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# Preparation, Protection, Connection and Embodiment: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Value of Spiritual Self-Care for Conflict Professionals

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Preparation, Protection, Connection and Embodiment: A Phenomenological Exploration  
of the Value of Spiritual Self-Care for Conflict Professionals

by

Diane Marie Gaston

A Dissertation Presented to the  
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University  
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Doctor of Philosophy

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**Nova Southeastern University**  
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This dissertation was submitted by   Diane Gaston   under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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## Dedication

I humbly dedicate this dissertation to my ancestors. The struggles that they endured laid the foundation for my academic aspirations and career goals. I went in to this knowing there was a legion of ancestral spirits guiding me, supporting me, encouraging me, while at the same time, being so proud of me. To my departed grandmother Simone Gaston, you were in my life for such a short period, yet your presence has always been felt. I know you lifted me up when I was down and you walked this walk with me with every step. Thank you for clearing obstacles out of my path, having my back, and helping me embrace this journey. Ayibobo.

“You are the fairy tale told by your ancestors” -- Toby Beta

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## Abstract

The field of mediation has emerged as one of the premier tools in the peacemaking process. While mediation has grown in popularity and become widely accepted in the judicial court system and corporate America, very few studies have focused on how mediators are impacted by the conflict resolution process. Moreover, few studies have focused on the role of spiritual self-care on the mediator. This research study explored how mediators who identify as spiritual integrate their spirituality in their own self-care practice. In order for mediation to continue as one of the most important tools in the peacemaking process, mediators of today and the future must have effective and beneficial self-care practices to perform professionally at a high level. This study utilized transcendental phenomenology to capture the lived experiences of 11 conflict professionals who incorporate spirituality into their self-care practices. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how they practiced self-care and the essence of what spiritual self-care entailed. The major themes identified in this study were: (a) mediators spiritual practices were used as tools for preparation and protection in conflict work, (b) spiritual practices invoked deep and meaningful feelings of connectedness, and (c) that spiritually identifying mediators began to embody the same practices they used. Essentially, spiritual self-care was vital to being effective in their professional lives. Mediators were able to offer deep value to their clients through their spirituality and simultaneously found deep value in their spiritual self-care practices. The research was significant, as it allowed for a deeper understanding of conflict practitioners and could benefit the personal and professional growth of the mediation field.

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Mediation is one of the most prevalent forms of conflict resolution. Mediators are deeply involved in multifaceted situations, some involving potentially hostile parties. Due to the negative emotions and contentious conflicts involved in the profession, mediators are susceptible to vicarious trauma, impairment, and burnout (van Dierendonck, Gassen, & Visser, 2005). Due to the nature of mediation being a job with high emotional labor, there is a need to practice self-care. Self-care is a vital part of maintaining the ability to mediate at a consistently effective level. While there is sufficient evidence in the literature relating to the importance of self-care for any helping professional (Figley, 2002; Mann, 2004; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2011), most researchers have not looked at the impact spirituality plays in the effectiveness of the self-care process for mediators and other conflict professionals. This study sought the perceptions of mediators who consider themselves spiritual regarding the impact that spirituality has on their self-care.

### **Background of Study**

Mediation is the most common form of third-party intervention and may be the closest thing to an effective technique for dealing with complex, difficult, and asymmetric conflicts in the 21st century (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). Mediation is an informal, alternative dispute resolution process where a neutral third-party can assist disputing parties involved in conflict reach a mutually acceptable settlement or agreement (Barsky, 2007; Bush & Folgers, 2005). The role of the mediator is to facilitate the mediation process while attempting to counter any tendencies towards antagonistically competitive win-lose strategies of the parties (Kressel, 2014).

Mediators focus on areas of social conflicts, such school conflicts, ethnic relations, interreligious struggles, community conflicts, disputes within organizations, interstate border disputes and resource allocations (Kressel, 2014; Kriesberg, 2007). In addition to that, mediators can also facilitate family court disputes, international conflicts, labor agreements, and environmental disputes. The role that mediators play is critical to the conflict resolution process because mediators teach conflict resolution techniques, assist individuals and organizations in reaching agreements, resolve problems, and help build trust and improve relationships between individuals or groups of people (Mediators Beyond Borders, n.d.).

The field of mediation is very similar to other helping profession fields. Many mediators have professional backgrounds in social work, marriage and family therapy, counseling, education, psychology, or law. A body of knowledge, skills, and approaches to best practices exists within each helping profession (Barsky, 2007). In addition to this, each field has its own extensive research on self-care, occupational stress, and burnout (Figley, 2002; Newell & Nelson-Gardell, 2014; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). In each of these fields researchers have determined that symptoms of burnout, occupational stress and fatigue, and vicarious trauma may occur if professionals in these fields are not adequately caring for themselves (Deville, Wright, & Varker, 2009; Gorgievski-Duijvesteijn & Hobfoll, 2008; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016). Mediators also deal with very traumatic conflicts, including family court and divorce mediations, and international diplomatic mediations. These types of disputes can be very strenuous and demanding on the mediator. Conflict professionals are exposed to very unfortunate cases that can bring on secondary traumatic stress or strain. Since the role of the mediator is

very similar to the role of these helping professions, it can be implied that mediators too are susceptible to these negative effects.

The field of mediation offers very little research on the area of self-care for the mediator, and even less on the impact that spirituality may have on the self-care process. After a review of the literature conducted on compassion fatigue and burnout, Good (2010) warned conflict practitioners could suffer the same negative effects as other helping professions. Professional development training courses and seminars in the field offers strategies on how to become more skillful as a mediator, but do not focus on how to better adapt to the everyday stressors of being a mediator or conflict practitioner. It is imperative that mediators take care of themselves to prevent occupational stress or burnout from the field (Kressel, 2014).

Mediation can be an emotionally stressful and tense process for all involved, especially the mediator; these professionals work under conditions that are often emotionally unpleasant (Kressel, 2014). Participants of mediation bring with them feelings of anger, hurt, resentment, betrayal, and other emotions. Often it falls to the mediators to either diffuse these intense moments and emotions; mediators may find themselves unintentionally involved with the parties in dispute. Clients also bring “hearts that are aching, burdened and twisted from their conflicts” (Good, 2010, p. 29). Good (2010) asserted that as mediators engage their clients with care and concern, they can become susceptible to those same feelings that accompany their clients to mediation. Having a healthy overall well-being can positively affect the quality of mediator’s work (Good, 2010). Those who work with or are exposed to conflict on an ongoing basis may carry a heavy emotional burden or become emotionally drained (Isenhour & Shannon,

2003). Furthermore, often the disputes that mediators are exposed to can trigger emotional issues in their own lives (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003).

The qualities that a mediator brings with them is very important to the overall mediation process in general. Having an awareness of what makes a mediator effective at their job is significant. However, the mediator brings additional personal resources to the mediation that they may not be aware of, such as their own energy. Occupational stress or fatigue can reduce a mediator's presence, shorten their patience, increase their irritation, and impair their ability to listen to and connect with the population they are trying to help (Brazil, 2008). It is difficult to establish a connection with clients when the mediator is uncentered or emotionally compromised. Brazil (2008) stated that being emotionally or behaviorally centered can reduce the level of mental strain that mediation work can impose on mediators and serving as a significant source of renewable and professional energy.

Riskin (2004) proposed that humanity provides the opportunity for us to feel fear, grief, and sorrow, pass judgments, make assumptions, and have biases. These feelings can fluctuate in availability to our conscious awareness, as can our ability to adjust to those emotions (Riskin, 2004). These emotional influences can help guide us through life and our professional activities--including teaching or resolving disputes--but a problem arises when these emotional influences interfere with our ability to perform those activities, thereby impairing the work (Riskin, 2004).

Newell and MacNeil (2010) stated that the practice of self-care and the development of individual coping mechanisms are useful to counter stress and burnout. Newell and MacNeil (2010) further added that maintaining spiritual connections such as

attending church, meditation, or yoga practices, and self-revitalizations also serve as an enhancement to general self-care. There are a number of ways that a helping professional can combat stress and occupational fatigue while being heavily involved in their work (Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Newell & Nelson-Gardell, 2014; Wicks & Maynard, 2014). Manning-Jones, de Terte, and Stephens (2016) explored the relationship between coping strategies and psychological outcomes of health professionals who were exposed to vicarious trauma. The authors determined that the use of self-care in one's personal and professional life was an effective coping strategy that could reduce the chances of secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma (Manning-Jones et al., 2016). While their study indicated a positive outcome of self-care and a reduction in vicarious and secondary trauma, there is still a paucity of literature from a qualitative perspective.

In the past 60 years, exploration of the role of spirituality in conflict studies has seen a dramatic increase (Jones, 2009). Scholars within the field of conflict studies have given attention to the topic of spirituality (Goldberg, 2016, Goldberg & Blancke, 2011; Jones, 2009; Jones & Georgakopoulos, 2009; Zumeta, 1993), but very few scholars have discussed self-care and spirituality as it relates to the overall well-being of mediators or conflict practitioners (Goldberg, 2016). According to Como (2007), as cited in White, Peters and Schim (2011), spirituality has been examined in the fields of sociology, theology, psychology, and medicine, and have significantly contributed to the ongoing discussion around spirituality. Sheldrake (2009) asserted that the subject of spirituality is now an important academic field with new journals forming, university courses being designed and developed, and the increasing number of people informally studying the subject. Schlehofer, Omoto, and Adelman (2008) stated that the mounting interest in

spirituality in research is due to the recognition that spirituality and religion are not just important components of people's lives, they may even be essential to humanity. While there has been a slowly widening body of research on spirituality and conflict resolution, it has not been emphasized or well-studied (Ben Nun, 2011).

Spirituality entails a connection to self-chosen and or religious beliefs, values, and practices that give meaning to life, thereby inspiring and motivating individuals to achieve their optimal well-being (Tanyi, 2002). Although quantitative studies have investigated the role that spirituality plays in an individual's self-care, there are fewer qualitative studies that have explored the role of spirituality in self-care practices for mediators. Examining a mediator's spiritual beliefs and practices gives insight into their own internal processes of how they perceive and deal with not only their own reality, but a shared reality that may exist with their clients, or cases. There is little research related to spirituality and self-care from the perspective of the mediator, or conflict practitioners (Nobel, 2005). This mission of the research was to investigate the role of spirituality has on the conflict practitioner's well-being.

### **Problem Statement**

Little attention has been placed on mediation from the practitioner's perspective, mediators and their own self-care, or more specifically the role that spirituality plays in self-care. Mediators are constantly exposed to levels of hostility, descriptions of abuse, and vicarious emotional dynamics during disputes; mediators must practice good self-care techniques to guard against burnout and vicarious traumatization (Taylor, 2012). The field of conflict resolution has no established set of self-care best practices for mediators. Despite the importance of self-care, the concept has been widely understudied. To the

detriment of the field, conflict resolution programs have yet to focus on an effective way to prepare conflict resolution practitioners mediators about the importance of self-care

The current Model of Standards of Conduct for Mediators (2005) has been approved and adopted by The American Arbitration Association, The American Bar Association and The Association for Conflict Resolution. This model serves as a guide for mediator conduct; however, there is no information regarding self-care within this guide, and no other guides have been adopted by these organizations. This lack of policy only speaks to the need for further research and suggests a need for self-care awareness and practices, models, or standards towards healthy practices for mediators.

The current literature regarding self-care and burnout is abundant with thousands of published peer-reviewed articles and books on the subject (Leiter, Bakker, & Maslach, 2014; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014). Nevertheless, many of these publications focus on the traditional helping professions. Additionally, there have been many published books and peer-reviewed articles regarding the concept of spirituality—however, researchers have yet to observe how spirituality can impact the self-care of mediators specifically.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact spirituality on self-care practices through the lived experiences of mediators who identify as spiritual, and how they integrate it into their own self-care. Despite the extensive research on self-care amongst other helping professions, there is a dearth of research conducted to examine mediators and their use of spirituality as a form of self-care. In addition, there is also a lack of research on spirituality as it relates to an understanding of self (Kavar, 2015). The

research findings contributed to knowledge in the field of conflict studies and to identify practices to prevent or reduce instances of burnout, occupational stress, and instances of vicarious trauma in mediators or other conflict practitioners who identify as spiritual.

### **Research Questions**

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do mediators with a sustained value for spirituality practice self-care?
2. What is the essence of spiritual self-care among mediators who identify as spiritual?

### **Significance of Study**

Mediation has emerged as one of the most important tools in peacemaking in the latter half of the 20th century (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). In order for mediation to continue to be one of the most important tools in peacemaking and in the various capacities that mediators fill, mediators must perform at the height of their abilities. A better understanding of how spirituality affects practitioners may lead to changes in their approach towards conflicting parties and ensure that quality mediators remain in the field (Ben Nun, 2011).

This study was significant due to the scarcity of research on how spirituality impacts the self-care process for conflict practitioners. Moreover, this study also sought to examine spiritual self-care from an intellectual perspective. Scarce information is known about how conflict practitioners use spirituality as a resource in their own lives, compared to the research that exist about a client's use of spirituality in their life. According to Kressel (2014), "mediation is an inordinately stressful social role" (p. 838) and dealing with high conflict clients on a day-to-day basis is particularly very

challenging work. Practitioners need to have or develop techniques to handle the stressors of their work. The present body of knowledge emphasizes how practitioners can focus on the client or participant's spirituality to resolve or transform conflict; there is very little regard for the mediator or conflict resolution practitioner, however, or how they integrate spirituality into their self-care routine. The research may serve as a basis towards understanding how conflict practitioners experience spirituality as part of their identity and within their daily lives (Kavar, 2015). To further add, the research is significant to contribute to personal and professional growth in the mediation field; the study can be reviewed to find a deeper understanding for both conflict practitioners and mediators.

### **Methodology**

With this study, the researcher sought meaning and understanding of the concept of self-care from a holistic view, focusing particularly on spirituality and its influence on mediator self-care. This study explored the role spirituality plays in the self-care of mediators who define themselves as spiritual people. The lived experiences of mediators was viewed through the transcendental phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that is used to explore details of specific phenomena by identifying the shared experiences of different individuals experiencing the target phenomenon. More specifically, transcendental phenomenology was used to analyze the data by reducing the information provided by the participants to significant statements or quotes that align into themes (Creswell, 2013).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The selected terms used throughout this study are defined as follows:

*Burnout* is primarily characterized as a common consequence of prolonged stress that is work-related (van Dierendonck et al., 2005; Otey, 2014). Schaufeli and Enzmann (1998) as cited in van Dierendonck et al. (2005) determined that stress is usually accompanied by decreased motivation, a sense of reduced effectiveness, and the development of dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors at work. The process of burning out is a reflection of the failure to find meaning and growth in life; burnout is the end result of a gradual process of “disillusionment in the quest to derive existential significant from work” (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998, p. 36).

*Mediator/Conflict Professional* refers to any professional whose occupation falls under the conflict resolution field. Some professions that fall into this field include mediators, arbitrators, third party neutrals, ombudsman's, peacekeepers, conflict coaches. For the purpose of this study, conflict practitioners and mediators will be used interchangeably.

*Self-care* is an individual's ability to balance personal, professional, emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual components to live in a balanced, energized manner designed to mitigate day-to-day stressors (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011).

*Spirituality* is a dimension of human experience that empowers an individual to create, encounter, or discover meaning, purpose and value in life, which may or may not be related to religion (Kavar, 2012; Tanyi, 2002).

### **Context of Researcher**

Interest in the subject of spirituality and mediator self-care came through the researcher's own interest in spirituality, the impact and role that it has on an individual, and what role it plays into an individual's overall self-care regime. While much has

already been written on the positive effects of self-care techniques for helping professionals in the service industries (Bressi & Vaden, 2016; Wise & Barnett, 2016), the researcher found a lack of research identifying how spirituality is interpreted and practiced for mediators and other conflict professionals. Despite mediation being inordinately stressful, the helping professionals have the potential to successfully improve the lives of those involved. The researcher believes that it is difficult to perform mediation work and not be affected by it. Additionally, the researcher places high value in the subject of spirituality and what role it plays in an individual's desire for self-care. According to Fortin (2016), there is no study of spirituality that does not directly involve the spirituality of the researcher. This generated an interest in the topic of how mediators who identify as spiritual could use their own spirituality in their work; the researcher explored how mediators interpret and incorporate spirituality into their self-care regime.

### **Summary and Overview of Remaining Chapters**

This chapter introduces the study by providing an overview of self-care and the mediation field and details the connections between spirituality and mediators. From an interdisciplinary approach, Chapter 2 will provide a literature review of fields within the helping profession, burnout and its effects, and spirituality. Chapter 3 describes in detail the methodology used for the study, justifies its application, and will further elaborate on the research study's limitations. The presentation of data will be discussed and analyzed in Chapter 4. Lastly, chapter 5 concludes the study and further elaborates on the implications to the field and provides recommendations generated from this research study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is used to examine the literature related to mediators, self-care, and spirituality. In particular, this chapter will reveal a gap in the literature as it relates to mediators and their self-care, in addition to reviewing how mediators use spirituality as a form of their self-care. The literature review draws from the research from the helping professions field regarding work-related stress disorders such as burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue—all of which has similar implications for conflict professionals. When mediators do not incorporate some level of self-care, they become susceptible to work related stress disorders that has the potential to affect their work. The need for an effective self-care regimen is common throughout the review of the literature; yet, this review highlights the paucity of research regarding mediators and self-care, and use of spirituality as a form of self-care. This chapter will also provide a theoretical framework for understanding individual needs and the desire for spiritual self-care.

### **Historical Background**

Arguably, mediation can be considered the most popular intervention used in conflict resolution practices today (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009; Rothman, Rothman, & Schwoebel, 2001). Forms of mediation have been recorded in the Bible, Koran, and in documents found from ancient tribal cultures (Blades, 1984; Moore, 2014), making it one of oldest forms of dispute resolution. Mediation is generally understood as an informal, alternative dispute resolution process in which a neutral third party assists disputing parties with reaching a mutually acceptable agreement or settlement (Barsky, 2007; Bush & Folgers, 2005; Folberg, 1983). The mediator coaches parties on how to deal with conflict constructively, and conversely moves parties away from dysfunctional patterns

of interaction (Barsky, 2007). In addition to this general definition of mediation, Folberg (1983) added that mediation is a goal-directed, problem-solving, helping intervention. The overall goal is to help parties in dispute resolve their issues and further reduce the conflict that exists between them (Folberg, 1983).

### **The Current State of Mediation**

Today, mediation has expanded in the United States and has become the most frequently used alternative dispute resolution (ADR) process in both state and federal courts. (Nolan-Haley, 2012). Kressler (2014) suggested that the rise in mediation in the past three decades is due to the fact that mediation offers parties an alternative to the traditional use of lawyers and courts. Nolan-Haley (2012) noted that one of the selling points of mediation to the general public lies in one of its core values of personal empowerment and self-determination. “Self-determination enhances the development of party’s problem solving capacities, their ability to craft individualized justice on their own terms based on their own interests and values (Nolan-Haley, 2012, p. 69).

Mediation has become more popular since the 1980s, and as a result of its acceptance as a growing field in academe, moved from being seen as a tool for labor disputes, to a broad range of non-labor disputes (Bush and Folgers, 2005). Mediation can be applied across all conflict domains such as interpersonal relations, commercial disputes, interethnic relations, environmental disputes and public policy disputes (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012; Lovenheim, 2002). Many communities in the United States have implemented mediation programs as central components of the justice systems; these programs are often “viewed as a way to enhance civil engagement while empowering citizens” (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012, p. 215). Advocates of mediation argue

that the power to make an agreement lies in the hands of the participants, as opposed to a legal system that determines the outcome for parties in dispute. (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012; Nolan-Haley, 2012).

