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THE VIETNAM PRISONER OF WAR EXPERIENCE:

LINKS BETWEEN COMMUNICATION AND RESILIENCE

A dissertation submitted

by

LINDA D. HENMAN

to

THE FIELDING INSTITUTE

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degree of

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Abstract

The Vietnam Prisoner of War Experience:
Links Between Communication and Resilience
by

Linda D. Henman

Resilience has been studied from a variety of perspectives, but links between communication and resilience have been overlooked. In contrast to the other populations of captives who have been studied, the repatriated Vietnam prisoners of war (VPOWs) are suffering almost no mental illness. The VPOWs' narratives provide a theoretical frame for thinking of resilience as a communication phenomenon. By making and sharing meaning on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group levels, the VPOWs were able to emerge whole, optimistic, and healthy. Understanding the association between communication and resilience among the VPOWs required an examination of literature in several domains. First, the literature by and about the VPOWs provides a starting point for understanding this group. Resilience literature forms the foundation for knowing how people bounce back from trauma. Communication theory builds the infrastructure for appreciating a new dimension for understanding how people create meaning and then share that meaning with others. Finally, systems theory furnishes a perspective for realizing the constellation of factors that helped the VPOWs remain resilient. This was a qualitative study which entailed the interviewer joining the Navy's team of researchers and aligning herself with them for over a year. Phase I consisted of approximately 50 unstructured interviews with repatriated VPOWs. Phase II involved interviewing 12 participants in a structured, topical format. Chronicling the subjective accounts of these men and framing them as communication allowed an examination of the results. Intrapersonal communication consisted of patriotism, faith in God, optimism, finding a purpose, and avoiding apathy. Dyadic communication and humor were the basis of sharing meaning between individuals. Interdependency, competition, a military system, and supporting others to avoid apathy formed the structure for sharing meaning within a group. Meaning making at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group levels offers an alternative perspective for understanding resilience. Knowing that human connection virtually insured the survival and resilience of these men indicates effective communication is contagious, as is resilience. Through the creation of social support, these fiercely independent men learned to rely on their own power and to draw a sense of mastery from each other.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

On August 5, 1964 Navy Lt. (j.g.) Everett Alvarez, Jr., 26 , became the first Naval aviator to be shot down in the war in North Vietnam. He was to be incarcerated in Hanoi until February of 1973. He, like many others, was to be beaten, tortured, starved, and plagued by parasites and disease during the ensuing years. The narratives of the Vietnam prisoners of war (VPOWs) are filled with frightening stories, stories that seem almost too horrible to believe. In fact, some of the people who actually visited the POWs in Vietnam, such as Jane Fonda, accused the VPOWs of fabricating the tales (Chapman, 1973, April 19).

Certainly the collective experience of these men would cause a reader of fiction to question whether such unrestrained savagery could really exist. Perhaps a novel about several hundred men recounting tales of tragedy, death, loneliness, and despair would be seen as too contrived. Such things just do not happen. In this case, however, fact was indeed more bizarre than fiction. Understanding the capacity for people to endure such horrific circumstances and to emerge as functioning people teaches much about the human spirit flourishing in communities.

The tale would seemingly be a sad one. How could it be anything other? Without question it is a tragic story, but more than that, it is an inspirational one. For every account of unspeakable atrocity there are two of heroism and

selflessness. For every tear of sadness, there is one of joy. The towering courage of these men, their unwavering commitment to each other, their stalwart sense of purpose, and their indomitable spirit provide lessons in survival, coping, hardiness, and the importance of community. Because they have emerged whole, healthy men, theirs is a story of endurance and victory.

Description of the Study

This study uncovers some of the gaps in the information about the VPOWs, their history, and their abilities to create a culture in captivity. The study is intended to augment the findings of the various quantitative studies, to enrich the learnings of the lived experience. The quantitative data that indicate VPOWs have fared well provide only part of the picture. Knowing *why* and *how* these men were able to achieve mental health helps explain the reasons for success. This study examines the personal VPOW accounts and interprets them in a frame of communication theory as they relate to resiliency. By shedding some light on the personal, subjective experience of the Vietnam POWs, perhaps the reasons for the VPOWs' hardiness will become clearer and more meaningful.

This investigation proposes possible explanations for hardiness. The literature certainly suggests there are links between communication and resilience. The assumption was the interviews of the participants would support the existing literature.

Purpose of the Study

The information gleaned from the Navy's study of 138 men for over 20 years is invaluable, yet many voids exist. The findings that have measured posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), general adjustment, and coping in solitary confinement are quantitative in nature, so much of the subjectivity of the experience has been ignored.

In 1975, two years after repatriation, John Deaton conducted a self-report questionnaire study of 137 Navy repatriated Vietnam prisoners of war (RVPOWs) who had all been aviators and had experienced solitary confinement during their incarceration. Deaton's findings provide a measurable, quantitative picture of the VPOWs' coping skills. However, the expressiveness of the experience, the individual account, has never been reflected.

Schutz (1970) argued that language is the central medium for transmitting meaning. Accordingly, social phenomenology rests on the tenet that social interaction constructs as much as conveys meaning. Words are the constitutive blocks of reality that the VPOWs used to create meaning for themselves and to share meaning with each other. Yet, these words have remained unrecorded for more than 20 years.

Why have the VPOWs done so well since repatriation? Why have they fared better than previous prisoner groups? What still remains to be learned? The purpose of this study is to build on the existing information and to provide additional insights about the intrapersonal and interpersonal coping strategies the

POWs either intentionally employed or inadvertently stumbled upon. The value of these coping strategies can then be estimated in terms of their consequences; that is, they can be appreciated in light of the present life adjustments of the individuals concerned.

This study rests on the premise that communication includes a wide range of behaviors, thoughts, and feelings. All that humans do involves communication because ideas and emotions are constructs of intrapersonal or self-communication. Examining three specific types of communication, intrapersonal, dyadic, and group communication, three of the commonly acknowledged forms of communication (Cunningham, 1992), allows a more thorough analysis of the role communication may have played in the POW experience and the function it may continue to play more than 20 years after repatriation.

Identifying patterns of behavior and interpreting them in a frame of communication theory builds confidence that certain kinds of communication behaviors served as coping mechanisms that were beneficial for POWs and could be advantageous to people in less traumatic yet stressful situations.

Argument for the Study

Deaton's 1975 study focused on learning how the VPOWs coped in solitary confinement. Deaton's findings provide a basis for understanding what the RPOWs perceived their coping strategies to have been while they were in solitary, but more needs to be said about how these behaviors or strategies were used throughout the captivity situation.

Since the literature identifies social support as a construct of resilience, discovering more about it provides a clearer picture of how the VPOWs relied on each other to find a purpose in their lives. Perhaps the same coping behaviors this group used in solitary confinement are some of the same coping strategies they used later, but some new knowledge needs to be generated.

The general area of the VPOWs' survival behavior has been studied from several angles, such as coping; but no study has concentrated on the *why* and *how* of the communication system. In addition, no study looks at this group from a systems perspective. That is, no study has examined a constellation of factors that may have worked together to bolster resilience, so important considerations may have been missed. The social support of the POWs occurred within a well defined context. Understanding the context of the behavior provides the underpinnings for appreciating how the POW communication system played an important role in the men's resilience.

Another limitation of the Deaton study is that it concentrates on *survival*. Knowing how the POWs survived is only part of the picture. They did much more than survive. Now, more than 20 years later, there is evidence that the members of this group not only survived, but they also went on to enjoy unexpectedly productive lives. In other words, these men are *hardy*. Using the current information, a reexamination is warranted. Now that some conclusions can be drawn that what these men did worked over a 20 year span, their stories. merit further examination.

The findings are more impressive when seen as encompassing a long span of time. In other words, making claims about resiliency 5 years after repatriation might engender a "so what?" reaction. However, the continued hardiness of the VPOWs after more than 20 years lends credibility to the conclusions and to new learnings.

Another impressive point about the current findings involves the populations considered. The VPOWs are compared to their control group counterparts and to the general population. One would expect the incidence of trauma related problems to be radically higher among the POW group, so even moderate elevations in PTSD diagnoses in that group would be considered important enough to study. However, that is not the case. According to the work of Nice, Garland, Hilton, Baggett & Mitchell (1996), there is no higher diagnosis rate of PTSD in the VPOWs than in the general population. The VPOWs obviously did something right.

Telling the stories of these men and detailing what they did to cause their long-term resilience is important for several reasons. First, knowing what worked with the Vietnam group provides an important teaching tool for the survival schools in helping them identify explicit constructive behaviors that have worked in previous circumstances. This information provides a basis for presenting a kind of repertoire of reactions to the survival school participants. Passing on to future potential prisoners the proven techniques of the past allows these people to become active agents in their own hardiness. In addition, knowing that these

RPOWs continue to enjoy productive lives after more than 20 years might help to diffuse the horror of the prospect of captivity.

The second reason this study is valuable concerns people who will never become prisoners in the classic sense of the word, the general population. What can the prisoners of life's disappointments learn from this group? Does the employee of a downsizing company stand to gain from the lessons learned from the POWs? The corporate battlefield of the 90s is not the horrific place that Hao Lo prison was, but it can be a scary place to live, nonetheless. Perhaps the lessons about hardiness the POW have to teach would serve the corporate population well.

The final point has already been mentioned. Uncovering the constructs of the VPOW resilience allows a clear picture of what this group did while in captivity. Bringing these coping behaviors to the surface, focusing on their value, and encouraging their constancy allows the RPOW group to continue to use the behaviors that served them and continue to serve them.

The RPOWs can become active agents for their ongoing hardiness. After hearing the results of the impressive statistics concerning the mental health of the POW group, one RPOW asked in reference to his current life dilemma: "What are we doing wrong now?" His question was prompted by a desire to improve his quality of life further. Information about effective behavior these men used in the past is a reasonable basis for searching for answers to future problems.

Background of the Study

In early 1973, five hundred sixty-six military personnel who had been held captive in Vietnam were repatriated to the United States. They received comprehensive medical and psychiatric examinations which indicated the POWs had been subjected to numerous physical and psychological traumas. Evidence of high mortality and morbidity rates among World War II and Japanese POWs prompted concern for the long-term consequences to the Vietnam group. In response to this concern, the Department of Defense established a comprehensive annual medical follow-up program for the RPOWs that was scheduled to last 5 years. The initial and primary purpose of this program was to provide preventive medical follow-up and monitoring, but the later addition of a matched comparison group in 1976 allowed a longitudinal comparison of the cumulative incidence of disease between the two groups.

One hundred thirty-eight U.S. Navy RPOWs were enrolled in this study with their control group counterparts who had never been POWs. Originally the study took place in San Diego, but the facility has since moved to the Robert E. Mitchell Center for Prisoner of War Studies at Pensacola Naval Air Station. In June of 1995 I moved from St. Louis to Pensacola to join the team of researchers who are taking part in this ongoing project. Under the auspices of the Red Cross and the direction of the command at the center, I have been able to meet and interview many of the RPOWs and the physicians who have examined them.

The results of the Navy's 20 year follow-up psychological evaluations are surprising: no more increased incidence of PTSD than in the general population and no significant differences in adjustment disorders between the POW group and the control group. Therefore, this study will not concentrate on PTSD. Rather, a myriad of coping behaviors that seemingly *prevented* the development of PTSD will be the focus of this discussion.

The possible reasons for the impressive findings of the 20 year study are numerous: participation in military survival training programs, chronological maturity of the POWs, ongoing medical and psychological examinations, and the availability of psychiatric support for the RPOWs and their families. Based on their study of World War II POWs, Zeis and Dickman (1989) added "emotional maturity, intelligence, interpersonal skills, educational level, commitment to the war effort, or locus of control, may be mediating variables that resulted in both promotion in rank and relative ease of adjustment to the stresses of POW life and repatriation" (p.86)

However, this was not just a typical group of mature, college educated men. This was a group of military aviators. That piece of the puzzle might not immediately seem significant, but the information addressed in Rhinehardt (1970) and Fine and Hartman's (1968) study of aviator personality provides a foundation for understanding this group. Unlike members of the general population, the members of the aviation community deal with the reality of death on a daily basis. People from any given corporation are not forced to face death as regularly as the

aviator does. Fellow employees do not routinely get killed in the line of duty in civilian places of work, but fatal accidents are a way of life in the flying community. Losing a squadron mate, while sad, is not unusual.

Because aviators must face their own mortality and that of their friends, they have built coping strategies into their culture. Singing songs about death at Friday night happy hour was a Vietnam Era tradition. The lyrics indicate a desire to overpower death or to be undaunted by it. The following are two examples of these lyrics:

> Dear Mom, your son is dead. He bought the farm today.
> He drove his OV-10 down Ho Chi Minh Highway.
> He did a rocket pass, and then he busted his ass.
>
> or
>
> By the fuchsia waterfall one bright and sunny day
> Beside his broken Phantom Jet the poor young pilot lay.
> His parachute hung from a nearby tree. He was not yet quite dead.
> Let's listen to the very last words the poor young pilot said:
> "I'm going to a better place where everything is right.
> Where whiskey flows from telephone poles and poker every night.
> Where all you have to do all day is sit around and sing, and the crew chiefs all are women. Oh, death, where is thy sting?"

"Buying the farm" is something that happens to the other guy; singing songs about it helps disarm the fear. Instead of viewing death as a taboo or scary subject, this group chose to scoff at it or perhaps to glorify it by singing about it. The steeling of oneself to the possibility of death may have been one of the training strategies these men employed that later served them during captivity. Their use of humor will be addressed later, but one thing seems noteworthy at this juncture. Thumbing one's nose at the frightful may be a way of disarming it.

One RPOW said their definition of pessimism and optimism would be a helpful addition to this discussion. He said their definition of pessimism was "We are going to die here, and we'll be buried here." Their definition of optimism was "We are going to die here, and they will send our bodies home" (Bob, personal interview, June 15, 1996).

Research Questions

After studying the personal accounts of the VPOWs, the significance of the human need to create meaning within oneself and among people becomes apparent as do the structures and systems that engender and bolster coping mechanisms. Simply put, the role of communication within the individual, between individuals, and among group members of the VPOW community is the focus of this study. The project is an investigation aimed at capturing the POWs' reports on their perceptions of their communication behaviors within the frame of the of the study.

The study is intended to be exploratory in nature. The research questions are meant to guide the search for reasonable explanations: Is there a the relationship between intrapersonal communication patterns and VPOW hardiness? Did effective dyadic communication play a role? Was group affiliation important?

These three areas outline some of the factors that may have helped these men make sense of a senseless situation. These three areas of communication were chosen because, as the literature review will show, they capture three of the major elements of communication and provide an arena for interpreting the subjective accounts as they relate to communication theory.

Often intrapersonal, dyadic and group communication happen simultaneously. Anytime a person communicates with a group, he is also communicating within himself and with another. So the three constructs of communication are not distinct, separate behaviors. Rather, they are reasonable divisions of a process that allows a detailed analysis of each (Adler & Rodman, 1994).

A Qualitative Approach

Holstein and Gubrium (1994) offered the notion that a family of qualitative research approaches concerned with reality and constituting interpretive practices explains how humans construct and give meaning to their actions. Therefore, qualitative methodologies will be used to safeguard the VPOWs' subjective points of view. As Schutz (1964) pointed out, "The safeguarding of the subjective point of view is the only but sufficient guarantee that the world of social reality will not be replaced by a fictional nonexisting world constructed by the scientific observer" (p.8).

The interview findings are intended to be more of an intervention technique than research in a more traditional sense. In other words, the study will be structured to help the participants see themselves as active agents in their own survival and hardiness.

Definition of Terms

Research Sample

References to Vietnam prisoners of war (VPOWs) refer to those who were imprisoned in North Vietnam. This was a group composed primarily of aviators

who had flown sorties over the North. With few exceptions, they were Air Force, Navy, and Marine officers who had voluntarily chosen to fly attack, bomber, or fighter aircraft. Defining the composition of the research sample is important because both the men and their experiences were significantly different from those of other captivity situations.

In addition to this group being different from those in other captivity situations throughout history, the group in the North was different from that of the South. The POWs imprisoned in South Vietnam were, for the most part, young enlisted personnel. Most had not received survival training; many were drafted into military service; and most had not received advanced formal education. Furthermore, the prisoners in the South were imprisoned in hellish jungle prison camps. Living conditions were usually worse than those of the North, and treatment was often worse as well (Hubbell, 1976).

Five hundred sixty-six POWs were repatriated in 1973, but this study concentrates on the 138 Naval aviators the Navy has been studying since 1973. Most of the statistics used in this dissertation focus on this group of 138 men. They were singled out because they had been in captivity for 7 years or longer. The rationale behind this narrowing of subjects is that the experiences of the late shootdowns were drastically different from those of the early ones. Also, the Air Force has just recently joined the ongoing study, so information about them is limited. However, currently about 300 hundred men are participating in the Navy's

evaluations; so claims about hardiness and resiliency will be based on all available data.

Defining Resilience

For the purpose of this discussion, *hardiness* and *resilience* will be used synonymously. They will be defined as the capacity to cope with and to survive traumatic conditions and to recover from adversity, as measured by the absence of a psychiatric diagnosis. The absence of psychiatric illness is appropriate because it implies these men "bounced back." The literature review supports these definitions.

In addition, the criterion of using psychiatric diagnosis as the basis for determining hardiness is reasonable for this group since the participants in the study have received psychiatric evaluations each year since 1973. Unlike members of the general population, these men have submitted to a screening process that is designed to determine whether any mental illness is present. Adding credibility to the findings, all evaluations were conducted at the research center at NOMI by certified psychologists and psychiatrists using standardized procedures.

The capacity for men to endure traumatic conditions and to emerge, for the most part, unscathed presents a number of challenges for researchers. The experience of the VPOWs is beyond the imagination, yet understanding a modicum of it might shed some light on survival and hardiness. Understanding which strategies, conscious or unconscious, contributed to the resilience of the POW group has the potential for helping individuals adapt when faced with life's

inevitable stresses and traumas. The explanations for the group's success are varied; this study will attempt to uncover a few.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the literature by and about the Vietnam POWs, a common theme emerges, a theme of hardiness and resiliency. The experiences of these VPOWs provide a dramatic backdrop for research on stress, trauma, and adaptation. The experiences offer universal lessons for other groups, groups who are suffering difficult, if not traumatic ordeals. A general look at related theories and a specific discussion about their application to the VPOWs provides a format for understanding the nature of the captivity situation and its relevance to a discussion of resilience.

