues. In other words, they have some range of shared experience in common. In situations where group members are in fact part of the group because of their shared experiences, a shared or group narrative will occur. *Narrative* refers to a process that occurs when one talks about his or her experiences and frames them together in a coherent way. In Ghislaine Boulanger's book *Wounded by Reality* (2007), she provided the following definition of narrative:

Narrative is transfigured memory that, in its turn, if it is a living narrative, further transfigures memory. The importance lies not in the memory itself but in the power to gather all the disparate impressions into a coherent whole, and in the rigorously intersubjective experience necessary to this process. In privileging narrative, we privilege the successive unfolding of increasingly complex experience. (p. 149)

In a paper on subjectivity entitled "The Love that Thinks" (2001), Paul Hoggett wrote about groups in a similar vein, but focused on the idea of political groups. He believed that groups that have not gained any power have no understanding of their

experiences or subjectivity because they have yet to form a coherent whole. Hoggett stated:

Empowerment, then, is akin to acquiring self-consciousness; the “group for itself” can behold itself in the relatively clear light of day, it can begin to develop its own narrative, its own account of things using its own language and means of representation. (2001, p. 14)

Hoggett felt that in order for a group to achieve this, it must have some sense of legitimate power.

From a clinical perspective, Saltzman, Pynoos, Lester, Layne, and Beardslee wrote a paper entitled “Enhancing Family Resilience through Family Narrative Co-Construction” (2013), which outlines a narrative approach for helping military families that are significantly impacted by deployments and psychological stress. The authors discussed the kinds of stressors that military families undergo after multiple deployments. This may include, for example, a physical injury to a service member that has long-term consequences for the entire family. Saltzman et al. (2013) highlighted the transformative possibilities opened up with a narrative approach:

Family-based narrative approaches provide a structured opportunity to elicit parents’ and children’s individual narratives, assemble divergent storylines into a shared family narrative, and thereby enhance members’ capacity to make meaning of stressful experiences and adopt beliefs that support adaptation and growth. (p. 1)

There is also an abundance of literature written on shared narratives that is centered on the experiences of trauma survivors, such as Stanley Rosenman and Irving

Handelsman's work on Holocaust survivors entitled "The Collective Past, Psychology and Personal Narrative: Shaping Jewish Identity by Memoirs of the Holocaust" (1990). The authors explained how revisiting the horrors of the Holocaust in narrative contexts "will help to release and then process, reorder, rebind—indeed, creatively utilize—the anguish of the disaster. Achieving these tasks, the group avows, will prod its narrative forward once again" (Rosenman & Handelsman, 1990, p. 2). They elaborated:

A group's story of itself establishes its sense of identity, interlocks within its internal and cultural organization, and fashions much of its behavior. Belief in the group's intentionality and reminder of its aliveness, especially after a catastrophe, is forwarded by the group narrative. (Rosenman & Handelsman, 1990, p. 10)

Identity, as described by Rosenman and Handelsman (1990), can be formed and re-formed through the sharing of experiences—that is, through a group or shared narrative. A sense of identity was achieved by the group of Holocaust survivors through the process of sharing their traumatic experiences in an effort to make sense of them and to integrate them into their lives. Erik Erikson (1956) described the ways in which identity occurs and how it develops through stages. In his paper "The Problem of Ego Identity" (1956), Erikson defined the concept of ego identity as the "gains" that have been made by late adolescence in order to be ready to move into the tasks of early adulthood (p. 1). He described his concept of identity as follows:

It is this identity of something in the individual's core with an essential aspect of a group's inner coherence which is under consideration here; for the young individual must learn to be most himself where he means most to others—those others, to be sure, who have come to mean most to him. The term identity

expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (self-sameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others. (Erikson, 1956, p. 1)

Erikson further discussed the concept of identification and its relationship to identity, emphasizing that these concepts have similar “roots” but that identifications occur at an earlier developmental phase (1956, p. 6). He did not believe that the formation of identity is based on the sum of all of one’s identifications, but rather suggested that identifications occur throughout childhood. He stressed, nevertheless, that only “part aspects” of people affect a child:

The final identity, then, as fixed at the end of adolescence is superordinated to any single identification with individuals in the past; it includes all significant identifications, but it also alters them in order to make a unique and reasonably coherent whole of them. (Erikson, 1956, p. 6)

Erikson went on to state, “Identity formation, finally, begins where the usefulness of identification ends” (1956, p. 7). This is accomplished through “the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications” (Erikson, 1956, p. 7). As the adolescent is exposed to society (or a subsociety), they start to receive some recognition about the emerging young person they have come to be. The military functions as an example of the kind of society—or more specifically, the kind of subsociety—to which a person in late adolescence can be exposed, as it is common for men and women to join at the age of 18.

In “Ego Development and Historical Change - Clinical notes” (1946), Erikson also discussed the role that group membership plays in an infant’s development and identity. Referring to studies of children in primitive societies, he stated:

Child training in such groups, so we concluded, is the method by which a group’s basic ways of organizing experience (its group identity, as we called it) is transmitted to the infant’s early bodily experiences and, through them, to the beginnings of his ego. (Erikson, 1946, p. 2)

A brief discussion of the ways in which shared narrative and identity relate to each other has already been presented. However, there are three specific papers in the book *Discourse and Identity* (2006) that provide an in-depth look into the relationship between these two concepts. The first is a paper entitled “Narrative and Identity: The Double Arrow of Time” by Elliot Mishler (2006). In his interviews with sexual abuse survivors, Mishler found that certain “turning points” can initiate a change in one’s perspective of an event or events that occurred in their past and can also cause a shift in one’s identity:

The process of restorying that both marks and results from the striking turning-point incidents is a general feature of our multiple identities, each rooted in a different set of relationships that form the matrix of our lives. Each of our partial selves is a character in a different story, where we are positioned in different ways in our relationships with others who constitute our several social worlds. These several stories, with their different plots, intersect and may conflict with each other, creating tensions at various points in our lives. (2006, p. 41)

The second paper in the aforementioned book is by Anna de Fina (2006), entitled “Group Identity, Narrative and Self-Representations.” De Fina’s focus was on “how group identity is represented and negotiated in narratives” (2006, p. 351). De Fina’s research into the social constructionist view found that there exists today a much broader understanding of this concept than in the past:

Within this vision, amply represented in this volume, people do not possess one identity related to the social categories to which they belong, but rather they present and re-present themselves, choosing within an inventory of more or less compatible identities that intersect and/or contract with each other in different ways and in accordance with changing social circumstances and interlocutors. (De Fina, 2006, p. 353)

De Fina continued her discussion by sharing her belief that a central part of identity is one’s membership in a social category. She found that one’s membership in and loyalty to groups changes due to various life situations. How a person views his or her social category and the ways in which one relates to groups can also shift (De Fina, 2006). De Fina’s perspectives and beliefs somewhat mirror those of Mishler (2006). The idea is that there is a fluidity to identity that is, in part, caused by the retelling of one’s stories in narratives.

The final paper from the aforementioned book is by Brian Schiff and Chaim Noy, entitled “Making it Personal: Shared Meanings in the Narratives of Holocaust Survivors” (2006). Schiff and Noy began their paper by stating, “The focus on narrative studies across the humanities and social sciences reflects a shared concern with the interpretation of subjective experience” (2006, p. 398). They believed that listening to people tell their

stories provides a framework for understanding the narrators and the ways in which they “make sense of self and world” (Schiff & Noy, 2006, p. 398). Narratives provide the listener a special view into how a person forms his or her identity. Schiff and Noy’s research focuses on the life narrative of an Israeli Holocaust survivor who only started to tell her story when the public trial of John Demjanjuk began. Schiff and Noy explained their focus on individual narratives:

The research presented here aims at describing the function of shared meanings in the telling of stories of personal identity. We argue that shared meanings are a significant part of all life story-telling, even in the context of conversations about the personal past, because they are always relevant to the life and story of individuals. (2006, p. 400)

Shared narrative and identity have been shown to be very closely intertwined, as the telling and retelling of stories creates shifts in the ways in which individuals and entire groups see and define themselves.

The following section includes two brief narratives where the narrators’ sense of identity while serving in the Army is quite evident. In an interview with two Army veterans, Arnie Reed (2007), an Army veteran conducting research for his counseling psychology doctoral program, asked one individual about the importance that being a soldier held for him. The veteran responded by saying, “I was a member of a team and I was an important member of a team and I was recognized as doing something for my country” (as cited in Reed, 2007, p. 179). Reed interpreted the soldier’s statements by saying, “You had an identity” (2007, p. 179). The other veteran interviewed shared similar sentiments. When asked if he felt the same or different about himself as a civilian

when compared to the time he spent in the Army he said, “You’ve got an identity there and you feel good about yourself” (as cited in Reed, 2007, p. 195).

The strong correlation between shared narrative and identity is therefore crucial for my research on the functions that are served for veterans through their membership to the American Legion. All Legion members have a shared connection to the military since they have either served themselves or they are the sons or grandsons of those who served; in this sense, they share a kind of group narrative. I listened to their individual narratives, paying specific attention to the kinds of identity they elaborated. Understanding the subjective experiences of my participants was by far the most integral part of this study.

#### **Altruism and giving back.**

The concepts of altruism and giving back often arose in the pilot study, and it was expected that they would reoccur with this study’s participants in part because they form part of the Legion’s mission. When discussing one’s sense of identity, it is important to consider how people relate to the social world and how they situate themselves in that world. In Freud’s aforementioned essay (1953), he specifically mentioned the concept of altruism: “And in the development of mankind as a whole, just as in individuals, love alone acts as the civilizing factor in the sense that it brings a change from egoism to altruism” (p. 18). The libidinal ties between people in a small group, or in one large group of mankind, create a movement away from doing for oneself toward shifting outside of the self by giving to others.

Sandor Ferenczi in “Notes and Fragments 1930–1932” (1949) described his beliefs about man’s knowledge of the universe through interconnectivity:

Another principle is that of *universality*; only groups, only world-total, only associations exist; *individuals* are “unreal”, as far as they believe themselves to exist outside these associations and neglect the *relations* between individuals (hatred, love) while leading a kind of narcissistic dream-life. Egoism is “unreal” and *altruism*, i.e. mutual consideration, identification are justified—peace, harmony, voluntary renunciation are desirable because they alone are in harmony with reality. (p. 7)

In 1921, Hannah Creasey wrote a paper entitled “Psychoanalysis and its Relation to the Neuroses” where she identified altruism as an end:

Psychoanalysis is therefore not only a therapeutic measure, but also a vehicle for ennobling the character of the patient, leading the individual from self-consciousness, self-absorption, *selfishness*, to self-denial, self-restraint, regard for others, sacrifice, service, kindness, control of the emotions, *altruism*—the goal of all right living. (p. 1)

To become altruistic, therefore, means to undergo a kind of change away from self-absorption. In “Toward a Science of Social Character” (2002), Michael Maccoby discussed his views on the development of social character and on the ways that it can change. Maccoby (2002) used Erikson’s (1946, 1956) developmental framework to look at how social character develops within each phase both in positive ways and in ways that cause people psychological difficulties. Maccoby described integrity in the last stage of life—referred to by Erikson as the phase of ego integrity vs. despair—in the following way: “Integrity means one has not betrayed one’s ideal self, or if so, has repented and found the path again” (Maccoby, 2002, p. 10). One of the important components of

integrity according to Maccoby is, “giving back to society more than one has received” (2002, p. 10).

In a paper entitled “Normal and Pathological Altruism” (2001), Beth Seelig and Lisa Rosof defined various forms of altruism. They suggested that there are five categories of altruism: protoaltruism, generative, conflicted, pseudoaltruism, and psychotic. The type that most closely fits with the subject of this literature review is the generative form of altruism, which Seelig and Rosof described as: “the ability to experience conflict-free pleasure in fostering the success and/or pleasure of another” (2001, p. 8). The authors believed that generative altruism grows from protoaltruism, which is a biologically-based form of altruism commonly found in animals and in humans through the nurturing mother caring for her infant (Seelig & Rosof, 2001). Empathy is an essential component of both of these types of altruism, particularly “empathy for the object of the altruistic behavior” (Seelig & Rosof, 2001, p. 8).

Seelig and Rosof (2001) described the ways in which altruism and object relations merge: “All altruism involves a relationship with an important other, and is a complicated mixture of direct gratification and relief of tensions coming from a variety of both internal and external sources” (p. 12). They believed that empathy is not the only component that is essential for mature, healthy altruism and that it is crucial to be able to know when to meet those needs: “Those capable of normal altruism recognize and respect the autonomous wishes of the object and enjoy enhancing the object’s pleasure or success” (Seelig & Rosof, 2001, p. 13).