Mediation draws from the field of conflict resolution which similarly continues to develop rapidly. This field has evolved from multidisciplinary roots that have each contributed towards the enrichment of the mediation profession (Dworkin, Jacob, & Scott, 1991). As a fairly new emerging area in the social sciences field, conflict resolution has drawn on almost every social science discipline by adopting various practices and approaches. This includes, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology while also adopting approaches from education, counseling and social work (Rothman et al., 2001).

Mediators in the field today come from diverse professions, ranging from lawyers, therapists, and social workers. Mediators originating from different professional backgrounds draw upon the theories and skills they have developed from their original professions. Using an interdisciplinary approach, mediators can aid parties in resolving their issues in dispute; therefore, mediation can be an additional area of expertise that is open to all professionals who are qualified (Baker-Jackson et al., 1985). Because mediation is just beginning to be applied in various fields and performed by individuals from various backgrounds, there has yet to be an established body of literature about this population as helping professionals.

### **Mediators as Helping Professionals**

Previously, mediators did not traditionally fall within the scope of the helping professions field. A helping professional supports the growth of or addresses the

problems of a person's physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional or spiritual well-being (Barsky, 2007). Careers such as nursing, healthcare, psychology, social work, and education are generally thought of as helping professions. Although mediators today come from very diverse backgrounds and disciplines, Lederach (2005) argued that mediators have the incredible task of helping people find the capacity in themselves to "talk to their enemies, recover from their wounds, and rebuild their lives and their societies, when all around them are the signs of their previous or current destructive circumstances" (as cited in Goldberg, 2016, p. 2). According to Barsky (2007), in some capacity all helping professionals are conflict resolution practitioners.

Similar to other helping professions, the mediation profession is also highly engaged in what has been coined as *people work* (Mann, 2004, p. 205; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Professionals who perform people work focus on the interaction and engagement with other people (Mann, 2004). Mann (2004) argued that professionals in this line of work are frequently subjected to the emotional exhaustion that occurs when dealing with multiple people or parties. There are many unique personal and professional challenges that helping professionals face, making their work especially demanding (Barnett, 2014a). Mediators bring their unique presence into the mediation session to positively impact the process.

Operating in various roles and settings, a helping professional provides valuable services to their clients, and often make a difference in the lives of those they service (Barnett, 2014a). Professionals in these fields may often have multi-layered responsibilities from several different sectors. Although mediators and other conflict professionals can come from diverse backgrounds, they may hold various professional

licenses and certifications provided by training from their original professions. While there is a multitude of research on how mediators can improve extrinsically through trainings modules or continuing education development, there is a gap in the literature as it relates to how mediators can improve intrinsically on an emotional, intellectual, or psychological level.

### **Mediator Presence**

There have been several researchers that have attempted to explore how personal energy requirements of the mediator can affect the mediation process. In the past, how mediators use themselves and what they bring of their own personal being had largely been neglected in mediation literature (Gold, 1993). The energy that a mediator brings into a mediation session is very important because it has the potential to have an impact on the actual mediation process and outcome (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003; Gold, 1993, Goldberg, 2016).

There has been little attention given to how the mediator's psychological, intellectual and spiritual qualities can impact the profession (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003). Gold (1993) stated that “the constricted and limited role parameters that have defined the mediation profession do not take into account the relationship between the client and the mediator, or the presence that the mediator brings into the session” (p. 56). Gold (1993) provided a context for what she also refers to as *presence*. Gold (1993) described four elements of presence that can increase a mediator's effectiveness: (a) being centered, (b) being connected to one's own values and beliefs and higher purpose, (c) being able to connect to the human side of clients, and (d) being congruent. When mediators are at their best, there are positive implications for the mediation session.

Similarly to Gold (1993, 2003), Bowling and Hoffman, (2003) discussed the personal qualities of a mediator that extend beyond a mediator's knowledge and skill set. Aside from the traditional skills that a mediator learns such as empathy, patience, trustworthiness, and flexibility, the authors believed the personal qualities that a mediator brings into the mediation process have a direct impact on the process and the outcomes of each mediation session. Bowling and Hoffman (2003) affirmed there are deeper, and more fundamental qualities that the most effective mediators possess that operate beneath the level of a conscious awareness. These qualities have a direct impact on the mediator presence.

Presence may have two different meanings: either (a) the mediator's physical presence, or (b) the qualities that their physical presence brings into the room (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003). However, both authors emphasized the second meaning of the term, as they believe the mediator's influence has impact on the mediation itself. Through their exploration of the qualities that a mediator brings with them into a mediation session, the authors also recognized that the personal qualities of the parties may also influence the mediator, a reverse Hawthorne effect (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003). This is a similar concept to countertransference in psychology, where the therapist redirects their emotions to the client in therapy (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003). There exists a gap in the literature involving how the mediation process could be negatively affected if the mediator is not present during mediation sessions. If the mediator is affected by outside stressors, they could potentially bring an unproductive negative presence into the conflict resolution process. Just like other helping professionals, because of the level of involvement or energy mediators bring into process, they are susceptible to work related stress disorders.

These work-related stress disorders can have an impact on the effectiveness of the services mediators provide.

### **Helping Professions and Work-Related Stress Disorders**

Newell and MacNeil (2010) contended that the “largest single risk factor for developing professional burnout is being involved in human service work in general” (p. 59). The consistent daily exposure to clients and clients’ trauma, issues, and distress can be emotionally taxing and can result in burnout (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Burnout is often defined as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, physical exhaustion, or cynicism, as a common consequence of prolonged work-related stress and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment (Gengoux & Roberts, 2017; Otey, 2014; Rosenberg & Pace, 2006; van Dierendonck et al., 2005). Maslach and Jackson (1981) characterized burnout as having three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of clients, and reduced personal accomplishment. Maslach, a notable researcher on burnout, concluded that burnout occurs frequently among individuals who do people-work of some kind (Leiter et al., 2014; Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996; Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Zellmer, 2004).

In addition to burnout, conflict practitioners and helping professionals also face being exposed to vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue. Figley (2002) emphasized that compassion fatigue is a natural consequence of engaging with people who have experienced stressful or traumatic events. Zeidner, Hadar, Matthews, and Roberts (2013) conceptualized compassion fatigue as “characterized by depressed mood, feelings of fatigue, disillusionment, and worthlessness, related to the provision of care of people who have experienced some form of trauma or severe stress” (p. 595). Vicarious trauma, often

used interchangeably with compassion fatigue, refers to the impact of repeated emotionally intimate contact with trauma survivors that mediators face (Dunkley & Whelan, 2006; Figley, 2002; Newell & MacNeil, 2010; Zeidner et al., 2013). Killian (2008) conducted a study of the impact of stress on therapists who worked with trauma survivors. The results from the study demonstrated that therapists could detect job stress through bodily symptoms, mood changes, sleep disturbances, becoming easily distracted, and increased difficulty concentrating.

Regardless of the disorder, burnout, compassion fatigue, or vicarious trauma can affect those who work with traumatized individuals; physicians, emergency room nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, counselors, pastoral care workers can all be negatively affected by work-related stress disorders (Zeidner et al., 2013). Scholars researching work-related stress disorders suggest it is almost impossible to work as a helping professional without being affected by the clients in some manner (Barnett, 2014a; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014; Wise & Barnett, 2016). Adams, Hough, Proeschold-Bell, Yao, and Kolkin (2016) added that the consequences of work-related stress disorders are potentially serious, not only for workers but also for recipients of the intended care. Although burnout and other work-related stress disorders have been a well-researched concept amongst various professions, there is still a paucity of literature that exists on the direct relationship between these disorders and the mediation profession. Further, the existing research on burnout has given very little attention to the personal resources that a practitioner implements to combat or prevent work-related stress disorders, such as spirituality.

## **Implications for Conflict Professionals**

Since professional mediators today have diverse backgrounds from other disciplinary fields, much of the research on burnout in those other disciplines have implications for the field of mediation as well. Levin et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study that examined mental health consequences among attorneys and their administrative staff who were exposed to clients' traumatic experiences. Compared to their administrative support staff, Levin et al. (2011) concluded that the attorneys demonstrated significantly higher levels of posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, depression, secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and functional impairment. In addition, the researchers found that the difference in severity of symptoms was mediated by greater exposure to trauma-exposed clients rather than other variables such as gender, years of experience, office size, or personal history of trauma (Levin et al., 2011).

The findings of this research highlight the implications on conflict professionals. Levin et al. (2011) also uncovered much more quantitative research on burnout and other work-related stress disorders than qualitative research. There has been a considerable amount of research on the concept of burnout among mental health practitioners, psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists that illuminated symptoms, risk factors, prevention strategies, and treatment of burnout experienced by those professions (Rosenberg & Pace, 2006). However, very little attention has been given specifically to the experience of mediators and their probability of experiencing the symptoms of burnout and other work-related stress disorders.

Mediators need to be aware that without personal detachment and other key skills, they may be more susceptible to burnout or other related disorders. Additionally,

Lovenheim (2002) stated that the desired skills and personality traits of successful mediators are good listening skills, the ability to read people, a calm demeanor, the ability to understand complex facts, and professional detachment. Due to the nature of their work, mediators are privy to “intimate details of their client’s lives, and are exposed to seeing clients in pain, life transforming injuries, ruined marriages and destroyed businesses” (Lovenheim, 2002, p. 95). Some mediators can maintain professional detachment from their client’s lives, but others ultimately get involved in the lives of their clients and cannot detach or close an unsuccessful mediation without seeing it as a personal failing (Lovenheim, 2002). Because of the negative implications of work-related stress disorders, it is critical that mediators take steps to self-administer holistic psychological and physiological care.

### **Self-care**

Dealing with conflict on a continuous basis is extremely demanding work. Caring for self is an important first step in being able to care and provide for others. Due to the nature of challenges and stressors that can place conflict practitioner at risk for distress, vicarious trauma, burnout and potentially impaired professional competence, the need for self-care becomes essential. Self-care refers to a set of actions and practices that help to maintain emotional, physical, mental, relational, and spiritual wellness (Barnett 2014a; McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). According to Baker (2003), self-care is a responsible practice, for all human beings, and indisputably for those who are employed in service industry like mediation. McGarrigle and Walsh (2011) further added that implementing healthy self-care practices impacts one’s overall well-being. The act of self-care can include activities such as getting enough rest at night, maintaining a healthy diet, regular

exercise, and maintaining an overall healthy lifestyle (Barnett, 2014). Furthermore, self-care activities can also involve deeper self-reflection and self-awareness that fall into the category of spiritual self-care. While self-care can vary from person to person, self-care practices are generally positive and aimed at promoting overall wellness and effective functioning (Wise & Barnett, 2016).

Self-care practices that are carried out on a regular basis have the potential to decrease high levels of stress while also serving as healthy coping mechanism during stressful times (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011). In contrast, Brucato and Neimeyer (2009) distinguished between self-care and coping strategies. Self-care is described as a preventative measure to stress, while coping strategies are how an individual responds to stress or challenges once they have manifested (Brucato & Neimeyer, 2009). While coping strategies are intrinsic and necessary, self-care can be viewed as a purposeful and preventative measure against work-related stress disorders. Although Brucato and Neimeyer distinguished the two concepts, they did acknowledge that it is possible for both self-care and coping to exist and function as preventative and responsive strategies to reducing stress (Brucato & Neimeyer, 2009). For example, the authors cited the spiritual practice of meditation as a self-care activity engaged in prior to stress that can also be used to cope with stress once encountered (Brucato & Neimeyer, 2009). If mediators were equipped with effective self-care strategies, it could mitigate the reactive responses that require coping strategies (Malinowski, 2014). Neglecting self-care and healthy coping strategies typically result in sleep deprivation, emotional exhaustion, reduced morale, feelings of despair, and in ineffective mediation sessions (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011).

### **Ethical Obligations for Self-care**

Each of the helping professions place a profound focus on professional ethics. In psychiatry, self-care has been long viewed as an essential element of professionalism (Gengoux & Weiss Roberts, 2017). Professional ethics are intended to guide members in their professional activities, responsibilities and obligations. These standards for ethical practices are used to ensure that helping professionals are working ethically and with the best interest of those they serve. However, over the course of a helping professional's career, they may struggle to adhere to these ethical standards if they become preoccupied with meeting the demands of their professional and personal lives (Barnett, 2014b).

Barnett (2014b) asserted that the idea of self-care should be viewed not as optional, but rather an essential part of maintaining professional competency. Wise et al. (2011) discussed self-care in an ethical context, arguing that self-care and ethics are related on a deeper and more nuanced level. Self-care values that are addressed in codes of ethics discuss taking adequate care of self, managing stressors and challenges in professional and personal lives that prevent burnout, and issues with professional competence (Barnett, 2014b).

Barnett (2014a) identified the ethical mandates that each helping profession must monitor to promote their own individual wellness. According to Barnett (2014a) each helping professions' code of ethics makes a clear connection between self-reflection, awareness of and attention to our emotional competence, ongoing self-care, and the maintenance of the professional competence needed to provide services effectively (Barnett, 2014a).

The American Psychological Association (APA) directly addresses the ethical obligation to guard against personal problems that may negatively impact professional functioning (APA, 2010; Wise & Barnett, 2016). According to the APA, psychologists should take appropriate measures, such as obtaining professional consultation or assistance, when they become aware of personal problems that may interfere with their work-related duties (APA, 2010). The APA's ethics code is consistent with those of other helping professions. For example, The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics states that social workers should not allow their own personal problems, psychosocial distress, or personal difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment and performance (NASW, 2008). While these Codes of Ethics imply the APA and NASW professionals employ self-care strategies, The American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014) explicitly addresses the issue of self-care for counselors. The ACA (2014) encourages counselors to engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities.

However, The Association of Conflict Resolution (ACR) Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators (2005) does not specifically address self-care, nor does it address personal problems of the mediator. The engagement of self-care activities for a helping professional, more specifically mediators, should be part of one's ethical obligations to their profession. Learning how to manage stress and forestall burnout is critical to professional development in any helping profession (Newsome, Christopher, Dahlen, & Christopher, 2006). If a similar set of standards is not built into the ACR's Code of

Ethics, then the same problems identified in other helping professions will begin to emerge within the mediating profession.

### **Work-Life Balance**

While the aforementioned steps are important, the most critical component of self-care is developing a sustainable work-life balance. While the work of any helping professional can be emotionally demanding and stressful, Baker (2003) maintained that because our personal lives serve as the undergirding and infrastructure of our professional lives, a fine, but critical line exists between our personal and professional lives. Pipes, Holstein, and Aguirre (2005, as cited in Barnett, 2014a), asserted that it is almost impossible to keep professional lives and personal lives separate. Wise and Barnett (2016) further found that while people may prefer to believe they can keep their professional and personal lives separate, there is truly no impermeable barrier between each other.

As members of society, mediators and other helping professionals must deal with relationship difficulties and challenges, family illnesses, financial stressors, death of loved ones, other losses, and other common stressors associated with personal lives (Barnett, 2014a). Barnett (2014a) maintained that the personal and professional aspects of our lives may often intersect with each other and have the potential to result in “decreased functioning in both domains” (p. 28). Due to the reality of this common intersection, Barnett (2014b) highlighted the importance of ongoing self-renewal and self-care of the practitioner. Without the practice of self-care, professionals could begin to see negative effects in both the workplace and in their personal lives.

The self-care literature emphasizes the importance of ongoing self-care; an essential part of self-care is balance between professional and personal lives. Rupert, Miller, and Dorociak (2015) summarized that work-family conflict is bidirectional, implying that issues at work may interfere with family life and family related stress can interfere with work life. After conducting a study on psychologists, Rupert et al. (2009) found that work-family conflict was associated with an increased level of emotional exhaustion, a lowered sense of personal accomplishment, and an increased sense of depersonalization. Rupert et al. (2009) suggested that when conflict in either the professional or personal aspect of a psychologist's life creates stress, it can negatively impact their professional life. The NASW and the APA address personal problems and conflicts in their Codes of Ethics, inferring that there may be a fine line between the personal and professional spheres. (APA, 2010; NASW, 2008). Additionally, Barnett (2014a) emphasized that balance is essential for preventing the development of burnout, especially its emotional exhaustion component. Baker (2003) contended that balance is essential in enabling us to tend to our core needs and concerns from a holistic perspective encompassing the mind, body, and spirit.

### **Spirituality**

To better understand how mediators can incorporate spirituality into their well-being and self-care practices, it is necessary to define and deconstruct what spirituality is. Spirituality must be defined in order to begin to understand the essence of its meaning to mediators or other conflict professionals. Researchers are still attempting to reduce the ambiguity surrounding the construct of spirituality and its relation to the construct of

religion. Recognizing the personification of spirituality is important because of its personal benefits to the individual.

As traditional religious memberships continue to decline (Adler et al., 2005), there is an emergent awareness of people who define themselves as spiritual, but not religious (Anderson & Grice, 2014; Emmett, 2015; Kavar, 2015). In 2012, a Pew Foundation survey on religion found that nearly 20% of Americans categorized themselves as *unaffiliated* with any religion (Funk & Smith, 2012). In today's world, a majority of people believe that spirituality or spiritual practice is essential to who they are (Gottlieb, 2012). Similarly, Kavar (2012) suggested spirituality functions in our lives in ways that are both transcendent and immanent. It is transcendent in the way that it allows the individual to be open to experience something more than what is noticeably present in certain situations, while simultaneously being imminent in so far as it draws the individual back to their own lived experience (Kavar, 2012).

### **Spirituality vs. Religiousness**

A number of authors have agreed on the difficulty in defining and separating spirituality and religion (Cashwell, Bentley, & Bigbee, 2007; Kashdan & Nezlek, 2012; Kavar, 2012; Malinowski, 2014). One of the major limitations in defining spirituality is because of its relationship with religion. Researchers have attempted to define spirituality and how it differentiates from religion; these two terms, however, often intersect and are used interchangeably.

Burnett (2012) differentiated religion from spirituality by stating that religion is a collective choice, while spirituality is the essence of an individual as well as each individual's relationship with their higher power. According to Kavar (2012), spirituality

and religion are two distinct domains. Religion can be defined in terms of institutional membership, dogma, and beliefs, or ritualistic observances that individuals subscribe to (Kavar, 2012). Spirituality, however, is about individualism and the pure experience, personal positive feelings, or other unique aspects of life events (Kavar, 2012). Whether the academic community can agree on a concrete difference between the two concepts or not, religion and spirituality are both vital to human existence and welfare (Jones & Georgakopoulos, 2009).

Spirituality may be considered a broader concept than the practice of a specific religion and is more challenging to define. Gottlieb (2013) defined spirituality as an understanding of how life should be lived and an attempt to live in that way. Como (2007) defined spirituality as the essence of a person as they seek meaning and purpose in their life. Kavar (2012) argued that spirituality is a dimension of the human experience that enables an individual to create, encounter, or discover meaning, purpose and value in life. Hodge (2001) defined spirituality as a relationship with God, or whatever deity is held to be the Ultimate, that promotes a sense of meaning, purpose, and mission in life. While these authors have explicitly defined what spirituality is, Tanyi (2002) viewed spirituality as something that innately exists because being spiritual is part of being human.

An approach to defining spirituality is to distinguish it from religion and intellectualize spirituality independent to religion (Gottlieb, 2012; Saroglou & Muñoz-Garcia, 2008). To combine spirituality with religion further obscures both concepts. Being religious may refer to an individual's outward participation in a religious organization, such as attending church services, mass, or charitable events (Malinowski,

2014). On the other hand, being spiritual can be characterized as a person's inward experience that may not be seen by others but brings about peace and a sense of meaning to their life (Malinowski, 2014). Gottlieb (2013) affirmed that spiritual virtues such as meditation, self-reflection, mindfulness, kindness, and gratitude can be practiced without religious beliefs. An example of this is when one refers to themselves as spiritual, but not religious. Knoblauch (2010) contended that the term spirituality must not be considered as another aspect of religion; some individuals, however, may deem spirituality as an alternative belief system to religion. It is evident in the review of literature that there is no consensus on a definition of what spirituality is (Beringer, 2000; Gottlieb, 2013; Jacobs, 2013; Malinowski, 2014; Tanyi, 2002). Currently the distinction between a religious individual and a spiritual individual is one who considers himself spiritual has an individualized belief structure that is organically developed. For the purposes of this study, spirituality can be defined as an embodiment of an individual's values and beliefs, that were shaped and developed by their lived experiences.