This review of the literature opens with a comparison of the VPOWs with prisoners from other wars. This is followed by a definition of resilience, an explanation of its constructs, and theoretical speculations about its acquisition. An analysis of specific examples of applications of the constructs of resilience among Vietnam prisoners of war used during their captivity provides some insights about how resilient behaviors may have played a role in the VPOW experience. Next, theories of communication are introduced to show the relevance of establishing meaning among the VPOWs and examples of how interpersonal communication and group affiliation played a role in the experience. The links between creating meaning and resilience will be highlighted

A Comparative Analysis

Claiming resilience in the VPOW group is reasonable when this group is compared to other captivity situations. The following studies indicate other groups suffered significant mental problems; the VPOW group did not. The fact that the VPOW group is, for the most part, mentally well (Nice et al., 1996) begins to take on new significance, and claims of resilience become appropriate. To illustrate the dramatic differences in POW groups, studies reporting posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will be presented.

Previous Captivity Situations

Evidence of PTSD among RPOWs from World War II range from 50% (Goldstein, van Kammen, Shelley et al., 1987) to 66% (Kluznik, Speed, Van Valkenburg and Magraw, 1986) to 82% (Oboler, 1987). In their research of 41 survivors of imprisonment by the Japanese during World War II, Goldstein et al. found half of the subjects met the full set of *DSM-III* criteria for PTSD. These researchers commented, "Interview data suggested that these individuals, despite the 40 years that have passed since their prisoner of war experiences, showed manifestations of posttraumatic stress disorder....MMPI data suggested significant pathology" (p. 1210).

Based on a sample of 20 Korean Conflict prisoners, Sutker, Winstead, Galina, and Allain (1990) found PTSD in 18 cases (90%), indicating problems more than 40 years after the POWs' repatriation. Oboler's 1987 report of 15

Korean Conflict prisoners stated that 73% the RPOWs had psychiatric impairment, and 47% had a specific PTSD diagnosis.

Kluznik et al. (1986) diagnosed retrospectively psychiatric disorders among 188 World War II and Korean conflict POWs. Within 1 year of their release, 67% of the two groups fulfilled *DSM-III* criteria for PTSD, and more than half of those continued to have symptoms over 40 years later.

Based on their longitudinal study of World War II POWs from the Pacific and European theaters and Korean Conflict POWs, using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale, Page, Engdahl, and Eberly (1991) concluded that depressive symptomatology is elevated in all the groups. They point out "Depressive symptoms are an associated feature of PTSD and major depression actually shares three diagnostic criteria with PTSD" (p. 676). They commented further that "these groups differ significantly from the general population and, in fact, most resemble a clinical population of recovering depressives" (p.676).

The reasons, Page et al. speculated, are twofold. First, the treatment of POWs during military captivity, at least as measured by self-reported medical symptoms, seems to be linked to subsequent depressive symptoms. Second, depressive symptoms can be attributed to captivity related factors. They suggested that the events of military captivity suffered decades ago are predictive of current, chronic posttraumatic depressive symptomatology.

The statistics for both World War II and Korean Conflict prisoners vary, and the sample sizes, in some cases were small; but one thing seems clear. Long-term

and dramatic consequences plague survivors of both World War II and Korean Conflict POW camps.

Vietnam War POWs

The available data from World War II POWs and Korean Conflict POWs naturally led researchers to expect problems in the Vietnam POW group. The VPOWs, were older, better educated, higher ranking, and better trained in survival than their previous counterparts had been, so some reduction in the percentages of the men with problems might have been anticipated. However, the drastic differences have only recently become apparent.

In their 1996 report Nice, Garland, Hilton, Baggett, and Mitchell compared the VPOWs to a matched comparison group of Naval aviators who were the same age, rank, and educational level but who were never POWs. The researchers reported "no significant differences between POWs and the comparison group members, with cumulative incidence rates of 3 (4%) of 70 in the POWs and 0 (0%) of 55 in the comparison group" (p. 379).

In spite of what would be expected, the VPOWs are not experiencing any significantly higher incidence of PTSD than their control group counterparts. This observation, coupled with a comparison to World War II and Korean Conflict RPOWs, leads to the startling conclusion that the VPOWs are experiencing almost no mental difficulties.

The conclusion is more surprising when three other factors are mentioned. First, the VPOW group has had yearly psychiatric evaluations for over 20 years, so

claims about the members' mental health are credible. Second, in the civilian population, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD has been estimated at 1% in the St. Louis area (Helzer, Robins, & McEvoy, 1987), at 1.3% in the population of North Carolina (Davidson & Fairbank, 1993), and at 9% of an urban population in Detroit (Breslau, Davis, Andreski, & Peterson, 1991). The rates of PTSD in the VPOWs appear to be within the range of lifetime prevalence rates among the general population. Third, since the men have enjoyed mental health for over 20 years, one many infer that, unlike the World War II and Korean Conflict POWs, no long-term problems are probable.

The evidence shows these VPOWs are different from other groups. Some of the previously mentioned advantages these men had as compared to prior POWs are certainly noteworthy and most probably significant. Furthermore, since almost all the VPOWs were officers, lower incidence of PTSD could have been predicted based on World War II POW research that indicated rank at the time of capture was a consistent and strong negative predictor of PTSD (Zeiss & Dickman, 1989; Sutker, Bugg, & Allain, 1990).

Another plausible reason for the VPOWs' success is their involvement in the Navy's study. As Nice et al. (1996) pointed out, "the comprehensive, long-term annual medical follow-up of these POWs may have had a substantial preventive effect" (p.380).

However, all this is reasonable speculation. No one has shown conclusively why this VPOW group has fared so well. So while assuming all the

aforementioned explanations are rational, realizing that *all* the explanations have not been forthcoming is also justifiable. Since prior studies do not adequately account for the impressive mental health of the VPOWs, more needs to be said. In spite of the insults of torture and deprivation, these men have bounced back. They are resilient.

Defining Resilience

Drawing from his work at the Center on Violence and Human Survival at the University of New York, psychologist Robert Lifton (1993) formulated his opinions about resiliency by studying crisis and evil. Between 1987 and 1990 he and his fellow researchers interviewed four highly disparate groups: social activists, civic leaders, poor Blacks, and Christian fundamentalists. From these interviews he sought to tease out and describe specific protean characteristics. He stated, "The protean self emerges from confusion, from the widespread feeling that we are losing our psychological moorings" (p. 1). The emergence of the changed self allows for a more resilient self. Lifton found that while the protean self may experience pain and trauma, it is able to transmute that trauma into various expressions of insight, compassion, and innovation.

In his work with trauma and recovery, Herman (1992) concluded "Resilience is best defined as a combination of externally observable adaptive actions and an internally held resilient point of view on one's own life" (p.259). Lifton seemed to support Herman's observation that resilience is tied to the ability to adapt. Examples of adaptability and intrapersonal coping are behaviors that appear

throughout the VPOW accounts and will be offered in this review of the literature (e.g., Hubbell 1976; Wagon, 1976; Sledge, Boydstun, & Rabe, 1980).

Vaillant (1977) implied that the ability to adapt contributes to resilience. His 20 year involvement as the principal investigator with a study of 268 college men and their 30 years following graduation led him to conclude, "adaptive devices are as important in determining the course of his life as are his heredity, his upbringing, his social position, or his access to psychiatric help" (p. 19).

Kobasa, Maddi, and Kahn (1982) linked resilience to hardiness and recovery from illness. In their study of middle and upper-level managers who filled out questionnaires covering a 5 year period, these researchers tested the hypothesis that hardiness--commitment, control, and challenge-- functions to decrease the effect of stressful life events. They concluded, "hardiness is a constellation of personality characteristics that function as a resistance resource in the encounter with stressful life events" (p. 169).

In addition to helping define resilience Kobasa et al. offered some other important information for understanding the VPOWs. Their work with resilience, as it applies to commitment, control, challenge, and social support are valuable to this dissertation. Comparisons between the VPOWs and other prisoners of war show how the Vietnam group supports the conclusions of Kobasa et al. and how the other groups failed to demonstrate the important array of personality characteristics.

Ordinarily the definition of a term states what the concept *is* rather than what it *is not*. The aforementioned researchers did not agree exactly about what resilience is, but they did seem to agree about what it is not. It is not sickness; it is not pessimism; it is not a failure to adapt. For the purpose of this dissertation, therefore, resilience will be defined as the capacity to cope with and to survive traumatic conditions and to recover from adversity, as measured by the absence of psychiatric diagnosis. The absence of psychiatric illness as definition of resilience is appropriate because it implies an ability to "bounce back."

Constructs of Resilience

Adler and Rodman, (1994) categorized human communication as intrapersonal, dyadic, and small group communication. Intrapersonal communication is communication with oneself (Cunningham, 1992); dyadic communication is communication between two people (Wilmot, 1994); and small group communication consists of a small collection of people who interact with each other over a period of time to reach goals (Adler & Rodman, 1994).

This dissertation is an examination and framing of the resilient behaviors of the VPOWs from an intrapersonal, dyadic, and group affiliation standpoint. Therefore, the constructs of resilience will be explored in the same way. As was mentioned earlier, there is not overwhelming agreement about what resilience is, so a reasonable approach is to discuss some of the theories about what constitutes resilience.

Intrapersonal Components of Resilience

Faith and Religion

Much of the POW literature from the Holocaust and the Vietnam War suggests the prisoners needed to believe in something outside themselves. The literature on resilience suggests this belief, in different forms, contributes to resilient behaviors. General faith and religion will be discussed separately later, but at this point they will be discussed together.

Lifton (1993) maintained being a part of something bigger contributes to resilience. Psychiatrist Leo Eitinger (1980), a Holocaust survivor, agreed that people devoted to a higher cause were more likely to build normal lives after their release.

After studying 40 resilient adults who had bounced back from childhood physical and / or sexual abuse, O'Connell Higgins (1994) contended that the most vital ingredient of resilience is faith. She suggested the resilient develop a "core conventional foundation about the importance of loving well that withstands their harsh treatment....their faith undergirds whatever specific religious or secular beliefs they might hold....their faith is anchored in their relationships with others" (p. 173).

O'Connell Higgins had been influenced by the writing of Sharon Parks who said that faith can be conceived as a unifying pattern that organizes a person's deepest convictions about him or herself and others. It is an individual's firmest core understanding of what is true (Parks, 1986).

Parks' link between faith and meaning making is noteworthy. As she pointed out, the connections which are achieved in the meaning making process, whether profound or superficial, are the knowledge one has woven. They are one's truth. This is the only canvas certain enough to receive the commitment of one's being and loyalty. Faith, therefore, is the unseen order the individual "sees" (Parks, 1986).

Optimism and Hope

The words *optimism* and *hope* also surface in a discussion of faith. These words imply a faith in the future and the expectation of a positive outcome. After administering neuropsychiatric examinations to military personnel that had recovered from Japanese prison camp internment, Brill's (1946) conclusion was that optimism plays a role in effectively coping. Based on her study of Holocaust survivors, Rappaport (1991) offered the notion that hope "provided fortitude to survive what could not be changed" (p.27).

Drawing from their work with the development of physical symptoms and recovery from coronary artery bypass surgery, Scheier and Carver (1987) developed an instrument, the Life Orientation Test, or LOT, for measuring optimism as it is negatively associated with physical symptom reporting. They found that variations in health over a period of time did not seem to lead to changes in optimism. In other words, the onset of physical symptoms did not seem to deplete optimism.

Scheier and Carver (1987) also concluded that optimism is a construct of resilience, as they linked it to a number of different positive health-relevant outcomes, ranging from the avoidance of physical symptoms to recovery from coronary artery bypass surgery. In their opinion, people who see desired outcomes as attainable continue to exert efforts for engendering those outcomes, even when doing so is difficult. They saw outcome expectancies as a major determinant of the disjunction between two classes of behavior: continued striving versus giving up and turning away.

The theoretical approach of Scheier and Carver (1987) emphasized the role of expectancies for the occurrence of good versus bad outcomes. In their view, faith in positive outcomes causes an optimistic orientation, that is, a set of generalized expectations that good things will happen. Their theory was that this expectancy of good actually causes it to occur.

Humor

Vaillant (1977) maintained that adaptability is a primary component of resilience and a sense of humor is a trait of effective adaptation. Lifton (1993) agreed that a sense of humor helps the "skillful psychological scavenger" (p.52). World War II prisoner Nardini (1952) supported the notion that a sense of humor helped the men survive and find a purpose for their lives.

Finding a Purpose

The significance of finding a purpose for one's life and its relationship to resilience is important because of its relatedness to the avoidance of apathy. *Not*

giving up seems to be tied to resilience in general, and faith and optimism in particular. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) stated that coping resources encompass the ability to "change the meaning of the situation" (p.4). Antonovsky (1987, p. 35), who studied the impact of concentration camp internment on Israeli women, added that meaningfulness is central to the optimistic attitude that "things will work out as well as can reasonably be expected."

For several reasons avoiding apathy is perhaps the most complicated of the constructs of resilience . First, as will be discussed in detail later, healthy dissociation and pathological apathy need to be distinguished, but this distinction is troublesome because the lines between the two are blurred. Second, finding meaning in a situation is an intrapersonal undertaking, but the creation of meaning among individuals is an interpersonal behavior. Both are key to avoiding an unhealthy apathetic reaction.

O'Connell Higgins (1994) discussed how intrapersonal and interpersonal communication behaviors contribute to resilience because individuals are able to create meaning out of their experiences. Based on her study, she concluded that creativity, activism, commitment, and conflict resolution all contribute to resilience. O'Connell Higgins' work suggests taking an active role and finding meaning can help foster resilience.

Interpersonal Components of Resilience

The aforementioned behaviors of adaptability and meaning making encompass both intrapersonal and interpersonal communication behaviors. The

communication behaviors exist within the person, but the addition of a social support network allows them to flourish.

The VPOW literature provides numerous examples that support the argument that social support is significant to resilience, but evidence exists outside the VPOW arena as well. Antonovsky (1979) noted "people who turned toward others for support tended to reverse negative consequences of an initially destructive experience" (p.278). Holocaust analysts Ayalon, Eitinger, Lansen, and Sunier (1983) concluded that reversing the perception of *victim* to that of *rescuer* gave the survivor a sense of mastery or control. The conclusions of Ayalon et al. add credence to the observation that taking action to help others and avoiding apathy can fuel social support networks, which ultimately contribute to resilience.

As a result of their study, Kobasa et al. (1982) concluded: "social supports are most effective in preserving health when hardiness is high....hardy personal may seek contact with others and with social institutions that could decrease the stressfulness of the events" (p.176).

After studying adults who had been physically abused as children, Olson (1992) concluded that locus of control, a social environment, and regard of supportive others are related to each other and to resilience. The role of mastery over one's situation is addressed at length in the POW literature, but realizing this need for control exists in other situations is noteworthy.

Developing Resilience

Discovering the origin of a specific characteristic such as resilience and understanding why the VPOWs are resilient needs to include a discussion of the broad field of human development. How do people acquire resilience? Human development theories encompass an extensive range of changes that happen during a person's lifetime and help to explain how and why resilience develops. Theories differ about whether these physiological, mental, sexual, social, and moral changes occur in an orderly and sequential pattern over an individual's life span; and there is little agreement about exactly how humans form traits and characteristics.

The Nature / Nurture Question

The way people become resilient is the basis of controversy. Some theorists argue genes, heredity and history form the person (Allport, 1937; Jung, 1960); others counter that experience and environmental influences do (Skinner, 1953; Maslow, 1971). Whatever influence is the most significant is debatable, but one thing seems clear. None of these forces exists in a vacuum.

Anne Anatasi (1958) took a different approach to the traditional "which one?" question. She began to ask, "How?" How do nature and nurture each influence the development of the person? She offered three points to consider in attempting to deal with this question of how both nature and environment play out their roles within the individual:

1. Nature and nurture are both fully involved in providing a source of any behavioral development. (Note that she used the word *fully* rather than *equally*.)
2. These influences cannot function in isolation but must always interact.
3. This interaction is multiplicative. That is, the full presence of each source is completely intertwined with the other.

Granted, nature and nurture are always involved in any behavior and both are ever-present if one believes Anatasi's theory. The question, then, is neither the age-old "Which one?" nor Anatasi's newer "How?" The questions become "How much?" How much of resilience is innate; how much is developed; and how much is learned? There is little agreement among the theorists about the answers.

Herman (1992) posed a different kind of perspective: resilience on a developmental continuum. According to Herman, "The development of a resilient point of view appears to follow a sequence, and individuals may be seen to be at a different point on this sequence rather than possessing or not possessing the trait of resilience" (p. 259).

Herman seems to support developmental theorist Erik Erikson who said that humans develop in a sequential pattern. Erikson postulated that human development occurs in a series of stages that are universal, and the stages progress in a predetermined way. For example, according to Erikson, trust or mistrust develops during infancy, from birth to one year (Erikson, 1950). Of importance to this discussion of resilience is Erikson's view of the interaction that takes place

between an individual and society during each stage of development, which can change the course of development in either a positive or a negative direction.

According to Vander Zanden's interpretation of Erikson, during the first year of life, the child whose needs are met both emotionally and physically, begins to sense the world is a safe place. In contrast, a child whose needs are ignored, whose world is chaotic and unpredictable, begins to fear the world and is suspicious of it. This can lead to the child developing a mistrust of others and of self (Vander Zanden, 1985). Erikson's work implied that mistrust or pessimism is a learned behavior. He seemed to be joining the ranks of the behaviorists and at odds with the trait theorists or the "nurture" side of the argument.

Considering trust as it is related to optimism is cogent to this discussion when viewed in conjunction with the work of Antonovsky (1987) with Israeli women, and Brill's (1946) with Japanese prisoners, who both contended that trust and optimism exist in resilient people. Antonovsky and Brill agreed that trust and optimism are constructs of resilience, but their work does not clarify the origin of either. Whether optimism is innate, and therefore not influenced by changing circumstances, or whether optimism is developed early in life is not clear; however, Scheier and Carver's research implied that, once established, optimism seems resistant to change.