If an altruistically oriented person is unconsciously doing something for others as a defense against latent early hostilities, it is also possible that the acts of altruism may be

serving as a reparative measure to ameliorate guilt. Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere discussed the complex concept of reparation in their 1964 book, *Love, Hate and Reparation*. The dynamic of reparation is explained using the following example. A baby loves its mother, but soon there are some frustrations felt by the baby caused by unmet needs (perceived or real). The same feelings are also occurring for the mother. Both mother and baby want to make each other happy, and at the same time, they also feel very responsible for each other. This requires the ability to be both sympathetic and empathetic with each other in order to truly understand the other and the other's feelings. Klein and Riviere stated, "To be genuinely considerate implies that we can put ourselves in the place of other people: we 'identify' ourselves with them" (1964, p. 66). The baby may have hateful fantasies toward its mother, which creates guilt since it does not feel right to hate the one you love. In response, Klein and Riviere stated, "At the same time in our unconscious phantasy, and for which we still unconsciously feel very guilty. This *making reparation* is, in my view, a fundamental element in love and in all human relationships" (1964, p. 66).

The concepts of altruism and of giving back provide some understanding of the ways in which people relate to others in their social world. These concepts could suggest several possible meanings. As I interviewed Legion members and analyzed the data, I expected to find the ideas of altruism and giving back.

### **Support groups.**

As it has already been determined that there are personal benefits gained from being a member of a group, it is now important to look at the support group as a specific

type of group in order to discover what it is and how it provides particular personal benefits to its members. In 1970, Robert Jay Lifton and Chaim Shatan, both psychiatrists, met with a group of veterans who were part of a new organization called Vietnam Veterans Against the War (Lifton, 1973). This small group of anti-war veterans and psychiatrists met together in “rap groups,” a term that the veterans had created to define this peer support group (Lifton, 1973, p. 76). The meetings were meant to last two hours, but the early sessions often lasted three or more hours according to Lifton. He recalled, “The explosion of feeling that occurred, associated as it was with a war whose pain pervaded all of our lives, rendered those first meetings unforgettable in their power and poignancy” (Lifton, 1973, p. 76). Lifton reported that these groups had an informal quality to them. He and Shatan referred to themselves as “professionals” rather than “therapists” and there was, “fluidity in boundaries between professionals and veterans” (Lifton, 1973, p. 77).

As the group continued, Lifton (1973) came to discover three important principles. The first was affinity, which he defined as, “the coming together of people who share a particular (in this case overwhelming) historical or personal experience, along with a basic perspective on that experience, in order to make some sense of it” (Lifton, 1973, p. 77). The second principle was presence, which he described as being present and “open to mutual impact” (Lifton, 1973, p. 77). Lifton said that presence did not just involve group members bouncing their thoughts and feelings towards the therapist, but that it was more about members being equally open with the entire group. The third principle that Lifton discovered was self-generation. Similar to self-determination, this principle involves the members guiding their own individual process

within the group and possibly relates to the idea of empowering these veterans, as they had been under the control of the military and were now in a group against the Vietnam War (Lifton, 1973). Judith Herman (1992) discussed the importance of these rap groups, stating, “The purpose of the rap groups was twofold: to give solace to individual veterans who had suffered psychological trauma, and to raise awareness about the effects of war” (p. 27).

James Griffith and Mark Vaitkus wrote a paper entitled “Relating Cohesion to Stress, Strain, Disintegration and Performance: An Organizing Framework” (1999). They described the parallels that exist between cohesion and social support. Cohesion involves the provision of support to other group members with the goal of achieving the necessary group tasks. Social support is similar as it involves the provision of “tangible” support and/or “advice and guidance” that assists the individual in his everyday functioning (Griffith & Vaitkus, 1999, p. 31). The authors stated that both cohesion and social support “incorporate expressive aspects of a social group” (Griffith & Vaitkus, 1999, p. 31). They elaborated:

Furthermore, the functions of cohesion and social support are comparable, albeit at different levels of analysis. Cohesion facilitates the productivity of the group member and successful interaction within the group as a whole. In a similar way, social support enables individual adjustment and effective interpersonal relationships. (Griffith & Vaitkus, 1999, p. 31)

The Griffith and Vaitkus research provides additional evidence for the positive impact of group support, cohesion, and interpersonal relationships. In a research study conducted by Heller, Roccoforte, Hsieh, Cook, and Pickett (1997) entitled “Benefits of

Support Groups for Families of Adults with Severe Mental Illness,” it was found that the family members benefited a great deal on two distinct levels: information and relationships (p. 193). Heller et al. (1997) reported that over 90% of the families felt better able to advocate for their mentally ill family member. In addition, many reported that they felt better able to emotionally cope with their family member and that they learned more about mental illness in general. The reported relationship benefits included “an improved ability to cope with the social stigma of having a relative with mental illness, less anger towards the relative, and better relationships with the relative and other family members” (Heller et al., 1997, p. 193).

There is an abundance of literature written about addiction support groups. For the purpose of this study, I have only focused on select papers that place importance on the relational and beneficial aspects of support groups. In Janice Haaken’s “Beyond Addiction: Recovery Groups and ‘Women Who Love Too Much’” (1992), she elaborated on her interest in support groups designed for women who were in addictive relationships. The Adult Children of Alcoholic (ACOA) support groups were the first to organize these types of programs specifically focused on *love addicts*. Robin Norwood’s 1985 book, *Women Who Love Too Much*, was the text used as the basis for these groups. Although Haaken stated that she did not believe that support groups replaced the crucial component of self-exploration offered by psychoanalysis, she did find the ACOA valuable. She found that these groups were quite orderly and that the leader played a small role in simply guiding the groups:

ACOA groups go much further than AA and Al-Anon in claiming to offer a Therapeutic and reparative experience for group members—a place where

Members are encouraged to talk about painful experiences in the past and Present, and to experience the restorative acceptance and support of the group. Confession before the group is emphasized as an initial step towards recovery from the injurious effects of growing up in a dysfunctional family. (Haaken, 1992, p. 9)

Haaken found that not only did the ACOA groups offer women the opportunity to join together due to a common problem, but it also granted them additional areas of self-awareness and growth.

In Bernard Brickman's "Psychoanalysis and Substance Abuse: Toward a More Effective Approach" (1988), he focused on the use of psychoanalytic treatment for patients with substance abuse issues and how this treatment alone was not effective:

I shall propose that psychoanalytic treatment of chemically dependent individuals frequently fails as it is informed by theories that have suffered serious methodological flaws in their inception. The basic misconception is that substance abuse is a secondary phenomenon to underlying psychopathology and thus amenable to being influenced through psychoanalytic insight. (p. 1)

Brickman encouraged all of his substance abuse patients to attend a 12-step support group such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA). He found that there was nothing about these groups that was not compatible with the analytic work he was doing with the patient. Brickman concluded that AA was an extremely effective program mostly because it offered the new member the chance to feel understood by the seasoned members who had similar experiences.

Brickman (1988) also described the Alanon and Naranon groups and the ways that they can be helpful to family members of the substance abuser. One of the key

components in these groups is to help the family members learn to not enable the substance abuser. Brickman said that psychotherapists can also learn from groups because he felt that “psychotherapeutic enabling” (pg. 9) took place, allowing a substance abuser to continue in analysis when it was not effective. Brickman shared a clinical case in which he found himself enabling a patient who was an alcoholic not making any improvements.

Robert Lifton’s (1973) three principles of affinity, presence, and self-generation seem to aptly depict the positive impact that support group membership provides. Although it is not a support group in any strict sense, the American Legion is a group of people who come together for a common purpose and who have a shared military background. The American Legion (2015b) mission statement includes the phrase “mutual helpfulness” (para. 1); together as a group they help others.

### **Band of brothers.**

Although *Band of Brothers* is a book by Stephen Ambrose and a television miniseries depicting the 2nd Battalion Parachute Infantry Regiment assigned to the 101st Airborne Division in WWII, the title for the book and the series was borrowed from the St. Crispin’s Day speech in William Shakespeare’s *Henry V*. In the play, King Henry V of England delivered this speech prior to the Battle of Agincourt. Part of it reads, “We few we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother; be never so vile. This day shall gentle his condition” ([www.william-shakespeare.info/act4,5/9/15](http://www.william-shakespeare.info/act4,5/9/15)). The most basic idea at the heart of *Band of Brothers* is that of a shared experience, a joining together of soldiers to perform a mission. This

narrative is quite psychologically complex given the deep attachments and relationships that form among the service members (active duty, separated, or retired) and what those relationships mean for each individual.

Jon Shaw used the term *band of brothers* in his paper entitled “The Acute Traumatic Moment-Psychic Trauma in War: Psychoanalytic Perspectives” (2007): “The particular character structure of the individual soldier with its relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, thinking, and relating to others contributes to the capacity to function as part of a ‘band of brothers’” (p. 4). Shaw stated that the superego of the soldier, in addition to his “idealized self-expectations,” become externalized onto the group (2007, p. 4). This creates an investment in the group as, “he loves the group, and loves himself as part of the group” (Shaw, 2007, p. 4). Shaw elaborated on the benefits of the relationship:

They become a band of brothers, united against adversity. The group provides the individual with the knowledge that he does not fight alone. An emotional bond is established which mitigates the effects of aloneness and facilitates a sense of succorance and support among comrades. Individual needs and values are subordinated to the group’s needs and standards of conduct. (2007, p. 6)

How can we understand the military culture, or military ethos, with all of its processes and nuances? Although these phenomena are important to understand when working clinically with a military member, the relationships between the members, both active and non-active duty, and the ways that these relationships manifest themselves, are of greater importance for the purpose of this study. Using notions such as that of a band of brothers helps to frame that relationship.

Abram Kardiner described the soldier's job in his 1959 paper entitled "The Traumatic Neuroses of War." He stated that the soldier's new social environment does not resemble the environment that was left behind. The hierarchy is no longer one of family and it requires obedience (Kardiner, 1959). The soldier no longer has freedom, but is instead told what he has to do. Much frustration and angst can develop in units because of these circumstances, which Kardiner believed have much to do with the morale of the units. The significant stress to which the soldier is exposed during wartime also contributes to morale. Kardiner stated, "The soldier lives in an atmosphere of continuation of fatigue, anxiety, and boredom, deprived of sex and opportunities to complete relaxation" (1959, p. 248). On the positive side, Kardiner stated that the soldier does feel taken care of by his team and his leadership. His morale will remain positive if he is fed well, is getting along with his team, and is under good leadership (Kardiner, 1959). If these conditions are not met, Kardiner stated that the soldiers' morale will decrease.

In Lynn Hall's essay "The Importance of Understanding Military Culture" (2012), she described many related components of military culture. She called one component the importance of mission, stating:

The conditions and demands of "a total commitment to the military—typically as commitment to one's unit, the unit's mission and its members" (Martin & McClure, 2000, p. 15) is the very essence of a military unit's cohesion. This felt sense of mission is, indeed, the purpose of the military. (Hall, 2012, p. 11)

Hall said that this dedication and commitment can be seen not only in a soldier's commitment to the country, but also to one's comrades. This creates a strong sense of

family, and many individuals feel as though they have a “second family,” which can often cause marital difficulties (Hall, 2012, p. 11).

This idea of a second family is synonymous with the concepts of band of brothers and camaraderie. A frequently heard statement when referring to the military is comrades in arms. When I have asked clinical clients to attempt to explain their relationships to their comrades, it is difficult for them to find the words for the phenomenon. One Army soldier who I was treating for PTSD and other issues found himself as disturbed by his move away from his comrades as he was by his symptoms.

Another important component of military culture involves service members’ constant disaster preparedness (Hall, 2012). We see this in the lives of our policemen and women and firefighters as well, but most civilians do not contend with this issue on a daily basis. This constant pressure can also create a great deal of stress for the family of a military member in addition to the member him or herself (Hall, 2012). Hall also addressed the components of honor and sacrifice. She stated, “it is difficult to understand the importance of the concepts of military honor and sacrifice without relating it to the male psyche and the traditional stereotypes of the military as a male domain” (Hall, 2012, p. 14). Although more women are joining the military today, it continues to be a predominantly male culture. The concepts of honor and sacrifice may provide us with more understanding of the stigmas associated with getting help, especially for many men (Hall, 2012).

Hall stressed the importance of understanding military culture, especially for those clinicians who provide treatment to veterans, service members (active, separated, or retired), and their families. Although numerous authors have provided nuanced and

detailed insight into military culture, there are nevertheless clear common themes, including honor, sacrifice, camaraderie, family, mission, ritual, tradition, and patriotism.