### **Spirituality and Mediation**

Spirituality is not a new concept as it relates to mediators and the field of mediation. Over the last decade, there has been a rise in the significance of influence of spirituality in the field of dispute resolution (Cloke, 2013). Scholars have contributed immensely in bridging the gaps between spirituality, meditation, and the conflict resolution field (Bowling & Hoffman, 2003; DiGrazia, 2015; Goldberg, 2016; Goldberg & Blancke, 2011; Jones, 2009; Zumeta, 2017, 1993). These authors have demonstrated how they are all connected, and the various ways spirituality can be incorporated into mediation. A number of authors have argued for the inclusion of more spirituality into

Western models of mediations (Chupp, 1993; Cloke, 2000, 2013; Gold, 1993; Jones, 2009; Jones & Georgakopoulos, 2009; Lapin, 1993; Zumeta, 1993).

Jones (2009) conducted a study to describe what happens during mediation sessions that have incorporated spirituality as part of the process. Jones used a hermeneutic phenomenology approach to explore meaning and understanding from the perspective of those experiencing the phenomenon (Jones, 2009). Mediators who participated in this study viewed mediation as a spiritual process that while not incorporating any particular sets of actions, became an extension of who they were (Jones, 2009). The findings from this study serve as a foundation for a greater understanding of the role of spirituality in the mediation process, yet it leaves an opening for exploring how mediators use their spirituality to improve their overall wellness and self-care.

Within the mediation profession, the recognition of spirituality and its emphasis on self-care is also evident. The ACR Spirituality Section provides other conflict resolution professionals a space to connect with other practitioners who understand the dynamics and the personal costs of what practitioners deal with (ACR, 2015). The Spirituality Section exists to serve as a spiritual and emotional resource for ACR members by providing resources for members to assist them in maintaining a healthy spiritual and emotional balance. Furthermore, the spirituality section of ACR promotes an annual self-care retreat for mediators and other conflict professionals as a resource to refresh and renew, as well as build strategies for vicarious trauma related to the profession. While the spirituality retreat and in addition to the annual or semi-annual

teleconferences provided by the section is beneficial, mediators who use spirituality in their daily lives are often relying on their own practices for spiritual self-care.

### **Spiritual Self-Care Practices**

Self-care practices can focus on emotional, physical, and mental aspects of one life. One component of self-care that has received attention from researchers is spiritual self-care (Arnetz et al., 2013; Baker, 2003; Cashwell et al., 2007; Fereday, 2014; Malinowski, 2014). While spirituality is still loosely defined, Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2014) believed that a spiritual or religious life is an important part of how someone sustains the personal self, implying that the spiritual self needs just as much care as the emotional, physical, and mental aspects. Como (2007), defined a spiritual practice as “any practice that supports the spiritual connectedness between self, others, and the sacred, which facilitates the empowerment of the self and results in enhanced spiritual health” (p. 234). Spirituality can be used to reveal and assess new understanding and perspectives about conflict practitioners and their self-care.

Various scholars hold the position that spirituality is the core of wellness and is inseparable from other aspects of wellness. Malinowski (2014) declared that the importance of spirituality cannot and should not be underestimated; spirituality should be viewed as another approach towards self-care for mental health practitioners. Newell and Nelson-Gardell (2014) affirmed that participation in spiritual self-care activities—such as attending church, regular meditation, practicing yoga, and other self-revitalization activities—serve to enhance self-care while at the same time act as a buffer from the effects of work-related stress disorders. All of the therapists who participated in Killian’s (2008) study cited spirituality as a major component in their self-care. Cooper (2009, as

cited in Wise & Barnett, 2016) found that 85.6% of psychologist participants managed their stress through the use of relaxing activities, such as meditation and yoga (Cooper, 2009 as cited in Wise & Barnett, 2016). It is important to note that although one may not identify as a spiritual or religious person, Yoga, meditation, mindfulness, prayer, and attending religious services are the most commonly addressed forms of spiritual self-care.

**Physical spiritual self-care.** Yoga is normally regarded as a physical health practice that incorporates various physical postures referred to as *asanas* (Gottlieb, 2013; Park, Riley, Bedesin & Stewart, 2016). The term yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word, *yuj* meaning union or *to unite* (Varambally & Gangadhar, 2012). The practice of yoga is the uniting of the mind, body and spirit and can be viewed as a holistic system for improving the connection between the mind, the body, and the spiritual side of an individual. There are many different types of yoga practices, each with their own unique components, including breathing technique (Pranayama), postures (asanas) and meditative methods. Although there are many physical health benefits of yoga, the root of yoga is both philosophical and spiritual (Park et al., 2016) and is one of the six schools of Hindu philosophy (Varambally & Gangadhar, 2012). In the Hindu-Indian tradition, yoga has been seen as a pathway for attaining spiritual goals (Varambally & Gangadhar, 2012). Many people practice yoga for its benefits of promoting relaxation, stress relief, and also increased flexibility (Park et al, 2016).

**Mental spiritual self-care.** Meditation can be a set of techniques used to promote overall wellness, and peace, and as a way to reduce stress in one's life (Chu, 2010; Gallant, 2016). There are many different forms of meditation that can be practiced through a formal intervention style, or can be informal on an individual basis, however,

mindfulness meditation is a popular form. Although meditation and mindfulness can be viewed as two different concepts, they are typically used together, as the two main dimensions of any meditative practice are awareness and focus (Gottlieb, 2013).

Mindfulness meditation is referred to as the practice of paying attention, intentionally. Mindfulness meditation is the intentional act of self-regulating one's attention to the present moment experience, combined with a nonjudgmental and accepting view concerning irrespective of any thoughts may arise (Pepping, Walters, Davis, & O'Donovan, 2016). The practice of mindfulness is empirically supported and researchers note its efficacy and the positive impacts on human functioning (Gallant, 2016; Garland, 2013; Good et al. 2016). Mindfulness meditation has been studied and shown to reduce stress; relieve physical ailments; and reduce psychological distress, physical fatigue, and emotional pain (Richards, Campenni, & Muse-Burke, 2010).

Prayer is commonly viewed as a religious practice consisting of communication between a person, or group of people, to one or more divine beings (i.e. God, the Universe, angels, or other deities; Olver, 2013). The spiritual meaning of prayer according to Gottlieb (2013) "is a way to express and shape our emotional lives into a spiritual form" (p. 101). Furthermore, prayer can be spiritual if it helps the individual become more accepting of human suffering, more loving towards one another, and more faithful to the circumstances we face without succumbing to bitterness (Gottlieb, 2013).

Spirituality can help conflict practitioners in the area of self-care and has been shown to be advantageous to those who practice it. In their study of individuals who practiced mindfulness meditation, Pepping et al. (2016) found that the most frequently cited reasons were to alleviate emotional distress, and to enhance overall wellbeing.

Another study found that those individuals, who practiced yoga, cited that stress relief, relaxation, and anxiety relief were primary reasons to continue their yoga practice (Park et al., 2016). In the same study, participants who began practicing yoga for the exercise and physical benefits, discovered spirituality as a new reason to continue their practice (Park et al., 2016). Although an individual may not identify as spiritual or religious, engaging in activities such as yoga, meditation, mindfulness, and deep breathing exercises can instill a sense of peace, calm and wellness internally.

The spiritual dimension of self-care for conflict practitioners can create a sense of peace, tranquility, meaning, and purpose in one's life (Malinowski, 2014). Spirituality and religion continue to be a crucially important aspect of life for mediators and many helping professionals, as well as those who seek their help (Gale, Bolzan, & McRae-McMahon, 2007). Negash and Sahin (2011) identified spiritual practice, meditation, journaling, wellness, and yoga as methods therapists can use for their self-growth and professional development. Phelps, Lloyd, Creamer, and Forbes (2009) identified spiritual self-care as either a protective factor against burnout or other work-related stress disorders, and as an aid to improved overall well-being. Additionally, a study conducted by Goodman and Schorling (2012) of 92 healthcare professionals who participated in an eight-week continuing education mindfulness based stress reduction course. The finding from the study saw significant improvements in the mental wellbeing of participants and saw decreased measures of burnout across allied health professionals. Spiritual self-care activities can also help one to relieve the stressful effects of their work. Therefore, spiritual approaches to self-care offers mediators and other helping professionals with additional contemplative practice options for self-care (McGarrigle & Walsh, 2011).

Gottlieb (2013) asserted that the goal of having a spiritual practice is to train our bodies, emotions, and intellect to help us “become more focused, self-aware, and ethically developed” (p. 93).

The popularity of mediation lends itself to exploring how spiritual mediators integrate their spirituality into their self-care practices. Moberg (2010) offered up a spiritual approach to self-care from a peacekeeper’s perspective by stating, “Care of the self begins with care of the soul” (p. 2). Moberg further asserted that, “I have found that if I do not honor my spirit first, I cannot continue in the work to assist others with their personal peace. I have discovered that I must hold self-care as a top priority for the successful continuation of my passionate work” (Moberg, 2010, p. 2).

According to Gold (1993), if mediators are offering themselves to their clients, offering the best sense of self makes the most sense. Per Gold, “Clients do notice that what they receive is straight from the soul of the mediator” (p. 38). Mediators agree to continually stand in the face of negativity. Self-care is integral to having high-performing professionals in the mediations field. There remains a gap in the literature relating to how self-care can be impacted by applying a spiritual approach.

### **Theoretical Framework**

John Fowler’s Faith Development theory provides a foundation for the necessity of self-care from a spiritual perspective. His theory is consistent with the significance of this study and is essential to understanding, analyzing and evaluating the data.

#### **John Fowler’s Faith Development Theory**

Faith development theory (FDT) was originally pioneered as a framework for understanding the process of how an individual conceptualizes a deity, and how that

influence impacts their core values, beliefs and meaning on personal life and relationships with others (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Fowler viewed faith as a pattern of developmental stages, paralleling the cognitive and moral development theories of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg. These proposed developmental theories influenced Fowler's interpretation of how faith is developed over one's lifespan (Andrade, 2014). Fowler's theory on faith centers on the idea that individual belief systems change and develop through recognizable and sequential stages (Rutledge, 1989).

These stages are distinct from one another and can be "recognized in the developing capacity for faith activity" (Rutledge, 1989, p. 18). Each stage relates to another hierarchically and sequentially; these stages develop in ascending order and are built upon the previous stage. Fowler argued that FDT provides a way of understanding faith that is separate from simply analyzing what the individual believes. The progression from one stage to another can be "protracted and painful" and may begin to emerge when a person becomes aware of the limitations of the present stage and pursues the progression to another stage (Rutledge, 1989, p. 18).

Although Fowler (1981) did not use the term spirituality in his seminal work, his distinction between faith and religion mirrors the contemporary discussions surrounding the differences between spirituality and religion (Parker, 2009, 2011) that have already been discussed in this chapter. For example, Tanyi (2002) described spirituality as a human's search for meaning in life. Kavar (2012) defined spirituality as the dimension of human experience that enables a person to create, discover meaning, purpose and value in life.

The foundation of FDT was based on 359 conducted interviews with individuals between the ages of 3.5 and 84 years old from 1972 to 1981 (Fowler, 1981). Fowler and his associates were interested in having in-depth conversations that centered around values, the stories that guided their lives, and how they sought meaning in life (Fowler, 1991). Each interview consisted of 40 questions related to the individual's relationships, life changing experiences, values, commitments, and religion (Lownsdale, 1997). From their analysis of these interviews, Fowler formed the "stage like positions in the process of growth and transformation of faith (Fowler 1991; Lownsdale, 1997). His study concluded with his initial assumption that "human beings are genetically potentiated with a readiness to develop in faith" (Fowler, 1981, p. 303).

One of the central components in FDT is Fowler's preferred use of the term faith, rather than religion. For Fowler, faith is a clear distinction from religion because he viewed faith as a more inclusive and universal term, arguing that one can have faith without religion (Fowler, 1991). Fowler viewed faith as a dynamic and generic human experience, describing it as a "human phenomenon", and contextualizing it as a consequence of "universal human burden of finding or making meaning" of life (Fowler, 1981 p. 33). According to Fowler, it is important to distinguish faith from the concepts of religion and belief. Fowler (1991) believed that "faith is deeper and involves unconscious motivations as well as those that we are conscious of in our beliefs and in our actions" (p. 31). Critics of Fowler's definition of faith described it as too broad; Fowler (1981) however argued that no other concept had interrelated dimensions that involved human knowing and valuing, when put together to understand how humans derived

meaning. For Fowler, all of the dimensions of faith inform our initiatives and responses, interpretations and guiding goals in life (Fowler, 1981).

Fowler highlighted a number of key points that are critical to understanding FDT. First, FDT is not intended to be used, or should be used to measure the effectiveness of one person's chosen faith, or how *good* an individual in the faith tradition may be (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Secondly, with each stage, there are a set of characteristics or distinguishable patterns of thought, realizations, and behaviors; qualitatively newer and more complex operations emerge from each subsequent stage (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Lastly, the transition from one stage to another is not certain or assumed.

Fowler's seven stages of faith development include undifferentiated-primal faith, intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individualistic-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith (Fowler, 1981).

**Pre-stage, undifferentiated primal faith.** Prior to seven stages of faith development is a stage of undifferentiated, primal faith. This takes place during infancy before a child develops language. This stage is characterized by an infant's realization that they are separate from their parents and will rely on them to meet their needs (Andrade, 2014). At this stage, infants develop either trust and loyalty, or fear and despair (Powell Stanard & Painter, 2004). Fowler (1991) argued while this stage does not determine the course of our later faith, it does lay the foundation on which faith is later built.

**Stage one: the intuitive-projective faith stage.** This stage spans through the ages of two through seven. This is the stage of first self-awareness (Fowler, 1981). At this stage the child begins to look for meaning, and trust is established intuitively and by

imitation of moods and actions of parents (Fowler, 1981, 1991). While this stage normally ends at the age of seven, it is at times found in adolescents. Representations of God begins to take conscious form at this stage and draws on the child's experience of their parents (Fowler, 1991). Transition to stage two begins with the development of concrete operational thinking of the individual (Powell Stanard & Painter, 2004)

**Stage two: the mythical-literal faith stage.** This stage is characterized by high levels of conformity to the beliefs and practices of an individual's community. At this stage, "faith is a joining faith" (Rutledge, 1989, p. 19). According to Rutledge (1989), "the person consciously joins the immediate social group, takes on its stories, symbols, myths, and doctrines; and interprets them literally" (p. 19). The person is not actively choosing their faith, but their faith is chosen by the community in which the person belongs to.

**Stage three, synthetic-conventional faith.** According to Andrade (2014), people in this stage have developed conceptions of faith from different influences; however, people do not engage in an active personal reflection of what these conceptions mean. This stage is a conformist stage where the individual lacks a sufficient grasp of their own identity to make sovereign, or self-directed judgements from an independent perspective (Rutledge, 1989). Individuals in this stage have chosen to accept what religious beliefs have been handed down to them with little question. Fowler (1981) explained that people can remain stagnant in this stage well into adulthood and may never transition into the next stage.

**Stage four, individuating-reflective faith stage.** This stage is a crucial continuation of the faith journey from stage three (Rutledge, 1989) The previous stage is

characterized by an individual who is unable to create their own identity and perspective on life (Gollnick, 2005). At this stage, the synthesis of stage three begins to break down, and a rift occurs between the individual self and the conventional expectations. Value systems come into question as the individual is exposed to different ways of life. A shift begins to emerge where the individual now has the responsibility to make meaning on their own rather than relying on or handing over the making of meaning to conventional authority (Andrade, 2014; Fowler, 1981; Rutledge, 1989). Fuller (2001) contended individuals who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious have entered this stage as they have not yet taken responsibility for their own beliefs.

**Stage five, conjunctive faith stage.** This stage is characterized by an individual's ability to be able to explore other belief systems or religion in a way that their own views may become reinforced or amended with past patterns. Elements of the self that had been ignored during stage four now become integrated with current beliefs and values. In this stage, the paradoxes of life are accepted. The concept of God is both personal and abstract; humanity is both good and evil; and humans are both determined and personally responsible for their choices (Lownsdale, 1997). According to Fuller (2001), this stage in Fowler's theory demonstrates a mature level of spirituality that requires taking responsibility for one's own beliefs, including the act of consciously rejecting beliefs that are not aligned with one's overall scientific and philosophical understanding of how they see the world. Also, while an individual in this stage is able to accept the paradoxes that exist in the world and realize the importance of justice, they still focus on the need to preserve their well-being (Fuller, 2001).

**Stage six, universalizing faith stage.** According to Fowler (1981), the sixth stage is a rare stage to reach. Out of the sample of 359 participants, only one was discovered in the sample. Rutledge (1989) describes an individual at stage six as someone who “who dwells in the world as a transforming presence” (p. 21). At this stage, the self is drawn out of its own limits into a groundedness and participation in one's understanding of God (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Individuals in this stage can be characterized as living and existing to overcome oppression, brutality, and divisions of all kind that exist in the world (Fuller, 2001). According to Fowler (1981) individuals in this stage commit themselves to transforming the present state of the world by sacrificing their lives for the greater good of humanity.

**Reviewing FDT as a framework.** Fowler (1981) maintained that while there are no upper age limits to his stages, there are minimum ages which the later stages are not normally found in. For example, it would be unlikely that an individual would be in the synthetic-conventional stage before their early teens (Fowler & Dell, 2006). One of the strengths of FDT is its inclusivity; individuals who do not identify with one religion or identify as spiritual but can derive meaning and purpose in their life through other sources, are still recognized in this theory (Andrade, 2014). Another strength of FDT posited by Andrade (2014) is the focus on the level of faith that an individual is operating from, rather than what it would mean to be practicing a respective religion at each stage.

Fowler's FDT offers a progressive model as to how faith and/or spirituality is developed, maintained, and altered (Lownsdale, 1997; Parker, 2011). For many people, spirituality is such a personal journey; FDT is a theory that can be used to explain and deconstruct how one makes meaning regarding their faith and helps to understand what

spirituality is and why it matters. This study did not seek to understand the concept of self-care; rather, it is sought the essence of engaging in spiritual self-care. To be able to comprehend what spiritual self-care is and its essence, FDT provides a framework for understanding how an individual may have arrived at a particular stage in their faith or spirituality.

Although Fowler outlined these seven stages of development, Fowler acknowledged that the initial primal faith stage (pre-stage), and the final stage (universalizing faith stage) are not likely to occur in one's lifetime (Fowler 1981, 2004; Parker, 2011). While the universalizing faith stage may be rare, it is still important to understand the characteristics of an individual at this stage. Fowler highlighted people such as a Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatmas Ghandi, and Mother Theresa as exemplary spiritual representations of individuals at this stage.

The later stages of FDT illustrate a developing spiritual person. Fowler illustrated a transition from a more conventional life to one that becomes individually guided away from societal norms. Gottlieb (2013) postulated that one of the hallmarks of spirituality is that it is detached from the constraints of organized religion, orthodox creeds, and defined communities. This is illustrated in the individuating-reflective faith stage, where the individual would begin to reject or question the faith that has been passed on to them, and then commence with to make a belief structure for themselves Fuller (2001) posited that people who defined themselves as more spiritual than religious, were operating from the fourth, or individuating-reflective, stage. Those operating in stage five, or the conjunctive faith stage, focused on preserving their own well-being while understanding and accepting the paradoxes that exist in the world. Gottlieb (2013) further affirmed that

the central values of spirituality competes against the status-quo of conformity within one's own society. The discipline of keeping spiritual virtues such as mindfulness, acceptance, gratitude, and love is a distinct way of life that stands out against material virtues, such as achieving career success, accumulating wealth, or other superficial wants (Gottlieb, 2013).