On the other hand, the Holocaust literature implied that trauma can interfere with the continued development of resilience (e.g., Mazor, Gampel, Enright, and Orenstein, 1988). According to Mazor et al., the ability to cope and adjust can be

reduced by trauma. The traumatic effects of the Holocaust were intensified in individuals who were children at the time of the trauma. Most of these children remained alone in the chaotic world after the war, but even those children who survived as a result of support received from parents or others during the war, usually absorbed the adults' inability to organize their war experiences. The trauma, therefore, not only retroactively affected the past but also proactively contaminated all subsequent events (Mazor, et al. 1988).

After researching the effects of abuse on children, Farber and Egeland (1987) concluded that resilience is not attainable, and maladjustment will always appear at some point as a result of trauma. The VPOW literature shows these men are not maladjusted (Nice et al., 1996), so they seem to contradict the findings of Faber and Egeland. However, the VPOWs were adults when they were captured, so the question arises again about whether trauma during childhood is more devastating than trauma during adulthood.

Since the work of Mazar et al. offers the idea that a more pronounced negative reaction seems to exist among the Holocaust and abused children than among traumatized adults, the conclusion that developing resilience is a *process* gains credibility. Apparently childhood trauma at least interferes with the development of some kinds of adjustment behaviors.

Perhaps these traumatized children had developed all the trust they were going to develop during their lifetimes, and this amount was not enough to sustain them through the extraordinary trauma of the Holocaust. There was no opportunity to

develop trust and optimism later in life because that stage had passed. However, the trait theorists might suggest these people simply were not born with the capacity to be optimistic.

Trait Theories

Since one of the pivotal questions centers around whether resilience is innate or learned, a discussion of the trait theorists seems in order. Obviously, these theorists represent the "nature" side of the argument, but there is not a universal perspective among the trait theorists about exactly how traits account for a person's nature.

There is not even agreement about what a trait is. Trait psychologist, Gordon Allport, defined a trait as a neuropsychic structure that has the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide equivalent (meaningfully consistent) forms of adaptive and expressive behavior (Allport, 1961). Allport offered this definition for common traits, or traits that exist in all humans.

Allport also attempted to do justice to the complexity and uniqueness of the individual. He emphasized the importance of conscious motives. He focused on normal behavior and accepted the commonsense assumption that people are real beings; each has a real neuropsychic organization, and comprehending this organization is important (Allport, 1961). In apparent support of Allport, based on working with the impact of traumatic experiences among Southeast Asians,

Mock (1991) suggested that resilience is innate and a key personality characteristic for adaptation.

Whether an individual is born with the trait or predisposition to develop stress-related symptoms, or whether a person is born with a proclivity to avoid symptoms is ambiguous. Many questions remain, but another school of thought challenges the idea that people are born with these tendencies.

Behaviorist Perspective

While the trait theorists might feel comfortable viewing resilience as a variable that exists in a person's nervous system, behaviorist theorists such as B.F. Skinner (1974) disagreed with this approach. Skinner clashed with the trait theorists who presupposed the existence of spirits within the body that move it, disputing the notion that the idiosyncratic learning history and unique genetic makeup of the individual account for personality development. He contended that theorists such as Allport give too much attention to what goes on inside the person and not enough credit to the impact of the environment or situation.

Although Skinner recognized that each person possesses a genetic capacity to respond to events, he emphasized that behavior takes place in situations and produces outcomes. According to Skinner, individuals operate on the environment to trigger consequences. Skinner called this link between behavior and consequences *conditioning*, a concept that was influenced by the earlier theorist, Pavlov (Skinner, 1953).

Skinner also opposed the earlier developmental theories that focused primarily on maturation. He recognized that maturation plays a role in development, but considered this approach too limited, espousing instead a position that stresses control or manipulation of events. In Skinner's view, the primary objective of science is the prediction and control of events rather than a description of them. For these reasons, Skinner preferred to study development by concentrating on the learning of a multitude of behaviors that allow the individual to survive and prosper in transactions with the environment (1953).

More recent work by Martin Seligman (1973) supported Skinner's ideas about learning behaviors that contribute to survival. Seligman theorized that "learned helplessness" impairs adaptation and coping. Learned helplessness, according to the theory, refers to a generalized expectancy that events are independent of one's own responses. Consequently, individuals believe their coping behaviors are futile.

When this futility is perceived, according to Seligman, a belief develops that attributes failure to factors beyond a person's control. Instead of searching for ways to overcome adversity, people accept it. Since, in their minds, they are powerless to overcome the problem, they give up. This, of course, reinforces the idea that they were helpless in the first place, and the perception of helplessness and pessimism increases.

Humanistic Theories

In contrast to the researchers who studied psychological pathology, Abraham Maslow (1968) set out to study the behavior of psychologically healthy people in order to learn more about the psychological growth process. Perhaps Maslow's conclusions based on his study of healthy people are the most valid explanation of the development of resilience. Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a vehicle for examining how humans develop resilience in stages.

The most basic of the needs Maslow identified, the physiological needs, address survival in its most fundamental form. According to Maslow, these basic needs must be met before moving up the pyramid. The second set of needs, the security and belongingness needs, call Erikson's work to mind. Maslow (1968) contended that once the basic needs are gratified, trust or optimism begins to develop, which creates security and belongingness. In Maslow's opinion, psychological health begins to develop after the physiological needs are met; and this process of developing psychological health forms the foundation for mental resilience, or in Maslow's terms, self-esteem and self-actualization.

Overcoming adversity can help foster a sense of achievement and ego strength (Maslow, 1968). Maslow maintained that the person who has not conquered, withstood and overcome feels doubtful that he *could* (Maslow, 1968). The previously mentioned studies are in conflict about whether trust can be destroyed, but Maslow stated that it can be nurtured. Maslow's observation appears to lend credence to Scheier and Carver's findings that optimism is resistant to change.

Carl Rogers (1961) is another humanistic psychologist who focused on what he considered an innate motivation for actualizing tendency. This drive toward fulfillment enables people to enhance their lives. Rogers conceptualized that increasing awareness of true feelings causes the self-concept to become more congruent with the total experiences of the individual. Complete harmony within the person allows full functioning, self-fulfillment (Rogers, 1961).

Rogers identified the need for positive regard from significant others in self-concept and personality formation. He added that this positive regard is contagious. He suggested that group process, tension reduction, and conflict resolution are all impacted by congruence of experience, awareness, and communication. According to Rogers, only one person in the relationship needs to feel congruence in order for changes to occur in other people (Rogers, 1961).

While many earlier researchers had grappled with the roles innate characteristics and environmental conditions play in personality formation, there was a significant gap remaining, according to Rogers (1961). No earlier theorist had adequately emphasized the roles of interpersonal relationships and the individual's frame of reference in personality development. Rogers maintained that frame of reference can only be known to the person himself. In Rogers' view, subjective experiences of reality are critically important because they create the basis for all of the individual's judgments and behaviors.

Rogers' observations about perception are particularly significant to this discussion because they introduce the idea that the *meaning* one assigns to an

event, to a large extent, will determine whether he or she will be able to cope with it. A later discussion of the creation of meaning will further clarify the importance of personal perception and frame of reference.

Conclusions About Resilience

Comparing the VPOWs to other captivity situations shows the significant differences between this group and all others. Clearly, what they did worked. They are different. They are resilient. The *behaviors* they used to insure, develop, or augment this resilience take on new relevance. Knowing what resilience is, what it looks like, and how it is perceived prompts an examination of the coping strategies that caused it.

Analyzing the major theories of development and describing the similarities and differences of each provides a beginning for discussing the major controversies in the field. There is no theory that has been embraced wholeheartedly, and there is not even a common list of dimensions of personality or development. The nature / nurture debate continues with added and complex elements surfacing with each new theory. The dispute about whether the past or present has a more profound effect on behavior is yet unresolved. Investigators disagree about the uniqueness of the individual versus the uniformity of the species. Some theories drastically conflict, and others build on each other. However, studying this variety of perspectives to understand how people develop and find meaning in their lives is fruitful if it provides an inkling about human resilience and meaning making, for from such inklings come answers.

Intrapersonal Resilient Behavior In POWs

Understanding how the individual VPOWs responded to abusive treatment over an extended period of time and, nonetheless found meaning in their lives, provides a basis for answering some questions about how people cope and about why the VPOWs are not experiencing PTSD. Coping and resilience seem to be associated with finding meaning in one's life, and the VPOWs show signs of being resilient, so uncovering how the VPOWs found meaning within themselves is reasonable. This search for meaning was unique for each man, but some universality does exist. The focus of this discussion is to discover the common ground some of these prisoners shared and to illustrate how their behaviors support the descriptions of resilience identified earlier.

Intrapersonal communication is the basis and foundation of all other forms of communication (Cunningham, 1992). As Cunningham explained, intrapersonal communication "augments our understanding of both what communication is and what it means to be a human being" (p. 597). Cunningham interpreted intrapersonal communication as having to do with inner processing that involves the assignment of meaning in the following ways: cognitive, perceptual, and motivational episodes, interpretation, thinking, understanding, awareness, dreaming, reflections, feelings, dispositions and emotional states.

Four intrapersonal communication behaviors of prisoners will be highlighted because of their significance in Deaton's 1975 study of coping strategies and because of their reoccurrence in the aforementioned literature: faith, religion,

humor and the avoidance of apathy. Each in some way reflects the "inner process" of meaning making. This discussion will concentrate primarily on the behaviors of the Vietnam POWs. Other captivity experiences will be considered as well, however, the logic being that those coping mechanisms that have been reliable in several captivity situations are most credible.

Faith in Something Bigger: Finding Meaning

Holocaust POWs

Victor Frankl (1984), a World War II Holocaust survivor, pointed out "that everything can be taken away from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms--to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way" (p. 86). Frankl believed striving to find a meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man.

When referring to this "something bigger" idea in holocaust survivors, Joel Dimsdale (1974) called the phenomenon "survival for some purpose." Dimsdale pointed out: "Survival for some purpose was an extremely powerful motivating strategy. The person who had to survive to help a relative, to bear witness and show the world what had happened, or to seek revenge--this person was using a strong coping style" (p. 794).

In each of Dimsdale's examples an entirely different motive drove the person to survive. In fact, some of these motives might seem incongruent. For example, surviving to help a relative might seem extremely different from surviving to seek revenge; however, the motives have one thing in common. As Dimsdale pointed

out, each motive served the purpose of creating a goal or task that needed to be accomplished after the trauma had passed.

Pueblo POWs

Within 48 hours of their release from North Korea, 82 crew members of the *USS Pueblo* were evaluated. Based on psychiatric examinations, a questionnaire, a Sentence Completion Test and the MMPI, the evaluators divided the group into those men who had coped with stress and those who had tolerated it poorly. Within the group who had coped well, the researchers found the POWs had used a wide variety of ego-defense mechanisms, one of which was faith (Ford & Spaulding, 1973).

For the *Pueblo* crew the bigger good reflected a very specific definition of faith. Ford and Spaulding reported that the *Pueblo* prisoners described "faith" as a type of patriotism, and they characterized this faith as confidence in the leadership of the crew and the belief that the U.S. Government and Navy would not abandon them.

Vietnam POWs

This kind of patriotic related faith existed in the Vietnam group as well (personal interviews, 1994-1997). The Vietnam prisoners were aware that many segments of American society were in opposition to the war, and many of the prisoners themselves disagreed with the political decisions concerning the war; but the POWs also believed in the system and in the overall importance of serving one's country. In fact, most of the senior officers on each returning plane

commented on this patriotic belief in America. Vice Admiral Stockdale's comments are typical:

> The men who followed me down the ramp know what loyalty means, because they have been living with loyalty, living off loyalty for the past several years. I mean loyalty to our military ethic, loyalty to our commander in chief, loyalty to each other. We're home. America, America, God shed His grace on thee. (Stockdale & Stockdale, 1990, p. 437)

In his review of the literature David Jones (1980) also identifieed patriotism as one of the kinds of faith the VPOWs mention in their writing. Jones concluded: "The underlying theme was an internal standard of behavior which each set for himself. This took the specific forms of loyalty to country, to family, to fellow prisoners, or to self-image" (p. 615). Jones further noted that his search of the literature caused him to conclude these men were sustained by a desire to be a credit to their families: not to disgrace them, not to betray them, and not to increase their suffering by being killed by their captors.

This "loyalty to self-image," as Jones called it, took several forms. For a few, this image approached magical thinking, a feeling of personal invulnerability. This "I can get through today," or "I can hack it one day at a time" mentality seemed to serve the prisoners well. Jones quoted one VPOW's more aggressive statement about loyalty to self-image. "I'll be damned if you people are going to kill me!"

The self-fulfilling prophecy theory, or the expectation of an event making its outcome more likely, certainly applies to the Vietnam group. Jones posed an interesting question about this. A phrase such as "I'll be damned if you people are

going to kill me!" is convincing when written after the fact by survivors; one wonders if some of the prisoners who did *not* survive said similar things.

The role of intrapersonal coping skills is of particular interest to any study of Vietnam POWs because, unlike prisoners in most other captivity situations, the Vietnam group experienced long periods of isolation. Virtually all Vietnam POWs spent at least a few days in solitary confinement, and some spent several years alone (Deaton, Berg, & Richlin, 1977). They had almost no opportunity for face-to-face communication with other Americans and limited chances to communicate through walls or by note (Rutledge & Rutledge, 1973). Consequently, each man was left to devise his own method for struggling with his situation and for making sense of a senseless situation.

The significance of analyzing the struggle these men faced is apparent. Not only did they struggle with the situation, they took control of it. VRPOW Howard Rutledge noted that describing how solitary confinement can unnerve and defeat a man is difficult. There are no books, no paper or pencils, no magazines or newspapers. There is only drab gray and dirty brown. Months or years may go by without seeing the sunrise or the moon, green grass or flowers (Rutledge & Rutledge, 1973).

VRPOW Porter Halyburton (1989) concurred with Frankl about the importance of finding a purpose for a situation in order to make sense of it:

> men could deal with suffering as long as they could find some meaning in it. The major difference seemed to be in the percentage of prisoners who reacted in this way. At Auschwitz it was a small number, and in Hanoi it was the vast majority. Perhaps the reason is that we were all military professionals who had volunteered to take the risk of death, injury or capture, and in this sense,

> were better prepared. To a certain degree, we had been conditioned to expect torture and suffering should we become prisoners, for it was understood that there was a purpose to the torture and, conversely, a purpose in our resistance. (p. 9)

Each man's way of finding meaning varied somewhat, and the term faith is used in several ways in this dissertation to identify various methods the VPOWs found meaning; however, a common resolve surfaces. Robert Ursano, a psychiatrist who has written extensively about the psychological aspects of captivity, and Rundell pointed out a recurring theme among the Vietnam returnees:

> all accounts had in common the theme that each man had a standard of behavior he set for himself. Loyalty to country, idealization of the family, alliance with fellow prisoners, and the maintenance of military bearing were commonly reported as sustaining. (Ursano & Rundell, 1990, p. 176)

As Ursano and Rundell stated, for some individuals, this bigger good was his family. Halyburton (1989) mentioned that he did not want his child to grow up without a father, as he had done. Others stated they knew their wives were depending on them, or their parents would be heartbroken if they did not return. They felt they owed their loved ones their survival (e.g.. Mulligan, 1981; Chesley, 1973).

Jones pointed out another important factor. The VPOWs were guided by the military Code of Conduct:

> Although couched in different terms, and at times projected onto outside--and perhaps idealized--figures, this standard was apparent in all accounts. Much of it was based on the "Code of Conduct for Members of the Armed Forces of the United States," but this was refined and individualized as time went by and the realities of the POW environment in Vietnam became apparent. (Jones, 1980, p. 615)

According to the VPOWs, although this code of behavior was revised and modified somewhat during captivity, it still served as a guide to a bigger good.

The Code of Conduct, without question, played an important role in defining parameters of behavior for the POWs, but as Jones noted, it gives only one piece of the puzzle. There were many others. Religion, for example, is a coping means or comfort-inducing behavior that is prevalent throughout trauma related literature.

Religion

Holocaust POWs

In referring to concentration camp victims, Dimsdale (1974) pointed out, "By possessing some religious belief the person was able to remove himself from the camp world to another world of different values and meanings" (p. 794). Syrkin (1947) recounted the role of religion at the moment of death in these camps. Many victims were heard to recite psalms and prayers until the moment of death. Obviously this was not a survival skill since the people did not survive, but one can infer that these people did whatever they could to take comfort during the last moments of their lives, and this involved religion.

Frankl's (1984) discussion of the concentration camp prisoners' reliance on "morality" or "dignity" as a motivating force is similar to both religious beliefs and Jones' (1980) "loyalty to self." In referring to people in general, and to camp inmates in particular, Frankl stated:

> the way in which he takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity--even under the most difficult circumstances--to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish. Or in the bitter fight for self-preservation he may forget his human dignity and become no more than an animal. Here lies the chance for a man either to make use of or to forgo the opportunities of attaining the moral values that a difficult situation may

> afford him. And this decides whether he is worthy of his sufferings or not. (p. 88)

Frankl introduced some difficult questions concerning whether religion or morality cause the situation to be more tolerable or whether the situation triggers a reliance on spirituality that might otherwise have lain dormant. Frankl recounted the story of a woman who was about to die. The woman stated, "I am grateful that fate has hit me so hard. In my former life I was spoiled and I did not take spiritual accomplishments seriously." Frankl suggested that the situation itself can play a significant role in causing a heightening of spiritual growth. However, in Frankl's estimation, "It is true that only a few people are capable of reaching such high moral standards" (1984, p. 88).

VPOWs

The reference to religion providing comfort surfaces again in the Vietnam literature. Not all Vietnam POWs found religion to be a coping strategy, but a significant number of them have mentioned it. Deaton (1975) found that 89% of the prisoners were using religious activities as a coping skill by week four of captivity. As Deaton pointed out, religious activity (e.g., prayer, singing hymns, reciting Bible passages) gave many men the spiritual comfort needed in order to survive captivity. Many of the books written by RPOWs refer to the role these religious activities played for them, but a few specifically relate their values and ability to withstand imprisonment to their strong faith in God (e.g., Chesley, 1973; Gaither, 1973, Rutledge & Rutledge, 1973; Mulligan, 1981).