In *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994), Jonathan Shay compared the army culture during the Vietnam War with the army described by Homer in the *Iliad*:

An army, ancient or modern, is a social construction defined by shared expectations and values. Some of these are embodied in formal regulations, defined authority, written orders, ranks, incentives, punishments, and formal task and occupational definitions... All together, these form a moral world that most of the participants most of the time regard as legitimate, “natural”, and personally binding. The moral power of an army is so great that it can motivate men to get up out of a trench and step into enemy machine-gun fire. (p. 6)

Shay then described the concept of honor in Homer’s era:

Honor was conferred by others for going into danger and fighting competently. Honor was embodied in its valuable tokens, such as the best portions of meat at feasts, land grants, or, in Achilles’ case, the prize of Briseis.... Homer makes it plain that men were willing to risk their lives for honor and that the material goods that symbolized honor were not *per se* what made them face “a thousand shapes of death.” (1994, pp. 13–14)

Homer clearly understood that these men did not fight to receive the prize, but that they instead fought for more complex and relational reasons. They fought because they were part of a band of brothers.

Arnie Reed’s (2007) aforementioned interviews with two Army veterans present rich narratives that reflect the sentiments of identity, teamwork, camaraderie, service,

pride, and patriotism. Members of the armed forces are frequently referred to as *service members* because they provide an integral service to the United States. They promise to serve when they are sworn into their various branches. How do we understand this kind of service? One component includes the capacity to care for people. On a large scale, this could take the form of caring for the inhabitants of the United States; on a smaller scale, it could take the form of caring for the brothers and sisters in service who they have come to call family. In Toby Keith's song "American Soldier," the lyrics describe service in this manner:

I don't do it for the money / there's bills that I can't pay / I don't do it for the glory / I just do it anyway / Providing for our future's my responsibility / Yeah I'm real good under pressure / Being all that I can be / (Refrain) I'm an American soldier, an American / Beside my brothers and my sisters I will proudly take a stand / When Liberty's in jeopardy, I will always do what's right / I'm out here on the front line / Sleep in peace tonight / American soldier, I'm an American soldier. (Keith & Cannon, 2003, l. 9–15, 28–33)

Other components of military culture include ritual and tradition. The military is steeped in tradition, and each military branch has its own specific traditions. One very common ritual and tradition is the presentation of the American flag to the mother, widow or widower, or other family member of a deceased service member. The cadences that are sung when running or marching are another type of ritual or tradition, as are the creeds and other sayings that are taught to every person who joins the military. The ceremonies for basic training, graduation, and retirement are additional examples; the

order, music, speeches, and other elements of each ceremony are steeped in both ritual and tradition.

### **Conclusion.**

This review of literature has revealed that membership in all types of groups can create a sense of belonging, a feeling of inclusion, a position of status, a sense of identity, a desire to care for others in the name of service, a forum for catharsis, and a theme of camaraderie. These are all crucial factors that contribute to one's sense of self, self-image, and identity. Erikson's (1956) theory that identity formation is somewhat complete at the end of adolescence may provide some understanding of the potential for a service member's need to continue to serve. If an individual joins the service in late adolescence and learns the value of it, this value may be brought forward into later developmental phases. The act of joining the American Legion and other veteran organizations might be a way to continue this service. Is it possible that the experience of being an American Legion member may parallel the experience of military service? There is continuity in service, but in a radically different capacity.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This research study was conceptually grounded in both psychodynamic and hermeneutic theories since they provide a premise for understanding human experience. The philosophical tradition of hermeneutics was developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, who believed, "understanding and interpretation is the method used throughout the human sciences. It unites all their functions and contains all their truths.... Understanding of

other people and their life-expressions is developed on the basis of experience (Erlebnis)” (as cited in Mueller-Vollmer, 1986, p. 152).

Each participant in this study had a unique, subjective experience of his or her American Legion membership. These combined, subjective experiences provided the phenomena for this study. It was only through listening closely and understanding these experiences that I was able to discover the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion. The goal was not to discover a truth, which is the goal in the positivistic philosophical approach, but rather to discover the perspectives of the participants’ experiences.

This researcher entered into the lived experiences of the participants because this empathic endeavor was the most salient manner through which to fully know and understand these experiences. Utilizing the psychodynamic approach of interpretation when analyzing the data allowed this researcher to discover potential unconscious meaning.

### **Question to Be Explored**

The question explored was: What is the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion?

### **Operational Definitions**

The operational definition of a Legionnaire is one who has served at least one day of active duty in specific wars prior to August 1990. Since this date, there have been no cutoffs for Legion membership. Thus all Legionnaires are military veterans since they

served during wartime. Having served in combat zones is not a requirement for Legion membership. Legionnaires are required to pay annual dues in the amount of \$33.

### **Statement of Assumptions**

1. There are multiple psychological functions or meanings at play in the link between military service and American Legion membership.
2. Military service is a distinct, psychological, social, and interpersonal phenomenon.
3. Part of this distinct psychological experience is the establishment of emotional or psychological ties with other service members and the ideals that guide military affiliation.
4. Another part of this distinctive phenomenon is a shared narrative, whether in war theater or not.
5. Military training involves many triumphs and adversities, the acquisition of new psychological confidences, potential vulnerabilities, and a newfound identity forged in a group context.
6. Membership in the American Legion (fraternity) provides some continuity between the military service period in a person's life and their ongoing life experiences.
7. The narrative data from the participants will contain psychological experiences regarding the functions and meanings that membership in the American Legion has had for them.

8. This researcher used a phenomenological approach in order to capture and illuminate these psychological experiences.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Type of Study and Design**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion. The goal was to provide an in-depth, psychological description of the ways in which veterans experience this affiliation. Because this study focused on the subjective and personal meanings of participants, a phenomenological approach was used. The design of this study was based solely on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith & Eatough, 2007). This method involves a two-part interpretative process: the participants make efforts to understand and make meaning of their experiences, and the researcher then makes an effort to understand and interpret the participants' understanding from a psychological lens (Smith & Eatough, 2007). The IPA approach for this study attempted to elicit the subjective and personal meaning that participants attribute to their American Legion membership experiences. The participants shared these experiences as clearly as possible, and the role of this researcher was to interpret what they were attempting to say and to explore possible meanings of which they may not have been fully aware. The aim of this study was not to solely retell the narratives of the participants, but also to understand and interpret them from an explicitly psychological stance. To achieve this, rich interviews were conducted to allow data

analysis that would closely convey the participants' own interpretation of their experiences.

### **Scope of Study, Setting, Population, and Sampling, and Sources and Nature of Data**

The scope of this study included veterans who were members of the American Legion and had been members for at least one year. Six new participants were needed. The three veterans who participated in the pilot study were also included, amounting to a revised total of nine participants. When I was ready to begin interviewing, I attended an American Legion monthly meeting to explain my study, and I distributed a sheet of paper that contained my contact information and described the research.

Following my attendance at the meeting, my American Legion point of contact sent a follow-up email to the Legionnaires containing the same information. I obtained one participant shortly after this meeting. As this occurred over the Christmas holiday, I waited until mid-January to see if I received responses from any other interested individuals. Not having identified any more interested participants via this method, I therefore decided to try an alternative method. I created a box with the study information displayed on the top and a slit into which people could place sheets of paper containing their name and contact information. I asked my Legion point of contact if I could display it at the Legion and he agreed. The day after I brought the box in, he sent an email to the Legionnaires reminding them about participating in my study. From that email, I obtained the other five participants needed for my study. I returned to the Legion one week later to retrieve the box and found one sheet of paper inside. I attempted to call and email the interested party, but they never responded.

The original location that I planned to use for the interviews, an area library, was under construction and was not scheduled for completion until spring 2015. Due to the fact that most of the participants now had to drive to a more inconvenient location, I offered \$10 for gas reimbursement for the first interview. Two participants refused the money but the others accepted. At the Legion meeting, a veteran offered me the use of his not-for-profit business location. I used this space for my initial interview with the first participant. Since I was never able to reach the veteran who owned the location again, I used two area park district facility buildings for my interviews (paying their rental fees out of pocket) with all but one participant. I conducted both interviews with the other participant at his office (I did not offer the \$10 to this participant as he did not have to drive anywhere for the interviews).

### **Data Collection Methods and Instruments**

I was as flexible as possible when scheduling interview times. Most interviews were conducted in the evenings, on Fridays—when I am not scheduled to work—, or on weekends. I conducted two 45-minute, semi-structured interviews with each participant. After transcribing each participant's first interview, I based the interview guide for the second interview on items that required further exploration and/or clarification. According to IPA methodology, these types of interviews are preferable to a structured interview for the following reasons: they allow for more engagement between researcher and participant, they allow the participant to follow his or her own interests, and the data obtained tend to be "richer" (Smith & Eatough, 2007, p. 59). Another reason for using a semi-structured interview was because the questions did not have a specific order to

them, which allowed for more freedom to follow the participant in any direction their responses led the conversation. This freedom was important to my study as I wanted each participant to feel as if he or she could tell his or her story in his or her own way without the restriction of a rigid structure. The participants were regarded as the experts relating to their own experiences, so it was important to hold flexible interviews that allowed for the development of truly meaningful dialogue.

The following statements and questions were used as an interview guide for the first interview:

1. How did you come to join the American Legion?  
(Follow up if necessary) What did you know about the Legion prior to joining, if anything?
2. What do you do in the Legion? Who do you do it with?  
(Follow up): How are you involved? Has that changed over time? How? What?
3. Tell me about experiences that stand out for you. Good, bad, and ugly.
4. In which war did you serve? How is it that you came to join the military? Were you ever in combat?
5. How did your military service end? How did you make the transition from military to civilian life? What was it like? (If they speak of positives ask about negatives, if they speak of negatives ask about positives).
6. How is belonging to the American Legion similar or different than belonging to other organizations or experiences?

7. I have heard that younger veterans typically don't join the American Legion.

What do you think about that?

The second interview with each participant began with questions that were not addressed during the first interview and then proceeded with clarifying or additional questions regarding the data obtained from the first interview.

### **Plan for Data Analysis**

The aim of the data analysis was to provide insight into the lived experience of affiliation for veterans in the American Legion. This was accomplished through an intensive analytic process. According to the IPA model, analysis of data is completed in a progressive manner as the specific statements given by each participant are translated into the overarching themes that emerge from the collection of participants by the study's conclusion (Smith & Eatough, 2007). First, each transcript was read multiple times with an eye toward distilling the most significant comments. The researcher employed a guiding perspective when determining which comments were significant, which included:

- Central concerns
- Authenticity of experience
- Reflection and affect
- Dilemmas
- Personal descriptions

The next step involved transforming these significant comments into categories of meaning. This was achieved by attempting to find the essence of what was being said and describing it in psychological terms and phrases (Smith & Eatough, 2007). At this point

in the process, I sent an email to each participant in order to member check to ensure that I had accurately described his or her experiences before moving on to the next step. A document was attached to these emails containing the clustered themes (categories of meaning) with tentative theme titles from their respective interviews. I received three responses, each of which stated that their experiences had been accurately described. Next, once these terms and phrases were distilled from each transcript, I identified overarching themes that emerged across the interviews. These themes were listed in the order in which they were noted. An important part of this process was to not only identify what was similar in each transcript, but also what was different. The emerging overarching themes were then clustered together, and each cluster was identified by a name. The final step was to develop a master list containing the overarching themes with the corresponding themes listed below.

In order to present this data for my findings, I developed a narrative from the overarching themes in combination with the direct participant quotes. The intent of this narrative was to present the participants' experiences as faithfully as possible. To that end, many portions of this narrative include my own interpretation of the stories shared by the participants. IPA researchers have explained this dynamic in the following way: "Thus an IPA narrative represents a dialogue between participant and researcher and that is reflected in the interweaving of analytic commentary and raw extracts" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009. p. 110). This is the approach that I took when composing the narrative for this study.

### **Statement on Protecting the Rights of Human Subjects**

Each participant was given a consent form prior to beginning the first interview, which he or she discussed with the researcher and then signed. The following information was included in the consent form and explained to each participant:

- The voluntary nature of the study (informing them that this study was in no way attached to the American Legion).
- The purpose of the study and the ways in which the data were collected.
- The right to end the interview and withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions.
- The potential risks involved in participating in the study and the plan to address any adverse reactions.
- Information about confidentiality.
- Although not included in the informed consent, it is important to note that the participants are identified by a numbering system so that there is no identifying information used. The number 1 or 2 that appears after the participant number refers to which interview is being quoted.

### **Limitations of the Research Plan**

The characteristics of qualitative research do not imply the generalizability of research findings.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The findings of this study exploring the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion are presented in this chapter. First, participant demographics are briefly summarized, followed by a discussion of the results of the study.