According to Pargament (2013), spirituality does not refer to a static set of beliefs or practices around a concept of the sacred. Rather, it is the process of searching for the sacred that can shift and change over one's lifespan (Pargament, 2013). FDT assists in understanding this process of searching for the sacred. Pargament (2013) argued the spiritual search involves the process of discovery of the sacred, efforts to preserve a relationship with what is perceived as sacred, and when needed, transform this relationship. FDT offers a lens for understanding the patterns and dynamics of faith knowing and valuing (Fowler, 1991). In FDT, by being able to understand the underlying structure of faith, the individual can then live and experience it. The theory provides a framework to identify where individuals are in terms of their spiritual development (Andrade, 2014; Lownsdale, 1997). The unique characteristics of each stage illustrates the progression of spiritual path and what each stage may mean for an individual. Fowler's FDT can be used to comprehend the maturation of one's spiritual journey. By using the framework of FDT to explore the phenomenon of spiritual self-care for conflict practitioners, there can be a critical component of analyzing and interpreting data, and subsequently addressing the impact of spiritual self-care for this population. FDT helps explain why spirituality can so strongly affect an individual; faith, or spirituality, can be a major influence on how one creates, understands, and applies

meaning in their life. Furthermore, according to Carroll (2001), the process of spiritual growth is becoming connected with self and others. The very act of understanding the importance of self-care is innately a spiritual

### **Spiritual Identity Development Model**

Poll and Smith (2003) suggested a theistic perspective of a spiritually developed identity model. In their model of spiritual identity, the authors (2003) posited that, individuals develop a sense of spiritual self in relation to God by interacting with God and by recognizing divine within themselves and others.

Poll and Smith's (2003) model is constructed of four phases. The first phase is the *Pre-awareness* stage. In this stage, individuals do not knowingly regard themselves in spiritual terms. Either the individual has not had spiritual experiences or past spiritual experiences has been abated or disregarded. The second phase is *Awakening* stage. This stage begins the awareness of the self in relation to God or the Divine. This awareness can be brought on by a major life crisis, a spiritual conflict, or a series of several events that prompt awareness. Individuals at this stage begin to recognize events or experiences in spiritual terms.

The third phase entails *Recognition*. At this stage, there is a remembrance of other spiritual experiences, such that the initial awareness obtained in the Awakening phase that is increasingly grouped to a consciousness of spiritual experiences in other situations and connections. Individuals at this stage begin to develop a consistent spiritual identity by having further spiritual experiences and by reflecting upon similar experiences in the past (Poll & Smith, 2003). At this point, spiritual themes begin to develop for the individual.

The fourth and final phase is the *Integration* of spiritual experiences with self-concept. The spiritual experiences from the previous stages become internalized, coinciding with the “development of spiritual relationships, person to person and person to God” (Poll & Smith, 2003, p.134). Individuals at this stage identify their own spiritual identity, and they perceive and interact with the world accordingly (Poll & Smith, 2003). Individuals at this point begin to exist, relating to others in spiritual terms so much that they come to understand themselves as spiritual beings through consistent interactions.

Themes of spirituality are interlaced throughout many facets of their life because they understand spiritual experiences across various settings (Poll & Smith, 2003). The authors (2003) noted individuals at this stage will “spontaneously take in and seek out spiritual experiences because doing so has become for them a way of life” (p. 134). The developmental sequence from pre-awareness to integration will, therefore, progress in accordance with an individual’s beliefs about God or their God image. Individuals will strive to develop a spiritual identity throughout the lifespan that is in accordance to their own spiritual beliefs (Poll & Smith, 2003). Compared to Fowler’s FDT, Poll and Smith (2003) argued individuals develop a sense of their spiritual self by concurrently relating to God and connected to the process of relating to others. While FDT is a depiction of an individual progression of faith, Poll and Smith (2003) determined individuals need to connect to other individuals and to the Divine, in order to transcend the self.

### **Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Motivation**

According to Acton and Malathum (2000), one variable that could influence health-related decisions is the status of basic needs as described by Abraham Maslow. According to Maslow’s theory of human motivation, the actions one takes are largely

motivated by the needs of the individual. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is one of the most popular and often cited theories of human motivation (Brown & Cullen, 2006). Abraham Maslow's theory of human motivation is applicable to understanding one's desire to focus on promoting one's well-being through spiritual self-care practices. According to Maslow's theory of human motivation, the actions or behaviors individuals take are fundamentally motivated by their needs (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Maslow originally identified five tiers of human needs arranged in hierarchy: physiology, safety/security, love/belonging, esteem/self-esteem, and self-actualization (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Once an individual has satisfied one tier of needs, they can begin to take actions that fulfill the next stage of human needs. Once physiological needs like food, shelter, and clothing are satisfied, the need for individual's safety, to feel protected and secure then become priority. Next, an individual has a need to feel a sense of connection to others (Gambrel & Cianci, 2003). Once an individual has connected to others, they desire a more personal longing for increased self-esteem and acknowledgement from others (Gambrel & Cianci, 2003). Upon satisfying the need for self-esteem and recognition from others, self-actualization becomes the prevailing need. This stage represents the need of an individual to reach their highest potential.

Maslow further developed his theory and expanded his self-actualization category, believing that there was a further step in human motivation that went beyond self-actualization. He categorized this stage into four domains; cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and self-transcendence (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). These needs have been referred to as *being-cognition*, *being needs*, or simply *B-needs* (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). The needs he identified in his original theory became *deficient*

*needs* or *D-needs*. Maslow asserted that mentally healthy individuals follow a path of growth motivation that allows them to move up this hierarchy from D-needs to B-needs (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). As Maslow later reframed his work on his self-actualization motivational level, he included the level of self-transcendence to his hierarchical model. According to Maslow, as cited in Koltko-Rivera (2006), when an individual is operating from being-cognition they have gone beyond self-actualization and are operating from a higher state of motivation. This higher state of motivation is characterized by an individual's motivational state to seek something beyond personal benefit such as developing a union with a power beyond thyself, and service to others as an expression of identity beyond the egoic mind (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

To further supplement this construct or self-transcendence as a human need, Gil (2004) identified self-actualization and spirituality as an individual's basic and biological needs for survival and development. Gil also identified a hierarchical set of motivational human needs that included the physiological need for meaningful human relationships; the need for engagement in productive and meaningful work; the need for a sense of security based on fulfilling work and relationships; self-actualization and spiritual needs (Dover, 2013; Gil, 2004). Similar to Maslow, Gil viewed self-actualization as becoming what one is "inherently capable of becoming" (p. 33) and described spiritual needs as discovering meaning in one's existence in an unknowable cosmos.

According to Acton and Malthum (2000), the responsibility of an individual's health is embedded in self-care. The authors contend that individuals are responsible for their well-being and health is largely self-determined through self-care actions. For individuals to engage in health-promoting behavior, they must identify the being-needs

benefit for self-care. Maslow's framework can be applied when assessing a practitioner's need or desire for personal fulfillment and potential when individuals are at a motivational level. The incorporation of spirituality into a self-care practice signifies a desire to gain something deeply meaningful from a spiritual experience.

### **Self-determination Theory**

Motivation to engage in self-care practice plays a major role in the continuation of self-care. Self-determination theory (SDT) offers a different perspective on human motivation. Particularly, SDT looks at those intrinsic motivators that influences an individual from flourishing or hindering in their overall wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2014, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Essentially, SDT is a theory describing human motivation that incorporates development, basic psychological needs to describe growth and optimal well-being (Hadden et al., 2015). Unlike need-based theories that contend that motivation is determined by an individual's personality or developmental processes, SDT considers motivation as dependent on context and highlights the environment's role in motivational change (Katz, Madjar & Harari, 2015). According to SDT, there are three basic human psychological needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence. When these needs are satisfied, an individual's autonomous motivation drives their behavior (Katz et al., 2015). When we view environment in a profession- or work-related context, this theory is applicable in understanding how a conflict practitioner may be motivated to engage in self-care practice due to the nature of the environment in which they work.

Katz et al. (2015) theorized that when individuals engage in practices for autonomous reasons—because of its value or importance—they become more meaningfully engaged, leading to better results and a higher sense of wellbeing. SDT is

beneficial due to the paradigms of individual autonomy, and the competence to perform self-care behaviors. SDT provides an additional lens to understanding the motivation to engage in self-care practice, and spirituality as a motivator for self-care.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature related to mediation, self-care, and spirituality. This chapter examined the importance and need for conflict professionals to engage in self-care by highlighting the existent research from the helping professions. Due to the existing overlap between the role of a mediators and other helping professions in terms of duties and responsibilities, some mediators still have roles in other helping fields while having concurrent mediation training and certification. Because there is no major governing body over all mediators, there has been little information given to this field about importance of self-care in preventing and reducing burnout, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue or other work-related stress disorders.

The literature review drew upon the research from the helping professions field regarding work-related stress disorders and the implications for conflict professionals. The review of literature addressed not only the importance of self-care, but also the need for more research conducted on how spirituality can be applied and used as an effective self-care strategy. The lack of research on spiritual self-care may result from the loose definition of spirituality.

According to the literature, helping professionals can use spiritual self-care practices as a coping mechanism, which can be used to combat work-related stress disorders. The chapter also presented the most commonly referenced spiritual self-care practices such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness. The current research uses FDT as a

framework to understand the development of spirituality at every stage of an individual's maturation with their faith. and also presented an understanding of how an individual creates, understands, and applies meaning in their life. After reviewing the literature, there is an evident gap relating to how mediators can apply spirituality into their self-care regimen.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

This study utilized a qualitative research method in order to understand how mediators with a sustained value of spirituality practice self-care. According to Moberg (2010), spiritual phenomena have a richness that can be difficult to capture by statistically manipulating experiences; therefore, qualitative methods are more suitable for studying them. Qualitative methods can lead to improved understanding of relationships between the subjects' interpretation of their own and others' spirituality, its connections with their own sense of meaning in life and its impact upon their perceived well-being (Moberg, 2010). Specifically, this study followed Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology method to extract a deep understanding of the lived experience of mediators who integrate spirituality into their self-care practices. This methodology contributed to a clearer concept of self-care in the context of spiritual mediators. Through in-depth interviews, mediators who identified as spiritual and incorporated spirituality into their wellness and self-care practices to determine how they integrate spirituality into their self-care practices. This chapter details the research method and design, participant selection, the method of data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations for the study.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experience of mediators who identify as spiritual and how is it that they incorporate their spirituality into self-care practices. This study focused on the exploration of the lived experience of the participants while gaining qualitative knowledge relating to mediators and spirituality. Creswell

(2013) discerned that phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a phenomenon, and knowing some of the common experiences can be valuable for other individuals or groups. The outcome of this study contributed to filling a gap in existing literature regarding mediators and their relational use of spirituality and self-care.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do mediators with a sustained value for spirituality practice self-care?
2. What is the essence of spiritual self-care among mediators who identify as spiritual?

### **Research Design**

Phenomenology is a methodology that has a strong philosophical component to it and draws heavily from the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology from a philosophical perspective is rooted in the idea that knowledge can only be gained through the consciousness of the person experiencing the phenomenon (Cooper, 2014). According to Cooper (2014), phenomenology is used to explore the found meaning of a person experiencing a phenomenon. In phenomenological research, evidence emerges from first-person accounts of their life experience. The objective of phenomenological research is to “obtain detailed descriptions of the lived experience of the phenomena in order to identify the essence of the experience” (Cooper, 2014 p. 70). There are various approaches and models of phenomenological research, such as existential phenomenology, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and transcendental phenomenology.

Existential phenomenology combines the philosophical perspective of existentialism and the methodology of phenomenology (Cooper, 2014). This phenomenological research approach focuses on the everyday experience of the phenomena while emphasizing the importance of bracketing throughout the research process instead of an isolated step (Cooper, 2014). Existential phenomenology seeks to describe the experience as it is lived. Thompson, Locander and Pollio (1989) noted that an existential phenomenologist “does not seek to study individuals separate from the environments in which they live, or the interaction of the two; rather, the study is of the totality of human being in the world” (p. 135).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) emphasizes on the interpretative nature of the research process (Cooper, 2014). According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), when people are engaged with an experience of a major event in their lives, they begin to reflect on the impact of what is happening. IPA research aims to explore those reflections. Using an IPA approach allows for a focus on detailed examination of a particular experience and how it affects an individual, and how the individual conceptualizes the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Due to the interpretative nature of IPA, the researcher must engage in a double hermeneutic role to determine how the participant contextualizes what is happening to them (Cooper, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Through thorough analysis, a researcher using the IPA approach can find new or different interpretations that a participant may not have achieved on their own.

Transcendental phenomenology is based on the principle writings by Edmund Husserl translated into a qualitative methodology by Moustakas (1994). Transcendental phenomenology is grounded in the idea that all preconceived ideas are set aside to be able

to see the phenomena through a set of new lenses, thus allowing the true meaning of the phenomena to organically emerge with a within their own identity (Sheehan, 2014; Moustakas, 1994).

In this study, Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological method provided a lens for describing the lived experience of spirituality in self-care practices of mediators. Transcendental phenomenology was used to discover the essence of spiritual mediator's experience of applying spirituality in their wellness and self-care practices. Transcendental phenomenology brought added dimensions to the study of human experiences through qualitative research (Sheehan, 2014). Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology focuses less on the researcher's interpretation of the phenomena, and more on the participant's descriptions of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Transcendental phenomenology was the most applicable qualitative approach for this study because of the focus on capturing the essence of the mediator's experience with spirituality in their self-care. Transcendental phenomenology aims at capturing statements that embody the essence of participant's experience. These statements contributed to the existing body of knowledge that existed in this context.

### **Target Population and Participant Selection**

The target population for this study were mediators or other conflict professionals that self-identified as spiritual. In order for participants to be eligible for this study, they must have self-identified as spiritual and been employed as a conflict professional. These criteria were selected in order to provide the study with the richest information concerning mediators and their use of their spirituality in their self-care practices. The participant sample in this transcendental phenomenology study consisted of 11

participants, nine women, and two men. The sample was representative of 10 non-Hispanic Caucasian and one Hispanic participant.

**Sampling.** There are several qualitative sampling strategies (Creswell, 2013), but for the purposes of this study, a purposeful sampling technique was utilized because it worked well with phenomenological research. According to Creswell (2013), purposeful sample includes selecting individuals and sites of study because they purposefully inform the research problem and central phenomenon of the study. Due to the nature of this type of phenomenological study, criterion sampling was utilized. The study population consisted 11 participants. According to Creswell (2013) phenomenological studies should have a sample size of between 5 and 25 participants.

**Participants.** After obtaining approval from Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited from members of the Association of Conflict Resolution (ACR) via flyers and email (Appendix A). The researcher also recruited other participants using snowball-sampling technique. Snowball sampling identifies potential participants from participants who know people who know what cases are information-rich (Creswell, 2013).

In order to participate in the study, participants self-reported that they identify themselves as spiritual and were willing to share their experiences of the common phenomena. Creswell (2013) suggested that all participants must have experienced the phenomenon being studied and can articulate their experiences which contributes to the richness of the data.

## **Data Collection**

The researcher was the primary data-recording instrument. Data were collected from participants using a semi-structured in-depth interview format. Semi-structured interviews are more conversational in nature and allowed the interviewer to have some flexibility in modifying the questions based upon the participant's responses (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). The interview guide was used during moments in the interview where the flow of the conversation did not produce thorough descriptions of the lived experience. The interviews were conducted via telephone and were recorded using a digital recorder. During the interview, the speakerphone feature was utilized to allow the interview to be recorded. The interviews were conversationally styled and the interview questions were open-ended in structure. The interview questionnaire was a guide that consisted of a set of 10 questions that were used to investigate the phenomenon. As held by Moustakas (1994), the interview guide was used to elicit certain responses when the co-researcher (participant) has not detailed the qualitative experience of the phenomena being explored.

To ensure and protect the confidentiality of participants during interview process, participants conducted their interviews in a private room. To secure privacy on the researcher's end, the researcher conducted the interview in a private room where the cell phone speaker feature was utilized to be able to record the interview. The interviews were digitally tape recorded, and then transcribed by the researcher. During the transcription process, the researcher played back the audio of the interviews in a private room or utilized headphones to continue to ensure confidentiality of participants. Both the transcripts and the audio recording of each interview were saved and backed up in: 1) a

secured password protected file and 2) a password protected and secured Dropbox online file storage. Dropbox is web-based data storage site that secures its data using protective encryption.

### **Validity**

To ensure validity of the data, participants of the study were sent copies of their transcripts to review that the researcher was able to accurately capture their words. Participants were given a generous amount of time to review and provide feedback to the researcher. Once the researcher received confirmation from all participants, the researcher began the data analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected, the researcher transcribed each individual interview from the study. The process of personally transcribing each participant interview allowed the researcher to be completely immersed within the data and become more familiar with the data. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. After the transcription of each participant interview, the researcher began to analyze the data using Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. According to Moustakas (1994), epoché, transcendental phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation are core processes that facilitate the researcher's origin of knowledge.

**Epoché and bracketing.** To begin, the first step in the phenomenology methodology is epoché. Epoché is the process of the researcher setting aside their own preconceptions, opinions and judgements in order to view the phenomena with a fresh set of eyes. Moustakas asserted that, "epoché requires a new way of looking at things, a way that requires that we learn to see what stands before our eyes" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).

It was critical for the researcher to bracket her own biases regarding the phenomena from the beginning. The researcher engaged in this initial step of the process in two ways; 1) by answering the guided interview questions and 2) self-reflective journal entry. The researcher answered the guided interview questions designed for the participants and self-reflected on the phenomena in her personal journal. Answering the participant interview questions and writing in the personal journal ensured that the researcher reflected on her own private feelings to avoid any prejudgments that could have interfered in the analysis process. Below is an excerpt from the researcher's personal journal:

My own spiritual practices have played a huge role in my life. My spiritual practices (such as meditation, yoga, being in nature and cultivating moment of self-reflection) have aided in me being mindful in all that I do. My mindfulness practices have provided me with great moments of clarity, guidance, and perseverance in my life. There are some days that are greater than other, but my own spiritual practices have been a gift that has provided me with greater awareness, the ability to stop and reflect in moments of sadness or despair.

The exercise of epoché or bracketing, for the derivation of new knowledge can be difficult, as the researcher must be “transparent to [them]selves” while in the process of being transparent in the viewing of things (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86). This was a challenging undertaking, as it required the researcher to bracket the existence of her pre-judgements and personal bias to allow the emergence of a more purified essence of the experience.

**Phenomenological reduction.** The next stage in the data analysis is known as phenomenological reduction. Utilizing the Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kaam

method of analysis of phenomenological data, the researcher read each individual transcript and identified the statements that elicited participants experience of the phenomena through a process called horizontalization. Horizontalization is the process of highlighting specific statements, sentences, or quotes that provide a clear understanding of how participants experience the phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

“So, for me, spirituality is a way to ground my cognitive mind.”

“I do it [meditation] just before mediation so that I can be calm and focused on the people that I’m dealing with and not take anything else I been doing, into the mediation.”

Once the researcher had a list of the relevant statements, the next step was to reduce the data by eliminating any irrelevant or repetitive statements. The researcher paid close attention to the data and identified the relevant statements that were repetitive or vague. After the repetitive or overlapping statements were eliminated, what remained were the horizons, the textual meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomena being studied (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then reviewed the invariant constituents and began to cluster the related constituents of the experience into themes. These clustered constituents became the core themes of the experience for the participant.