This researcher found no evidence in either the literature or personal interviews of religious conversion among the VPOWs. Although there was seemingly a lack of complete transformation, there are numerous accounts of a religious renewal or awakening. Howard Rutledge's experience is typical. For some, like Rutledge, imprisonment allowed a deepening of faith. "It took prison to show me how empty life is without God....God had been so real to me in prison" (Rutledge & Rutledge, p.98).

RVPOW James Mulligan (1981) gave a particularly moving account of experiencing religion in prison. On May 26, 1968, the anniversary of his parents' wedding, Mulligan had finally reached the complete breaking point. He estimated that his cell had reached a temperature of 130 degrees; his appetite had vanished; his mental powers had collapsed; and his health was waning. He prayed, "Lord, you've got to do something. Let me hear Your thunder." He had barely uttered this plea when across the heavens a loud crash of thunder rolled. Within a few minutes, there was a torrential tropical rain. The wind howled. The wind blew the cool air into his cell. The temperature dropped 40 or more degrees, and his cell miraculously cooled off. James Mulligan had been a religious man before this incident, but it served to solidify his faith and to sustain him throughout the remaining years in captivity.

In their study, Ford & Spaulding (1973) cited religion as a useful coping skill of the *Pueblo* survivors. Their use of religion incorporated both faith, e.g., "The Lord will take care of me," and resignation, "I am ready for whatever He wants."

The former, trust in God, was more common among Vietnam POWs and the latter, resignation, more similar to the Holocaust victims who knew they were facing death. In either case, religion seemed to provide a sustaining influence on those faced with adversity or even imminent death (Bettelheim, 1953).

Humor

An association seems to exist among intrapersonal meaning making, humor, and resilience. Babad (1974) offered the opinion that an advanced degree of the use of humor is a component of communication competence. The Chief of Psychology for the Air Force Survival School, Jim Mitchell, (1996) said: "humor plays a role in psychoneuroimmunology....If persons are in high stress, high risk situations, then the capacity to generate humor to 'jump-start' their immune system will certainly influence their susceptibility to disease" (p. 6). The following examples illustrate how prisoners from various captivity situations used humor.

Holocaust POWs

References to the use of humor occur in much of the captivity related literature. Even in the Holocaust literature there are references to the use of humor as a coping strategy. Frankl (1984) recalled that "humor was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation" (p.63). Realizing this, Frankl suggested to a friend that they promise each other to invent at least one amusing story daily about some incident that could happen one day after their liberation. Frankl found these stories allowed the prisoners to escape the confines of the wall, if just for a few seconds.

For example, Frankl told the friend, a surgeon, they would be unable to lose the habits of camp life when they returned to their former work. Since they had become accustomed to responding to the foreman's command for "Action! Action!" they would not be able to function without this encouragement. One day back in the operating room, Frankl assured the surgeon, he would be performing an important abdominal operation. Suddenly an orderly would rush in announcing the arrival of the senior surgeon by shouting, "Action! Action!"

Other prisoners joked that forgetting themselves at future dinner engagements, they might beg the hostess to ladle the soup "from the bottom," a request that would bring a prisoner the treasured vegetables instead of the watery soup on the top. This type of making light of the intolerable was also extended to the jokes regarding the Jewish guards known as capos, the prominent prisoners who were given special privileges, often in payment for mistreating fellow prisoners. In reference to a particularly troublesome capo, one prisoner remarked, "Imagine! I knew that man when he was only the president of a large bank. Isn't it fortunate that he has risen so far in the world?" (p.84).

Dimsdale (1974) too reported the use of humor among Nazi prisoners. He indicated that the role of humor in mediating stress is well known; it is a potent agent for psychological removal from stressful situations. He cited an example to illustrate his point. One of the Jewish capos joked that prisoners should behave properly because yesterday a man was *even killed* for not behaving. The prisoners thought this statement was extremely funny, the irony of such a warning at

Auschwitz. This type of humor is, perhaps, lost on the reader, but appreciating a type of "dark humor" is evident in VPOW related literature.

Pueblo POWs

The significance of humor is mentioned again in reference to the captivity of the *Pueblo* crew. Ford & Spaulding (1973) reported that the use of humor as an "ego mechanism" was significant. In fact, these researchers found it to be even more helpful to the prisoners than religion. They pointed out that "*Humor* was an ability to joke about the characteristics of their captors and to give the guards (and each other) nicknames" (p. 341). The researchers also mentioned the efforts at joke telling among the captives.

VPOWs

The evidence of the use of humor by VPOWs is overwhelming. Nearly every book written by or about the POWs mentions some humorous story or incident (e.g., Hubbell, 1976; Mulligan, 1981; Coffee, 1991; Gaither, 1973). Even naming the prison the "Hanoi Hilton" and giving other areas Las Vegas hotel names such as "The Stardust" indicate the sarcastic humor the men used (Hubbell, 1976).

RVPOW Porter Halyburton (1989) pointed out "Humor is often an important element of survival in difficult circumstances, and it was in ours. We used to say, 'You have to get here early to get the good deals'" (p.1). This sort of mocking, or ridiculing humor sustained many of the men during captivity. In this same vein, Ralph Gaither (1973) wrote: "humor in the bleakest of circumstances is a characteristic of Americans. That wisecracking and laughter in the face of torture

and inhumanity announced to our captors that any capitulation to them would be only fleeting and insincere" (p.48). Jeering and finding humor seems to be almost a fighting back posture.

Comparing Prisoner Uses of Humor

Unlike any other group that has experienced long-term captivity, the VPOWs were, for the most part, college educated, chronologically mature (over 21), healthy, trained aviators who had voluntarily put themselves in a position that they knew might result in their capture. Also, the majority of the prisoners had received some form of POW and survival training (Hubbell, 1976). Those who had not received formal training were able to be educated along the way by those who had. No other group of World War II, concentration camp, Korea, or the *Pueblo* prisoners met these criteria. In short, this Vietnam POW group was better prepared than any other in recent history to withstand the rigors of captivity (Hubbell, 1976; Nice et al., 1996).

Another important difference was present as well: these prisoners were almost all aviators (Hubbell, 1976), and as such, most possess a somewhat typical "aviator personality," which includes a relatively advanced degree of use of humor (Fine & Hartman, 1968), a component of communication competence (Babad, 1974).

The communication of humor has been found to be associated with other personality traits such as extroversion, lower anxiety, internal locus of control, and field independence; (Babad, 1974) and these studies have also shown humor to be linked with communication competence. In their review of the literature, Wanzer,

Booth-Butterfield, and Booth-Butterfield (1995) indicated that positive relationships were based on humor, expressiveness, interaction management, and overall impressions of a person. These descriptions are similar to the personality descriptions of the typical or outstanding aviator (Fine & Hartman, 1968; Reinhardt, 1970).

These aviator personality studies portray the aviator as a dominant individual who relates well socially, seeks new situations, sets high standards, is free of psychopathology, is responsive to the environment, and is reasonably spontaneous. Such a person would, according to the opinions of the humor theorists, be a person who is likely to enjoy both the reception of humor and the generation of it (Babad, 1974; Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991).

Wanzer and his associates contended the reason more people do not effectively produce humorous messages is personality traits and behavioral repertoires differentiate high and low humor oriented people. In other words, according to these theorists, not everyone has the predisposition for or the communicative skills to create effective humor (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 1995).

With the aviator personality profile and the work of Wanzer et al. in mind, analyzing the use of humor by Vietnam POWs, most of whom were aviators, becomes more significant. Perhaps the VPOWs relied on the use of humor more heavily because they were able to do so. That is, maybe these aviators were just more competent in this communication skill. Perhaps the personality traits of the

VPOWs, coupled with their training and maturity, allowed this group to utilize humor as a coping skill more than other groups had been able to.

Duran (1992) incorporated humor or wit within the communicative adaptability construct, contending that it functions as a means of diffusing anxiety and tension. When an individual is in a situation that is producing anxiety, humor is a more positive response than verbal aggression and can lead to "greater perceptions of satisfaction within the communication encounter" (p. 325).

Duran's comments about diffusing anxiety and tension are relevant to a discussion of the VPOWs because these prisoners needed to react to both (Hubbell, 1976). When aggressive behavior was likely to bring about physical retaliation by the captors, the use of humor to ameliorate stress might have been a much better coping mechanism than an overt "fighting back" posture would have been.

One of the most obvious and striking facts about humor is that most people most of the time cannot or will not effectively produce humorous messages. Most people are likely to function as receivers rather than as sources in humorous contexts (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991). If enacting humor is viewed as positive, (Duran, 1992), then why is it that POWs throughout history have not relied more heavily on this coping mechanism? One possibility is that since personality traits and behavioral repertoires differentiate high and low humor oriented people, not everyone has the communicative skill to create humor.

However, the Vietnam POWs seem to have possessed more than a usual amount of this skill. As mentioned earlier, countless examples exist to illustrate this point.

Conclusions About Intrapersonal Communication and Resilience

Certainly each prisoner in Vietnam was an individual who had to develop his own system of coping. His uniqueness required him to look inside himself and to call forth resources he perhaps did not even know he possessed. The situation challenged him to find some meaning in a seemingly meaningless experience, and communicating within himself was the first step in discovering that meaning.

The war was not popular; there was dissent among Americans; and American public figures such as Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden visited Vietnam and told the press that the prisoners were lying about mistreatment Giving up, dying, or failing to thrive in the Vietnam prisons would need no explanation; survival does, but survive they did. In fact, more than 20 years after repatriation, the VPOWs show no statistically significant difference in occurrence of neurosis than their control group does, and their physical health is impressive as well (Nice & Baggett, 1994).

Coping skills surface when the situation demands a reaction. An historical comparison of groups who have experienced captivity, trauma, and atrocities and an analysis of their ability to cope with these allows the average person to infer that some of these same coping skills might be beneficial during times of less extreme stress. As Frankl brought into focus,

> There is nothing in the world..that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life. There is much wisdom in the words of Nietzsche: "He who has a *why* to live for can bear with any *how.*" (Frankl, 1984)

The Link Between Resilience and Interpersonal Communication

The previously mentioned definitions, studies, and theories indicate resilience is associated with a person's ability to create meaning within himself. As the review of the literature shows, meaning making is essentially a communicative phenomenon, encompassing communication within oneself and communication with others. Realizing the kinds of communication behaviors that occurred within the individual VPOW that helped him cope forms a foundation for understanding how the VPOWs created meaning for themselves. The struggle to make sense of their changed world did not stop with introspection, however. The VPOWs also sought ways to make sense of their situation by creating meaning *among* themselves, a process that would require a new and challenging use of symbols.

As Littlejohn (1983) pointed out, people use language to share experiences, and the VPOWs were no exception. The correlation between language and experience is meaning, an abstract and elusive concept. Meaning is the concept that links symbols with humans (Littlejohn, 1983). Suzanne Langer (1972) maintained that not only do humans possess an increased *capacity* to use symbols, but they also have a basic *need* to symbolize. She contended that the symbol-making process is a continuous function in humans, tantamount to eating and sleeping. Much of human behavior, therefore, can be explained in terms of meeting the need to symbolize and communicate.

Communication is interwoven in all areas of human life, but the role it plays is confusing; and explanations of its importance are elusive. Other studies of

hardiness and resilience might take interpersonal communication for granted, but this discussion will treat communication as central to the quality of human life. The guiding question focuses on how different scholars and theorists conceptualize and describe human communication. This helps to explain the important role it plays in maintaining resilience. Specifically, symbolism, meanings theories and rules theories will be considered. These theories are not at cross purposes with one another. On the contrary, a great deal of communality exists in the two schools.

Symbolism and Ritual

Langer's theory that humans need to symbolize is important to a discussion of VPOW communication because these men lend credence to the theory. As will be discussed in more detail later, these men literally risked their lives to communicate with one another. In some cases, their need to send messages to one another through the use of symbols and their communication rituals even took precedence over their need for eating and sleeping. As Langer put it,

> In order to relate these two distinct conceptions of symbolism (language and ritual), and exhibit the respective parts they play in that general human response we call *life*, it is necessary to examine more accurately that which makes *symbols* out of anything--out of marks on paper, the little squeaks and grunts we interpret as "words," or bended knees--the quality of *meaning* in its several aspects and forms. (Langer, 1942, p. 52)

One of the main reasons to consider interpersonal communication as key to any discussion is that communication helps determine the behavior and habits of thinking in a given culture (Whorf, 1956). In other words, the words themselves and the context in which they are used help to create reality for the individual. The

creation of reality is intertwined with an individual's creation of meaning, a subjective and complex process. Benjamin Lee Whorf, a linguist, suggested the following:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group....We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choice of interpretation.
> (Whorf, 1956, p. 134)

According to Whorf's theory, thought processes and perceptions are shaped by the language of the individual. Barnett Pearce (1989) pointed out that the traditional concept of communication held that *we* exist in a material world and use communication to express our inner purposes and to describe the events of the external world. Communication, therefore, works well to the extent that it accurately expresses inner feelings or external reality and when it produces understanding between the speaker and the receiver. In their work on the transactional nature of communication Rogers and Kincaid (1981) seemed to support the traditional perspective about the effectiveness of communication with regard to the roles of the sender and the receiver.

An alternative view, however, according to Pearce, is *we* consist of a cluster of social conversations, and these patterns of communication constitute the world as we know it. In this view, communication is a *primary* social process, the material substance of those things whose reality is often taken for granted. The forms of

communication in which humans participate, then, either liberate or enslave them; the forms either facilitate or subvert human values.

Pearce's notion that communication either liberates or enslaves are particularly germane to this discussion of POWs who were not liberated in the physical sense of the word but who may have been in the abstract or philosophical application of it. Pearce cautioned that acceptance of this radically new notion of communication and reality will have profound implications for what it means to live a life.

Whether language creates people or whether people create language is debatable; how meaning is created within the individual and among people is confusing. However, as the aforementioned theorists seemed to imply, the *way* people communicate and the fact that they do are related to how they think and behave; and the way people think and behave impacts their quality of life. This is the foundation of this discussion.

Creating Meaning : Intrapersonal and Dyadic

By providing a bridge between the discussion of meaning making on the intrapersonal level and the interpersonal level, Frank Dance and Carl Larson (1976) help to clarify how and why these two constructs of communication are significant to a discussion of VPOW communication. Dance and Larson offered the theory that intrapersonal communication distinguishes humans from other animal forms. According to these theorists, unique distinguishing characteristics manifest themselves on the intrapersonal level, that is, within the real of self

communication; but they are developed and sustained through interpersonal communication.

Dance and Larson offered five attributes that characterize interpersonal communication: (1) symbolic content, (2) is produced by one individual, (3) according to a code, (4) with anticipated consumption by others (5) according to the same code. These five characteristics are relevant to any discussion of interpersonal communication but will be particularly significant to this analysis of POW communication because these men had to *create* codes and channels for sending and receiving messages.

The production of symbols according to a code with anticipated consumption by others illuminates part of the process necessary for communication to occur. This dissertation has grouped communication patterns into three distinguishable categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group communication. The separations are not distinct, however, as Dance and Larson pointed out; and in the construction of meaning the lines are even more blurred.

For example, prayer is mentioned in the intrapersonal section of this literature review, but whether prayer is really within the self is not clear. Prayer is the invocation of a higher being. If an individual believes a receiver is hearing his prayer, this is interpersonal communication, according to Dance and Larson's explanation of it. Numerous accounts illustrate the VPOWs prayed to make sense of their lives in captivity (e.g., Mulligan, 1981; Rutledge & Rutledge, 1973;

Chesley, 1973; Gaither, 1973). Some, such as RVPOWs Mulligan and Gaither indicated their prayers were answered or acknowledged.

Theories of Meaning

Meaning can have several definitions. Meaning has to do with intention, "something interpreted to be the intent, goal or end," (Webster II, p. 736), such as "What did he mean (or intend) by that comment?" Meaning can also be concerned with purpose, or the "inner significance" (p.736) such as "What does this all mean? What is the purpose of it? How can I make sense of it?"

Both definitions are important to this research. The former, meaning as intent, is pertinent to a discussion of interpersonal communication. How did the POWs communicate their intentions and meanings to one another? The latter definition concerning the purpose of the experience is more central to intrapersonal communication. However, since all interpersonal communication involves intrapersonal communication, considering meaning as purpose at this time is also relevant.

As Littlejohn (1983) pointed out, language and meaning are domains that are central to the process of communication, multifaceted dimensions that are at the heart of all human communication; but they are not easily defined or understood. While issues in meaning theory are semantic, the problem becomes the meaning of meaning.

Meaning theorists do not agree on what to observe to make inferences about meaning because they cannot agree on what meaning is. For the purpose of this

discussion, therefore, meaning will be divided into two main categories: meaning as intention and meaning as purpose. The two definitions are not separate but will discussed as such in order to distinguish between the two perspectives. Discussing meaning as intent provides an in-depth analysis of communication as a product of interaction, and an examination of meaning as purpose clarifies how interaction influences personal perceptions or reactions.

Meaning as Intention

Anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972) asserted that to communicate and to attempt to establish meaning within oneself and between individuals is to be human. Communicating organisms and badly programmed computers will mistake the map for the territory, but humans are able to discern relationships among data. Bateson maintained that the word is the *context* of the phoneme; but the word only exists as such--only has "meaning"--in the larger context of the utterance, which again has meaning only in a relationship. Bateson argued that the human individual, the society in which the individual lives, and the ecosystem, the natural biological surroundings of the humans will affect communication.

In addition to the systemic nature of the individual, the systemic nature of the culture in which he lives, and the interconnected nature of the ecological system around him, Bateson maintained that there is a curious twist in the systemic nature of the individual man whereby consciousness is, almost of necessity, blinded to the systemic nature of the man himself (Bateson, 1972).

Mead (1934) stated "Meaning arises and lies within the field of the relation between the gesture of a given human organism and the subsequent behavior of this organism as indicated to another human organism by that gesture" (p. 76). Meaning is implicit in the relationship among the various phases of the social act. Its development takes place in terms of symbolization.

Meaning as Purpose

Bateson furthered his discussion of meaning as purpose to include consciousness. As Bateson asserted, consciousness and purpose have been characteristic of man for at least a million years. Bateson used the word *wisdom* as a term for recognition of and guidance by a knowledge of the total systematic creature.