#### **Participant Demographics**

Prior to conducting the interviews, every participant completed a demographic survey. Based on the results of the survey, there were seven male and two female participants, five from the Army and four from the Air Force. The number of years served in the military ranged from 3 to 30, with an average of 6. The rank at the end of service for seven of the participants was either E-4, E-5, or E-6 (junior enlisted), and O-3 and O-5 (officers) for the other two participants. The year of military separation or retirement ranged from 1945 to 2008, and years as a Legionnaire ranged from 3 to 63. Additional demographic information gathered from the interviews included the war in which each participant served: one in WWII, two in Vietnam, three in Grenada, one in Desert Storm, and two in Iraq.

## **Results**

The interviews conducted for this study generated rich data about veterans' lived experience of affiliation with the American Legion. The findings encompass five themes that emerged from the data and will illuminate the phenomenon of affiliation with the American Legion. These themes include: affiliation provides an assumed intimacy, affiliation provides an alternative society, affiliation provides transformation, affiliation provides non-combat veterans with a sense of being valued, and affiliation provides reparative experiences.

### **Theme 1: Affiliation provides an assumed intimacy.**

This theme addresses the ways in which the participants' American Legion affiliations provide them with intimate social connections that emerge without being explicitly elicited. Three illustrations of this theme are included: developing friendships, feeling understood, and feeling united.

#### ***Developing friendships.***

The first illustration of assumed intimacy relates to developing friendships and attending social functions within the Legion. This middle-aged Army veteran described himself as a loner who found that maintaining friendships prior to his Legion membership had been high maintenance. He stated, "07-1- I met these people and you have this little common thread that goes between you... so you automatically get like some friends...so there's all these built-in functions that happen." This participant and others experienced the Legion culture as cultivating a sense of ease that facilitates the

formation of social connections that have an intimate quality to them. The development of these intimate friendships is based on an innate familiarity stemming from their shared veteran experiences.

***Feeling understood.***

Another illustration of assumed intimacy is seen in the experience of being understood in a way that creates a natural feeling of being known. One middle-aged Army veteran described his experience in this way:

08-2- ...there's a similar common ground...you don't need to go through some of the small talk stuff that you might with somebody who 'ya never knew because you've...already shared something... but I think it is a leg-up so to speak...it transcends the need to talk about it...you know it's there...and makes talking about other stuff that much easier.

This veteran's experience reflects the sentiments of many participants. The experience of feeling known by being understood in this deep and innate manner provides these participants with intimate social connections. A female Air Force veteran in her early forties who is a mother of two shared her experiences of feeling deeply understood:

09-1- It's one good thing about veterans and the Legions is that when we get together it's like we're a family...we've all got...shared experiences so that...when I say something they understand what I'm talking about where if I were to say the same thing to my husband who's never been in the military...he looks at me like I grew a second head...we have that familiarity...we have that

camaraderie that we could easily finish each other's sentences even though I don't know them very well.

This innate experience of feeling known as a veteran in the Legion shares the same dynamics as family membership. There is a context rooted in a shared history that cultivates a deep sense of familiarity; you are known just because of your membership in that group. The common shared experiences of family membership presume that you are known in a deep way; the participants experience the same phenomenon through their Legion affiliation. Experiencing a sense of being known based on shared experiences creates powerful, intimate connections. The same participant who was just quoted also stated: "It's a different kind of family but it's in some ways they're closer than what you were to your normal family."

***Feeling united.***

The final illustration of assumed intimacy focuses on the concepts of unity and bonding and their relationships to shared experiences. The "bond" described in this quote depicts the participant's experience of connecting with others and the quality of those connections. This quote was given by a Vietnam veteran who is in his seventies:

10-1&2- ...an acceptance speech I said that, 'Here we are we're all working together and we only have three things in common...we were in the service, we're members of the Legion and we all like a drink'...I think we have more in common because we're all in the service and there's a bond there...like I belong to the license place club and car clubs and there's a bond but it's a different bond because we all went through a little portion of hell.

The female veteran who experiences her Legion affiliation as being part of a family described the ways in which the power of shared narrative creates a sense of unity and bonding:

09-2- ...we're not free to talk about some of them (in her church) whereas if you were at the American Legion we could talk about whatever we wanted to talk about...those experiences... the things we've saw and done...because if you talk about killing somebody...that's a sin at church.

The acts of working together toward a common goal and sharing experiences create a strong sense of unity. The camaraderie described here not only refers to the experiences shared in the military, but also to the ways in which this sense of closeness and cohesion is experienced again through the participants' affiliation with the Legion. These participants are bonded together and united by a shared struggle, "hell," which fosters intimate connections.

In summary, this theme illuminates the ways in which the participants' affiliation with the Legion cultivates powerful and intimate social connections. This assumed quality of intimacy illustrated by finding friends, feeling known, and feeling unified exists because of the shared experiences of the participants.

### **Theme 2: Affiliation provides an alternative society.**

This theme centers on the participants' experiences of feeling increasingly marginalized by a society whose values and traditions of citizenship have increasingly declined over time. Their affiliation with the Legion provides them with an alternative society that helps remedy this marginalization.

This participant is a retired Air Force officer and pilot who is in his fifties and is a white-collar worker, presumably from the upper-middle class or lower-upper class. He stated the following when asked about his experience with the American Legion:

12-1&2- I think the Legion is probably the last bastion of citizenship...well they're kind of the keepers of it in that they actually think and talk and do things about it...my son attended like a contest for the constitution... kind of an oratory...when was the last time you attended an oratory?... I think the Legion is probably more at the grassroots of citizenship...what it means to be a citizen...what the constitution means, civic involvement and nurturing it.

This participant introduced the notion of citizenship, some of the values attached to it, and most importantly, the idea that the American Legion offers an environment that protects, preserves, and “nurtures” these values. There is also the sense that some of the values and traditions have become outdated, forgotten, and less valued in today’s society. Nearly all of the participants shared this perspective and experience.

Many of the participants spoke about certain patriotic traditions that they experience through their Legion affiliations. These include taking proper care of the American flag and keeping God in the Legion. One participant spoke about God, explaining that she felt comforted that the Legion has kept God in its organizational values, whereas other organizations have removed Him. These participants find that the Legion not only keeps these conservative traditions and values alive, but also holds them in the highest regard, thus helping to remedy their sense of marginalization.

The same participant who introduced the notion of citizenship described his experience of the shifts in societal values over time:

12-2- (When asked about the possibility of the Legion becoming extinct if younger generation vets don't join): Oh they very much have to be thinking of that just because, if you look at the numbers are shrinking considerably. Maybe joining of Legions or some might disappear altogether. In WWII just about everybody knew of a brother or a father or an uncle or somebody else that had gone to war and you would see kids lying about their age to participate in some of these wars because they felt so very strongly about what it was to be an American and to uphold values that were intrinsic within those communities and I think a lot of that was probably firmly anchored in that WWII generation and then it has shifted away. I mean bombers use to fly crews of an airplane full of people and now you got some airplanes without anybody on it.

There is a strong sense that societal values have not only declined over time, but that those who honor and respect these values are in the minority and have become somewhat marginalized. This is evident in the participant's belief that the Legion's existence is in jeopardy as there are fewer and fewer people who both respect and live these values and traditions. The Legion can thus be seen as providing an alternative society by allowing these participants to be a part of the mainstream Legion culture and helping them to feel less marginalized overall.

Another important tradition of citizenship is service to others, which is an aspect of the American Legion's mission. Their preamble concludes with the statement, "...to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness" (American Legion, 2015c). Numerous participants spoke about the strong sense of altruism that they have experienced through their Legion affiliations. This female

participant is a former Air Force officer and nurse. She is in her fifties, is a white-collar worker, and is presumably from the upper-middle class or lower-upper class. This participant is married to the participant who introduced the idea of citizenship to the study. She described her experience of altruism by stating:

11-2- It humbles me to see what these people do to give back and they don't have to. I think well when I retire I just want to like do nothing, go work out and go travel and go on trips and look at the scenery and they're giving all their free time to other people. Where I want to give my free time back to myself or my family. It's mind boggling to me, the dedication, the shirt off their back, the hours. It's just unbelievable.

This participant uses herself as an example of the decline in traditional societal values as evidenced by her desire to do for herself in retirement rather than give service to others. Her social location as white collar, a minority in the Legion, may contribute to her perspective, as she finds herself brought down to a level of modesty within this culture of selflessness.

This participant's husband described his experience of the decline in societal values (12-1&2), "their focus is community centric and at the exclusion of the individual and there aren't too many organizations that aren't about me anymore." This participant speaks about the mainstream societal tendency to be focused on oneself ("me") and recognizes that the Legion and its members have been increasingly displaced and downgraded to a minority status due to their conservative and traditional beliefs and values.

Another participant, a middle-aged Army veteran and white-collar worker who is presumably from the middle class, stated:

08-2- If it were not for the WWII guys, most of the Legions probably around the country would have even existed cuz there's just a different mindset from one generation to the next. I've known some people who say, 'Hey, you know what do you think, you served in the military, it's a great thing, it's a good lobbying power and—but what's it do for me?'—and that's the difference in a nutshell that one statement where most of the older generation, particularly the WWII guys, it wasn't about what I get from it, it's about what I can put into it for you and that's what's really different and it's still different today and now we're so segmented everything that we do it's a shame sometimes progress isn't necessarily progressive.

In addition to this participant's experience of the decline in social values resulting in predominantly me-centered attitudes, he has also found that there are more distinct divisions in social class that have created a greater divide between people. From his perspective, societal values have regressed since the WWII era. This sentiment parallels that of other participants who have found that the Legionnaires have become a marginalized group of people.

In summary, this theme focuses on the alternative society that the Legion provides for these participants. Despite the decline in societal values, they can continue to participate in a culture that upholds the conservative values and traditions that they hold close, which helps to remedy their sense of marginalization.

**Theme 3: Affiliation provides transformation.**

For two of the participants, their affiliation with the American Legion resulted in life transformations. These transformations can be categorized as (a) transformed/reclaimed life and (b) transformed associations.

***Transformed/reclaimed life.***

The first participant, a middle-aged Army Lebanon/Grenada War veteran and a blue-collar worker, described the significant transformation he experienced when he joined the Legion 27 years after the end of his military service. He shared the following when asked about his transition from military to civilian life:

07-1- The excitement level—you're doing and going—you're not getting on helicopters anymore. There's something about being around your company and the men. You're getting orders. You're giving orders. You lose all that...wearing your uniform I mean there was nothing more proud than when I would come home from the airport and I'd be strutting down in my class A uniform and people look at you. The sense of pride that you get. All that's gone now I had to go back to a job, and it was like that one movie where Patrick Swayze says, 'These people who drive to work on the expressway and they're driving coffins'—but anymore time in there and I really, you know the song, the people go postal.

This participant then described some of his experiences as a Legionnaire:

07-1&2- They've got an opening for a chaplain and it fell right into what I wanted to do. I wanted to do the funerals cuz that's where I went and I was moved by that. My father-in-law's funeral is what got me off my ass after 27 years and now

all of a sudden I'm doing this. And that's kinda like pulling me out of my little circle. It brings your sense of pride back. Starting to do things for other people and maybe, just how I got sparked maybe I'll spark somebody else, that's to me the most important thing right there. It killed me to get out of it (the military) but the Legion that's it, now it's coming up, B. wants me to move on in the ranks but I don't want to. At this time I can't see myself doing any other thing—it's got my name written on it.

This participant shared a story about being very nervous before having to speak to the largest group of people to whom he had ever spoken at a funeral for a fellow Legionnaire. He started thinking about the war experiences of the deceased and his uncle and their fear and courage. He said:

07-2- I just kept telling myself, "Think about what they had to go through," and my God it worked, and I didn't have that flutter and I could actually talk. To think that now coming up in June that I'm not gonna be chaplain just when I had that breakthrough. This is what I have the passion for. I had that breakthrough moment and that really made me feel good, so I came home and I really felt good.

For this participant, something was ignited when he was introduced to the Legion at his father-in-law's funeral. The Legion pulled him out of isolation and "sparked" his life as if he had been brought back from the dead. His life has been transformed, as the Legion made him feel a sense of pride and belonging for the first time since he left the military. Through his Legion affiliation, he has found a new life purpose and identity in his role as Chaplain. As a result, he now has a strong desire to give back to others. During his "breakthrough" moment at the funeral, he found that he was able to manage his

anxiety by empathizing with the feelings of the other veterans. He felt a sense of achievement in his ability to calm his own fears and, as a result, become courageous. He has reclaimed a sense of himself as someone who has something of value to give to others. For this Legionnaire, his affiliation has provided him with a sense of fulfillment, achievement, and pride; things he says have been sorely missing in his 27 years prior to joining.