Using the invariant constituents and themes, the researcher constructed a textural description of the experience for each participant. The textural description describes the integration of the invariant constituents along with the themes to gain an understanding of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Once the researcher constructed individual textural descriptions for each participant, the researcher then constructed a composite textural description which is the integration of all individual textural descriptions.

**Imaginative variation.** Following phenomenological reduction, the next step in the process is imaginative variation. This method involves the researcher seeking “possible meanings through the use of imagination, varying frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, approaching the phenomena from divergent perspectives, positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The goal of this process was for the researcher to develop structural descriptions of the experience, or “how” the experience of the phenomena came to be what it is (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) outlined the four-step process of imaginative variation. These steps include, systematic varying of possible structural meanings underlying the textural meaning; recognizing the underlying themes that relate to the phenomena; considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts in reference to the phenomena; and searching for illustrations that vividly depict the invariant structural themes that facilitate the development of the structural descriptions of the phenomena. An excerpt of this process is below:

Well I work in the field of family law, and if you don't pay attention to your reactions, if a practitioner doesn't pay attention to their reaction to the party, or another professional, you can get sucked down into the mud with what else is going on around you, and you lose perspective, you're not effective, you're not able to represent your client or help people rise above the conflict

Following these steps, the researcher was able to derive a structural theme from the textural descriptions from the phenomenological reduction stage. Once the structural themes were identified; the researcher was able to develop composite structural description of all participants.

The transcendental phenomenological method concludes with the synthesis, or integration, of both the textural and structural depictions. Combined, these descriptions provided the essence of the lived experience of the phenomena. During this step in the methodology, the researcher reread and studied the textural and structural descriptions of each individual participant and reviewed them as a whole to develop the essence of spiritual self-care in conflict professionals.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher conveyed to participants that the study was voluntary, and they were able to withdraw at any time. Prior to interviewing participants, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and the intended use of its data. Additionally, prior to interviewing participants, the researcher collected the completed required consent forms (Appendix B). The researcher also conveyed to the participants that their anonymity would be protected at all times by using aliases. All participants were asked the same set of questions related to the study (Appendix C). To ensure further confidentiality, physical data were stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home and electronic data were stored in a password-protected computer and file.

### **Summary**

This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative research method that was employed in this research study. To capture the essence of the lived experiences of mediators who incorporate spirituality into their self-care regime, this study will apply Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological method. Phenomenology is the philosophy of examining one's lived experience of an event, or an aspect of their life. Both the

philosophical approach and the research methodology are geared towards gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday life (Grace, Higgs, & Ajjawi, 2009).

## Chapter 4: Findings

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact that spirituality had on self-care through the lived experiences of mediators who identify as spiritual, and how they integrated their spirituality into their self-care practices. This chapter presents a description of the study's results. Participants described how they incorporated spirituality into their self-care practices; this chapter outlines the findings based on analysis and interpretation of the data. Exemplar statements from participant interviews were included to provide a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and substantiate the themes that emerged from the data.

### **Description of Participants**

The sample of participants in this study included a range of professionals in the conflict resolution field. The professional roles of the sample included mediators, ombudsmen, coaches, and facilitators with an average of at least 18 years of experience in the field. The age range of participants included one participant between 31-40, two participants between the ages of 41-50, and eight participants identifying over the age of 50. All 11 of the participants were employed as either a mediator, conflict coach, or other setting with the conflict resolution field. Nine of the participants were females and two participants were male. Of the 11 participants, one participant identified as Hispanic, and the remaining 10 identified as White. Participants in this study self-identified as spiritual. Each participant viewed spirituality as an integral part of his or her self-care regimen.

Their individual spirituality was interpreted as being altogether separate from a traditional religion, or still maintaining a religious practice as part of their spirituality. For

the purposes of this study, the terms mediator and conflict professionals will be used interchangeably. The term conflict professionals will refer to those individuals that engage in conflict resolution or peace work. These include professions, but not limited to, mediators, negotiators, ombudsman, facilitators, or conflict coaches. These professionals use a specific set of skills to assist individuals or groups to positively transform and resolve disputes and conflicts (Raines, 2018).

### **Composite Structural Description of Data**

In order to arrive at the essence of spiritual self-care among mediators, the researcher developed a composite structural description of the analysis. This description is consistent with transcendental phenomenology and aided in the complete understanding of the essence of the phenomenon. The researcher obtained the data through individual interviews with 11 participants. All 11 participants of the study identified spirituality as being an essential component to their overall wellbeing. Participants have taken a holistic approach to their self-care that is integral in maintaining a healthy personal and professional life. Additionally, participants acknowledged that there is an inherent toll that mediation, or conflict resolution work can take on the professional.

Common to all participants was a shared value of spiritual intelligence that seems to be embodied in how they prepare to work with clients in conflict. Participants displayed a capacity for deep understanding and reflection of their role as a third-party intermediary and exhibited high emotional and spiritual intelligence. Participants appear to consciously connect their spiritual life to their personal and professional lives. Their spiritual practices assist in developing this deeper consciousness.

For these participants, spirituality is an ongoing practice. The mediators interviewed in this research have added in a spiritual aspect that facilitates their overall resiliency as conflict professionals. Each of the participants acknowledged the impact of the field on their emotional well-being if preventative measures are not taken at the appropriate time. For the participants of this study, the preparation included self-care with a focus on spirituality. Participants of the study did not assess spiritual practices as a feature of their self-care--spirituality for them is self-care. Spirituality guides and informs their life from almost every aspect. From the composite structural descriptions, the researcher was able to come up with the themes from the study discussed in the next section.

### **Research Findings**

This section presents the analysis of the data that was collected from the participant interviews. Textural and structural descriptions from the interviews were organized into themes. In essence, three collective themes were identified that represent the experience of spiritual self-care amongst mediators who identify as spiritual. The themes that the researcher identified were: (a) spiritual practices as tools for preparation and protection, (b) spiritual practices provide feelings of connectedness, and (c) integration and embodied practice.

#### **Spiritual Practices as Tools for Preparation and Protection**

Experiencing the practice of self-care with the integration of spirituality provided a heightened level of self-awareness for many of the participants. The concept of a sustained value for spirituality and its incorporation into a self-care practice is to acknowledge it as an essential aspect to fostering a healthier environment for mediators,

those around them and their clients. Participants' use of spiritual self-care practices deepened their preparation for mediation work. The spiritual self-care practices were also recognized as a way to avoid taking the emotional burdens their clients brought into the mediation process. Participants used their spiritual practices as a tool of emptying the self to be present and prepared for service. Participants described these spiritual practices as specific and ritualized techniques used in preparation for working with others and connecting and engaging with their clients. Understanding this level of involvement with clients often requires another set of skills; participants conveyed that deeper connections with clients could lead to work-related stress disorders such as countertransference or burnout. Participants believed they needed to cultivate practices that prevent and protect from vicarious trauma, or countertransference. The researcher has divided this theme into two sub-themes, which are: spiritual practices as a tool for preparation and spiritual practices as a tool for protection against work-related stress disorders.

**Spiritual practice as a tool for preparation for working with others.** By preparing with spiritual practices, participants were able to purposefully engage with clients. One of the participants, Kali, explained that her spiritual practices helped to “just kind of clear [her mind] mentally, emotionally, spiritually... preparation for the next thing and preparation for every moment.” This preparation helped participants to be grounded, present, and fully attentive to their clients or mediation sessions.

Many of the participants highlighted the beneficial aspect of meditation before mediation preparation. For participants, meditation ranged from simply setting aside alone time to quiet the mind, or meditation was a time to pray to their deity of choice. Participants described meditation as one of their spiritual self-care practices that prepared

them to engage in conflict resolution work. The meditative time that participants used prior to mediations was also a time for them to separate any personal emotions as they engaged in becoming a neutral mediator.

The use of a regular meditative practice provided the participants with a sense of calm, stillness, and a means to help center them in their preparation to work with clients. For example, Tara described her preparation for mediation as a ritual that begins with isolation from her staff, 15-30 minutes prior to mediating. Tara described this seclusion as:

A way for me to shut out the world and focus on, not just facts of the case, but just close my eyes and think about these people and ask for the clarity that I need to enter their sacred space, to stop thinking about what's going on in my life, to think about this family and putting the emphasis on them.

The time prior to mediation also illustrates how Tara used this time of preparation to separate her personal life from her professional life. This way a key component for her ability enter a "sacred space" with her clients.

Another example of this sub theme of preparation via meditation is illustrated by participant Isis. Isis also prepared for mediation by meditating. Similarly to Tara, Isis acknowledged that her meditations prior to her mediation sessions provided her with feelings of "calm and focus." She described that her purpose for meditation as a method to "not take anything else I've been doing into the mediation." Isis' meditation practice was in preparation to enter into a space of focus prior to mediating with clients.

Participants also discussed the significance of a daily meditation practice that begins prior to starting their workday. Meditation was how practitioners developed the

practice of cultivating attention. This morning meditative practice helped to set the tone of the day by bringing in their spiritual virtues thus ushering in a dimension for participants to work from a centered and focused perspective. To illustrate, Sedna discussed the benefit of a daily morning meditation practice. Sedna recounted,

When I do set aside some time each morning for meditation, it does help center me, and it centers me when I'm in the mix of other people's stuff. It allows me to not react and respond more appropriately.

Due to her meditative ritual, Sedna could develop the practice of focusing her attention; she could then be more impartial as a mediator and focus her attention on her needs of her clients and not carry over any negative thoughts, or ill judgements. The attention she has developed through her meditative practice helps to enrich her work with her clients and plays an immense role in the effectiveness of her clients.

Moses described his spiritual practices as being an integral part of his work as a mediator. His morning ritual begins with meditating, "for an hour every day, every morning" after he wakes up. Moses will also meditate before going into a mediation session. He opined that, "I'll just stop sometimes in my car, sometimes outside and I'll just go inwards into myself and make sure that I'm in touch with myself. Then I'm able to be simultaneously honest and empathetic." He disclosed that, "I don't do this because it feels good and I enjoy it, I do it because it helps me do my work." Moses did not complete these practices for the purposes of pleasure, yet he was able to see the value in having this practice be an everyday ritual. The value that Moses gained from his meditation practice transferred into his work where he was able to be more attuned to himself which in turns allowed him to be a completely present during mediations.

Ganesha described her self-care practices as a way to “stay emotionally steady, present, and patient with people when I am being a mediator.” Her preparation “might take the form of a little quick prayer or it might take the form of remembering certain statements that almost become mantras to help me.” She described these practices as,

A way to prepare for mediation and I just make sure that my heart is in the right place and that does not just happen automatically, so I do some self-care to try to make sure that I am healthy emotionally, spiritually, and physically so that I can be present when moments happen.

Ganesha’s self-care practices are her tools in her self-care arsenal that she relied on to prepare for engagement in conflict work. Her preparation for mediation work is to ensure that she performs from a good space so that she can be fully present emotionally, physically and spiritually.

For these participants, the practice of meditation became a daily ritual, particularly when they were about to engage in conflict work. This spiritual or meditative practice is a way for the participants to go within themselves, center themselves and perform from a space where they feel relaxed and spiritually equipped to do their work. Their meditation practice became a ritualized preparation for their mediation work. Further, these ritualistic practices are not only performed prior to a mediation session, but they are also an ongoing practice that occurs before and after mediation sessions with their clients.

**Spiritual practice as a tool for protection against work-related stress disorders.** Participants identified that their spirituality and spiritual practices aided them with detaching from their client’s emotional issues and acted as a buffer from vicarious

trauma, and other work-related stress disorders. Participants recognized that their self-care practices were an asset to their overall sustainability in the field of conflict resolution and helped to foster a healthier environment and overall well-being. Spiritual practices included “walking meditations” “exercise” “dancing” “being in nature”, “spiritual readings”, “Shamanic journeying”, and practicing mindfulness. Other participants mentioned that their spiritual self-care practices “play[ed] a role” in working with people in conflict.

For many of the participants, the nature of conflict resolution work was an acknowledgement and an awareness of the potential negative impact that the work could have on the practitioner. For Sedna, she believed that if she did not have an element of self-care in her life, “going into a room where people might be behaving poorly or aggressively or competitively, it will move you to take action.” For Isis, it was important for her to be aware of “when you’re starting to get hooked, when you’re not being able to be objective and observant and you’re starting to get emotional reactions to somebody else’s issues.” Isis expressed that her spiritual self-care practices protect her, “because if you allow yourself to get caught up in their emotions, in their energies, in their distress, then you are not helpful to anyone...” Further, Isis explained that as conflict professionals,

Burnout in this field [can happen] pretty quickly if you’re not mindful of what your purpose is and how you’re reacting to what’s going on in the case. Because if you get to be part of the problem, you’re not doing your job and you’re not following your ethics and you get worn-out.

As Isis gradually saw the potential negative impact that the field of law and mediation can have on the practitioner, it was important for her to establish boundaries. Isis spiritual self-care practices help to build these boundaries as these practices helped her to remain objective and served as a reminder to be mindful of her role and abilities and to keep a healthy distance from the issues of her clients.

When discussing why their spiritual practices helped in maintaining “healthy boundaries” between clients and themselves, participants explained that there needed to be a level of “detachment” that discouraged negative implications that can come with unhealthy attachments. Kali’s statement below illustrated this sentiment:

Yes, I feel like it helps me to maintain, healthy boundaries, kind of a healthy detach, but not like detach as in not caring. Detach in terms of not taking on what isn’t mine. That’s an ongoing practice of course. I feel like that really helps, both in throughout the day, in terms of what I’m taking on and what I’m not.

Kali described the crux of her spiritual practices as a way of protecting herself from the emotions or behaviors of her clients in order to more effectively serve them. These spiritual practices of protection helped to clear her emotions from her clients and vice versa as she maintained these self-appointed boundaries.

Tara took a strong stance on the importance of conflict practitioners establishing a self-care routine. Tara’s work with high conflict cases often involved heavy and sensitive topics such as physical violence. When contemplating the impact that conflict resolution work can have on the practitioner, Tara expressed that working in the field as a conflict practitioner is similar to other service-oriented or helping occupations in the terms of the negative emotional effects. Tara described herself as being very family oriented and

stated the importance of being connected to her children and grandchildren, yet she warned that, “So personally, this field can wear you down to where you don’t have the energy to be available for your family.” Tara further advised,

I think the conflict resolution field, if you don’t have an element of self-care...will damage you. Just like being a cop, or being a lawyer, where people don’t like you... so I think the conflict resolution field is similar to that. So professionally, it will wear you down if you don’t have a self-care practice and I was noticing that pretty early on in my conflict resolution career.

For Tara, a “huge reason to engage in spiritual self-care is because “it protect[s] you” from work related stress disorders. Being a mediator that deals with high conflict cases, Tara was able to see the potential damaging effects of conflict resolution work on the practitioner from an onset of her career. To remain as an active member in her family's life, Tara had to maintain a practice that cultivated care for herself.

Guinevere became aware of the implication on the practitioner of working with people in turmoil. She too noted her susceptibility to work-related stress disorders from an early point in not only her career but her life. Before implementing a self-care regimen, she experienced chronic stress that would lead to muscular issues that took a physical toll on her body. Guinevere stated that “I knew that I had to develop routines to take care of myself because if I wanted to continue in [this] type of career, I knew that I had to take care for myself.” Due to this awareness, she worked on building self-care habits that protected her from burnout by enrolling in “different trainings and programs” until she “found what worked for her in order to take care of [her]self.

Similarly, when reflecting on the importance of a self-care practice, Kumara shared that she could not perform this job without self-care practices. Kumara commented,

[There are] so much feelings, emotional energy that's not my baggage, that's brought to me. If I wouldn't absolutely take care of myself, go to therapy, and recalibrate... I could not do it the way that I do it.

Realizing the emotional drainage that comes with conflict work, Kumara's self-care practices contributed to her resiliency in being a conflict practitioner.

Participants expressed that if the practitioner does not develop self-care practices to provide a layer of protection from experiencing work-related stress disorders, the practitioner could become susceptible to these disorders and be detrimental to their client if they are not performing at their best. For Isis, this became evident during her experience as an attorney. Isis revealed,

I think that it was a gradual thing as I saw what the practice of law was like, and what a toll it could take. I knew that I had to remember my role, stay within that role, and not take on my client's problems. If a practitioner does not pay attention to their reaction to the party, or another professional, and you can get sucked down into the mud with what else is going on around you, and you lose perspective, you're not effective, you're not able to represent your client or help people rise above the conflict.

While Isis maintain the value for having a spiritual self-care practice, she was also able to preview the implication that it may have on not only the practitioner to perform at his or her best, but also be a disservice to the client.

In a spiritual context, participants relied on their spiritual practices to not only prepare to work with their clients, but also serve as a “protective bubble” against work-related stress disorders such as vicarious trauma. Devi stated,

Going internal into that protective bubble so that all that craziness can happen out on the periphery, so that inside I can still be calm and not caught up in it... and be able to move, and act, and ask questions, and tap into love and wisdom from that space.

To perform from that space of love and wisdom for Devi meant she could tap into a source where she is not affected by the energy that other people brings with them into a mediation session. Rather she could work from a space that was spiritually led.

Participants spoke candidly about how their spiritual practices were used both to prepare them for engaging in conflict work with their clients and as tools for protection. The preparation work involved meditative activity that created a sense of peace and calm, or a way to “ground their cognitive mind.” This helped to ensure that there was a separation from their personal lives from their professional lives. The protection aspect of their spiritual practices allowed them to connect to their clients, without taking in problems or issues that belong to their clients. Since conflict professionals engage in work with the same type of emotional labor as other helping professionals, there is an instinctive awareness that they too can be as susceptible to work-related stress disorders or burnout. These protective strategies aid in the prevention of work-related stress disorders. The preparation and protection practices were continuously maintained by participants. This continual engage in self-care practices offers them with a sense of value knowing that they can be at their best if these preventative practices are set in place.

## **Theme 2: Connectedness**

Connection was identified as an integral part of self-care for conflict professionals in this study. While all participants of this study self-identified as spiritual, their personal experience with spirituality was closely associated with connection. In this study, participants spoke widely about this concept of connection and what it means for them and its application to the work they do. Connection became a common theme that emerged through the interview process. Participants felt more balanced when they could connect; other participants believed it valuable to have these connections as a healthy way to separate from their work. Some participants sought support from colleagues when faced with professional challenges. Moreover, one aspect of spirituality was being able to feel connected to something greater than oneself. Feeling spiritually connected to something greater than oneself served to not only sustain them in their work, but also reinforce the fostering of a peaceful existence in their personal and professional lives.

Through their self-care practices, participants were able to fully connect and be tune in to their clients' needs. Being in-tune with their clients became another facet of establishing and maintaining a positive rapport with clients. The researcher categorized this concept of connection into four subcategories. The concept of connection is explored through the importance and significance of connecting with (a) family and friends, (b) connecting with their clients, (c) connecting with colleagues, and (d) connecting with something that is greater than oneself.

**Connecting with family and friends.** Participants attributed one of their self-care values as staying connected to others. Isis credited staying “in touch with friends and having outside interest” as a specific part of her self-care regimen. Kumara described the

value of “staying connected, connectedness, connected with self and others...I value others and the connections and staying connected with self and others.” She built upon this connection with others during her attendance at the annual Rocky Mountain Retreat for conflict professionals.

Connecting with people outside of their profession became a vital part of participant’s self-care regimen as it acted as a supportive and a healthy balance for participants. Rather than being overworked or detached from having a healthy personal life, participants acknowledged and purposefully created opportunities that countered personal and professional isolation. Tara expressed this sentiment below:

I just put it in my day planner that I am going to have drinks with my girlfriends or get together with my girlfriends once a week so I did that no matter what.” I had to force myself to do it for a couple of years because I’d rather stay home. So you know, I had to put it in my calendar and had to go and connect with people who are not involved in conflict.