One aspect of this wisdom has to do with the power people have to avoid assimilating disturbing information. Part of creating meaning is using the mechanisms to edit that which stands in the way of creating meaning. Bateson claimed people not only possess but *are* self-corrective systems. According to Bateson, these systems are self-corrective against disturbance, that is, disturbing information can be framed so that it does not make a nuisance of itself.

Bateson's observations provide some important insights about survival. He stated that changes occur in the system to conserve the truth of some descriptive statement, some component of the status quo. People learn what will cause disturbance and if the information is the kind that a person cannot easily assimilate without internal disturbance, the self-corrective mechanisms work to sidetrack it,

to hide it, by shutting off various parts of the process of perception (Bateson, 1972). Meaning, then, occurs when people consciously or unconsciously admit some stimuli and reject others.

Constructing Meaning

Bateson's conclusions further explained the delicate balance between apathy and disassociation. Selective perception, the process of admitting some stimuli and rejecting others, may have allowed the VPOWs to distance themselves from the disturbing reality around them without causing them to withdraw to the pathological point.

Charles Taylor (1985) echoed Bateson's philosophy in his conjecture that language is essential to human life. Taylor asserted that language is a "phenomenon of nature" that should be understandable in the same way that other natural phenomena are understood. According to Taylor, an individual is constituted by language and culture. He hastened to add that the community is also constitutive of the individual in the sense that the self-interpretations which define him or her are drawn from the interactions within the community. Therefore, people are separate from society, although it may be difficult, according to Taylor, to survive as a lone being; but as humans this separation is unthinkable.

Taylor's contributions to this discussion are obvious. The VPOWs lend credence to Taylor's ideas about the impact of language on the individual. This analysis of POW communication will show examples of how the men were dependent on one another, but it will do something else too. It will support

Taylor's contention that language does not only serve to *depict* individuals and their world, it also helps *constitute* their lives. As Taylor put is, because certain ways of being, of feeling, or relating to each other are only possible given certain linguistic resources, the POWs *needed* to devise linguistic resources for articulating and shaping their lives. Linguistic rules allowed them to communicate their meanings.

Rules Theory

An understanding of how meaning is created between or among communicators provides a structure for discussing how this transmission and realization of meaning is possible because of rule following in communication situations. Achieving prominence in the 1970s, the rules perspective is a relatively new approach to communication, but it had its foundation centuries ago (Littlejohn, 1983). Aristotle warned that students who knew only the rules for successful argument in the Athenian court would be left with "nothing to say" if they moved to another city or the court changed its rules. As Aristotle pointed out, the alternative to learning *a* set of rules or a context-specific code is to realize the broader scope rules play in each specific communication situation. This is the essence of the rules theory. Rules theorists discuss the specific mechanisms at work in everyday interaction. They teach that people generate rules for interaction and use these rules to govern social behavior (Littlejohn, 1983).

Many of the rules theorists and meanings theorists have identified the role of context as an important element for grasping the nature of communication.

Cronen, Pearce, and Harris, (1979) further elucidated how rules, meaning, context, and personal reaction work in conjunction with one another.

> The rules which guide action are composed of people's meanings. We suggest representing the *structure* of people's meanings as a hierarchical model....The existence of constructs explains why events do not account for experience; an intervening filtering, interpretive process generates the meanings of experience. In general semantics terminology, constructs create the "maps" which are not the "territory." (p.121)

According to Littlejohn's interpretation, another basic assumption of most rules theories is that social behavior is structured and organized but not universal. While certain behaviors recur in similar situations, the highly contextual nature of the situation will cause variation. Therefore, most rules theorists "consider the relationship between the way people act and the culture and situation wherein the action occurs. In fact, rules scholars criticize law-governed theories precisely because of the failure to reflect such variation" (Littlejohn, 1983, p.61). That is not to say that there is no commonalty. The essence of the rules theory is that "because rules are thought to be contextual, they explain why people behave similarly in similar situations but differently in different situations" (p. 61).

The contextual nature of rules theory is of interest to this dissertation because the VPOW context required formation of new rules. The books by and about the VPOWs indicate that these men formed new rules to fit their new environment (e.g., Coffee, 1991; Mulligan, 1981; Hubbell, 1976). The men commented in these personal accounts that they relied on each other heavily; disclosed highly personal information; and came to know their fellow POWs, in some cases, better than their wives. This level of intimacy among heterosexual males is unusual

(Baird & Bradley, 1979), but since the situation demanded flexibility, these men created new communication and behavioral rules to meet the challenges of the environment.

The Rule-Following Approach

Barnett Pearce (1971), who has written extensively about the problems that occur with the contact of dissimilar cultures, espoused three main groups of rule conceptions. The first is the *rule-following approach*. This approach points out that rules are simply observed behavioral regularities. By this definition a recurring pattern is a rule. The predictability or likelihood of something happening in a communication situation causes it to become a rule. These rules suggest what can be expected in a given situation because of predictable behaviors.

The Rule-Governed Approach

According to Pearce (1971), the *rule-governed approach* is a prescriptive rather than descriptive approach to rules. From this perspective rules are beliefs about what should or should not be done to accomplish an intention. This approach assumes people know the rules of acceptable behavior and have the power to follow them or to violate them. This approach also presumes the individual acts consciously, intentionally, and rationally, a conclusion that might be accurate some of the time but questionable at other times.

An example of an application of the rule-governed approach would be the POWs agreeing to use certain symbols at specific times. For example, to "call up" another POW the sender would begin by tapping "shave and a haircut" on the wall

to which the receiver would respond, "two bits" (Hubbell, 1976). By *prescribing* this would be the way to begin a communication, the group was able to develop a system for communicating, a system based on predictable behaviors or rules.

The Rule-Using Approach

Pearce (1971) posited that the *rule-using approach* is a view that is similar to the rule-governed approach in that socially acceptable options are considered. However, this approach goes one step further to include the elements of flexibility and competence. When a person is faced with a situation in which several rules would be appropriate or when there is a conflict between rules, the competent and flexible communicator is able to sort through the alternatives to choose an interaction strategy. When the rules are few and simple, the choice of which one to use is not complicated; but a more demanding or challenging communication situation requires evaluating rules and potential outcomes to choose wisely.

An example of the POWs applying the rule-using approach would be their flexibility with the tap code. When the situation was not conducive to tapping, the men would employ a vocal version of the code. Through coughs and grunts they were able to use their flexibility as communicators (Hubbell, 1976).

On a more psychological level, the POWs' willingness to explore different levels of disclosure during their captivity further illustrates their application of the rule-using approach. In this situation, there were several rules in conflict with each other. On the one hand, these men probably had societal and military pressure to be stoic, to hold the cards close to the chest, to suck it up and avoid burdening

others with their problems. In captivity, however, when they needed each other, the POWs chose a different course of action. In other words, because of their adaptability, the VPOWs were *competent* in their rule using. They were able to consider the alternatives and to choose the strategy that would best serve them.

Action Principle

Donald Cushman (1977) offered common assumptions about the rules approach to studying human communication. Drawing from symbolic interactionist theory, Cushman identified the action principle as a primary assumption of the rules approach. The action principle, simply stated, suggests important behaviors are actively initiated by the individual. People choose particular actions to accomplish their goals. The role of fate, luck, and outside forces need not be dismissed in order to appreciate this idea. In a given situation, people have choices. These choices or actions are chosen for a reason, and they engender consequences.

Cushman posed a perspective on the role of rules that is particularly cogent to this discussion. Some of Cushman's observations about rules are of a somewhat different ilk in that they address the linguistic application of rules. He commented on the rules people use to send messages effectively, the mechanics of the transaction. Cushman pointed out that grammatical rules have been developed to explain how speakers can generate any novel sentence from minimal exposure to the language. Sentences are generated and understood on the basis of these rules the native speaker learns early in life.

The reason Cushman is important is he offered some insight about the acquisition of these skills people learn early in life. The VPOWs drew from these early rules to establish rules for sending messages to each other under a new system, a system they modified and reinvented throughout their captivity. Specific information about how these rules were employed will be offered later.

Another of Cushman's major rules applications is similar to the theories of meaning mentioned earlier. As Cushman pointed out, actions relate to intentions. Individuals realize goals or reach objectives by applying particular rules. People use communication to meet their needs or to fulfill their intentions. Cushman maintained that the force of intentions as an explanatory model lies in the fact that agents are disposed to follow rule-governed patterns of behavior. Such patterns provide the regularities linking the intention to the behavior (Cushman, 1977). The rules provide the method or action necessary to accomplish the intention. The POWs were able to communicate their intentions by following particular rules.

The third major area of Cushman's work is also significant, in that the third rules tradition is in cognitive development. This perspective looks at how people conceptualize and solve problems and how their behavior is affected by cognitive processes. These cognitive processes develop gradually during a person's life, starting with the early ability to grasp and use rules. The processes become more complex as the person matures and the need to solve problems and conceptualize becomes more demanding. Therefore, experience with rules behaviors at one stage becomes a prerequisite for learning rule patterns of behaviors at subsequent

stages (Cushman, 1977). According to Cushman, then, an individual's grasp of the constitutive nature of communication evolves as each new threshold of behavior is reached. Perhaps Cushman would agree the VPOWs succeed in their communication behavior because, for the most part, they possessed both chronological maturity and educational experience.

Speech Act Theory

The speech act theory, a concept espoused by John Searle (1969), is one of the applications of the rule-governed approach that helps explain how the VPOWs used language for sharing meaning. Searle's ideas are often grouped with the theories of meaning because they are relevant to that school. However, for the purpose of untangling some of the components of the theories, Searle's theory is included with the rules theories.

As Searle pointed out, the speech act is the fundamental unit of language for expressing meaning. By following the rules the performer acts in ways that are likely to bring about a desired outcome. As Searle explained, therefore, speech is an action or intentional behavior. Searle said that from the standpoint of the speech act theory, meaning is generally the same as intention. The sender means something when he or she performs a speech act. The performance of the speech act is an attempt to communicate a message to another. In order for meaning to occur between the persons, the receivers needs to understand the speaker's intention.

Searle's extended analyses of speech acts provides several categories of rules for examining language and the context of its uses. Because of their application to an understanding of how the VPOWs created and shared meaning, this discussion will focus on two general categories of rules: constitutive rules and regulative rules.

Constitutive Rules

Constitutive rules can be used to create new forms of behavior; that is, acts are created by the establishment of rules. Constitutive rules also provide information about the conditions that define or constitute an act. With regard to speech acts, a person's intentions are largely understood by the receiver because of constitutive rules. These rules tell others what to count as a particular kind of act (Littlejohn, 1983). Cronen et al. (1979) added that constitutive rules specify how meanings at one level of abstraction may count as meaningful at another level of abstraction. Unlike Pearce's explanation of the rule-governed approach, constitutive rules do not guide behavior. They clarify what constitutes meaning by specifying that in a certain context, if specific antecedent conditions are satisfied, then meaning at one level of abstraction counts as meaning at another level of abstraction. In other words, constitutive rules clarify how meaning is transferred.

Richard Buttny's comments about the ascription of meaning add another dimension to a discussion of constitutive rules (Buttny, 1986). According to Buttny's examination of the Wittgensteinian perspective, the meanings of words is ultimately based on *conventions* of language use, and the ascription of meaning is

not based on an inner process but on the satisfaction of criteria. Criteria are context dependent.

Buttny's comments about Wittgenstein provide insights that are important from both a meanings and rules perspective, and his ideas are relevant to a discussion of POW communication as well. As Buttny stated, the obligation created by a promise is based, not on inner meanings, but on social conventions. In regard to communicative actions which count as a promise, certain public criteria have been specified. In applying these observations to the POW situation, much of this theory seems valid. However, the denial that *obligation* created by a promise is based not on inner meanings is problematic.

The POWs' "inner process" about their obligations seems to go beyond what ordinary people might perceive as their responsibility or duty. Would the average person withstand torture in order to live up to the obligations created by a promise to observe the Code of Conduct? On the one hand, Wittgenstein's analytical concept is believable because the POWs created public criteria that constituted their obligations. On the other hand, seemingly at least part of the locus of meaning was indeed in the head of the individual (Buttny, 1986). As Taylor (1985) put it, there can be no absolute understanding of what people are.

Constitutive rules offer an important addition to a discussion of how meaning and understanding occur among people, but this approach does not answer all the questions either. More information about how people follow rules to regulate behavior provides another important perspective.

Regulative Rules

Regulative rules are a cognitive reorganization of the constitutive rules (Searle, 1969). Regulative rules provide guidelines for acting out already established behavior. The behaviors are known and available before being used in the speech act, and the regulative rules tell an individual how to use the actions to accomplish a particular objective (Littlejohn, 1983). As the name suggests, these rules regulate behavior. They guide sequential action (Cronen et al., 1979). In other words, some degree of force exists for or against the performance of actions because of the knowledge that actions trigger consequences.

The VPOWs created a communication system that was based on regulative rules. Through the development of regulative rules concerning abbreviations, signals, and symbols, the men were able to bring about a desired consequence or reaction by using agreed upon rules. These rules served as guides to help them streamline their messages. The force that existed for the performance of these actions was the knowledge that without a covert means of communication the POWs would have been cut off from all human contact (Hubbell, 1976). As Taylor (1985) and Bateson (1972) pointed out, relying on others is central to humanness. Perhaps the POWs had no choice but to develop rules to regulate their message sending in order to insure the system's survival and their own.

Conclusions About Creating Meaning

In his discussion of American social order, Jack Douglas (1971) observed that intelligence consists preeminently of the ability to think symbolically. The use of

intelligence creates the potential of human freedom or of conscious choice; the necessity of using this symbolic capacity makes people *necessarily free.* Obviously the POWs were not free in the traditional sense of the word, but they did create a type of freedom for themselves and for each other because of their use of symbols. Douglas added that social existence is symbolic and meaningful. Human society is not possible without a shared symbolic universe or shared meanings. Symbolic intelligence and social existence are preconditions of each other and, taken together, are preconditions of human existence.

Barnlund (1962) described communication as the process of creating meaning as an attempt to cope with experience, mood, and emerging needs. There is some disagreement about what does and does not constitute the essence of a human communication study and much of the debate can easily turn into a mystery, according to Taylor (1985). Theories converge and diverge, but one principle seems constant. Humans are social beings who use and perhaps need communication to make sense of the world in which they live. In fact, Pearce, Bateson, Taylor and Douglas might even go so far as to suggest communication causes or establishes humanness. At the very least, communication allows people to use symbols, metaphors, and rhetoric to create reality within themselves and between each other. This helps to explain the desire and need the Vietnam prisoners had for communication with each other.

Interpersonal Resilient Behavior Among VPOWs

The role communication plays in bolstering resilience is obscure, but the success of the Vietnam prisoners of war encourages the investigation of all aspects of the VPOWs' behavior. *Why* did these men seem to need to communicate with each other? Analyzing why and how these POWs communicated, and consequently formed a system, provides a basis for explaining some of the reasons these prisoners have fared better than previous prisoners have.

Reasons For Communicating

As repatriated VPOW Risner (1973) pointed out, not being able to communicate openly was inhuman. The VPOWs kept communicating because, as Risner reported, it was important to morale. Validation by significant others seems to sustain people in ordinary circumstances (Rogers, 1961). Perhaps validation by others serves an even greater purpose in the face of adversity. Adjusting to change and relying on interaction during the adjustment can be significant in everyday life. The VPOWs show interaction is even more significant in dire circumstances. General Risner is one of many RVPOWs who has indicated that communication with fellow prisoners was paramount in warding off self-doubt and guilt (personal interview, 1995).

As RVPOW Bobby Wagon (1976) pointed out, like communication in the larger world, communication in a POW society serves three roles: (1) it makes possible social interaction; (2) facilitates group dynamics; and (3) serves as a necessary tool for the socialization and indoctrination of new group members.

RPOW Senator John McCain (1973) echoed Wagon's observations about the importance of communication in captivity:

> the most important thing for survival is communication with someone, even if it's only a wave or a wink, a tap on the wall, or to have a guy put his thumb up. It makes all the difference ....Communication with your fellow prisoners was of the utmost value--the difference between being able to resist and not being able to resist. (p.52)

Adaptation to Change

Social philosopher, clinical psychologist, and researcher Sidney Jourard offered some insight as to why these POWs needed to communicate. According to Jourard, the ideal interpersonal relationship is one in which people allow others to experience them fully and in which they are open to experiencing others fully. Jourard maintained that willingness to disclose and to be open allows personal growth and adaptation to change. Adjusting to change requires an acknowledgment that the world has changed, a shattering of the present experienced "world structure," and a restructuring of the changed reality (Jourard, 1968, p. 154).

Jourard's claims suggested communicating with one another and self-disclosing helped these POWs accept the changes of their new world structure. To accept one's own changes requires verification and acceptance on the part of others. One of the reasons the POWs needed to communicate was to respond to the demands of a changed environment. This healthy response and willingness to disclose themselves might help to explain the continued mental and physical health of this group.

Researchers Harre (1987) and Backman (1983) indicated that conversation with significant others is the locus of selfhood. These researchers pointed out that the interaction with others is the basis of self-discovery and the foundation for self-acceptance. Berger and Kellner (1964) agreed that communication shapes identity. According to them, every individual requires ongoing validation, including the crucial validation of his or her identity and place in this world by a few truly significant others. All the actions of the significant others and even their simple presence serve this sustaining function. In everyday life, the principal method employed is speech. Through conversation the individual is made capable of adjusting to changing and new social contexts. In a very fundamental sense, according to these writers, one converses one's way through life.

In answering the question of why the POWs needed to communicate, Backman, Berger, Kellner, and Harre seem to agree with Jourard that the POWs *required* the interaction of each other to help them make sense of their changing world. In 1976, about three years after repatriation, respondents to a POW questionnaire supported the contention that interaction helped these men adjust to their changed world of captivity and to return as better men (Sledge, Boydstun, & Rabe, 1980).

Personal Benefits

Sledge et al., after analyzing the results of a questionnaire that was mailed to all 251 U.S. Air Force repatriated prisoners of the Vietnam War still on active duty, concluded that some people had received personal benefits from this brutal experience. These benefits were frequently described in terms of transformed ideas

and attitudes about themselves, and increased interest in and sensitivity to interpersonal relationships. Some of these benefits include feeling more self-confident and stronger than the respondents had felt before their captivity.