*Transformed associations - "Put a face with the suffering and the violence."*

When this participant, also a middle-aged Army Grenada War veteran, first became involved in the American Legion, he started a friendship with a WWII veteran named E. He described the transformation in his associations to life and death that he has experienced because of his relationship with E. and other WWII veterans. He recalled:

08-1&2- E. was just a great guy. He was really something. There was so much history to be learned there from talking with those guys. It was really a wonderful experience for a lot of different reasons. They have some wonderful stories about things that people will only ever read about and you're almost part of that history when they're telling you these things. You hear guys talk about this stuff and it becomes so much more realistic than what you may have read about or even glanced over in any of the history books. When you're able to put a face with the suffering and the violence that existed at that time it makes it a little bit different> Seeing a movie particularly something that's fixed around WWII, and it just comes at me cuz I can see E. there. I can see some of these other men there and that's huge, to me that's just big.

The participant saw a picture of E. holding a Japanese rifle and E. told him that in WWII he took the rifle from a Japanese man who was trying to kill him with it. At a celebratory party for the participant, E. presented him with this rifle. The participant said, “that was a pretty emotional moment for me, knowing where this came from, its history, what it meant to him, that was pretty special to me you know. The guy meant a lot to me.” When asked if his interest or involvement in the Legion changed after E. died, the participant said:

Yeah I think it did a little bit. He was a big part of what kept me there. I kinda feel like maybe those experiences come along only so often, but I guess maybe that’s what makes ‘em so special too. I’m actually kind of glad I answered your call so to speak; it’s my chance to get a little bit of E. back.

This participant’s Legion affiliation also resulted in a life transformation. His life has been transformed in the sense that his associations with life and death and the meanings he attaches to them are no longer the same as they were before his relationships with E. and the other WWII veterans at the Legion. This transformation manifests itself in the way he now experiences WWII movies; he no longer regards the characters as fictitious, but recognizes them as real veterans with whom he has/had relationships, especially E. By listening to their stories, this participant was invited into their world, and he experienced the reality of both the precariousness of his own life and the possibility of his own death. Life is represented by the fact that these WWII veterans survived and are able to pass down their stories of “suffering” and “violence,” which are interpreted as heroism by this participant. The Japanese rifle symbolizes both life and death, and being the recipient of this deeply meaningful gift contributed to his transformation: the

Japanese soldier had to die in order for E. to live. This gift also symbolized how special and important he felt in his relationship with E. as they shared an intimate bond.

Previously, a participant alluded to war shifting towards the impersonal, but this participant's transformation challenges that idea. To him, war, life, and death were made personal through his relationships with E. and the other WWII veterans.

**Theme 4: Affiliation provides non-combat veterans with a sense of being valued.**

There is a distinct status hierarchy involving combat and non-combat veterans that exists both in society and among veterans themselves. Combat veterans are highly valued, are assigned a higher status, and are more highly respected. Non-combat veterans are devalued, are relegated to a lower status, are less respected, and are somewhat excluded in society and among combat veterans due to their lower position on the hierarchy. This status hierarchy exists in the American Legion, but it is not openly addressed. Through their Legion affiliations, the non-combat veteran participants—who struggle with feeling excluded and devalued by mainstream society—are made to feel included and valued despite their status.

This participant is a 94-year-old Army non-combat WWII veteran; he provided an illustration of the distinct combat versus non-combat status hierarchy:

06- I was very lucky that I didn't ship overseas and become involved in combat. Maybe you could say I took the easy way out. I didn't talk about it with my brother because, not that I was ashamed, but I couldn't match his story, match his experiences when he was shot down in Africa or when he was shot down in

Germany. No way should I be honored as I was in the Honor Flight. I feel bad personally, like this Wednesday, these two POWs are recognized and then they call on me. I didn't go through what they went through. They were in the war.

This participant feels a sense of shame as a non-combat veteran and regards his brother as possessing a status significantly higher than his own. He respects and values his brother's combat service while simultaneously devaluing and disrespecting his own non-combat service. He does not talk to his brother about this—in part because this era of veterans typically did not share their war experiences, but mostly because this status hierarchy is not generally acknowledged or spoken about. Although he feels undeserving, this participant is afforded the opportunity to feel included and valued through his affiliation with the Legion.

This participant is in his seventies and is a U.S. Army non-combat Vietnam veteran. He shared a similar sentiment about the status distinction between combat and non-combat service members:

04- There's that bond that you served, although I wasn't in the war so I don't have that same experience that those people in the war did. In fact I have more of a deeper feeling, deep regard and respect, for my father's service and proud that I'm his son (he served in WWII) than for my own service. I served in Alaska and fought the cold.

This participant deeply devalues his non-combat military service, nearly disregarding it altogether. He experiences a sense of shame for his non-combat status and ranks his father's combat service at the opposite (higher) end of the status hierarchy since it is much more valued by society, other veterans, and himself. Despite his feelings, the

participant's Legion affiliation affords him the opportunity to feel valued and to help diminish his experience of being undervalued by mainstream society.

This participant is a male Army combat Iraq veteran in his late twenties and is positioned at the opposite end of the status hierarchy as the two non-combat veterans discussed above. He is the son of the participant who provided the previous quote and is a member of both the Legion and the VFW. He described his experience of the status hierarchy and the dynamic of silence that accompanies it:

05- I didn't know they (American Legion members) didn't have combat experience. It didn't really change the feeling for me but I was like, 'I thought he was in combat but now I learned that he's not, oh o.k.' I mean it's just a realization that VFW will have—you'd know they were in combat.

Researcher: Do you think there's a delineation, separation, competition about those that have been in combat and those that haven't?

05-Unspoken. Like even with my Dad knowing that he hasn't been in combat I would say I stand taller but I don't say I'm better than that, I'm just saying it is not a competition so much but an identification that I have above him.

This participant experiences a distinct difference between the status of combat and non-combat veterans. Although he stated that nothing changes for him when he discovers that a Legion member is not a combat veteran, it is apparent that his feelings do change and that he places them at the lower end of the status hierarchy. He devalues them specifically due to their non-combat status, but feels unable to openly state this since this hierarchy is never directly addressed and remains unspoken. This participant is unable to say that as a combat veteran he is better than his dad, but clearly he knows that he has

achieved a higher status and is more highly respected. There is a slight sense of condescension in his response and for those at the lower end of any social status who have been marginalized they may have frequently experienced this feeling of condescension from those who perceive themselves to be in a higher status. This participant's dad valued his own father's combat service more than his own, but this participant places a higher value on his own service than on his father's.

This female U.S. Air Force combat Desert Storm veteran is in her early forties and belongs to both the American Legion and the VFW. When describing her experiences in the Legion, she said (09-2), "that's one of the things I love about the Legion is that there's no limit other than you have to be a veteran, and if you're a veteran you're welcome." This participant's experience of the Legion is that they include anyone as long as they have a veteran status. She can belong to both organizations as a combat veteran, but non-combat veterans are excluded from the VFW. It is possible that this culture of inclusion is somewhat of an illusion, however, since the status hierarchy between combat and non-combat veterans does exist within the Legion but remains unspoken.

This male Army non-combat Grenada/Lebanon veteran shares a similar sentiment as the previous participant. His sense of exclusion and his need for silence are illuminated quite clearly in this statement:

07-1- And that's kind of what I like about it. They say to leave your rank at the door and I really like it when you leave your branch of service at the door because my father-in-law was a Marine and I took 30 years of abuse. You can't imagine the abuse I've taken that I was in the Army and he was a Marine and I never knew

that that existed but, I kinda like that. We don't care what branch, we don't care if you were a Colonel or like me I was only an E-4 when I got out. Now there's a couple new people coming in and we'll have to set them straight (laughing), cuz there's no room for that, it just builds animosity. The line in between the grooves are real faint. I like that a lot because it's just like if you were in combat or you weren't in combat it doesn't matter. There's not any separation there. You can think you're better but not in here. We're Legionnaires. We're Legionnaires.

This participant has been victimized, marginalized, and devalued for being at the low end of the status hierarchy within mainstream society. Although he feels included, valued, and safe from abuse in the Legion environment, he is acutely aware that the attitudes of discrimination and exclusion do exist within the Legion, as they do in society, and this is evident in his statement that newcomers have to be told to “leave their rank at the door,” but these attitudes remain unspoken. If this unspoken status hierarchy were to become spoken, it would threaten this façade of inclusion and could potentially result in exclusion, devaluation, and possible abuse—experiences that are quite familiar to him.

In summary, this theme addresses the distinct status hierarchy that exists for combat and non-combat veterans and the ways in which this hierarchy remains unspoken, potentially in an illusionary way, within the Legion environment. Non-combat veterans who experience a sense of shame, exclusion, and devaluation in mainstream society resulting from their service status are afforded an opportunity to experience inclusion and to feel valued through their Legion affiliation.

**Theme 5: Affiliation provides reparative experiences.**

The participants' affiliation with the American Legion provide them with reparative experiences. Two specific types of experiences illuminate this theme: addressing an "injustice" and relying on rituals. The first reparative experience focuses on the participants' needs and desires to somehow address the injustices inflicted upon Vietnam veterans and veterans in general. The second reparative experience focuses on the ways in which the participants rely on the Legion's rituals.

***Addressing an injustice.***

When this participant, a U.S. Army non-combat Grenada veteran in his fifties, was the Commander of the American Legion, he started a Welcome Home program. Through this program, Legionnaires and the Legionnaire motorcycle riders, in conjunction with the families of service members returning from overseas, go and meet the service member and accompany them on their route home from the airport. They hold a reception for them at the Legion, attended by the entire community, and then a parade escorts the member to his or her home. The participant explained the history behind his motivation to develop this program, as well as the program's impact:

08-1&2- ...having grown up as a kid during the Vietnam years and seeing and remembering some of how those folks were not very well treated and I always thought that was real injustice...maybe there's something we can do to kind of make up for that and obviously not exactly to those people specifically although as an interesting side point... many of those men and women who were affected in the Vietnam era will come out and do find a great sense of relief in

participating in that...the common phrase that's uttered is, 'Never again,' that whole we're not gonna forget anybody, we're not gonna treat anybody the way they were treated and you can see...it seems to me like a sense of relief it's just that they know...someone else wasn't treated the same way and that they have a chance to kind of pay it forward in regards to this is how it should have happened...and that's the right thing to do...

When asked about his experience transitioning out of the military, he stated:

...there was still a little bit of, 'Yeah so what you served in the military' kind of a thing but I don't think it...it couldn't have been anywhere near what those men and women would have experienced back in the mid to late '70's.

Through his Legion affiliation, this participant is provided with experiences that have not only offered a certain level of healing for other veterans, especially Vietnam veterans, but have also helped to repair an aspect of himself. His intentions when starting the program were to address the injustice done to Vietnam veterans, although he was aware from the beginning that they may not be directly affected by it. What he has experienced, however, is that this program has provided some level of direct healing for Vietnam veterans. He observed that some of these veterans have experienced a certain level of healing through making homecoming better for other veterans. The act of vicariously experiencing an honorable and celebratory welcome home through the younger veterans may diminish and help repair the suffering that the Vietnam veterans endured during their homecoming. The participant felt a deep sense of gratification for his ability to help provide this opportunity for healing.

This participant described the treatment that he received as he transitioned out of the Army, which amounted to the sense that military service is unimportant. He has lived most of his life with the knowledge of Vietnam veterans being treated with hatred and disgust, and he experienced a sense of “relief” when he was not treated the same way. This relief led to feelings of guilt in the form of survivor’s guilt. His Legion affiliation has provided him with reparative experiences to help diminish and potentially repair these guilty feelings.

Since becoming a Legionnaire, this participant, an Air Force veteran in her early forties, has had a desire to become an advocate for veterans’ rights. She is outraged by the government cuts to veterans’ programs and the substandard quality of the Veteran’s Administration. She explained:

09-1&2- I would like to be able to promote veteran’s causes and veteran’s rights and try to get the things we should have. We served our country and we deserve more respect than we’re getting, so I’d like to be able to do some kind of advocacy and try to get our rights, get what we deserve, get these guys to remember what we sacrificed for them. We gave them the right to hold office. If it wasn’t for the veterans they wouldn’t be where they are today, and these guys need to remember that, need to learn it. No I don’t think they understand at all. I’ve got a lot of people you know when they find out that I’m a vet they’re like, ‘Thank you’ and I’m like confused and I’m like, ‘Do you even know what you’re thanking me for? Do you even understand it?’ You know and instead of saying what I really want to say I’m like, ‘You’re welcome’ you know cuz there are days when I just want to go off and say, ‘You don’t even understand what you’re

thanking me for.’ You know especially when I consider what happened to the vets when they came back from Vietnam, they were booed, they were spat on, they were hit. That’s just, it almost seems, I can’t even think of the right word—just hypocritical?