Tara made it a priority to schedule personal time in her life for family and friends because personally, professionally and spiritually, the conflict resolution work can take a toll on the practitioner. Therefore, for Tara, engaging and connecting with “people who are not in conflict” or outside of the field, not only served as an aspect of self-care that she also viewed as a spiritual experience, but it also restored balance in her personal lives.

Maintaining a personal network of family and friends nurtured and sustained participants, which in turn made their role as a helping professional less depleting.

According to Maeve:

I have a friend that is a lifelong friend of mine that I talk to at least 3 or more

times a week. She is certainly part of my self-care regimen. We support each other and counsel each other and I would add that being with my family and friends are very much part of self-care.

While Maeve may not specifically identify connecting with loved ones as a form of spiritual self-care, she unequivocally recognizes that maintain valuable friendship is certainly part of herself-care routine because she values the support that it provides her.

Participants made a conscious effort to engage continuously in relationships with family and friends outside of work. Having this external support of family and friends provides for these participants an emotional escape from their professional roles. For participants, this connection emphasized the importance of having a work-life balance for general well-being. Participants developed strategies to connect physically with friends and loved ones on a regular basis. This frequent connection for participants provided a much-needed opportunity for experiences of joy and other positive emotions. Participants actively sought out to engage in friendships and other relationships because they saw the value in having a healthy separation from the work that they continually engaged in.

**Connecting to something greater than oneself.** Individually, each participant defined and interpreted their own spirituality differently. Collectively, however, these participants are supported by the belief that they are part of something greater, whether that was God, something Divine, or any other transcendent spirit or source of energy. Among participants existed this sentiment that they are “not in this alone” or that “the Universe is working for [their] benefit.” To induce this connection and sentiment, participants sought out activities that created and fostered feelings of connection to something superior to oneself. Participants chose to cultivate and purposefully seek

spiritual activities that encouraged transcending and divine experiences. This was demonstrated by their engagement in “yoga,” “going to church,” their “meditation” practice,” watching “spirituality movies,” “being in nature,” “journaling,” or other activities that brought them “closer to [their]creator.”

Participants shared that some of their spiritual practices ushered in this sense of being connected to something beyond them, something transcendent. Sedna expressed she found deep significance by engaging in reading. She expressed, “Sometimes spiritual reading, which could be religious in nature or not religious in nature... and I actually like to journal, and for me that could also lead to spiritual connection or centering.” This inner sense of spiritual connection, or interconnectedness reinforced the significance and meaning of their professional work. Their spirituality provided them with a spiritually-based detachment that let them acknowledge they are not solely responsible for the outcomes in their pursuit to resolve conflict.

For Sedna, her connection to her Divine faith and guidance reassured her that she was not alone. She reflected that:

I think for me spirituality is a sense that I am not in this alone. This being life, and I foster a sense of acceptance of what is, knowledge of what is in my control, or what needs to be let go of that isn't in my control...as opposed to thinking everything is on me.

Sedna's spiritual beliefs provided much context and relief in how she views her role as a conflict practitioner and how she views her effectiveness as a practitioner.

Similarly, Isis' connection to the Divine was a reminder for her that she also is not in control and can only do the best that she can as she supports her clients. This

realization provided a sense of relief because she is not attached to the outcome of the dispute:

Well my spirituality is to remember that I have a relationship with a higher being or you know that I'm not in charge and so if I can help that's fine, but I can only do what I can do, and I'm not responsible for other people's decisions.

Incorporating spiritual practices into their self-care regimen also provided the participants with a deeper connection to something that is sacred to them. When describing the significance of incorporating spiritual practices into their self-care regimen, participants believed the incorporation deepened their connection in a transcendent manner. Kali described that incorporating spirituality into her self-care regimen "prioritizes it in a different way and deepens it in another certain way." She added, that the incorporation of spirituality into their self-care regimen puts "it into a different space... it puts it into a deeper, more sacred space that self-care is held in and experienced through."

This connection to something divinely greater allowed participants to tap into a space where they could recognize the unity or oneness that exists between them and their clients. Participants recounted how their experience of being spiritual allowed them to tap into a sacred space with a deepened sense of their connection to the Divine, and to each other. Devi recounted below what it means to tap into a divinely connected space:

Well, to me, God, Spirit, Universe, whatever you want to call it, the All that is, the big I AM, the Now, the reality present, we are all a part of that at our core. I think when we tapped into that place inside where wisdom lives, peace lives and love lives, then it's really hard to be in the world in a combative violent, abusive

way, and so helping people with conflict resolution that is more peaceful than they otherwise might have, is very rewarding and very much in alignment with my personal values.

Tapping into this space means also to tap into a deeper connection that aided to sustain her through the work. This connection for Devi allowed her to function in a negative space but remain connected to her spiritual virtues of peace, love and bring about a sense of harmony to her mediations.

This construct of connection to a spiritual realm of existence fosters a space for them to be able to continue to be motivated and encouraged to endure the difficult work that they perform. Further, their connection to a higher entity sustains them through the work while also providing them a sense of freedom in knowing that they are “not in this alone” or “not responsible” for the outcome. It was a rather profound acknowledgement that they themselves are an extension of a Divine tool in the conflict resolution process, there to assist in the best way that they can.

**Connecting to Clients.** The concept of being or feeling connected to their clients or their circumstances involved a deeper level of basic rapport building that mediators generally seek and are trained to do. For participants, their spiritual self-care practices further allowed them to be able to effectively connect with clients. Being able to connect to their clients was to also to be attuned with their clients. Being attuned with clients is a profound level of engagement from a deeply spiritual and empathetic aspect. Solomon sensed that:

Self-care seems to me is making extra time and extra attention for the things that actually really help my professional work be better and be what I want it to be.

Which is helping me be more connected to my true nature, and nature of the people that I work with.

Solomon's self-care practices allowed him to journey deeper within himself to a place where he was able to feel connected to his true nature and allowed him to connect more deeply with his clients.

Spiritual practices allowed these practitioners to be fully attentive and present when working with clients. When they are present, they are then able to connect with clients in a deeper spiritual space, permitting themselves to go beyond the surface of the conflict. This sense of intuitive connection goes past sensory perception. Moses' statement below exemplified this concept of intuitive connection:

Another piece is listening deeply to what people have to say, not just to the facts, not just to the emotions, but to the cries for help, that are hidden in what they're saying. The anguish, the request for acknowledgement, for forgiveness that people have in their conversations but they're not expressed. So I tend to think of statements, especially angry statements as request, rather than as statements. If I hear it as a request, then I can try to figure out, what is it that they're asking for, and seeing if I can get that for them.

Through this connection, Moses could be present to hear things that may not have been verbally said, and to see things that are not visible to the naked eye. His practices allowed him to be fully present to connect with them in such a profoundly deep way.

For other participants, performing conflict resolution work was a spiritual experience in and of itself. The spiritual virtues and practices have supported these conflict professionals to actively seek connection with their clients, thus bringing in

qualities such as compassion and empathy that are in alignment with their spiritual values. Kali described the experience of connecting spiritually with her clients:

It feels like a spiritual practice, to be present, be a witness of their suffering and struggles, and to be of service however, I can, and helping them work through that in a constructive manner.

Through her practice of Buddhism, which encourages incorporating mindfulness into an everyday practice in every engagement, Kali could be a source of compassion to her clients as she attempts to connect with their suffering or tribulations thus providing empathy to her clients.

Similar to Kali's Buddhist practice, Ganesha described how her Buddhist faith allowed her to connect compassionately with her clients in order to serve them well:

It helps me to bring in...from the Buddhist tradition, on consciously thinking how do I be compassionate to people right in front of me, and how do I gain an idea of perspective of what this must feel like to that person. So believe me that has helped a great deal so that I won't immediately go to dismissing or judging people because of politics or economic challenges or mistakes or addictions. If I can have a little bit of compassion to get through a session, I will have a lot more patience and try to find something that we have in common as opposed to differences. So that has really helped enormously.

Ganesha's compassion helped her to be able to assess and accept her clients beyond the scope of their personality or their conflicts. Ganesha used her spiritual practices to establish a connection with her clients that bars her personal opinions or perceptions of

clients to cloud her judgments. Through this method, she cannot be inhibited and can effectively perform while maintaining personal boundaries.

Accompanying this level of connection with clients also promoted professional satisfaction. Sedna credited her ability for deep connection with clients to her self-care practices:

It's harmony within myself, and connection within myself that I do think that fosters being in harmony with others around me and being more open and when I'm in that open space I can be more connected. So that's sort of the cycle, and with connection comes self-care. So I think it's sort of cyclical that all of them lead to the other one.

Similarly, Guinevere also found deep satisfaction when her clients pointed out her genuine tranquil manner. She attributed her peaceful aura to her self-care regimen:

I have received a lot of feedback from people that at the moment that they get in touch with me at the table they can sense and feel the sense of peacefulness and [that] brings trust to people. I think that my self-care helps me to bring that into the table, and bring trust, transparency and being very authentic and give space to people to be able to work whatever they need to work on the table.

Insofar as the spiritual self-care practices created a space for participants to go deeper with their clients, it also empowered them to not be fearful of engaging with clients on such a sacred and profound level. Connection on this level not only aided in creating a positive rapport with clients, but also led to participants feeling professionally satisfied which in turn counters work burnout because they are feeling valuable in the services they provide.

**Connecting with other professional colleagues for support.** While most of these spiritual self-care practices are performed alone and individually for each participant, one aspect of self-care that participants discussed significantly was the collective practice of connecting with their professional peers. While the support may not be spiritual in nature, being able to connect with others who have similar professional experiences through their line of work, was very valuable to them. For example, Maeve expressed that:

All of my professional colleagues, I seek support and may or not necessarily be about spirituality, but I do seek their wisdom. So I seek their support and furthering my goals for myself... we work collaboratively, so I seek their support.

Additionally, connecting to a professional community of people offered participants an additional resource to counter work-related stress disorder and deal with them in a positive way through connection with colleagues. Moses illustrated this point, commenting,

I think that one of the best ways of avoiding burnout is through social interaction, by interacting with each other, creating a sense of professional community with the emphasis on community. So if it's possible for people to get together to compare notes or talk about what was upsetting to them, all of that is really important.

Participants in this study emphasized the importance of ongoing connection through professional support. This form of connection buffered against professional isolation by drawing upon communal support amongst their peers. An example of this

spiritual collective practice is a professional and supportive network of mediators residing in the Denver, Colorado area. A notable number of participants of this study have attended the yearly Rocky Mountain Retreat in the Denver area. It is an annual gathering of mediators and other conflict practitioners to further develop individual insight and cultivate personal qualities and attitudes that build and encourage resilience in the profession. Kumara discussed the importance of this professional support group:

We're lucky that we're several practitioners together and otherwise, it's a severe challenge, it's lonely if you're a sole practitioner and since we have several, we [have] peer and colleague support.

When participants of the retreat did not meet annually, a group of these professionals still found it sustaining and beneficial to meet regularly with professional colleagues as an important component of their self-care regimen. Tara, a member of the Rocky Mountain Retreat team recounted below:

The retreat team meet[s] once a month and those women are all in our field and they all undergo the same sort of stress. We will get together and share personal information, share peer-reviews, and try to bolster each other up.

Tara further expressed how important it was to remain connected to professional colleagues as a means of sustainability in the field:

I think sole practitioners really are in danger of not having anyone to share this with. So I have a wide circle on the national level, and in Denver of professional women in my field that I can talk to when I'm beat up and they will always be there for me.

Participants recognized the value in seeking support from others and viewed this connection as a method of countering negative self-talk, reducing work-related stress, and increasing emotional stability. Devi described the importance and value of this connection:

I think it's very important to be able to connect with other humans...when we reach out to other people, then it has a calming effect. It's like that critic voice doesn't have that much influence to say you're doing it wrong, you're not enough, you don't know or you need another training... so being around other people I think is very important.

Whether participants were connecting with their clients, colleagues, peers, or their sacred deity, the concept of connection was central for participants. Through connecting, participants were able to tap into their spiritual self-care practices. In addition, connection became another avenue of self-care for participants. Spirituality for these individuals involved deep connections that went beyond superficial means. Connection involved tapping into the same spiritual principles and exploring those shared fundamental values of their spiritual self-care practices. These fundamental values of spiritual connection are explored through continual connection with family and friends, clients, colleagues, and forces greater than oneself.

### **Theme 3: Integration**

Insofar as participants were able to find spiritual meaning through connection, each participant described and interpreted their spirituality as an individual practice, experience, or choice. Yet, for these participants, their spiritual existence did not simply occur in their personal life; but their spiritual journey has integrated and transcended into

all other aspects of their existence. While both spirituality and self-care are entangled for these participants, each has enough distinction to remain as two different conceptualizations. Nevertheless, what emerged from the findings was that participants integrated their spiritual principles into their self-care routines from their personal lives with their professional lives. Kali expressed that, “I’m slowly integrating that so it’s informing my spiritual and professional life.”

During the study, participants acknowledged that the integration of their spiritual principles with their professional life has allowed them to use their spiritual principles to mitigate their daily situations. This integration of the spiritual, in combination with the personal and professional, then emerged for participants as an embodied awareness or practice. Solomon spoke to this idea of embodiment below;

Another value or how I look at self-care has to a lot to do with embodiment... from moment to moment, to self-care and spiritual practice, both are kind of intertwined values in my mind that compel me to want to turn to the body or choose things to help me to return to the body as I engage in spiritual practice or self-care.

Kumara saw great value in the integration of her spiritual virtues into her self-care practices. She credited the integration of spirituality into her self-care practices to her more effective performance as a conflict practitioner. She explained:

So, for me, it’s not so much at how it informs but how its growing together, how it’s becoming more integrated. So, before it was only self-care—when I take care of myself so that I can do my job better. Now, I see all these elements and how I can actually use them in my conflict resolution job, share, and teach them,

depending on where the openings are.

Participants described spirituality as a “life energy that flows inside you at every moment” and that every experience that we have has a “spiritual component” to it. This merging, or integration, for participants emerged when they intentionally sought the spiritual component in each activity, whether it be personal or professional. In this study, participants conveyed that common experiences could turn into meaningful expressions of their spirituality. Participants viewed activities such as “taking a walk on the beach,” “going into the kitchen” or “sitting and having a nice conversation with a friend” as “deeply spiritual occasions.” While the layperson may view these same activities as just common or normal experiences, participants uncovered spiritual value in these experiences. While conventional on their face, each experience was viewed as spiritual because they furthered the development of the participant spiritual virtues. Sedna eloquently framed this concept by stating, “So you can eat right and exercise to lose weight, or you can use both of those things to increase and enhance your spiritual quality.”

The integration of spirituality into their self-care regimen provided deep substantive value to their life. Sedna conveyed that her spirituality enriched her ability to find meaning and purpose in her daily activities:

I think without spirituality for me, the self-care process could end up just being very formulaic. Like, eat your meals, exercise, and it could just become just a checklist, and that would not be very meaningful. But if there’s a spiritual component to it, it’s much more nurturing, and I think there’s motivation to keep it going and because it’s not just physical needs, it becomes physical, emotional

and spiritual all in one.

Further, Sedna was aware that each component of her life was integral to other components of life, contributing to the effectiveness of her overall well-being. Sedna reflected that:

I think my spirituality can affect my self-care and also my self-care can affect my spirituality. Because if I'm poor [in my] physical self-care I'm usually poor [in] spiritual connection too. So they're integral part of each other.

This integration into her professional and personal life affected all of Sedna's activities and forms her both her personal and professional identity.

Mediator's spiritual practices not only served to nourish their spiritual wellbeing, but it also sustained them in other aspects of their lives so much that the integration flourished into an essential embodiment of who they are. Their spiritual practices were not outside of their other activities; rather, participants' spiritual aspects informed their approach to self-care, as well as their personal and professional dichotomies. Kali described this embodied integration, stating

In terms of spiritually, I feel like the professional is also the spiritual just as it is the personal. There's this spiritual component to everything that we do and every interaction that we have if we choose to see it. So I feel like though I work with folks who are in conflict, it's very much a spiritual practice as well. It's very much a professional experience, as it is spiritual as well.

Kali's own spiritual practice of engaged Buddhism informed her perspective and her personal and professional life. Her spiritual practices enabled the incorporation of her

spiritual virtues of compassion and empathy in everything that she did, especially with her profession.

Furthermore, Kali also expressed how she found difficulty separating her personal and professional ideals. Kali's sentiment below illustrated how paradoxical the concept of separation can be:

For me it's not just the profession, it's a way of life. So, it's something that I really integrate it into my own life. I feel like if I can't integrate it myself as a conflict resolution professional, then you know, how can I teach, or expect others to try and integrate these kind of skills. So very much for me, the professional is as well the personal.

Maeve also had difficulty seeing her spiritual practices and her self-care as two separate concepts. She said, "I'm having trouble separating the practices from the spirituality. For me it goes hand in hand. The practices help me tap into the resources, of my spirituality." For participants such as Maeve, spirituality was a valued contribution to their self-care regimen as it provides a deep and meaningful influence in one's life.

Maeve expressed her spirituality as a critical component in her life that also created a space for her to seek within the resources of her spirituality. She expressed:

I believe that it's absolutely critical to my well-being. That without the spirituality and the connections, that it really creates an environment, a space, for my well being. It is critical and essential. My awareness really helps me be calm, and focused, present and grateful, deeply grateful.

Through her spiritual practices, she was able to tune into herself to gain profound understanding of what is critical to her overall wellbeing. Maeve and other participants

developed practices that may or may not be spiritual in nature to attune to themselves, inside and out.

For Sedna, her embodied spiritual practice was illustrated through the concept of spiritual virtues such as self-love, along with other dimensions of love that impelled her towards more self-care as she was able to embody these principles in her mediation practice:

I would say with spirituality comes with, the base of an ethic of self-love. Love of myself, love of universe, love with God, being in a place of safe, rather than fear, so all of that propels me into greater self-care.

The significance of integrating spiritual practices into their life has an impact on their overall well-being and helps to define, self-care and its significance. Mediator experiences of this embodied practice involved connecting to a sacred space that is not often explored within. The integration of spiritual self-care practices evolved into an embodiment of their spirituality and professional roles. By pursuing integration, participants allowed the spiritual dimension of self-care to infiltrate all aspects of their existence. The participants of this study integrated their unique individual spirituality within their conflict professional role and used it to work from a spiritual framework. Moreover, due to this embodied practice, participants found it challenging to separate their spiritual side from any other facets of themselves. Through self-care, participants had “an arena to take [their] spirituality more serious, fully, genuinely” into an embodiment of “walking instead of just talking” and fully integrating their practice into their lives. Spiritual self-care was not simply an activity for participants, it evolved into a way of being a mediator and affected how they mediate.

### **Summary of Themes and Essence of Experience**

The essence of spiritual self-care for conflict professionals with a sustained use for spirituality presents a need for them to provide valuable service to their clients. The themes that emerged from the interviews were (a) spiritual self-care practices were used as both tools for preparation and protection, that explored various concepts of (b) connection, which led to (c) the emergence of an integrated and embodied practice. Based on these themes, it is evident participants utilize spiritual self-care practices to provide the best version of themselves to their clients. It is because of these spiritual self-care practices that these professionals felt they could be of the utmost value to their clients and have a profound impact.