Sledge et al. found that many of the POWs perceived the forced group and individual relationships as beneficial. According to them, having no choice but to work out conflicts and differences with fellow POWs proved to be advantageous . Sixty-one percent of the POWs answering the questionnaire indicated favorable significant mental changes, the changes occurring in the areas of self-concept and interpersonal relationships. Interpersonally, they felt they got along better with others and claimed greater patience, human understanding, and appreciation of communication with others.

After late 1969, when much of the solitary confinement had ceased, the VPOWs spent many days, weeks, months, and even years relating both individually and collectively to others they had not chosen. The POWs had to work out their communication problems and interpersonal conflicts. They struggled to put the experience in perspective, to find sanity in an insane situation. Their flexibility as communicators seemingly allowed them to take control of the circumstances and not only endure but actually improve (Sledge et al., 1980).

Connection to the Outside World

The VPOWs established a communication network that served to keep the prisoners connected with the rest of the world. Shortly after his shootdown

RPOW Sam Johnson remembered communicating with Jeremiah Denton, a man who had been shot down earlier:

> As he asked me more questions about world events, the 1965 and '66 baseball World Series, college and professional football teams, I realized how news-starved he was. Soon everything I knew would be yesterday's headlines, and I too, would be desperate for information about the world outside the concrete walls of Hoa Lo....Any accurate news about the war and world events would come to us as bits and pieces brought in by the new shootdowns and tapped on the walls at risk of beatings or a week in leg stocks or, in later years, a stint in leg irons. (Johnson & Winebrenner, p.88)

Johnson realized later that Denton had

> only one concern at that time: to get me into the communication system as quickly as possible. He knew the desolation of Heartbreak Hotel would overwhelm me unless he could distract me with something constructive. And he proceeded to teach me the tap code. (p. 87)

Conclusions about Reasons for Communicating

RPOW Gerald Coffee (1991) recalled how the leadership of Robbie Risner helped him realize the importance of communicating:

> I thought about what Risner had said. Yes, we do need to take care of each other. When isolated we tend to magnify our own shortcomings, but when interacting with others we can more easily see that everyone is human, has weaknesses and regrets. I could see that being in touch with the others, communicating with one another, would be essential for us all to keep our own self-doubts and guilt in perspective. (p. 138)

In writing about a fellow prisoner RPOW Dick Stratton mirrored Coffee's observations:

> Mullen survived because of communication, and so had they all, those who survived. Revelations passed to him revealed he was not the only one who caved in, or was tortured, or was willing, after the hands turned black from the torture cuffs, to spill his guts. Nor was he first with thoughts of suicide or mortification over weakness, self-discovered and believed present only in others. (in Blakley, 1978, p. 149)

These examples give credence to the findings of the theorists who maintained that people need interaction to build self-esteem and a sense of self.

Hubbell (1976) reported numerous accounts of either threats of torture or actual incidence of torture for those engaging in communication, yet communication was so important to these men they were willing to risk torture and even death in order to engage in it. Hubbell pointed to Vice Admiral Stockdale's attempted suicide in order to protect the communication network:

> Stockdale feared he was to be squeezed for the names of those with whom he had been communicating. In his weakened condition, he was not confident that he could long guard any names, but was determined not to give any away. That night he broke a windowpane and slashed his wrists with shards of glass....He had milked his wrists of perhaps a quart and a half of blood and was fading away by the time he was discovered. (p. 513)

Understanding *why* communication was so important to the POWs forms a foundation for appreciating *how* they were able to create channels for interacting with one another.

The Birth of the Communication System

In March of 1965 Hayden Lockhart joined Bob Shumaker who had been in captivity since his February 11 shoot down. Shumaker was eager to devise a way to communicate with the new prisoner. Since both men cleaned their waste buckets at the same place, Shumaker loosened a piece of cement and hid a note written on toilet paper that requested Lochart scratch his crotch if he received the note. Lockhart found the note; scratched the appropriate place; and the communication system for the Vietnam POWs was born (Naval Aviation Symposium, 1996).

Later in 1965 Bob Shumaker was given cellmates after having spent 133 days without speaking face-to-face with another American. Since Shumaker was the

senior ranking officer at that time, the mantle of leadership fell upon him. He sensed how vital communication was to the morale, spirit, and even sanity of the group; and he was painfully aware the group could be separated at any time, and communication would be forbidden. Proactively realizing the importance communication would play in their survival, the prisoners began to formulate channels for communication. One of the cellmates, Smitty Harris, recalled a communication system, the tap code, that provided a simpler code for communicating than Morse Code, which had been used until this time (Hubbell, 1976).

Mechanics of the Communication System

Through a series of taps the prisoners were able to use a 25-letter alphabet to send messages. The letter C substitutes for the letter K, which is dropped. The 25 letters are arranged in a block with A B C D E reading across and A F L Q V heading the group reading down. The first signal refers to the number of the row reading across; therefore, one tap means the letter to be sent is in the A B C D E row. The second signal refers to the column, reading down. One tap followed by one tap would mean the letter A. To speed transmission, many abbreviations were created and the tap code became the primary means of POW communication (Hubbell, 1976).

RPOW Howard Rutledge (Rutledge & Rutledge, 1973) wrote "we learned to communicate with anything and everything....we used tin cups as transducers to tap or talk coded messages through solid walls. For short distances we tapped

with fingers; for longer distances we tapped with the ball of fist or elbows against the floor" (p. 49). He added that any and all channels for communication were explored. The POWs would sweep through the compound, using the broom movements to signal messages. Men would drag their sandals in code, use hand flashes, squish clothes as they were washed or flap them before hanging them, and even cough and spit in code. Almost anything that made sound was used. Any time the prisoners were standing in the courtyard they knew they were being watched by another prisoner through a tiny crack or peephole. They took advantage of this communication opportunity whenever possible.

The tap code was used primarily for sending verbal messages, but it served as a means for nonverbal communication as well. RPOW Coffee (1991) remembered:

> From subtle variations in his tapping I could feel urgency, longing, sadness, excitement, and humor. I could tell if he liked my joke, or if it had bombed depending on his extemporaneous scratching, drumming with the fingernails, brushing, or light thumping. What was he doing, laughing or groaning? I was really beginning to know. (p. 140)

Communication as the Foundation of a System: Group Dynamics

Transmitting messages to one another helped the men feel linked to each other, but it served some other important purposes too. As RVPOW Coffee (1991) pointed out, covert communication was "often the only link between cell blocks and would keep all apprised of what was going on throughout the prison" (p. 141). This network helped the men know who had joined the group so his name could be added to the lists different prisoners memorized, the intent being to make sure all

prisoners were accounted for. Knowing the whereabouts of each man and his status helped the prisoners attend to each other as best they could.

As RPOW Wagon (1976) stated, one of the ways of taking care of each other involved informing and indoctrinating each other. According to Wagon, an elaborate grapevine eventually formed that linked most of the camps. Prisoners tended this intricate communication system by feigning sickness to receive a medical transfer from one camp to another and even incurring disciplinary transfers by baiting their captors. This grapevine allowed the dissemination of policy, a system that allowed the prisoners to be a part of the chain of command.

RVPOW Senator McCain (1973) echoed Wagon's opinions about the value of communication and its role in the formation of the POW society:

> Communication primarily served to keep up morale. We would risk getting beat up just to tell a man that one of his friends had gotten a letter from home. But it was also valuable to establish a chain of command in our camps, so our senior officers could give us advice and guidance. (p.52)

Leadership and Cohesion

In addition to recognizing the importance of the grapevine, Wagon credited the leadership and group cohesion for the formation of the POW society: "The impact of communication on the POW society, and thus on the prisoner of war himself is clear. With good communications, a strong, supportive society can be formed and maintained" (p. 46). The communication and supportive society about which Wagon wrote helps explain why this group of POWs experienced a very different outcome than prisoners in other captivity situations have. The formation of this society and its importance will be detailed later in this discussion.

Wagon contended:

> The group dynamics of a POW society embody the two thrusts, leadership and cohesiveness. Awareness on the part of POW leaders that men need a strong group with which to align themselves is one reason Vietnam POW's apparently weathered their experiences so much better than their Korean war predecessors. (p.37)

Wagon's claim that the Vietnam group has fared better is substantiated by the information gleaned from studying this group since repatriation (Nice, Garland, Hilton, Baggett, & Mitchell, 1996). Unlike captives in prior situations, these men were not on their own; they were accountable to recognized authority, a chain of command and a code of conduct. Contrary to the outcome of the Korean War prisoner situation, of the 566 repatriated Vietnam prisoners, only 10 have been formally accused of failing to adhere to the standards of the Code of Conduct (Wagon, 1976).

Contrasts Between VPOWs and Korean POWs

Perhaps the outcome of the Vietnam POW experience and the impact communication had on it are most impressive when compared to other captivity situations like the Korean War. After studying the aftermath of the Korean POW experience, Edgar Schein concluded:

> It is this maintenance of social relationships, roles, and self-image, which, I believe, accounts in large measure for the stability both of group and individual personalities, and which represents, therefore, one of the greatest forces against change or influenceability. (Schein 1958, p.1)

In the case of the Korean prisoners, the captives did not experience these phenomena. The men were prevented from communicating with each other; they did not trust each other; they had low regard for each other; and there was no

opportunity to share knowledge or norms. This set of circumstances put these prisoners at risk for manipulation and collaboration.

Biderman (1957) and Schein (1956) concurred that in the case of the United Nations prisoners of war of the Chinese Communists there was a set of examples of undermining the bonds which hold groups together, thereby reducing the flow of confirming interpersonal cues. This led to a feeling of heightened social alienation and individual prisoner susceptibility to being influenced to collaborate with the captors. To compromise communication and cohesion, the Chinese captors systematically segregated leaders and other key personnel from the remainder of the group. This led to the overall breakdown of the POW society.

The Vietnamese captors also realized the power of communication and tried to separate prisoners from each other, to put empty rooms between cells, and to isolate leaders from the group. The Vietnamese captors were not as successful as their Chinese counterparts, however. The lessons learned from the Korean War served as a training ground for the Vietnam group (Hubbell, 1976).

In a 1958 address Schein identified three conditions that foster the creation of a state he called *influencability:* lack of communication, lack of trust, and low regard for each other. His claim was confirmed by the accounts of many who successfully resisted by maintaining relationships with other prisoners. Prisoners who organized themselves and formed relationships were better able to resist captors. Learning from their predecessors, the Vietnam prisoners were able to share knowledge and to even go so far as to create meaning.

The Need to Communicate

In answering the question of *why* did the Vietnam POWs choose to communicate in the face of adversity and torture, the answer might be "they had to." They had to if they were going to resist their captors, observe the chain of command, and adhere to the Code of Conduct. The Vietnam group members had the advantage of learning from previous captivity situations, so they were better able to make decisions that led to their success as prisoners. The methods they invented to communicate and the eventual outcome of their experience further lend credence to the observation that "they had to." Perhaps the need to create meaning in a situation that had none prompted them to institute a system for helping them resist influence, for establishing solidarity, and for finding meaning in their lives.

The System's Influence on Resilience

In 1958 William Schutz proposed a theory of interpersonal behavior that postulated three areas for understanding human interaction. In the original theory, at the *behavioral* level these were called inclusion, control and affection. Years of experience, however, showed that the term *affection* was problematic since it referred primarily to *feelings* rather than to *behavior*. Accordingly, *affection* was changed to the essential behavior ingredient of affection, *openness*. The three behavioral dimensions then became *inclusion, control,* and *openness* (Schutz, 1992). The prisoners held in North Vietnam had a society that functioned well, a society based on inclusion, control, and openness.

Schutz maintained that these parameters delineate the salient variables of interpersonal relationships, and people form groups to fulfill their needs for each. These three constants served as a framework for the Vietnam prisoners of war who created and maintained a system of strong interpersonal relationships and group affiliation that helped them survive seven years in captivity and the subsequent years since repatriation.

After reviewing the related VPOW literature, researchers Rahe and Geneder(1983) concluded: "coping with depression is aided enormously by a strong support group. Repeated documentations exist of virtually life-saving influences of support persons or groups in the lives of depressed captives....Group activities lend vital cohesive forces to the captive group" (p. 579).

Inclusion

Schutz (1992) claimed that all people have the need for inclusion, the need to feel a part of other people's lives. As Schutz stated, people ask themselves: Am I a member of this group? Do I belong? Are others attuned to my needs? Are they interested in me? Each human has a need for inclusion, but the need for inclusion can be magnified during difficult times or times of crisis. The Vietnam POWs were no exception.

For the first two years of their captivity, many of the Vietnam prisoners were in solitary confinement. Their need for inclusion could not be met through the usual channels of face-to-face contact, so they took solace and strength from the cohesion and unity they felt with the other prisoners (Mulligan, 1981; Coffee,

1991; Stockdale & Stockdale, 1980) They learned to communicate by talking through walls, by signaling under doors, passing notes, tapping on walls, and by sweeping and coughing in code; and they did so at the risk of torture if they were caught. Yet communicate they did (Hubbell, 1976).

As RVPOW George Coker explained, "without directly knowing it, communications allowed the weaker P.W.s to draw strength and guidance from the stronger. It was important to guard against the enemy's efforts to identify weakened prisoners and to isolate them" (Coker, 1974, p. 43). Every attempt was made "to draw in anyone being held in isolation or a remote position; and to make every effort to contact every prisoner, making sure they were brought into the communications net" (p. 43). The sense of inclusion apparently allowed the prisoners to thwart the efforts of the captors and to render the members of their group somewhat less vulnerable.

RPOW Wagon concurred with Coker when he explained the role inclusion played in survival:

> the trust necessary to reach out and try to communicate helped to create a POW society. The risks necessary to maintain links welded the community. From this social interaction developed groups so closely knit that they recognized their own sociological status and consciously sought to create a strong, supportive society. (Wagon, 1976, p. 37)

The society of which Wagon spoke consisted of numerous small groups that would change as prisoners were relocated, but the overall prisoner society or system did not change. Each new person was identified and included. RPOW Grant's (1975) account is typical. He wrote that he had been in solitary confinement only a few weeks when he received a note by covert means. It said:

> "Welcome to the Plantation Gardens...There are more of us here and we are all praying for you. To beat these guys you must have faith in us...." The note went on to give me the tap code....Receiving the note was a tremendous morale booster, as was the description of the tap code, by which I was able to establish communications with other prisoners. (p. 258)

Grant, like all of the other prisoners, was identified by name, was brought into the system, and was administered to.

The POWs in North Vietnam seemingly realized the importance of inclusion. Each man's name was memorized so every individual could be accounted for. Jim Mulligan, a senior ranking POW, memorized 459 names of known living POWs and recited them into a tape recorder on the airplane on his flight out of Vietnam (Mulligan, 1981). Mulligan's list of names was then compared with the numerous lists of names others had assumed responsibility for remembering. Each man was distinguished from the others by name and rank. Each man received personal attention, and status was recognized.

Larry Chesley (1973) remembered:

> Each Sunday we would pass the signal around, then each man would kneel in his separate room, offer a prayer....To others, each of us might have seemed alone, but to us the separating walls were insignificant for those few minutes on Sunday. We were together in spirit. (p. 21)

This spirit of unity caused a cohesion among these men that is unparalleled in most captivity situations.

Inclusion at Alcatraz

Jim Mulligan was a member of a group the North Vietnamese identified in 1967 as 11 "troublemakers." These men were isolated from each other and from the rest of the prisoners in a place Bob Shumaker named "Alcatraz." The Alcatraz Eleven, as they were known, the "hard-core diehards," were a specific example of a group

in crisis, a group that considered inclusion in this community "a badge of honor" (Denton, 1982). These 11 were singled out by their captors as men to whom the others looked for guidance, inspiration, and leadership. They were men who needed to be removed from the mainstream. Contrary to their captors' plans, these men solidified as a group and offered support to one another, making them even stronger in their resolve (Hubbell, 1976).

Texas Congressman Sam Johnson remembers how he felt about inclusion in this group: "I was again a part of a whole, a member of the team....It was a strange sort of elation, an excitement almost, that I had been categorized with such valiant men as these" (Johnson & Winebrenner, 1992, p. 160). In further addressing the aspect of inclusion with this group, he added that the group at Alcatraz was consumed with the need to get acquainted and to communicate.

The Alcatraz Eleven, and many other prisoners, went years without seeing another American, but they nonetheless felt linked to their particular small groups and the whole POW group. Camaraderie and association were established in nontraditional ways. In fact, prisoners refused to take early release and special privileges (Mulligan, 1981). This spirit of "unity over self" was the foundation for the cohesion these men felt in their social system, but it was also related to the control they experienced (Stockdale & Stockdale, 1992).

Control

As Schutz (1966) explained, the human need for control refers to the decision-making processes among people. The need for control manifests itself as

the desire for power, authority, and control over others and, therefore, over one's future. At the other end of the continuum is the need to be controlled, to have responsibility taken away.

Control addresses the question of who gives orders and who follows them. Power, authority and leadership are all components of the control feature in a group's process, but the nature of the group's task plays a role too. In well structured groups the power will be direct and apparent, but in less formal and less task-oriented groups, control is more subtle. As Schutz pointed out, this type of control is more influence than direct control.

Hardiness researchers Kobasa et al. (1982) also delineated some of the positive outcomes of control. They contended: "Control enhances stress resistance perceptually by increasing the likelihood that events will be experienced as a natural outgrowth of one's actions and, there, not as overwhelming experiences (p. 169). They added that control appeared to be responsible for the development of a varied repertory of responses to stress. Zeiss and Dickman (1989) said: "locus of control is one of the mediating variables that helped World War II POWs adjust to life in captivity" (p. 86).

Loss of Control in Nazi Prisons

According to Schutz (1966), one way to break down a group's power is to reduce the feelings of control the members have. If people have a need to feel control and influence over their lives and over the lives of others, removing this perception can, according to Schutz, compromise the cohesion of the groups. In

the Nazi prison camps, the guards succeeded in doing just that. The prisoners were forced to say "thou" to one another, which in Germany is indiscriminately used only among small children. Using this term with adults shows a lack of respect, but the Nazi guards did not permit the prisoners to address one another with the many titles to which middle and upper-class Germans were accustomed. On the other hand, the prisoners had to address the guards in the most deferential manner, showing respect by giving them all their titles (Bettelheim, 1953).