This participant feels a strong sense of indignation that these injustices are not being addressed and she is adamant that the government should repair the various levels of damage it has caused. She identifies an “us versus them” dynamic that has created a hierarchy in which veterans are not understood or respected, and are placed at the bottom and treated as inferior. She finds that the individuals at the top of the hierarchy exude a sense of undeserved superiority and she demands that this injustice be addressed to minimize the division and hierarchy. If this injustice is not addressed, she would regard her sacrifice of military service to have been given in vain—something she believes to be true for all veterans, especially those who fought in Vietnam. Through her Legion affiliation, she now has the opportunity to create reparative experiences through this political platform and advocate for helping repair the suffering that she and other veterans have endured.

This participant is an Air Force combat Vietnam veteran in his seventies who currently holds the status of Legion Commander. He has been working with Congress in an effort to change a Legion policy. However, he has found that Congress is not military friendly. He described how he has enjoyed reparative experiences resulting from an injustice being addressed:

10-1&2- I just got notice last week that the congress has passed a new thing that they’re gonna start having a welcome home Vietnam vet’s day. It’s March 30<sup>th</sup> so

there was no way we had any time to plan anything, but we're gonna plan big time for next year, and I think it's going to give everyone that was spit on and everything else a little warmer feeling. We have a lot of Vietnam people that don't belong to anything, cuz they want to forget that period of their life for all the names they were called, but I'd say it's about time that we got recognized for what we did without being called horrible names. We would sneak into the washroom and change our clothes. Didn't want to walk through the airport in uniform. Everybody knew that these nitwits are waiting for ya to throw something at ya but my father was very upset about that and he showed up in his full uniform to walk me down the (starts crying)

To this participant, the Welcome Home Vietnam Vets day initiative is a long overdue gesture that is, hopefully, just the beginning of efforts to address a grave injustice. As a Vietnam veteran, he chose to be involved in a veteran's organization and is willing to remember that "period" in his life. However, he needs "them" (a Congress that is not military friendly) to address the injustices in an effort to provide some healing from the abusive treatment he and others have endured. His affiliation with the Legion has provided him with reparative experiences since he feels safe identifying as a Vietnam veteran there. Moreover, his status in the Legion now affords him the power to effect change.

This participant was angry when describing the treatment he received from "them" (civilians whose attitudes paralleled those of the government), but he became emotional at the end of the above statement as he remembered with pride how his dad's indignation helped protect him from abuse. This poignant memory of his father

confronting an injustice may also provide a reparative experience for him, as it may be powerful enough to help compensate for the trauma he experienced.

***Reliance on rituals.***

The second reparative experience that illuminates this theme is a reliance on the rituals that are provided to the participants through their Legion affiliation. Many of the participants spoke about the Legion rituals and the ways in which these rituals evoke a diverse range of impactful memories of their military experiences:

05- You know just the simple act of saluting brings back memories.

07-02- You know what's really cool in the military is when you go to sleep at night, when they bring down the flag they play Taps and then in the morning you hear Reveille. If you're out anywhere you're supposed to know where that flag is. You stop and you salute and we salute at our meetings and anytime we pass the flag and it brings back all that you've went through.

09-02- So I'd been out for almost 12 years before I actually joined the Legion. I was very glad I did cuz then I got to talk with these guys, kind of go back into the old world. It's a little bit about being back in the military but at the same time I kind of enjoy it. It just reminds me of what we've done, where we've been.

These three participants' quotes do not mention the specific memories that get evoked during rituals and/or as a result of being in the Legion environment. During their interviews, however, they each spoke about experiences they had in the military that were difficult, devastating, and even traumatic. These experiences included dealing with relationship issues, being used as a political pawn to help an upper-echelon officer obtain

rank, and being victimized by comrades. The female veteran who stated that being in the Legion “reminds me of what we’ve done, where we’ve been,” shared one of these reminiscences describing the following experiences when she went overseas for her first duty assignment (09-1), “When a woman first gets to base she’s called fresh meat. If you think about a pack of dogs going after fresh meat, and unfortunately, I didn’t have a very high self-esteem so—”

Through their Legion affiliation, the participants are each able to rely on the organization’s rituals to offer some repair as these memories are now given representation and a place in which to commemorate them. Having these experiences memorialized offers participants the opportunity to honor their memories even if they do evoke painful feelings. Not only are their struggles memorialized in this way, but the rituals also often evoke fond memories. Each of these participants talked about different memories, including how their military service served as a rite of passage into adulthood, the powerful connections they forged with their comrades and—for one Iraq veteran—with (Iraqi) civilians, and feelings of pride.

This Vietnam veteran, now in his seventies, described how just being in the Legion environment evoked very distinct memories of his basic training experiences (10-1&2), “It’s like living your childhood all over again...it all comes back...well your military childhood...cuz when you’re a newbie it is your childhood...you have to learn a whole new way of life...what all these words mean.” During his interview, he described the infantilizing experiences he had during his basic training. He explained that everything was taken away from him and, like a child, he had to complete certain tasks in order to earn a reward such as a can of pop. This participant’s Legion affiliation provides

him the opportunity to memorialize these memories in an effort to repair some of the vulnerability and the shame/embarrassment that resulted from feeling patronized during those regressive experiences.

The same participant explained that speaking at funerals is his least favorite Legion experience. He stated:

10-2 It's sad and I tear up real quick (getting teary and chuckling) and my voice crackles when I get upset. It just bothers me (very serious and still teary). We had a guy who was a prisoner of war in the second World War. They had the service out on the lake (teary and chuckling) and they then played the Taps you know and you just lose it (teary) I mean and you don't want to but you do, that's the part I don't like, maybe it shows a weakness or something I don't know what it is but I get all goofy (laughing).

This participant later shared that the strong emotions that he experiences during these funeral rituals, especially those for the WWII veterans, remind him of the loss of his dad. He experiences a strong sense of embarrassment when succumbing to his emotions at these funerals. However, despite the discomfort they cause him, he is able to rely on these funeral rituals, including the playing of Taps, to help diminish the pain and provide some repair for the loss of his dad. For this participant, the experience of memorialization brought about by these rituals provides him with some level of repair for his loss, but also offers him an avenue through which to keep his dad's memory alive.

In summary, this theme describes the ways in which the participants' affiliations to the American Legion provide reparative experiences. Two specific experiences illuminated this theme: addressing an injustice and relying on rituals. Many participants

have experienced some level of repair through their efforts to address causes that have resulted in righting a wrong. Many other participants have also experienced some level of repair through their reliance on rituals to give representation to their memories, whether they are positive, traumatic, or intimate in nature.

### **Conclusion**

The Legionnaires in this study have received five main provisions through their affiliation with the American Legion. First, they have been provided with an assumed intimacy created by shared experiences that results in strong and intimate social connections. Second, they have been provided with an alternative society which helps remedy the sense of being marginalized by a society with declining social values. Third, they have been provided with transformational experiences in the areas of a reclaimed life and transformed associations. Fourth, the non-combat veterans have been provided with a sense of being valued and included in spite of being devalued and excluded by mainstream society. Fifth, they have been provided with reparative experiences in the forms of addressing injustices and relying on rituals. These provisions of Legion affiliation have enhanced the lives of these participants and contributed to an ongoing sense of well-being.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

This study has illuminated the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion. This phenomenon of affiliation is comprised of five themes that describe the provisions that these veteran participants experience, which include an assumed intimacy, an alternative society, transformations, a sense of being valued despite non-combat status, and reparative experiences.

Although the concept of affiliation was discussed early in this study's conception, it was not formally added to the study until after the proposal hearing, and was therefore not included in the literature review. The initial attempt at exploring the ways in which veterans experience their American Legion membership resulted in the preliminary title of, "What functions does membership in the American Legion serve for veterans?" However, it was concluded that the word *function* connotes a non-living entity rather than a living one and thus does not fully capture the notion of subjective experiences of affiliation. The title was therefore adjusted to "The lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion." In order to address this shift in focus, a condensed review of the cogent literature on affiliation is provided in the first section, followed by a discussion of this study's findings.

## Literature Review on the Concept of Affiliation

In the 1930s, biochemist and physician Henry Murray of the Harvard Psychological Clinic sought to achieve a more in-depth understanding of human behavior and motivation. In his book, *Explorations in Personality* (70<sup>th</sup> edition, 2008), Murray included *affiliation* as one of the variables of behavioral motivation. He described the goals of affiliation's "desires" as "draw[ing] near and enjoyably co-operat[ing] or reciprocate[ing] with an allied O" (object), associating with it the emotions of "trust, goodwill, affection and love" that are in conflict with the variables of rejection and aggression among others (2008, p. 174).

In the 1940s, David McClelland (1987), a behavioral psychologist who based his work of human motivation on that of Murray and numerous others in the psychological and psychoanalytic fields, studied the ways in which the strength of human motives can be measured. His studies are presented in the book *Human Motivation* (1987), where McClelland described four behavioral motive systems: achievement, power, affiliative, and avoidant. He described the concept of affiliation: "The need to affiliate with others includes sexual contacts, but it is much broader, including various types of emotional interpersonal attachments that may grow out of natural contact incentives" (1987, p. 334). By using the word "love" to describe "various types of affiliative ties," McClelland included Sigmund Freud's belief that love/libido, when functioning correctly, is an essential component of both physical and mental health and that the quality of harmony is a salient factor in the maintenance of "love and health" (1987, p. 334). McClelland and his predecessors also discovered that affiliation is represented as the fear of rejection. Those who scored higher on the affiliative motive scale tended to, "avoid conflict and

competition as if they feared negative feedback” (1987, p. 356), which may explain an association between harmony—thought by Freud to be a crucial component of health and love—and affiliation.

In his paper “The Empathic Mode of Perception: An Update” (1993), psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Joseph Lichtenberg developed a motivational system to enhance the ways in which analysts cultivate an empathic stance with their patients. He believes that in an analysis, “both clinician and patient construct model scenes to organize previously puzzling information, further integrate previous understanding, and initiate further exploration of the analysand’s experience and motivation” (1993, p. 2). It is through these model scenes that clinicians are able to gain a sense of their patients’ “adaptive and maladaptive” areas of development embedded in the motivational systems he has developed (1993, p. 2). Lichtenberg found that motivational systems are based on certain needs that begin in infancy and continue throughout the life span and that one’s motivation is organized as a response to meet the five types of needs (1993, p. 3). One of these five types is the need for attachment, which begins in infancy and develops into another type of attachment to the unit of family as the child gets older, which he refers to as affiliation (1993, p. 3). Lichtenberg stated, “Still later affiliations develop with teams, school, religion, and country. Although a sense of intimacy, kinship, attachment and of group process reveal differences in the rules of inclusion and exclusion, of leader and led” (1993, p. 3). Lichtenberg has described the developmental phases that transpire, commencing with the infant’s need for attachment and transitioning into affiliation once the child belongs to other groups outside the family. He finds that there is a strong motivation to have the need for affiliation satisfied.

Lichtenberg has found that for each motivational system, the “goal or aim is an affective experience”; he used the word “satiety” to describe the transition from distress to relief as the need becomes met (1993, p. 4). In his paper “A Theory of Motivational-Functional Systems As Psychic Structures” (1988), Lichtenberg suggested that although psychoanalytic work is quite familiar with attachment in infants within their family unit, it is not as familiar with other aspects of relations:

As psychoanalysts, we are less familiar with the powerful motivation to generalize relations in such groups as family, neighborhood, school, team, religion, country, toward whom we establish highly organized affiliations.

Looking at the history of the world, it can be said that more people have been motivated to die for their affiliations than for any other motive. (1988, p. 4)

Lichtenberg believes that affiliation is a potent human need that, when satisfied, results in powerful, life-altering, and even life-ending experiences.

This condensed literature review has presented the prevailing understanding of affiliation as a powerful motivator of human behavior. Drawing on this notion of affiliation, the present study has illuminated the phenomenon of affiliation with the American Legion experienced by the participants in a lived way.

### **Discussion of the Study Findings**

In this section, the study findings, described thematically, are explained in relation to the literature and placed in the context of the study’s three stated objectives. These objectives include addressing the nature of the relational ties that comprise group affiliation, determining the ways in which this affiliation relates to a member’s previous

military experience, and exploring the ways in which affiliation contributes to a veteran's life in an ongoing way.

The theme of the provision of an assumed intimacy experienced by participants through their affiliation with the American Legion is evident in their descriptions of intimate social connections. The nature of these intimate relational ties is described by Freud in "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego" (1953) as the bond that is the defining "characteristic of the group," which is comprised of the "libidinal ties" of various types of relationships—including friendships (1953, pp. 3–4). Freud found that this kind of love is the "essence of the group mind" (1953, p. 13). Both McClelland and Lichtenberg's studies of affiliative needs cite Freud's work on group psychology and his beliefs about the nature of libidinal ties.