Participants spoke of this “inner call” or “inner want” to be of value and service as well as being at their best as a motivating factor and purpose for engaging in self-care practices with the inclusion of their spiritual beliefs. Realizing how easily mediators can be immersed in the tumultuous conflicts of their clients, practitioners sought out activities that brought about a sense of peace, calm, and centeredness. One mediator discussed that, “The nature of the work that we do is to be of value to people, and if you’re not in that space of peacefulness, how would you be able to bring about that into a practice?” These activities became practices that were rooted in spiritual engagement. Additionally, these activities were also deliberate practices in self-care that encouraged practitioners to take care of themselves before attempting to be of service to others. Guinevere discussed “When people go through conflict, there’s trauma. It affects me to become more self-aware of how is it that I have to take care of myself in order to be able to help other people.” Guinevere further expounded on this sentiment below:

So, I do believe that you have to charge your batteries in order to help other people because if you don't take care of that you're doing a disservice to the other people because you are not in a position where you can be of value to somebody else, if you're not taking care of yourself.

Moses further expressed this same concept taking care of oneself to better make an impactful difference:

There's a phrase that comes out of folklore that says "I was so busy chopping wood that I didn't have time to sharpen the axe." So, if you're the axe, you have to take time to sharpen yourself. To show up with energy and care and a series of things like this to make it possible for you to really make a difference.

Additionally, for Moses, although all mediation may not come to a positive resolve, he believed it was still possible to gain meaning from the process itself. He explained:

For myself, I'd say there are times when I have to walk away from a conflict if I'm not having an impact on it, but I always make sure that if I do that that I give up on no one. Sometimes people will come back years later and say "that session made a real big difference in my life.

The significance of Moses' self-care routine was that change began with him. In order for him to be an effective resource for his clients and to be that difference, he knew he had to take care of himself. The continuous self-care practices were a way for him to sharpen his proverbial axe.

The concept of value for these practitioners also has a spiritual component to it. Many of the participants viewed service and being of service to others as an extension of their spirituality. When discussing spiritual virtues that were important to them,

participants mentioned being “non-judgmental,” “authentic,” and “very present for people, in all aspects, body language, mind, energy.” Being of the utmost value and service to others means to engage in and put into practice their spiritual virtues such as the Noble Eightfold Path in Buddhism, practicing The Four Agreements, or other deeds that encourage individuals to be fully be present practice non-judgement, and have compassion for others. Participants were able to be of value to their clients due to their spiritual self-care practices. Kali shared:

Being of service to the greatest extent I can, benefitting other to the greatest extent I can. There’s a particular quote by the Dalai Lama that I’ve been using daily for many many years on just the preciousness of human life. It’s called the precious human life. So that’s something that really guides me, and that speaks to really being of service and just being as much of a benefit to others as possible

Throughout Ganesha’s interview, she spoke often about this spiritual idea of

being useful in everything she did. Ganesha conveyed:

So, my spiritual practices today... is to just figure out how to be useful to others. I’m also trying to figure out how can I be useful in my volunteer role and be grateful to God for the opportunity to be useful another day.

Routinely she would reflect and ask herself, “So every day that I’m in this world, am I practicing compassion and refining my skills in how I can be useful to others?” Ganesha held the belief that once she passes away, “there’s going to be an afterlife.” Ganesha believed that holding spiritual values and providing tremendous value in being useful to others are preparation for the afterlife. She expressed, “I’ve developed a skill set that not very many people seem to have and so I’m trying to bring my calmness and my presence,

and I'm driven by my spiritual ideas of being useful." Because Ganesha is driven by her spiritual ideas of being useful, she maintained her self-care practices; these spiritual practices help to ensure that she remained important and useful to those she serves.

Maeve highlighted that in her Jewish background there is a shared valued to be helpful. She acknowledged that, "I'm Jewish and in that there is an agreement to repair the world and to be helpful where you can. So that's part of my value system."

Additionally, by being valuable to their clients, participants felt their work was a contribution towards a global goal of peace for all. Guinevere stated,

Especially if I'm going to be working with people, I like to pray because I want to be of service to other people and I want to be a vessel for other people to find their resolution in that I'm not going to be the one bringing them resolution, but I'm going to be like a tool or a vessel for them to find the resolution.

Guinevere described the practice of prayer as not only a way to take care of herself, but also as a method of being beneficial for her clients and a global contribution toward peace.

Furthermore, spiritual self-care brought sustainability and resiliency to participants, and it conveyed further value to their professional satisfaction. Guinevere shared that because of her spirituality, she could "step out of myself in order to make space for people when they need to work on conflict" and for her, that was her "contribution to world peace." Participants viewed their acts of service as valuable contributions they are providing their clients and they are very mindful that the kind of value they are offering is meaningful for both their clients and themselves. It was also important for participants to continue being genuine and authentic so that their clients can

connect with the honesty and empathy that these practitioners have on display while engaging in conflict resolution work.

For Moses, his ambition was to do his best job so that the people that he works with can feel as though he cares about them and that he is working for them:

What I want to try to aim for is that combination where people feel that I care about them and I care about what is happening to them... if I can show that to them, show that to them in a different way, I am doing my best job.

Guinevere described her inner desire to be of the most value to her clients. She attests that this innate desire can be attributed to her spiritual nature:

It is not my ego that drives me to do mediation because I feel important in the middle of people. It is not that, it is my authenticity, and that is probably my spirituality, or my inner want of being of value to people.

Guinevere did not desire recognition for helping her clients, simply being of value is enough.

Spirituality was not just a philosophical ideology littered with a few religious principles that participants have incorporated into their self-care routines. Rather, spirituality within itself was the self-care for participants. Spirituality is how they care for themselves. What may have originated as an individually unique experience that ushered in a need for better self-care practice, developed into a practice of wanting to be more than just good at their job. By building spiritual self-care practices to sustain them in their field, participants also found deep value in their personal and professional lives. It evolved into an innate calling to provide their clients with the best value of themselves and their service.

### **Summary**

The purpose of chapter 4 was to present the findings from the study. The analysis of the data from the study identified three core themes. The findings suggested that (a) conflict professionals use self-care practices as tools for preparation and protection for working with people involved in conflict, (b) spiritual practices provided feelings of connectedness for the conflict professionals, and (c) their spiritual practices and beliefs became integrated into their life as an embodied practice. All three of these emerging themes help to sustain mediators in their field by providing meaning and purpose for the work that they do. These themes helped to identify the essence of spiritual self-care for mediators, which is to be of the utmost value to their clients. Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings presented in this chapter.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

*“We are spiritual beings. Our spirituality is an inborn part of nature, the essence of who we are as aware, sentient, and intuitive human beings.”* (Powell, 2003 pp. 10)

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to develop an understanding of spiritual self-care practices of mediators who identify as spiritual. The research study was guided by two research questions: 1) how do mediators with a sustained value for spirituality practice self-care and 2) what is the essence of spiritual self-care among mediators who identify as spiritual? The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the findings of the study, present a discussion of the researcher’s interpretation of the findings, and discuss the study's implications for the field of conflict resolution and and recommendations for future studies and the practice. further study. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations for future practice and study.

### **Summary of Results**

After analysis, three themes emerged from the responses from the participants. The themes the researcher identified were: (a) spiritual practices as tools for preparation and protection, (b) spiritual practices provide feelings of connectedness, and (c) integration-embodied practice. These themes aided in developing the essence of this phenomenon which is that their spiritual self-care practices assisted them with offering the best value of themselves to their clients. These spiritual self-care practices allowed these professionals to feel that they can be of the utmost value to their clients and contributes to having a profound impact on the clients.

## Findings and Interpretations

### Theme 1: Spiritual Practices as Tools for Preparation and Protection

The first theme that emerged from the study was how participants used their spiritual self-care practices as both tools of preparation and protection when working with people in conflict. The significant relationship between participants use of their spiritual self-care practice supports Maslow's theory of human motivation and hierarchical needs. Participants were motivated to continue to cultivate self-care practice because they were motivators that sustained them in their work. There is a bevy of researchers who suggest helping professionals are at risk for developing burnout and other work-related stress disorders if proper measures are not established to combat these disorders (Newell & McNeil, 2010; Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2014; Wagaman et al., 2015). Participants believed in the value and importance of self-care because it enhanced their overall well-being. Spiritual self-care practices deepened their preparation for mediation work while also aiding as a protective barrier from the burdens of their clients and the very nature of conflict work. While self-care in general is regarded as a positive component to any healthy lifestyle, incorporating spiritual self-care may have a direct effect on overall well-being (Kashdan & Nezlek, 2012; Pargament, 2013). Additionally, Brown and Cullen (2006) proposed that spiritual behavior is an enabling mechanism not only for survival but also for overall human well-being.

Participant use of spiritual practices as tools to preparation for conflict work consisted of emptying themselves to be present and ready for conflict work. By emptying themselves, participants were able to set aside their biases or presumptions and become clean vessels to support clients through difficult times. Therefore, engaging in activities

such as meditation, prayer, morning rituals at the beginning of each day, or other mindfulness practices allow participants to increase their self-awareness, center themselves, and be present or mindful enough to bring value to conflict situations. It is important to note that these tools were not just implemented before going into a mediation or conflict situation; participants performed these actions daily.

Participants engaged in meditation or other mindfulness practices to feel sense of peace, and calm within themselves and their work. Goldberg (2016) argued that the role of a conflict specialist is to help those individuals who are feeling vulnerable, threatened and without resources to put themselves back together and re-engage with their rational self. Goldberg (2016) further stated that self-care should be viewed as a part of a lifelong practice that can combat those moments of confrontation and contention in conflict work where the practitioner may feel off balance.

Similarly, participants displayed high levels of emotional intelligence to maintain their resiliency in this type of work. Participants of this study exhibited an acute sense of understanding of the nature of their work and displayed high levels of emotional intelligence that allowed them to connect with clients on a profound level. This level of involvement with clients often required additional skills, or intelligence, that allows a practitioner to gain deeper connections with clients. However, participants understood this deeper connection could lead to work-related stress disorders such as countertransference, compassion fatigue, or burnout. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence entails being self-aware of how you are feeling and being able to handle those feelings without being overwhelmed. Emotional intelligence also entails the ability to evaluate situations and then discern how to act accordingly (George &

Adhikari, 2017). Because the participants possessed high emotional intelligence, they were able to use their spiritual self-care practices as a barrier from negative reactions or behaviors.

Spiritual self-care as a tool for protection is their ability to be aware the potential negative impact of conflict resolution work on the practitioner. In this study, participants commonly acknowledged work fatigue, stress, and burnout as motivating elements to their self-care practices, irrespective if they were spiritual in nature. Self-care and spiritual well-being have been thoroughly researched as protective factors against work-related stress disorders such (Newmeyer et al., 2016; Phelps et al., 2009). Similarly, researchers have linked the practice of meditation, yoga, and mindfulness activities with mental and physical benefits such as reduced stress and anxiety, enhanced self-awareness a boost in happiness (Alexander, 2013; Gengoux & Roberts, 2017; Richards et al., 2010). Participants cited these same practices (yoga, meditation, and mindfulness) as aiding them in building up resiliency in their vocations.

Conflict mediators from this study implemented spiritual self-care practices as a personal resource of strength, support, and maintenance to better endure conflict work. By using SDT as a framework, these practices became self-regulating behaviors that participants were able to sustain through their self-care practice. According to Ryan et al. (2008), “developing a sense of autonomy and competence are critical to the processes of internalization and integration, through which a person comes to self-regulate and sustain behaviors conducive to health and well-being” (p. 2). It is the ongoing cultivation of these practices that prevents and protects these participants from work-related stress disorders.

## **Theme 2: Connection**

The concept of connection was identified as an integral part of self-care for conflict professionals in this study. Deci and Ryan (2014) identified feeling connected and being meaningfully connected to others as being amongst the most important values and motives of people around the world. Participants in this study shared a significant desire to cultivate the experience of connection through various means. This was evident through participants' desires to connect with family and friends, connecting to something transcendent, connecting with their clients in mediation sessions and connecting with professional colleagues for support.

The concept of spiritual connection is situated in Maslow's description of a developmental stage beyond self-actualization. In his reframed hierarchy of human motivation, Maslow suggested that individuals have a strong motive toward seeking self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Individuals at this developmental stage seek personal and communal experiences with the transcendent through mystical or transpersonal experiences (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). They further come to identify with something greater than their individual self by engaging in service to others. (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

Participants felt supported when connecting with family, friends, or colleagues. Interacting or engaging with family and friends was a way for participants to connect with individuals outside of their profession to balance their work life with their personal life, often aiding as a healthy detachment from their professional role. Further, this construct of connecting with family, friends, or professional peers fulfilled a need that was part of their overall self-care practice. Self-determination theory offers a lens in

understanding this basic need that participants exhibited. According to SDT, humans have a fundamental psychological need to experience relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Relatedness in this frame can be understood as a concept that is similar to feeling connected to others. SDT describes relatedness as a desire or need to “feel personally accepted by and significant to others, and to feel cared for by others and caring of them” (Deci & Ryan, 2014, p. 53). Relatedness is an evolved psychological need that is essential to human satisfaction and wellness (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Participants of this study purposefully engaged in behaviors or activities that connected them to family, friends, or loved ones to boost happiness or satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Gengoux & Roberts, 2017). A core assumption to SDT theory and relatedness is that when individuals experience greater satisfaction in feeling relatedness and meeting that need, higher levels of psychological wellness will be evident (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2014). Engaging with colleagues was a way to connect with individuals from within the field of conflict resolution to provide professional support. Additionally, Rupert et al. (2015) suggested that having positive resources at work might help reduce burnout.

By using these self-care skills, participants were able to better connect with their clients by displaying extreme empathy. Gerdes and Segal (2011) suggested that being empathetic with one’s clients in the helping professions is a critical skill. In addition, in the counseling and therapy field, the ability to empathize is one of the greatest skills in treating a client (Malinowski, 2014). Empathy allows them the ability to understand what their clients are feeling and thinking. According to Lewis and Umbriet (2015), conflict resolution practitioners have long known about the significance of connection. The authors stated when individuals connect more deeply with each other through safe

and constructive dialogues, the outcomes of their conflicts are better for all parties involved (Lewis & Umbriet, 2015).

Participants discussed how almost every experience had a spiritual dimension to it. Connection is an extension of their spirituality by which they experience transcendent feelings via connection. Referring back to Poll and Smith's (2003) spiritual development model, individuals at the integration stage already view themselves as spiritual beings, and they typically relate with others accordingly, meaning that they will use their spiritual lens to connect with others. Further, the authors asserted that individuals are innately motivated to "feel after" a relationship with God (Poll & Smith, 2003, p. 133). This notion of "feel after" can be interpreted as an individual seeking experiences to further connect transcendentally. This was illustrated in participants' desires to feel and cultivate feelings of connectedness.

While religion can be thought of as behaviors associated with a particular religion, spirituality can be thought of as a relationship or connection to God, or some type of transcendence (Hardy, Zhang, Skalski, Melling & Brinton, 2014). This concept of connection was continuously sought after for participants and it showed up in their lives through the experience of connecting with meaningful people to experience transcendence.

As a mediator, Zumeta (2017) argued that spirituality is the connectedness of all things. Individuals who are more spiritually inclined are actively searching for the experience of connection (Zumeta, 2017). Many participants detailed how their spiritual self-care practices allowed them to connect better with clients in mediation session. Zumeta (2017) determined mediation can be an opportunity for spiritual connection.

These are times when there is a deep connection between mediator and clients. There is a quiet trust, a willingness to move beyond settlement, to transformation. Agreements seem stronger and longer lasting. For the mediator, the work is more fulfilling. I see these as spiritual events, spiritual connections (Zumeta, 2017, p. 68).

Participants also used mindfulness practices to connect with their clients. Being able to connect with clients is not exclusive to the participants of this study, but there is a humanistic approach to mediation that has already emerged. Within the field of mediation, Lewis and Umbriet (2015) developed framework for a humanistic model and approach in mediation and dialogue. This framework moves mediation from a settlement driven model to a model that is driven by dialogue instead. Humanistic mediation emphasizes the humanizing capacities of mediators, their parties, and the communication process.

The emotional intelligence participants exhibited related to the three major themes that emerged from this study. According to Goleman (1994), there are five major components of emotional intelligence. They are Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Empathy, Social skills and Motivation. Self-awareness encompasses knowing one's own emotions, values, strengths and weaknesses and their impact on others. Self-regulation involves being able to control or redirect one's own impulses or negative emotions. Empathy comprises of being considerate of the feelings of others and the ability to understand the emotional component of other people. Having social skills gives one the unique ability to build rapport with others and move people in the right direction. Motivation speaks to the passion, resiliency, or optimism that one displays to continue to

go beyond and persevere. The analysis from this study emerged that the participants operated from the position of emotional intelligence to be able to be self-aware of not only their own emotions and its potential negative impact, but they were also able to use their spiritual self-care practice to self-regulate their behaviors or actions, connect with their clients empathetically using the appropriate social skills, and realizing the value of their worth so they were still able to motivate while being resilient.

The concept of connection is a core component of any individual's spiritual identity. For participants, spirituality brings a sense of purpose and meaning to all aspects of their life, including their nurtured spiritual self-care practices. According to Matisse, Ratcliff, and Mosci (2017), when our spirituality is nurtured, we feel connected. This connection is both a sense of relationship to something Divine, as well as our relationships to all people (Matisse et al., 2017).

### **Theme 3: Integration-Embodiment**

In addition to displaying high levels of emotional intelligence, participants also tapped into their spiritual intelligence. This became evident as the third theme of embodiment emerged. Csordas (1994) defined embodiment as a way of "being in the world" (p. 12). Similarly, spirituality can be defined as the seeking for fundamental being (George & Adhikari, 2017) or a "way of being and experiencing" (Mayer, 2000, p. 49). To speak of embodiment is to say that there is an interconnected relationship between the mind, the physical body, the environment or culture, and spirit (Csordas, 1994). Framed in this way, an embodiment of practice, is the interconnections of all of these components and pursuing ways to cultivate these interconnections. This idea can be understood through the spiritual practice of yoga, where obscure and intangible ideas or feelings are

experienced through the physical body of the yoga practitioner (i.e. connecting to the breath or breathing through certain body parts).

There is a correlation between emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence. In their study, George and Adhikari (2017) examined the correlations between emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, and adult well-being. Based on the findings, spiritual intelligence can be positively correlated with emotional intelligence, and that an individual's emotional intelligence increases with spiritual intelligence. According to Vaughan (2002), spiritual intelligence is related to emotional intelligence insofar as spiritual practices aim at developing intrapersonal and interpersonal understandings of self in relation to others. Further, "paying attention to subjective thoughts and feelings and cultivating empathy is part of increasing awareness of the inner spiritual life" (Vaughan, 2002, p. 20). Spiritual intelligence is a different way of knowing that connects the personal to the transcendent and the self to spirit (Vaughan, 2002). Spiritual intelligence is also the awareness of the connectedness of our relationship to the Divine, to each other, and to all beings (Vaughan, 2002).

Emmons (2000) defined spiritual intelligence as having five characteristics: the capacity for transcendence; the ability to enter heightened spiritual consciousness; the ability to invest everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the sacred; the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems; and the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior. Working from Emmons' (2000) characteristics of a spiritually intelligent individual, it is evident that participants of this study display not only high levels of emotional intelligence, but also a high level of spiritual intelligence. Many of the participants saw common everyday experiences as spiritual experiences, or

opportunities for further self-development. According to Hodges (2002), as cited in Malinowski (2014), “a truly spiritual person, sees himself-herself as part of a larger community that issues an intrinsic set of values to help society and finds meaning and purpose in life in everyday activities” (p.114). Participants used their spiritual virtues to view how they saw conflict and how they regarded their profession as a way to be of service and practice their virtuosity.

Developing and cultivating spiritual intelligence necessitates a commitment to spiritual practices. While some participants held a non-religious interpretation of spirituality, they intentionally sought out activities that were spiritual in nature that called for the experience of transcendent connection. The development of spiritual intelligence occurs when an individual purposefully attempts to cultivate spiritual sensitivities, or experiences. Participants’ spiritual self-care practices such as yoga, meditation, connecting to family and friend, listening to music, being out in nature or bodily movements augmented self-awareness and contributed to the development of their spiritual intelligence.