As Bettelheim (1953) pointed out, forcing these adults to live like children, to speak like and to be spoken to like children caused them to eventually take on some characteristics of children. They were unable to plan for the future, and they were unable to establish durable relationships. The Nazi prisoners had no control over their lives, according to Bettelheim, even to the extent that their most basic of human needs for food, sleep, and using the toilet were controlled by the guards. The need for control was purposefully thwarted for these prisoners. Expressions of independence, rebellion, and resistance were almost certain triggers for more abuse, so these prisoners did not find control within their own lives or through forming relationships with other prisoners.

Control in the VPOW Society

The VPOWs, on the other hand, did form groups and relied on their *system* to help them overcome some of the adversity of the situation. These prisoners, like the Nazi prisoners, were treated like children (Hubbell, 1976). Satisfaction of their basic physiological needs was also determined by their guards; however, one

significant difference is apparent. The Vietnam prisoners had a *system* for resisting. They were forced to submit and comply with many of the guards' demands, but because of their system, their group, they were able to rebel when prisoners in other captivity situations had not been able to (e.g. Mulligan, 1981; Stockdale & Stockdale, 1992).

Hunger strikes among the already starving prisoners, for example, showed the power unity can play. On several occasions, hunger strikes brought about desired results such as medical treatment for a particular prisoner (Mulligan, 1981). On other occasions senior ranking officers ordered hunger strikes to vent their wrath about continued solitary confinement and leg irons (Stockdale & Stockdale, 1992). As RVPOW Stockdale pointed out, the VPOWs were demonstrating organized resistance to authority and, in Stockdale's opinion, that is the highest crime any group can commit in a Communist country.

The Vietnamese captors, like the Nazi captors, tried to break the power of the group, but the Vietnamese were not so formidable. The Nazis were successful in controlling the prisoners, and their prisoners had no system for resisting the coercion. When the North Vietnamese tried to impose a rule similar to the Nazi's rule of saying "thou" to one another, they were met with unexpected resistance. The VPOWs refused to give in to the captives' demands that they refrain from addressing each other by rank. VPOW Naughton recalled, "The Vietnamese never recognized military rank among PWs, and reference to a fellow PW as captain or major produced violent reaction on the part of the Vietnamese" (Naughton, 1975,

p. 11). However, the prisoners continued the practice. RVPOW Chesley explained:

> The North Vietnamese did not like our chain of command under which the senior officer in the room ran the room. Instead they tried to set up a system under which junior officers would run the room. For a while they wouldn't give us anything if we didn't ask for it through the junior officers ...Though the withholding of supplies made things extremely inconvenient for us we adhered to the proper system of working always through the senior officers except in cases of emergency...and finally the Vietnamese junior officer program fell apart. (Chesley, 1973, p. 100)

Certainly any time groups form some element of influence will take place (Schutz, 1966), and the VPOWs were no exception to Schutz's observations. However, the VPOWs experienced a very definite system of control because they operated under the military Chain of Command (Stockdale & Stockdale, 1992). This standardized system determines who reports to whom and who assumes leadership roles.

RVPOW Wagon explained one aspect of influence when he discussed the group's norms. According to Wagon, group norms were not difficult to establish. The particular norms relevant to camp experience were determined by the leadership and enforced by peer group pressure. In Wagon's opinion, the group strengthened its cohesiveness through organization and structure (Wagon, 1976).

Chesley, too, addressed the structure the Chain of Command offered, "We always knew who the senior officer was, and even if sometimes some of us did not agree with the decision, we did exactly what he ordered" (p. 100). RVPOW George Coker added:

> We were able to maintain an integral solid front strong enough to continue to fight the enemy. By taking command, our seniors made sure that this was done officially. No one went down the drain because the guy next to him was

> lazy....The junior officers organized themselves automatically, because they were military men who instinctively looked toward their seniors. (Coker, 1974, p. 43)

Coker credited the command structure with making decisions for the group. This, in turn, helped the group achieve strength.

According to RVPOW Naughton, another way the VPOWs used to maintain control was to routinize the events of the day and to maintain rigid control of the routine. Planning such common events as exercising, sweeping the floor, cleaning the cell, telling stories, and communicating with other cells served a twofold purpose. It gave an element of order to life and permitted some control of one's action. Otherwise a prisoner had to perform the most common daily acts of eating, bathing, rising, and going to bed at a time designated by the prison guards. The value of order and self-control is best appreciated in the light of the prisoner uncertainties and required compliances. In other words, taking charge of *anything* allowed a perception of some degree of control (Naughton, 1975).

After reviewing the VPOW literature, Rahe and Geneder (1983) echoed Naughton's observations. These researchers observed that the use of humor was a way of exercising some control as well as a means of coping:

> Use of humor has an immense coping value. Getting the best of one's guards, on occasion, not only provides humorous remembrances that can be savored later, but gives captives a moment of control in what otherwise is a totally uncontrolled situation. (p. 580)

Augmenting Control

Gradually the VPOWs were able to take control of different parts of their lives. During the final years of captivity the VPOWs were confined in larger rooms that housed groups of individuals (Hubbell, 1976). At this time another aspect of the

POWs' system emerged. Since most of the torture and punishment had stopped by this time, the prisoners were no longer worried primarily about physical survival. Now they had the wherewithal to focus some attention on other needs, so the prisoners began to rely on each other for intellectual stimulation and entertainment (Stockdale & Stockdale, 1992). Realizing the need to concentrate on intellectual growth, the prisoners organized a system for educating each other and for providing recreation.

Individuals took turns teaching classes in a variety of subjects about which they were knowledgeable. Many prisoners learned foreign languages, advanced math, philosophy, and a host of other subjects (Stockdale & Stockdale, 1992). Both the teaching of the classes and the learning of the material allowed the group members to be challenged mentally, a process that encouraged the interaction and interdependence that strengthens group cohesion.

The Code of Conduct as a Factor of Control

An additional factor that helped to establish structure for the groups concerned the Code of Conduct. In 1955 President Eisenhower issued an order prescribing a six-point Code of Conduct for members of the Armed Forces. The order states "every member of the armed forces...is expected to measure up to the standards embodied in this Code of Conduct while he is in combat or in captivity" (Wehrum, 1971, p. 139).

The Code provides guidelines to cope with interrogation and indoctrination techniques used by the enemy, but as Vice Admiral Stockdale (1992) pointed out,

"The Code, as good as it is, is like a constitution--arguments can go on endlessly about how it should be applied to specific situations" (p.251). The problem the Vietnam prisoners faced was how to apply a standardized set of criteria that had never been tested in an actual combat situation. The interpretation of the Code, a foundation of the group's system, therefore, was left to the group's leadership:

> My whole concept of proper prisoner-of-war behavior was based on sticking together....our highest value had to be placed on the support of the man next door. To ignore him was to betray him....It was "unity over self." (Stockdale & Stockdale, 1992, p. 252)

As the group's leader, Stockdale had to make decisions about how to apply the heretofore untested Code to the current situation.

In spite of controlling all that they could, the Vietnam prisoners of war still experienced little governance over their lives. Like the Nazi captors, the Vietnamese guards told the POWs when to perform routine tasks, but the domination went beyond the other captivity experiences. The Vietnam prisoners were coerced into giving information to the captors and into signing anti-American propaganda statements. Their loss of power was so pervasive and profound that they needed to find control in whatever way they could. The Code of Conduct and the Chain of Command provided a modicum of control for these people. Without the systematic execution of each, the prisoners would have experienced almost total loss of mastery in their lives. Grasping what little power they had helped them clutch the reins momentarily (Hubbell, 1976).

In contrast to the Vietnam prisoners, Bettleheim (1953) stated that the Nazi prisoners, lacking a systematic approach to their situation, tried unsuccessfully to

take control in other ways. These prisoners developed feelings of detachment which rejected the reality of the situation. To safeguard their integrity many prisoners behaved in the camp as though their prison lives there had no connection with their "real" lives. The prisoners' feelings could be summed up by the statement that "What I am doing here, or what is happening to me, does not count at all; here everything is permissible as long and insofar as it contributes to helping me to survive in the camp" (p. 432).

Conversely, the Code of Conduct and the Chain of Command helped the Vietnam prisoner group keep their goals in focus. They were constantly reminded by other group members that they were part of a system, a system that expected them to behave in prescribed ways. Keeping this expectation in the forefront of their minds was one way these men created a sense of control even when little evidence of actual control existed. As Naughton (1975) pointed out that resistance was viewed as a contribution to the war effort as well as an individual responsibility. These men assumed responsibility for their roles as members of the POW group and as members of the military. In their view, their jobs continued even though they were in captivity.

Affection and Openness

Affection, or openness, is the third component of Schutz's theory. According to Schutz (1966), the interpersonal need for affection is the need to establish and maintain a satisfactory relation with others with respect to love and affection. Schutz asserted that affection refers to a two-person or dyadic relationship. This

need encompasses the psychological needs to be able to love other people, to have others love in return and to feel lovable. The affection between two people forms the foundation for cohesion in the larger group setting. Schutz's early explanation of the need for affection and his later clarification that openness is the behavioral outcome of affection are both relevant to a discussion of the Vietnam POWs since both definitely played a role in their system and possibly in their resilience. These men have indicated they had both the *feelings* of affection and the *behavioral* evidence of openness.

The Vietnam POWs have written extensively about the affection they felt for one another. Many of the men experienced years of isolation, so the presence of another person was almost overwhelming. Many men mentioned the elation of being given a cellmate after not seeing another American for two or three years (e.g., Coffee, 1991; Mulligan, 1981).

Group Affection Tied to Resilience

A specific type of openness centered around the POWs' need to be reassured after they were forced to give information. RVPOW General Risner recounted the group's efforts to raise the spirits of individuals who had been tortured into giving information. Learning that most of the others had been through the same thing and had been broken as well allowed the men to gain their perspective and balance. Because of the openness of others, the broken prisoner no longer felt like a traitor because he had not been strong enough to take torture (Risner, 1973).

Alcatraz member Howard Rutledge remembered the feelings of affection and openness that developed among the POWs when they realized how important each man was to the other. He claimed the more they knew about each man's strengths or weaknesses, the more they loved each other (Rutledge & Rutledge, 1973,).

Openness: An Element of Resilience

Naughton (1975) too indicated that openness was part of living in close quarters with another. He stated: "when a POW has the same roommate for 2,3,4, and 5 years, it is safe to conclude they know each other better than they know their wives," because living together in a small cell meant constant association and interaction for 24 hours a day, not the mere 8 hours a day at work or at home that most people equate with 'knowing a person'" (p. 8).

One of the Alcatraz members recalled:

> We told each other things we probably had never spoken of before--things about our childhoods, our family lives, our wives. There was little we didn't learn about each others' wives. In later years, we all sensed that our wives were uncomfortable with the fact that others had such intimate knowledge of them. But we had held back nothing, so great was our need to communicate and be close to another human being. (Johnson & Winebreener, 1992, p. 166)

Since there were no other distractions from work, family, and social obligation, the men relied on each other. They tended to share their innermost fears, hopes and dreams.

Conclusions About VPOW Group Communication

The VPOW accounts indicate these men formed a system that defined and encouraged methods for communicating among the group's members. Much of the interaction among the small groups of Vietnam prisoners took place without

face-to-face interaction, a traditional aspect of small group definition. Nevertheless, all other elements of group involvement were present: inclusion, cohesion, interaction, and goal realization. These men relied on group affiliation not in spite of the crisis but *because* of it. RPOW Orson Swindle believed "We've got a good system, let's don't abandon it today" (Naval Aviation Symposium, 1996). For group members, inclusion, control, and affection are central to their group's health, their personal benefit, and in the case of the Vietnam POWs, their actual survival.

Avoidance of Apathy

The intrapersonal communication behaviors of faith, religion, and the use of humor seem to have formed the foundation for the VPOWs to find meaning in their captivity. The social support and interdependency of their dyadic and small-group communication helped transmit their personal meanings to each other. This creation of meaning helped the VPOWs discover a purpose in the imprisonment and in their reliance on each other.

Effective intrapersonal, dyadic, and small-group communication aided prisoners in general, and the VPOWs in particular, find some meaning in their lives and helped them avoid giving up. Finding the balance between healthy distancing and giving up, however, was not always easy for POWs. Similarly, explaining the role apathy played in both positive and negative ways is not simple either.

Apathy Among World War II POWs

In 1948 Ralph Greenson defined apathy as a "state of affectlessness," with the most striking characteristic of the apathetic person being his visible lack of emotion and drive (p. 290). Drawing from his work with prisoners from World War II Japanese prison camps, Greenson concluded that when viewed as a "defense against painful perceptions" and when it "serves the purpose of avoiding overwhelming feelings of annihilation...it can be regarded as a successful defense mechanism." The prisoner who just put his mind "in neutral" rather than rebelling or giving up was the one who made it through (Greenson, 1949, p. 300).

Apathy in Concentration Camps

Although not identical to Greenson's definition of apathy, Dimsdale's study of coping behavior of Nazi concentration camp survivors refers to a similar behavior known as "psychological removal" (Dimsdale, 1974, p. 794). He explained that this behavior essentially revolved around insulating oneself from the outside stress, allowing the prisoner to develop the feeling that "I'm not here," and "This is not happening to me," which would be similar to Greenson's explanation that these behaviors acted as a type of "defense against painful perceptions." Greenson pointed out that these denial strategies were omnipresent and are often effective in shielding a person from complete realization of the shock.

Based on his study of 12 autobiographical accounts, Bluhm's (1948) explanation of concentration camp survivors is similar to Dimsdale's. Bluhm described various intrapersonal blocking mechanisms that were put in motion in order to protect the individual from further traumatic experiences. A type of "emotional frigidity" was the protective blocking mechanism that established a sort of mental emergency regime. By depersonalizing the event, the reality of the situation could be ignored with a "It cannot be true; such things don't happen" reaction (p. 9).

Apathy Among Korean POWs

Perhaps the most pervasive use of apathy as a defense mechanism occurred during the captivity of Americans during the Korean War. Prisoners repatriated by the Chinese and North Koreans reported that the only way to keep from either collaborating or resisting to the point of eliciting punishment, was to withdraw as much as possible from any but routine interactions with either the Chinese or other POWs (Strassman, Thaler, & Schein, 1956).

Most men adopted a pattern of what they called "playing it cool," which involved being unresponsive and minimally communicative. These men were caught in the conflict between cooperating with the Chinese to a point of arousing the suspicion and hostility of their fellow POWs or resisting to the point of triggering the hostility of the Chinese. This adjustment to the captivity situation did not imply resignation or giving up; rather it was a way of not allowing themselves to become dependent on anything or anyone (Strassman et al. 1956).

Strassman and his associates made a point of discussing the intensity to which one experiences apathy, distinguishing between a healthy amount of apathy and a pathological measure of it. They contended that apathy is not to be a single absolute reaction, but a syndrome which can vary markedly in degree; and if this degree of apathy becomes too pronounced, the prisoner will be in danger. The distinction between healthy and pathological apathy is key to this dissertation because it outlines the importance of using rather than misusing or overusing a coping or defense behavior.

As Strassman and his associates reported, American Medical Corps officers, who were themselves POWs, related that some of the deaths did not seem warranted by the physical conditions of the men. The prisoners seemingly became listless and indifferent to taking care of their bodily needs. They refused to eat and eventually lay down as if waiting for death. Research suggests there can be such a thing as too much of a coping mechanism (Strassman et al. 1956).

Apathy Among Pueblo Crew Members

The use of apathy appears again in the form of withdrawal in Ford and Spaulding's account of the *Pueblo* crew's use of coping mechanisms (1973). These investigators said that "denial was described as an ability to divorce oneself from preoccupation with the reality situation" (p. 341). While this use of the word *denial* does not exactly equate to the definition of *apathy*, the definitions of the prisoners' behaviors seem similar. Ford and Spaulding posited that by denying long-term imprisonment, execution, or the failure of the U.S. Government to

secure their release would occur, these men allowed themselves to enjoy the passive reactions that removing oneself from reality provided. This removal, divorcing, or distancing from reality sustained the *Pueblo* POWs.

Absence of Apathy in VPOWs

This withdrawal and detachment behavior is less obvious in Vietnam POW literature. Ursano (1981) stated that, in contrast to the apathy syndrome identified in Korean War POWs, the VPOWs showed isolation of affect and a stubborn unifocal determination as well as a heightened drive to master and achieve:

> The POW was better able to carry out the repetitive, monotonous tasks necessary to survive years of imprisonment, much of which was spent in isolation. This adaptive style is similar in function to, although less profound than, the withdrawal component of the apathy syndrome. (Ursano, 1981, p. 317)

Ursano's explanation of similarities and differences in adaptive styles is significant. His observations about the degree to which an individual uses distancing is relevant to this discussion, but the degree of distancing or denial that is healthy and how much is unhealthy is not obvious.

Dissociation is probably a better term for positive distancing. This process involves more of a separating of mental functions rather than a mental distancing. Dissociation is defined as "an unconscious process by which a group of mental processes is separated from the rest of the thinking processes, resulting in an independent functioning of these processes and a loss of the usual relationships" (Stedman's Medical Dictionary, 1990, p. 458). As Wood and Sexton, (1995) pointed out:

> Of key importance is that only a group of mental processes is separated. The captive must maintain keen awareness of his interrogator's maneuvers and

> purpose during an interrogation. A lack of attentional focus by the captive could yield a response which is damaging to him/her, or our government, or fellow prisoners. (p. 8)

They added:

> During torture, it is expected that part of the captive's awareness will "separate" from his or her thinking processes, especially that part responsible for the evaluation of pain. The captive should expect that dissociation will naturally occur as a result of fatigue, pain, loneliness and humiliation of torture. (p.8)

Deaton's VPOW self-report study (1975) indicates withdrawal was not considered to be a useful strategy during solitary. The VPOWs' coping strategies were apparently directed toward a more active confrontation with the captor and the environment, as opposed to a passive, withdrawn method of dealing with the situation.

Perhaps Deaton's distinction between active and passive modes of coping best answers the question concerning how and when to use dissociation. Actively dissociating during torture is radically different from passively giving up in a more general sense. For the purpose of this discussion, then, dissociation will differ from apathy in that the former, dissociating, is a separating of mental processes and a positive coping mechanism; and the latter, apathy, is a passive withdrawal that can, when taken to extremes, cause rather than ameliorate problems.