An illustration of the theme of affiliation's provision of transformation is depicted by the participant whose associations with life and death were transformed as a result of the powerful, intimate, "libidinal ties" (Freud, 1953, pp. 3–4) that he formed with the WWII Legionnaires—primarily E., the man who presented him with the Japanese rifle.

The assumed intimacy theme experienced by many of the participants is directly related to their previous military experiences and is exemplified by phrases they used including "common thread," "commonality," and "shared experiences." Freud described the binding qualities of groups such as the army and the church as having family-like structures that bind people together through a shared cause that gives the group meaning and a sense of value (1953). His ideas of family-like structures and shared cause parallel the sentiments of the participants who experienced this assumed intimacy. This

experience occurs naturally and is not elicited, thus providing a replication of the veterans' previous military experiences.

In "Achilles in Vietnam" (1994) Jonathan Shay described army culture in the following way:

An army, ancient or modern, is a social construction defined by shared expectations and values. Some of these are embodied in formal regulations, defined authority, written orders, ranks, incentives, punishments, and formal task and occupational definitions.... All together, these form a moral world that most of the participants most of the time regard as legitimate, "natural", and personally binding. The moral power of an army is so great that it can motivate men to get up out of a trench and step into enemy machine-gun fire. (p. 6)

Shay's use of the word natural in the above quote evokes this sense of an assumed quality of intimacy existing without provocation and creating the libidinal bonds described by Freud (1953). Shay's description of an army's "moral power" and its motivation is paralleled by Lichtenberg's belief "that more people have been motivated to die for their affiliations than for any other motive" (1988, p. 4).

The provision of transformation theme depicted by the participant's experience of a reclaimed life transformation through his Legion affiliation represents a direct relationship to his previous military experiences. Freud described the vital and meaningful outcomes that occur when, "in cases of collaboration libidinal ties are regularly formed between the fellow-workers which prolong and solidify the relation between them to a point beyond what is merely profitable" (1953, p. 18). This participant reclaimed the sense of intimate connections, pride, value, purpose, and identity that he

experienced during his military service. His transformation, related to Freud's idea of a "point beyond what is merely profitable," is a result of the replication of the assumed intimacy that he has experienced through his Legion affiliation.

In addition to the Legion's provision of an assumed intimacy and the ways in which this type of intimacy has replicated this participant's military experience, the culture and mission of the Legion are also analogous to creating a sense of familiarity. In Lynn Hall's chapter entitled "The Importance of Understanding Military Culture" in the book *Social Practice with the Military* (2012), various components of military culture are described. In particular, Hall stressed the importance of "unit cohesion," whose basis is grounded in a dedication and commitment to its mission, its unit, and its members. This participant's transformation is also a result of his return and reunification with a familiar and intimate culture that provides him with the same sense of importance and purpose that he felt during his military service.

The themes of the provision of an alternative society and the provision of a sense of value to devalued non-combat veterans both revolve around participants' Legion affiliation providing a remedy for their experience of marginalization. These participants have found themselves in the social minority based on various differences in values and status. As WWII veterans are dying, many of their values of citizenship—including altruism, reverence for the flag, and community service—have resulted in an increasing decline in social values. Moreover, while society specifically honors and values combat veterans for their heroism and bravery, non-combat veterans are viewed solely as supporters of the war and thus feel devalued and excluded, with their sacrifices going unrecognized. As an alternative society, the Legion facilitates curative experiences

resulting in the remediation of experiences of devaluation and marginalization. In Malcolm Pines' paper "Group Analysis and the Corrective Emotional Experience: Is it relevant?" (1990), he stated, "In group analytic therapy a rather deep and powerful effect seems to arise from the experiences of 'group as a whole'...powerful corrective emotional experiences seem to take place" (1990, pp. 2–3). Pines suggests that the concept of resonance within an alternative society such as that formed in group analytic therapy is one of the factors that contributes to this phenomenon, as each group member is able to relate to the other's emotions and life experiences in a profound way. This concept can be identified in participants' experiences resulting from their affiliation with the Legion, an affiliation comparable in many ways to that of an analytic therapy group, as those who have been marginalized and devalued are able to resonate with the experiences of other Legionnaires within this alternative society.

Jennifer Tolleson's (1996) research on gang membership and its relationship to members' early trauma also speaks to the powerful effects of group membership. She found that, "group belonging is indeed a powerful mediator of trauma, and in fact, appears to effectively diminish traumatic hyperarousal" (Tolleson, 1996, p. 83). This finding is particularly pertinent for the participant who was abused for thirty years for his non-combat status. Although he experienced a very different type of trauma than that experienced by Tolleson's participants, the idea holds that group membership provides a healing power and helps to mitigate the effects of trauma and marginalization.

Jon Shaw's paper entitled "The Acute Traumatic Moment - Psychic Trauma in War: Psychoanalytic Perspectives" (2007) describes the powerful effects of military membership. He stated:

They become a band of brothers, united against adversity. The group provides the individual with the knowledge that he does not fight alone. An emotional bond is established which mitigates the effects of aloneness and facilitates a sense of succorance and support among comrades. (Shaw, 2007, p. 6)

These participants experienced this powerful sense of unity as a “band of brothers”—a unity which they experience again as Legionnaires. This alternative society provides a sense of standing “united against adversity” (Shaw, 2007, p. 6), thus facilitating a decrease in and a remedy for the negative effects of marginalization.

The theme of providing a sense of value to the devalued non-combat veterans revolves around the idea that they not only feel a sense of value but also feel included in the Legion despite their status. The status hierarchy of combat and non-combat veterans that occurs in society also exists within the Legion, although it remains suppressed. Through their Legion affiliation, the non-combat veterans feel valued and included despite their lower status. However, their feeling of inclusion is somewhat tentative. One of the participants stated that “animosity” would emerge if the status hierarchy were directly addressed in the Legion environment. Freud suggested that a group is bonded together by love and that the individual within the group succumbs to a kind of “suggestion,” or a group mindset, for the purpose of being in harmony with the group rather than opposing them (1953, p. 13). WRD Fairbairn (1952) stated a very similar belief. Like Freud, Fairbairn believed that libido is the binding quality of group membership, and that “aggression...causes group disintegration” (1952, p. 235). Fairbairn suggested that for a family—the “original social group”—to sustain itself it requires the existence of libido and the absence of aggression (1952, p. 235). Applying

this concept, the Legion will remain intact and sustained as an alternative society if harmony is maintained and aggression—in the form of addressing the status hierarchy—remains suppressed.

The final theme identified in this study is the provision of reparative experiences through Legion affiliation, which are reflected by addressing injustices and a reliance on rituals. Many of the participants experienced opportunities to address injustices that not only resulted in a level of repair for themselves but also for other veterans, especially Vietnam veterans.

Participants were also able to rely on the rituals provided by Legion tradition and culture, which often evoke memories of their military experiences. The reparative quality of this evocation is found in the process of memorialization: the opportunity to honor their memories. Joyce Slochower's paper "Out of the Analytic Shadow: On the Dynamics of Commemorative Ritual" (2011) addresses the reparative effects of memorialization. She shares an example of this process that was exemplified in Donna Bassin's film *Leave No Soldier* (2008) in which the filmmaker follows a group of Vietnam veterans participating in a parade that concludes at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC. Slochower stated, "That parade embodies, even reenacts, the trauma to which the veterans were exposed: Decades after the end of that war, the vets continue to mark, remember, and grieve their losses" (2011, p. 2). Drawing on Jessica Benjamin's concept of "creating a space of linkage, of like subjects" (Benjamin, 1995) and her own concept of "like mourners," Slochower also found that collective memorialization through rituals "facilitates the construction of group memory" (Slochower, 2011, p. 2). The participants' sentiments about the Legion rituals such as, "brings back all that you've went through,"

and “just the simple act of saluting...just brings back memories,” provide an understanding of the powerful and reparative effects of memorialization—and potentially creates a “group memory” (Slochower, 2011, p. 2). The rituals of saluting and passing the flag, among other rituals mentioned by some of the participants in their interviews but not quoted in the findings—one being the POW chair (an empty chair always present at the Legion to remind those in attendance to never forget these men and women)—are practiced unfailingly and can be steadily relied upon to honor their memories.

Each provision received by the participants through their Legion affiliations contributes to their lives in an ongoing way. The provisions of an assumed intimacy, an alternative society, life transformations, a sense of being valued as opposed to devalued as non-combat veterans, and reparative experiences all contribute to an ongoing sense of well-being as participants’ needs for affiliation are met. Their experiences of marginalization and devaluation can be progressively remedied and their difficult and traumatic memories can be memorialized through their reliance on Legion rituals.

### **Implications for Clinical Treatment**

The rich bodies of literature discussed in this chapter have not only supported the findings of this study, but also point to various implications for clinical treatment. One implication comes from Lichtenberg’s (1988) work on affiliative needs, which emphasizes the need for clinicians to be ever cognizant of their patient’s needs for affiliations and the way these needs may be motivating their behaviors. His use of the word “satiety” to describe the sense of contentment felt when the need for affiliation has been met following the distress of the unmet need provides a clinical lens through which

to learn about the nature of the patient's affiliations and/or the distress experienced by the lack of affiliation (Lichtenberg, 1993, p. 4). With patients who may have a greater need for affiliation—those who have been lonely, marginalized, devalued and/or traumatized—clinicians must be consistently empathic to the meanings that these patients make of these experiences and how they are managing the emotions attached to these experiences.

Another implication for clinical treatment is derived from Lynn Hall's paper on military culture (2012). It is crucial that clinicians be aware of the affiliative needs that are met for many individuals through their military membership and the ways in which the transition from the military culture back into the civilian world may impact them. Many service members derive a strong sense of identity from their status/rank/job through their affiliation with the military, and it is important to contemplate how the loss of this affiliation affects them, particularly if they are unable to regain a sense of identity as a civilian. What are the implications if veterans are unable or unwilling to find a replacement or replication of this affiliation? In the beginning phase of clinical treatment with veterans or active duty military, an assumed intimacy is lacking—in fact, many current or former service members may not even seek out treatment based on the belief that civilian clinicians will be unable to understand the camaraderie, culture, joys, and struggles that they have experienced. Ameliorating this lack of connection by providing patients with referrals to veterans' organizations may therefore offer an effective complement to their clinical treatment.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on this research study's findings regarding the lived experience of affiliation among veterans in the American Legion, the following directions for future research are recommended:

1. If the American Legion provides an alternative society for many veterans as a way to remedy marginalization and devaluation, it may be worth exploring whether the military itself provides an alternative society for the marginalized and devalued people that join.
2. Future research might also consider what the implications are for veterans who are not affiliated with the American Legion or any other veteran organization. What are the risks for those who feel isolated due to their lack of affiliation? Many of the participants responded to my interview question asking about their thoughts regarding younger vets not joining the Legion by talking about the "old guy" image of the Legion, while others discussed the decline in social values and the fact that people did not want to get involved with the organization anymore. Many participants also mentioned that they knew people who had negative military experiences who wanted nothing to do with any military or veteran organization. Examining the implications of veterans' lack of affiliation would address some of these phenomena.
3. Researchers may also wish to explore the implications of gaming as a type of virtual affiliation for veterans. There is a significant increase in military members who are addicted to gaming (understanding the concept of addiction as an amelioration of painful feelings), and when those members leave active

duty the likelihood that they will continue to use this manner of coping is quite high. Gaming addiction has resulted in an increase in both child abuse and domestic violence cases, which occur when the gamer is disturbed during gaming and reenacts the violence and aggression they use in their game onto a family member. Gaming can be regarded as a type of virtual affiliation that for some individuals may replace the need for the sense of intimacy derived from affiliating with a group of people who are physically in the same room. Interestingly, some American Legions have increased their revenue significantly after adding gambling machines. Although these machines are somewhat different from the concept of gaming, they share a similar condition where one sits isolated from others with sparse human interaction.

## **Conclusion**

The lived experience of affiliation to the American Legion has provided these participants with provisions that contribute to their lives in an ongoing way. Group affiliation has the power to enhance not only the emotional growth of the individual member but also the emotional growth of the group as a whole. These personal and group enriching provisions of affiliation include: experiencing the “band of brothers” intimacy they felt while serving in the military, experiencing life transformations, experiencing an environment in which their sacrifices as non-combat veterans are both understood and recognized, experiencing rituals they can rely on to commemorate and honor their struggles and traumas and allow them to grieve their losses, and experiencing an alternative society that offers refuge from and remedy for the marginalization they have

experienced in mainstream society. Although this alternative society is protective and meaningful it can also be viewed from another perspective.