The essence of spiritual self-care for these conflict professionals revealed that in order for them to truly be an agent of change for their clients, they had to be at their best. Incorporating their spiritual self-care values ensures that when performing conflict resolution work, these professionals were operating from a positive space where the energy that they brought into their mediation sessions were conducive enough for great change. This became their motivation not only for their own well-being and preservation against burnout, but also to be impactful in the process. Maslow’s theory of self-actualization correlates with this concept of spiritual self-care that the mediators used to

ensure they were at their best. According to D'Souza and Gurin (2016), Maslow's theory of self-actualization postulates that mentally healthy individuals are deeply driven to follow a path of growth motivation that shifts the individual's incentive from self-interest to social interest, thus resulting in personal satisfaction and collective peace.

Additionally, Maslow's redeveloped hierarchy of human development

Faith Development theory (FDT) provided a framework for understanding the necessity of self-care from a spiritual perspective. FDT significance to this study was essential in analyzing and evaluating the developed themes that emerged. In summation, FDT is a developmental model used to understand the process of how an individual conceptualizes a deity, and how that influence impacts their core values, beliefs and meaning on one's personal life and relationships to others (Fowler & Dell, 2006).

Fowler's theory on faith centers on the idea that individual belief systems change and develop through recognizable and sequential stages (Rutledge, 1989). In Fowler's theory, he identified seven stages of development. Each stage relates to another hierarchically and sequentially; these stages develop in ascending order and are built upon the previous stage. These later stages, four through six, are illustrative of a spiritually developed person.

Participants in this study held a non-religious interpretation of spirituality. Fowler considered spirituality (faith) to be a human experience. In this study, participants growth and development was situated within their relationship to something spiritually transcendent. Participants of this study developed strategies for self-care that facilitated the development of their overall health and wellbeing. Particular to this study are stages 5, and 6 in Fowler's theory.

Fowler's sixth stage in his development theory is the universalizing faith stage. In this stage, the individual commit themselves to transforming the present state of the world by sacrificing their lives for the greater good of humanity (Fowler, 1981). Participants of this study illustrated being at this stage through their innate desire to being of the utmost "value to clients" and "contributing to world peace."

Spiritual self-care became essential to participants overall wellbeing and how it is that practiced mediation. The essence of spiritual self-care is to be of the utmost value to themselves and their clients through the work that they do. Realizing that if they did not value themselves through the method in which they cared for themselves, they would not be as valuable to their clients. This idea of being valuable to their clients is similar to how Fowler saw spirituality as a *center of value* in an individual's lifespan (Fowler, 1991, p. 32). What Fowler implies by center of value is that as individuals we attached our affections, causes, ideals by what we value the most. He posited that a center of value is something that calls forth our love and devotion and exerts power and influence on the rest of our lives (Fowler, 1991). Specifically, the center of value for participants was their sustained value of spirituality which influenced their self-care practices. FDT helps to understand how one arrives at spirituality as the center of value to the point of making it an instrumental component of their self-care.

The incorporation of spirituality into their self-care practices address the participants level of spiritual development similar to FDT. Fowler (1991) implied that spirituality has implications for the personal development, growth, healing, and change in an individual's lifespan. Additionally, Maslow's later model of transcendence is also applicable to this finding of this study because it places the highest form of human

development at a transpersonal level where an individual seeks to go beyond the self. This may involve service to others, devotion to something Divine, and or a desire to feel connected to what one would perceive to be divine or transcendent (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

**Healing the healers.** The self-care practices for these practitioners has been a source of healing for themselves. The participants of this study used their own personal experience of using life's challenges and difficulties as opportunities for growth and development to heal themselves. It is through their spiritual self-care practices that participants learned to use life's obstacles to grow deeper in their individual spirituality and emerge as a healer. The healer emerges when an individual uses their own intrinsic healing skills to assist parties involved in conflict. Insofar as their spiritual self-care practices have been a source of continual healing for these participants, they have extended their healing experience to help facilitate and guide their clients through their challenging times.

These practitioners view themselves as healers. It is through their spiritual self-care practices that they can continuously develop this innate healing modality within themselves. Since they value their presence and what they offer to their clients, their work is healing work. Their spiritual self-care practices allowed participants to heal themselves, so they could in turn heal others. The role of a mediator is similar to that of a healer, especially a mediator that exhibits a sustained value for spirituality. Literature defines a mediator as a third-party intermediary that is used to help resolve or manage conflicts (Deutsch, Coleman, & Marcus, 2014). Comparably, a healer is defined as a facilitator who helps parties work through underlying causes of a conflict (Barsky, 2007).

Conflict professionals employ similar techniques for healing parties, such as having parties actively listening to opposing parties, improve self-understanding, provide apologies, accept responsibility, and reconcile relationships (Barsky,2007).

Mediation can offer healing to parties involved in conflict (Gold, 1993; Zumeta, 2017). Individuals who come to mediations, arbitrations, or conflict coaching sessions, whether court ordered or voluntary, are involved in possibly deep-seated conflicts. They are experiencing with a multi-faceted array of challenging emotions. Similarly, when we evaluate the healing nature of restorative justice, we can see that the role alternative dispute models can be very impactful and meaningful to create a space for healing to grow and flourish. The mediators of this study understood their role as a mediator went deeper than helping to facilitate a resolution process. Rather, their role is a be the instrument for healing for parties in conflict. The role of healer for conflict professionals was not to cure, but to facilitate healing by creating a space for resolution where healing can begin.

### **Limitations of Study**

Although conducting a qualitative research study was useful for gathering information from the participants in their own words and was appropriate in capturing the essence of spiritual self-care for mediators, this study had various limitations. One of the limitations that was present in the study was that the participants self-identified as spiritual, therefore their lived experiences with spiritual self-care were presumed to be accurate and honest. Self-reporting can limit the validity of the research because the researcher cannot verify the participant's actual experience. However, the descriptions

provided by the participants were insightful, reflective, and richly supported the research questions.

Age of participants was also a limitation presented by the study. Eight out of the 11 participants were over the age of 55. Although most of the participants were over the age of 55, the experience that these participants provided were seasoned and contributed value to the study. This disparity shows the need to include additional recruitment stipulations to select younger professionals in the study of self-care.

Another limitation was conducting the interview via the telephone. Because the interviews were conducted via telephone, the researcher was not able to make visual observation of the participants such as viewing their body language. A participant's body language might provide the researcher with other useful non-verbal data. To address this, future research can be conducted face-to-face.

To date, there has been a dearth of prior research on spiritual self-care for mediators. Due to this limitation, no previous research was cited in this study that could lay the foundation for the understanding this research problem. While no prior studies specifically mention spiritual self-care practices in the conflict resolution field, this presents an opportunity to investigate further qualitative and quantitative studies on the subject.

The sampling strategy used in this study was purposeful and snowball sampling. Members of the ACR were recruited. Most of the participants of this study attended were the annual Rocky Mountain Retreat for conflict professionals. While this retreat is not marketed as a spiritual retreat or gathering, it has previously been supported by the

Spirituality Section of ACR. Therefore, it is possible that participants of this study were influenced by experience with the retreat.

### **Implications of the Findings and Recommendations for Future Research**

In spite of the limitations of this study, the results of this phenomenological research were valuable in improving the overall wellbeing all conflict professionals. Based on the findings, conflict practitioners were aware of the emotional toll inherent in this line of work can have on the individual. It is vital for conflict professionals to be aware of their emotional, mental, and physical health and to be cognizant of any work-related stress disorder that may be occurring. DiGrazia (2016) emphasized that conflict professionals are not completely free from conflict in their own lives; yet, peacemakers should be aware of any unaddressed conflict within themselves and be sensitive to how it may affect working with others in the peacemaking process. Raising the awareness that work-related stress disorders can happen to conflict professionals is imperative to the field, and it is important that this message is shared and addressed through professional associations, in training programs or continuing education courses and most importantly, in graduate school courses for those seeking career opportunities in the field of conflict resolution. The field needs to become more proactive in raising the awareness and encouraging more self-care, more support groups, and more professional development courses to inform and support professionals.

Bowling and Hoffman (2003) are credited with the initial discourse relating to the presence a mediator brings into a mediation session. Prior to Bowling and Hoffman, Gold (1993) identified how a mediator's presence could have a profound impact on the mediation process and developed a conceptual framework for mediation as a "healing

paradigm”. This idea of presence can be described as the qualities that a mediator brings that can have an impression (negative or positive) on the mediation process. In the field of conflict resolution, being neutral is often cited as being central to any effective mediator, as a mediator is often defined as a third party neutral. Mediators are trained and expected to be neutral, setting aside their biases before going into a mediation process. The participants of this study are spiritual practitioners who themselves have a tool that they use that assists them in being a third party neutral. If current and future conflict practitioners are challenged on how to become neutral or be more neutral in the process of mediation, this study offers insight and to the concept of neutrality. Mayer (2004) challenged this basic value of the field by posing that it is neither possible, realistic, or preferable doing mediation work and the mediator to separate his or her own attitudes or beliefs so that they are truly neutral in the process.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research conducted on spiritual self-care should focus on the continued discourse on spirituality and the conflict resolution field. The participants of this study highlighted spirituality as a framework for understanding self and being of the utmost value to those they serve. While in recent years there has been greater attention on the two subjects collectively more research is needed concerning self-care of practitioners in the conflict resolution field as well as exploring the relationship between conflict practitioners and work-related stress disorders such as burnout. A review of the literature in chapter two presented the various research that has been conducted in the helping professionals field, yet, further research is needed to specifically address self-care and

conflict practitioners to decrease the lacuna in the literature. Furthermore, there needs to be a more in-depth exploration as to how conflict professionals take care of the self.

While this study focused on the spiritual aspect of self-care, more informational data could be gathered from other conflict professionals regarding their specific self-care practices and evaluating whether or not spiritual self-care practices emerges as a theme. Future research should also explore larger sample sizes and include mixed methodological research designs. The quantitative aspect of a mixed methods study can provide a numerical representation of a research problem, while the qualitative aspect of a study give voice to participants and further informs the numerical representation. A mixed methods study design can add a broader perspective and counter any weakness of a qualitative or quantitative study, thus making it a more well-rounded study that can be analyzed from multiple perspectives.

Additionally, while this study focused mostly on mediators within the conflict resolution field, it would be insightful to conduct research on other types of mediators, or conflict professionals that are employed as mediators, or United Nation Peacekeepers involved in high-conflict regions or war zones exposed to high traumatic conflicts. Further, the findings from this study suggest that spiritual self-care practices are not implemented to solely decrease high levels of stress or provide balance to practitioner's lives; more so, the findings suggest that we redefine how it is that we look a self-care, whether it is spiritual in nature or not.

### **Contribution to Conflict Resolution Field**

This study explored the integration of spirituality into the self-care practices of conflict resolution professionals. The field of conflict resolution, specifically mediation,

has seen tremendous growth in the recent decades with increased career opportunities for individuals seeking to advance the field (Zelizer & Chiochetti, 2017). If mediation is often thought of as the premier tool of conflict resolution, the growing importance and value of this sector must not be overlooked. Similar to other helping professionals, mediators are aware that the work they perform can have a negative impact on them, and the need for self-care is essential to their overall effectiveness and resiliency. Gengoux and Roberts (2017) affirmed that the phenomenon of burnout should not be discounted, as it poses a risk for the professionals' quality of work, life, and ultimately poses grave consequences for the client.

Conflict professionals in this study purposefully sought out spiritual activities that supported their self-care. The participants of the study cited mind-body practices and techniques such as mediation, yoga, or other mindfulness practices that aided them in connecting with their clients, or higher power, thus providing them with a space to feel calm, safe and ready to deal with conflict. Morelli and Fitz (2016) suggested that developing mind-body techniques for awareness is a foundation for both novice and experienced conflict resolution practitioners. The authors further added that mind-body practices are "excellent forms of self-care and can promote resilience in the practitioners" (p. 94).

In mediation trainings, conflict resolution skills are taught, however, the need to address self-care and how a mediator practices taking care of themselves is often not addressed in certification trainings. Participants of this study overwhelmingly discussed the importance of self-care and its preventions towards work related stress disorders. The importance and value of self-care practices should be emphasized in mediation training,

continuing education trainings, and especially graduate school conflict resolution programs. According to Gengoux and Roberts (2017), evidence from other helping professionals training programs has indicated effort towards building a culture that overtly values self-care to help graduate students engage in higher self-care practices.

Finally, the inclusion and importance of spirituality was very present throughout the study. Participants found great value in the incorporation of spirituality into their self-care practices. The themes that emerged from the study support the idea that having a spiritual self-care practice helped participants become more aware of professional and personal preservation, connecting with their clients, and finding great value in the work that they do. Perhaps, spiritual self-care for conflict professionals can be included in trainings, mentorships, and continuing education seminars to enhance the quality and effectiveness of all conflict professionals.

### **Conclusion**

In chapter 5, a summary of the results from the data analysis process was presented and interpreted into three major themes from the study: spiritual self-care practices were used as tools for preparation and protection from work-related stress disorders, evoked feelings of connectedness, and participants embodied their practices into their daily lives. Through the findings of this study, further studies can be conducted to continue the discourse of not only spirituality and self-care, but specifically conflict professionals and their spiritual self-care practices. The implications from this research illuminate the critical need for conflict professionals to be aware of their emotional, mental, and physical health. Conflict professionals must be cognizant of any work-related stress disorder they may be enduring. Through the finding of this study, participants

emphasized the importance and need for a self-care practice. The research conducted can contribute to the field of conflict resolution in regard to how prospective, current, and future conflict professionals are trained with respect to emphasizing self-care practices, and burnout prevention. Further, there is great value in incorporating spiritual practices into a self-care regimen.

### **Summary**

In order for mediators and other conflict professionals to be effective tools in the peacemaking process, professionals in the field must maintain regular spiritual self-care practices. The purpose of conducting this research was to explore how conflict professionals who identified as spiritual incorporate spirituality into their self-care practices. The results of this research emphasize the importance of an established self-care practice towards the prevention of burnout and also resiliency in the conflict resolution field. This study utilized Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological methodology to capture the participants' lived experiences of incorporating spirituality into their self-care practices. To attain an understanding of this experience, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 conflict professionals who self-identified as spiritual, exploring their self-care practices and the essence of what spiritual self-care entailed. After conducting the interviews, the researcher identified three major themes: (a) mediators' spiritual practices were used as tools for preparation and protection in conflict work, (b) spiritual practices invoked deep and meaningful feelings of connectedness, and (c) that spiritually-identifying mediators began to embody the same practices they used. In essence, spiritual self-care was vital to participant efficacy in their professional lives. These conflict professionals were able to offer deep value to their

clients through their spirituality, while simultaneously finding deep value in their spiritual self-care practices. The themes that emerged from the study related to the body of literature within the helping professions field, supporting the need for a self-care regimen, with an emphasis on spirituality as a vital component of that regimen. Conflict professionals, mediators and other professionals who fell under the scope of a conflict resolution specialists are driven by the desire to be of service and help those who are in need. However, this type of work can be very taxing on the professional, both physically and mentally. To effectively combat the stressors that can plague these professionals, incorporating self-care habits, whether spiritual in nature or not, is essential for the retention of great and valuable peacemakers. With a strong spiritually based self-care regiment in place, practitioners are better able to connect to their clients, develop and fine tune skills to combat work-related stress disorders, and offer tremendous and invaluable service to their clients. These implications can be beneficial for practitioners the field of conflict resolution.

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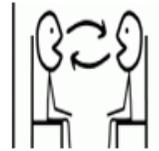
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## Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Flyer



## *You're Invited to Participate in a Research Study*

*Be part of an important research study on spiritual self-care*

- *Are you a mediator or other conflict practitioner?*
- *Do you practice self-care?*
- *Do you incorporate spiritual practices into your self-care regimen?*

*If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study on spiritual self-care.*

*The purpose of this study is to explore the impact that spirituality has on self-care through the lived-experiences of mediators, or conflict practitioners who identify as spiritual people, and how they integrate spirituality into their self-care regimen.*

*Participants must be at least 25 years of age, and have been consistently practicing in the field for a minimum of two years. Interviews will be conducted via telephone.*

*To learn more about this research opportunity, please contact Diane Gaston at (786)237-1071, or email [dgaston@nova.edu](mailto:dgaston@nova.edu) for more information.*

## Appendix B: Adult Consent Form

### Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled *Spiritual Self-Care for Mediators*

Funding Source: None  
 IRB protocol # 2017-88  
 Principal investigator  
 Diane M. Gaston  
 511 NE 177 Street  
 North Miami Beach, FL 33162  
 786-237-1071

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:  
 Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)  
 Nova Southeastern University  
 (954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790  
[IRB@nsu.nova.edu](mailto:IRB@nsu.nova.edu)

Site Information:  
 Diane Gaston  
 3500 Washington Street  
 Hollywood, FL 33021

#### **What is the study about?**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study to explore the impact that spirituality has on self-care through the lived experiences of mediators, or other conflict professionals that identify as spiritual, and how they integrate spirituality into their own self-care regimen.

#### **Why are you asking me?**

You are invited to participate because you are currently a member of the Association of Conflict Resolution (ACR), or provide mediation or conflict resolution intervention services.

#### **What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?**

The principal investigator, Diane Gaston, will interview you. You may be asked questions about your spiritual beliefs, practices, attitudes and perceptions that are held by you regarding your self-care regimen. The interviews will last no more than 90 minutes.

#### **Is there any audio or video recording?**

This research project will include audio recording of the interview. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher. The researcher will transcribe the recording. The recording will be kept securely in the researcher's home office in a locked cabinet. The recording will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study. The recording will be destroyed after that time by deleting the transcript.

#### **What are the dangers to me?**

Risks to you are minimal, meaning they are not thought to be greater than other risks you experience every day. Risks might include emotional discomfort, feeling uncomfortable being audio recorded, and loss of confidentiality. To minimize the feeling of discomfort, the researcher will allow any additional time needed for you to gather yourself before proceeding with the interview. Being recorded means that confidentiality cannot be promised. The researcher will

keep all records locked in a home office and will destroy the recordings and all other records after three years, to reduce the possibility of any discomfort to you. If you have questions about the research, your research rights, or if you experience an injury because of the research please contact Diane Gaston at (786) 237-1071. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions about your research rights.

**Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?**

There are no benefits to you for participating.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

**How will you keep my information private?**

The transcripts of the recordings will not have any information that could be linked to you. As mentioned, the recordings will be destroyed 36 months after the study ends. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB, or the researcher may review research records. Records will be kept locked in the researcher's home office in a locked file cabinet, the interviews will be conducted in a secure location with the door closed, to ensure that the records remain confidential.

**What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

**Other Considerations:**

If the researcher learns anything that might change your mind about being involved, you will be told of this information.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Spiritual Self-care for Mediators: A Phenomenological Study*.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Interview Protocol Questions

### Interview protocol

This study will use semi-structured interview questions that will take no longer than 90 minutes to complete. The questions in this interview will be consistent through each interview to examine the phenomena experienced by the participants. The questions below will be used in combination with some follow-up questions if needed.

1. Do you practice self-care; if so, describe it?
2. What values or beliefs do you have that pertain to self-care?
3. Was there a moment in your life when you realized the importance or value of having a self-care regimen?
4. How do you describe and interpret your own spirituality?
5. What spiritual practices do you use for self-care?
6. What is the significance of incorporating spirituality into your self-care practice?
7. How do you think your spirituality affects your self-care and overall well-being?
8. Has working in the conflict resolution field affected you personally, professionally and spiritually?
9. Does your spirituality or any of your spiritual practices play a role or act as a protective barrier for working with people involved in conflict?
10. Do you seek support outside of your spiritual and/or religious support?
11. Are there any other practices that you engage in that are part of your self-care regimen?
12. What specific spiritual virtues are important and significant to you?