Group affiliation has the power to promote emotional growth but it also has the power to thwart or even inhibit emotional growth by maintaining rigid traditional and conservative values, thus prohibiting those who share less conservative values from participating. Retrospectively, I understood that the American Legion's provision of an alternative society creates a society that is set apart from the mainstream, thus paralleling the separation they previously experienced from civilian society when they were active members of military society. Since there is no voice given to the various differences that actually exist in this alternative society, the façade of sameness and equality that it provides results in the neutralization of aggression and competition. Moreover, this façade endorses the individual's need to avoid addressing and dealing with their own sense of feeling different, of feeling shame, and/or of feeling disappointment. Many veterans feel a sense of unimportance both within themselves and within society, but addressing these feelings within this alternative environment is prohibited due to the Legion's unofficial code of silence. In addition, many experience an "us vs. them" mentality which creates further separation from mainstream society and results in the defense of the splitting of good and bad objects. Due to this mentality, Legionnaires form an alternative society united in embitterment regarding the maltreatment they have experienced within mainstream society and thus feel persecuted by these "bad objects." In turn, as an alternative society, the Legion becomes idealized. There is a defensive idealization, however, as the society's unofficial policy on remaining silent and split off

from the mainstream provides a means to avoid the real, multi-dimensional world where emotions, differences, and genuine inclusion exist and are addressed.

I approached this study with the assumption that I would be one of “them,” the participants, because of my affiliation to the military. This assumption led me to feel hindered in my ability to delve more deeply into the analysis of their experiences. I am now aware that I felt compelled to honor my fellow men and women by seeing solely the positive aspects of their affiliations. My assumption of inclusion was incorrect and in a sense I colluded with the code of silence believing that I was the same and was one of the “us,” the good objects. What I discovered in retrospect was that I was part of the “them,” as I was different; I had never served in the military, my status in life was different, and my values are quite dissimilar from theirs; I was not one of them.

Despite the fact that I am not included in their world, these veteran participants generously offered me their time and provided rich accounts, full of subtleties and complexities, of their lived experiences of affiliation in the American Legion.

**Appendix A**  
**Hand-Out to the Legionnaires**

## RESEARCH STUDY: YOUR AMERICAN LEGION EXPERIENCE

You qualify for this study if you've been a Legionnaire for at least one year.

Contact Information:

Vicki Brown

Cell: 847-877-1201

Email: [vbrown62@sbcglobal.net](mailto:vbrown62@sbcglobal.net)

Please contact me directly if you are interested in participating.

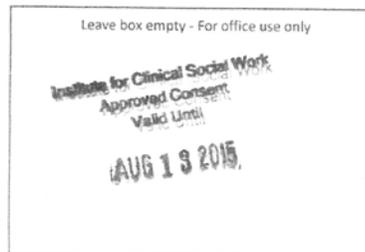
Your name will not be used in this study.

**Appendix B**  
**Demographic Survey**

**Demographic Survey**

1. Gender: Male\_\_\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_\_\_
2. Branch of service:
3. Number of years served:
4. Rank at end of service:
5. Year of military separation or retirement:
6. Number of years as a Legionnaire:

**Appendix C**  
**Informed Consent**



**Institute for Clinical Social Work**  
**Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research**  
**[Insert Study Title]**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, acting for myself, agree to take part in the research entitled: *Your American Legion experience.*

This work will be carried out by Vicki Brown (Principal Researcher) under the supervision of Michelle Sweet, Ph.D. (Dissertation Chair or Sponsoring Faculty) and conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Clinical Social Work; At Robert Morris Center, 401 South State Street; Suite 822, Chicago, IL 60605; (312) 935-4232.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of your experience as a Legionnaire and as a military veteran.

This study will involve research and its purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of group membership in the American Legion. The findings of this study may be used to enhance the field of social work as it focuses on group membership for veterans.

**Procedures used in the study and duration**

This researcher will have the participants complete a brief, demographic survey prior to the interview.

*2, 45- minute interviews* This researcher will be doing *4 1/2 hour* interviews with each participant at the local public library, or if the participant is unable to get to that location, the interview will be conducted at the participant's home. This researcher will be using a digital recorder to record the interviews. A \$10 bill given to the participants who travel to the library for the interview.

**Benefits**

A foreseeable benefit to the participants in this study is the opportunity to talk about their involvement in the American Legion and their experiences serving in the military. There are no known direct benefits to the participants aside from the \$10 travel stipend. There is a potential benefit to the clinical social work field as there may be an enhanced understanding of military veterans and group membership.

**Costs**

The only cost to the participants would be gas for travel to the interview site and the participant's time.

**Possible Risks and/or Side Effects**

There are two risks associated with this study. The first is the possible invasion of privacy to the participant or their family. The second is the collection of personal or sensitive information in interviews. I am not expecting that these risks would be frequent or severe. These risks will be minimized by conducting the interviews at either a neutral location or at the participant's home and using pin numbers to identify the participants.

If a participant is having emotional difficulty during the interview I will ask them if they would like to stop the interview for a short time or if they need to terminate the interview. If they continued to have difficulty I would refer them to the Federal Health Care Center (formally the VA) for a psychological assessment and/or clinical treatment.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

For the purpose of the pilot study, names will not be used to identify the participants when discussing the data obtained with my dissertation committee. The participants will be identified by four-digit pin numbers. The signed informed consent forms and demographic surveys will be kept in a fire-proof safe in my home and will be destroyed five years after the completion of this study. The digital audio files will be kept in my home, downloaded to my private password protected computer. These audio files and hard copy transcriptions will also be kept in a fire-proof safe in my home and will be destroyed five years after the completion of this study.

**Subject Assurances**

The following is the format that should be followed in creating the assurances: By signing this consent form, I agree to take part in this study. I have not given up any of my rights (my child's rights) or released this institution from responsibility for carelessness.

I may cancel my consent and refuse to continue in this study (or take my child out of this study) at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. My relationship with the staff of the IGSW will not be affected in any way, now or in the future, if I (or my child) refuse to take part, or if I begin the study and then withdraw.

If I have any questions about the research methods, I can contact Vicki Brown 847-877-1201 (Principal Researcher) or Michelle Sweet, Ph. D. (Dissertation Chair/Sponsoring Faculty), at this phone number, 630-325-3700.

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact Dr. John Ridings, Chair of Institutional Review Board; ICSW: At Robert Morris Center, 401 South State Street; Suite 822, Chicago, IL 60605; (312) 935-4232.

**Signatures**

I have read this consent form and I agree to take part in this study as it is explained in this consent form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I certify that I have explained the research to \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of subject) and believe that they understand and that they have agreed to participate freely. I agree to answer any additional questions when they arise during the research or afterward.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Revised 1 Feb 2014

## References

American Legion. (2015a). About. Retrieved from <http://www.legion.org/about>

American Legion. (2015b). Mission. Retrieved from <http://www.legion.org/mission>

American Legion. (2015c). Preamble to the Constitution. Retrieved from  
<http://www.legion.org/preamble>

Benjamin, J. (1995). *Like subjects, love objects: Essays on recognition and sexual difference*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Bion, W. R. (1952). Group dynamics: A re-view. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 33, 235–247. Retrieved from  
<http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>

Boulanger, G. (2007). *Wounded by reality*. New York: Psychology Press.

Brickman, B. (1988). Psychoanalysis and substance abuse: Toward a more effective approach. *The Journal of American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, 16, 359–379. Retrieved from  
<http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>

Creasey, H. (1921). Psychoanalysis and its relation to the neuroses. *The Psychoanalytic Review*, 8, 361–374. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>

De Fina, A. (2006). Group identity, narrative and self-representations. In A. de Fina, D. Schiffrin, & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and identity* (pp. 351–375). New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Erikson, E. (1946). Ego development and historical change-Clinical notes. *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 2, 359–396. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Erikson, E. (1956). The problem of ego identity. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 4, 56–121. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Fairbairn, W. R. D. (1952). *Psychoanalytic studies of the personality*. New York: Routledge.
- Ferenczi, S. (1949). Notes and fragments 1930–1932. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 30, 231–242. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Foulkes, S. (1946). On group analysis. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 27, 46–51. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Freud, S. (1953). Group psychology and the analysis of the ego. In J. Strachey (Ed. & Trans.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 18, pp. 69–143). Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive> (Original work published 1900)
- Galatzer-Levy, R., & Cohler, B. (1993). *The essential other*. New York: Basic Books.
- Griffith, J., & Vaitkus, M. (1999). Relating cohesion to stress, strain, disintegration and performance: An organizing framework. *Military Psychology*, 11(1), 27–55. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/archives/general-archives/digital-archive-viewer>

- Haaken, J. (1992). Beyond addiction: Recovery groups and “women who love too much.” *Free Associations*, 3A, 85–109. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Hall, L. (2012). The importance of understanding military culture. In J. Beder (Ed.), *Advances in social work practices with the military* (pp. 4–17). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Heller, T., Roccoforte, J., Hsieh, K., Cook, J., & Pickett, S. (1997). Benefits of support groups for families of adults with severe mental illness. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(2), 187–198. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/archives/general-archives/digital-archive-viewer>
- Herman, J. (1992). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: Basic Books.
- Hoggett, P. (2001). The love that thinks. *Free Associations*, 9, 1–23. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Kardiner, A. (1959). Traumatic neuroses of war. In S. Arieti (Ed.), *American handbook of psychiatry* (Vol. 1, pp. 245–257). New York: Basic Books.
- Keith, T., & Cannon, C. (2003). American soldier [Recorded by T. Keith]. On *Shock'n Y'all*. Glendale, CA: DreamWorks. Retrieved from <http://www.metrolyrics.com/american-soldier-lyrics-toby-keith.html>
- Klein, M., & Riviere, J. (1964). *Love, hate and reparation*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Lichtenberg, J. (1988). A theory of motivational-functional systems as psychic structures. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 36S, 57–72. Retrieved from <http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id>

- Lichtenberg, J. (1993). The empathic mode of perception: An update. *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, 21, 485–500.  
Retrieved from <http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id>
- Lifton, R. J. (1973). *Home from the war*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Maccoby, M. (2002). Toward a science of social character. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 11, 33–44. Retrieved from  
<http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- McClelland, D. (1987). *Human motivation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mishler, E. (2006). Narrative and identity: The double arrow of time. In A. de Finna, D. Schiffrin, & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and identity* (pp. 30–47). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mueller-Vollmer, K. (1986). *The hermeneutic reader: Texts of the German tradition from the enlightenment to the present*. London, England: Basil Blackwell.
- Murray, H. (2008). *Explorations in personality* (70th ed.). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Norwood, R. (1985). *Women who love too much: When you keep wishing and hoping he'll change*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher.
- Pines, M. (1990). Group analysis and the corrective emotional experience: Is it relevant? *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 10, 389–408. Retrieved from  
<http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Reed, A. (2007). Appendix 1: Data set. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analysing qualitative data in psychology* (pp. 176–199). Los Angeles: Sage.

- Rosenman, S., & Handelsman, I. (1990). The collective past, psychology and personal narrative: Shaping Jewish identity by memoirs of the Holocaust. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 50, 151–170. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Saltzman, W., Pynoos, R., Lester, P., Layne, C., & Beardslee, W. (2013). Enhancing family resilience through family narrative co-construction. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 16(3), 294–310. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/archives/general-archives/digital-archive-viewer>
- Schiff, B., & Noy, C. (2006). Making it personal: Shared meanings in the narratives of Holocaust survivors. In A. de Fina, D. Schiffrin, & M. Bamberg (Eds.), *Discourse and identity* (pp. 398–425). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Seelig, B., & Rosof, L. (2001). Normal and pathological altruism. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 49, 933–959. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Shakespeare, W. (1599). *Henry V*, Act IV, Scene 3, 15-16. Retrieved from <http://www.william-shakespeare.info/act4-script-text-henry-v.htm>
- Shaw, J. (2007). The acute traumatic moment - Psychic trauma in war: Psychoanalytic perspectives. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, 35, 23–38. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Shay, J. (1994). *Achilles in Vietnam*. New York: Scribner.

- Singer, E. (2007). The dialectics of relational psychoanalysis and group psychotherapy: Commentary on paper by Robert Grossmark. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 17, 513–527. Retrieved from <http://www.ebscohost.com/academic/pep-archive>
- Slochower, J. (2011). Out of the analytic shadow: On the dynamics of commemorative ritual. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 21, 676–690. Retrieved from <http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id>
- Smith, J., & Eatough, V. (2007). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In E. Lyons & A. Coyle (Eds.), *Analysing qualitative data in psychology* (pp. 35–50). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Tolleson, J. (1996). *The transformative power of violence: The psychological role of gang life in relation to chronic traumatic childhood stress in the lives of urban adolescent males* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Smith College for Social Work, Northampton, MA.
- Van der Kolk, B. A. (1987). *Psychological trauma*. Washington DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- Wheat, G. S. (1919). *The story of the American Legion*. New York: Knickerbocker Press.