Deaton's and Ursano's findings are certainly credible when considered in tandem with Reinhardt's (1970) conclusions about outstanding jet pilots. In his study of 105 superior jet pilots aged 20 to 40, Reinhardt suggested that these men were not introspective and tended toward interpersonal and emotional distance. He concludes that this tendency toward interpersonal and emotional distance caused these pilots not to be touched too deeply by life.

Fine and Hartman (1968) too stated that "interpersonal relationships were adequate and satisfying but generally distant" in the typical Air Force pilot (p. 30). Perhaps these tendencies helped the Vietnam POWs during captivity. Since they already routinely experienced an emotional distance from others and from life in general, a turn toward apathy was not necessary.

Another plausible explanation is that, according to Fine and Hartman (1968) and Reinhardt (1970), the aviator tends to be more action oriented than the typical person. As Deaton (1975) concluded, the POW utilized an active, direct confrontation with his captor as his primary method of coping in solitary confinement. Reinhardt's observations that jet pilots tend to show a great desire for challenge and success also supports the notion that apathy might not have occurred to the typical Vietnam POW. Then, too, perhaps the Vietnam POW relied on apathy occasionally but either failed to find the behavior particularly useful, or he was reluctant to report using it for fear such a revelation would seem not to be in the image of a fighting man. Another explanation is that apathy serves to maintain personality integration in the face of severe reality and psychological stresses (Strassman et al. 1956). Maybe the Vietnam POW enjoyed a stronger sense of who he was, and this personality integration could occur without the use of apathy.

Summary

In summarizing the literature on resilience, coping, prisoners of war, and communication, the complexity of this study becomes apparent. Truly a complex cluster of factors helped the Vietnam POWs return to their former lives, for the most part, psychologically unscathed. Uncovering and untangling all of the answers is impossible. The only possible goal is to attempt to describe and sort out some of the elements that have contributed to this group's success.

Framing the behaviors of the VPOWs as communication is an attempt to understand why the VPOWs have done so well since repatriation. Some of the theorists mentioned would offer that all that is human is communication, so the field of study remains wide open. What, if any, is the relationship between intrapersonal communication and resilience? Did effective dyadic and small-group communication play a role in the VPOWs' resilience? Ostensibly a constellation of factors seems to have helped these men. Bringing some of the communication behaviors to the fore is an attempt to learn more about the role of communication on survival and resilience.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This study explored the possible relationship between communication patterns of VPOWs and their resilience. To accomplish this, three major areas were identified for examination. These include the three major constructs of communication: intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, and small-group communication.

Based on the review of the literature, the VPOW accounts were framed as communication activity. This study addresses how each of these areas could conceivably further the cause of effectively training future aviators who might become POWs and how these lessons can be applied to persons coping with less extreme adversity. This chapter focuses on providing an explanation of the research questions and on clarifying the course the study took.

Data Collection

The quantitative data that exist and the individual written accounts have left much of the narrative unsaid. The richness of the lived experience has not been chronicled. The larger picture that would allow a look at the relationships among communication behaviors within the VPOW system remains undiscovered. A partially structured interview approach allowed the oral histories and narratives to come to light.

As Sellitz, Johada, Deutsch, and Cook (1959) pointed out, the "partially unstructured interview, if properly used, helps bring out the affective and value

laden aspects of the subject's response" (p.263). By approaching this topic from a qualitative research perspective, centered around face-to-face interaction, some of the personal accounts and unsaid words provide a focus for an understanding of the VPOW experience.

The interview questions were intended to be open enough to elicit the kinds of rich narratives that would provide these unsaid, subjective accounts but not so open that they would encourage a didactic interaction with the interviewer. That is, much has been written about the general VPOW experience. The kinds of food, clothing, daily schedules, and general experiences were very similar. During the Phase I meetings the RPOWs spent time explaining aspects of the experience that are widely written about and generally known. These repeatedly said words do not add greatly to the knowledge base nor do they explain the complexity of the subjective experience. For that reason, the interview questions were intended to capture and illuminate the less obvious personal reactions about the VPOW experience.

Selection of Subjects

Each man in the Navy's ongoing VPOW study participated voluntarily. No pressure has or is being put on the men to continue in the program. The medical advantages of receiving a thorough medical, dental, and psychological examination yearly coupled with their desire to generate information has provided motivation for most of the men to continue in the project.

Three categories of participants were identified. First, the 138 aviators who began the Navy's initial study after repatriation form one segment of the participants. These Naval aviators, as mentioned in chapter 1, were selected over 20 years ago to begin a long-term study. Their counterparts have been examined yearly since the study began. Many of the findings cited in the review of the literature refer to this cadre of RPOWs simply because they are the ones about whom the most information exists.

These 138 men were selected because they were Naval aviators, as opposed to Marine or Air Force aviators, and because they had been held in captivity for seven years or longer. The rationale behind this narrowing of subjects was that the Navy was funding the project and could reasonably use the Naval aviators as subjects, and the experiences of the early shootdowns were drastically different from those of the late shootdowns.

In the last two years, the Air Force RPOWs have joined the Navy's study. In an attempt to synthesize the available information, the services are finally united in their efforts. Currently about 300 men are participating in the evaluations, so all available information from the ongoing study of the Navy RPOWs and the more recent data concerning the Air Force RPOWs will be included. That is, all claims about resilience will include the data from the psychological examinations of all VPOW participants.

Dissertation Research Subjects

This study involved 10 participants and 2 pilot study subjects. Interviewing was to occur until saturation (Denizen & Lincoln, 1996), which happened almost immediately. Two of the subjects were members of the group that had been in Alcatraz, the eleven "troublemakers" who were identified and isolated from each other and from the other prisoners, but who formed a group nonetheless.

These 11 were moved to a separate prison known as Alcatraz. Special attention was given to finding members of the Alcatraz Eleven, as these prisoners were called, because they formed a unity that seemed to sustain them during the worst part of their captivity (Hubbell, 1976).

The homogeneous nature of the group suggested some of the variables such as age, education, and occupation that would ordinarily call for a larger sampling were not be present. The similarities of the participants, coupled with the fact that redundancy appeared almost immediately in the Phase I meetings, suggested 12 subjects would be adequate.

Both Navy and Air Force RPOWs were included. All have been aviators, since information about aviator personality is significant. All participants were in captivity for at least four years. The rationale behind using this criterion of four years is twofold.

First, the treatment of the VPOWs changed significantly after the death of Ho Chi Minh in September of 1969 (Hubbell, 1976). Men imprisoned after that 1969 time frame received better treatment, were in solitary less, and were tortured less.

Second, the duration of captivity needs to be similar in order to account for some of the changes the men experienced. Men who were in prison for a year or less were seldom in solitary, were seldom tortured, and they never had to adjust to a lengthy imprisonment; consequently, they underwent a very different ordeal than the ones who were there longer. In short, these men never *needed* each other in quite the same ways that the earlier shootdowns did.

Procedure

In selecting participants for the in-depth interviews, no attempt was made to find a particular man or to schedule a specific individual, except for finding members of the Alcatraz Eleven. Rather, those men who were available for a face-to-face meeting were interviewed. This face-to-face preference automatically singled out individuals who live in the Pensacola area. Two of the Alcatraz Eleven were included in the study because of their seemingly strong group affiliation.

The preference for a face-to-face interview automatically limited the number of available men. The ones in the Pensacola area were the most accessible, and others who happened to be in Pensacola during interview trips were also available.

Identification of Subjects

No one was coerced into participation. At the beginning of the interview I stated that this study is being conducted in conjunction with the ongoing Navy study, so no new consent form procedures were necessary.

Participants were assigned fictitious names, and each tape and transcript carries this identifying name. No one, except the primary researcher, knows the identity

of the participants. All tapes and transcripts will be held by the primary researcher unless the Navy requests the data.

Phase I

Phase I of the research began in the summer of 1994. At that time I began to read the personal accounts of the VPOWs. There are approximately 20 books and articles by the former VPOWs that allowed me to draw some conclusions about the common aspects of their captivity experiences. This search also pointed out some of the differences that existed among the authors. This review of the literature *by* the VPOWs began the first phase of the project.

In the spring of 1995 I moved to Pensacola to begin the process of meeting the individual RVPOWs. Each week between two and four men return to Pensacola for an annual checkup. They all wait in a room where coffee and refreshments are available. This room adjoins the office where the medical personnel work.

Each week I would read the histories of the men before I met them and then planned some time to meet with each one. Sometimes I would sit in the waiting room for an entire morning and talk with the men as they came in to wait for their next appointments. The conversations were informal and unstructured. Occasionally I would speak to an individual RVPOW alone; other times their wives would be included in the conversations; and often several men and their wives would join the conversation. On several occasions I would go to lunch or dinner with the participants.

I had no particular goal in mind for the meetings except to let them know about the research and to elicit their cooperation in whatever form the final research would take. In a few cases, the men were former Air Force RPOWs who were visiting the POW center for the first or second time; so in these cases, I made myself available to answer questions about the center's ongoing research and the current findings.

During the year and a half I lived in Pensacola I was able to meet about 40 RPOWs. I found the conclusions I had reached based on reading the personal accounts were similar to the information I was receiving from the informal meetings. Often I would say, "I have read about this. What do you think of that conclusion?" or "Did you experience anything like that?" Sometimes they would tell me I was absolutely correct in my assumptions; other times they would explain how I was wrong. In either case, I was able to clarify for myself in what ways the experience must have been alike and different for the men. Redundancy in the responses began to occur almost from the beginning of Phase I in the major areas of research.

With few exceptions, the research questions that form the foundation for this dissertation have been repeated in some form in every article, book, and interview. This information guided me in the kinds of questions I asked during these initial meetings, and these early meetings helped formulate the interview questions for Phase II of the research.

Phase II

Interviews

The actual interview consisted of questions in three major categories: finding meaning, humor, and apathy avoidance. These categories reflect the findings of the literature review and the Phase I portion of the study.

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. No reference to any person appears in any publication without the man's written permission. All investigators, including this researcher, have signed confidentiality agreements that state explicitly that privacy will be protected, and the subjects are aware of this.

These interviews were intended to explore the RPOWs' perception of their experience in captivity. Over 20 years have elapsed since repatriation, so the participants were relying on memory to help them answer the questions accurately. As one RPOW told me, "Those rats get bigger every year." The *memory* of how these men used communication and the way they actually did use it may not be the same, but the memory is all that is available now.

Secondly, the interview questions were written by me. My perceptions of what communication was like during captivity guided and shaped the questions. Having never been a captive, my perceptions cannot be anything other than those of an outsider looking in. So the respondents were reacting to an instrument framed by me that is aimed at discovering what communication was like in the prisons of North Vietnam.

The data will be kept for at least five years in the possession of this researcher. The results of the study will be kept indefinitely at the Navy's center for the benefit of future researchers.

Pilot Study

Two people were chosen to participate in the pilot. I asked them the interview questions in a structured fashion so that I would be able to evaluate what kinds of things need to be done differently. Specifically, I considered whether there were too many or too few questions, whether the questions elicited the kind of information that will be useful, and whether the questions can be covered in one hour or less. I also determined that I should tape record subsequent interviews and have them transcribed.

Interview Questions and Archival Data

In addition to conducting interviews, an existing archival data set was used. I became a Red Cross volunteer, and as such, am doing volunteer work for NAMI. Membership in the Red Cross binds all researchers to the standards of the Red Cross. My ongoing affiliation with the Red Cross and the Navy's research teams allows access to the data set, files and computer programs. The Navy continues to collect and analyze data concerning the VPOWs' mental and physical health which the Naval researchers provide for me as it becomes available.

Interview Questions

Phase I, the pilot study, and the review of the literature indicated there are some recurring themes concerning how the VPOWs reacted to their captivity. Deaton's (1975) research helped identify what the VPOWs perceived some of their specific coping behaviors to have been. Based on Deaton and the other articles by and about the VPOWs, categories of reactions were identified that address the psychological, social, and coping aspects of reacting to crisis. These were then framed as communication behaviors: finding meaning, humor and apathy avoidance.

Pearlin and Schooler (1978) said the problem may be "buffered by *responses that function to control the meaning* of the problem" (p. 6). The open question, "What would you say most helped you make it through?" allowed the participant to identify any and all resources that helped him buffer the problem. For some, finding meaning meant relying on religion or spirituality; for others it meant patriotism, loyalty to other POWs, or loyalty to family. Each of Pearlin and Schooler's three categories of "any response to external life-strains that serves to prevent, avoid, or control emotional distress" can be seen in the participants' stories (p. 3).

The second category of questions addresses the use of humor among the VPOWs. "Were there things in prison that seemed funny that might not have been funny at other times?" and "Was there much variation in the 'light' and 'heavy'

times?" allowed the respondents to outline the kinds of activities or events that brought them some relief in the form of humor.

Trivializing the importance of that which is noxious and magnifying the importance of that which is gratifying often helps a person anchor his attention to what he considers worthwhile and rewarding (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Asking the interviewees, "Were there any times when you felt like giving up or really didn't care what happened to you? What turned it around for you?" allowed the men to identify those things that kept them from giving up.

Analysis of Data

The coding of data at a general level served as the first step in organizing the data into meaningful categories. Reading of the transcripts allowed themes and patterns to show themselves. Moustakas (1994) recommended distilling the narratives to major themes which allows for the identification of "meaning units" (p.122). When these became clear, when the segmentation of data into categories of responses was evident, a "hi-light" color was assigned to the broad groupings. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) advised using this sort of system to allow a type of "data-reduction task" (p.35).

Segmenting and coding the data in this way allowed characterization of each part of the interview in terms of thematic content. Even though the respondents' answers fell into some broad categories because of the structured nature of the interview, a denser set of themes and categories needed to be identified. From these themes and groupings lines of speculation were formed.

The broad categories of intrapersonal, dyadic and small group communication became evident. Presenting the findings according to these general classifications allowed an overall picture of the kinds of perceptions the VPOWs have about their meaning making activities during captivity.

More specific color coding was possible after the overall themes had been identified. Patriotism, faith in God, optimism, and finding a purpose emerged as intrapersonal behaviors that helped the VPOWs cope with captivity. Dyadic communication and sharing humor were evident in the interpersonal behaviors of the participants. Interdependency, competition, and living according to the military code of behavior were apparent as elements of their system for relating to each other and for helping all of them to avoid giving up.

Coding qualitative data enables the researcher to recognize and recontextualize data, which allows a fresh view of the findings (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). This then provides the opportunity for a systematic exploration of the meaning of the data and for thinking about the interview answers in a new way.

In order to transform the coded data into meaningful findings, patterns, themes, regularities, irregularities, contrasts and paradoxes are all important. Then, as Coffey and Atkinson pointed out, one can "move toward generalizing and theorizing from the data" (1996, p. 47). The words of the VPOWs provided a solid foundation for theorizing how their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and group behaviors helped them cope with captivity.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Coping with extreme trauma is a complex psychological, physiological and sociological phenomenon. The narratives of the VPOWs indicate each survivor used an amalgamation of strategies during captivity to augment and ensure his resilience. Each man formulated his unique blend of strategies, but some universality seems evident about how these men made sense of their situation by relying on their intrapersonal resources and by giving and receiving nurturance in interpersonal situations.

Phase II of this research involved interviewing 12 participants about their reactions to their captivity. This chapter will introduce the participants and explain their reactions to the questions.

Profile of Participants

All of the participants are former military aviators who spent at least five years in captivity. All were officers; all had earned a bachelor's degree; and all were over the age of 24 at the time of their shootdown. In short, this is a homogeneous group of chronologically mature, educated men who had voluntarily participated in flying exercises that led to their capture. They in no way represent the young enlisted men who had been drafted and who were captured in South Vietnam where they were held in jungle prisons. The VPOWs were all repatriated during February and March of 1973.

In spite of the similarities of the group members, however, some differences need to be addressed. Most of these differences involve the number of years in captivity, the number of months in solitary confinement, the age and rank of the participant at shootdown, the leadership position he assumed during captivity, and the individual's decision about whether to remain on active duty after repatriation. The marital status at the time of shootdown will be noted because, in some cases, this seems to have played a role in the individual's coping behaviors. Each participant has been given a fictitious name.

Andrew

Andrew, an Air Force aviator, was shot down in December of 1967. He was repatriated in 1973 and returned to an Air Force career from which he retired. He was married at the time of shootdown and had children. He remains married to the same woman today.

Brad

Brad was shot down in June of 1967. He was on active duty with the Air Force at the time of shootdown and returned to an Air Force career upon repatriation. He is currently married and retired.

Craig

Craig was shot down in February of 1966. He was a Naval aviator who returned to finish a career in the Navy and a master's degree. He was a part of the Navy ongoing study of 138 VPOWs. He was married during his captivity and

remained married for many years following repatriation. He is now divorced. He is employed full time.

Dick

Dick was shot down in February of 1966. He was 28 years old. He was an Air Force aviator who returned to a lengthy career in the Air Force after repatriation. He is currently married and working in his own business.

John

John was shot down in October of 1966. He was in solitary confinement for 14 months. He returned to a career in the Navy and flew until 1978. He retired as a Commander. He has been a part of the Navy's ongoing study. He was single at the time of his shootdown, but shortly after repatriation he married a woman whom he had not known prior to his tour in Vietnam. He is married today.

He was a deeply religious man before his capture and remains active in church activities today. He commented frequently in his interview about the role of God in his survival and his belief that the United States would work for his freedom.

Kurt

Kurt was shot down in July of 1967. He was in solitary confinement for 13 months. He has been a member of the Navy's ongoing study. Due to his rank he was more senior than the average POW. Some leadership responsibilities fell on his shoulders, depending on who was the most senior man in the camp at a given time.

One of his main concerns was to try to establish organization among the POWs. He mentioned that the leadership established good "plums" or policies that guided

each man in his conduct. This insistence on military structure was essential, in his opinion. As he stated, "When things are really bad, humans tend to rationalize to make wrong right. Some icon gave guidelines about what *should* happen. The Code of Conduct was there and was the basis for the camp's organization." This participant is a graduate of the Naval Academy and returned to a lengthy career, which included flying until 1987. He was married at the time of shootdown and remains married today.

Eric

Eric was shot down in February of 1965. He returned to a full Navy career and returned to flying status until 1975. He has been in the Navy's ongoing study. He was married at the time of shootdown and is still married today.

Floyd

Floyd was an Air Force aviator who was shot down in December of 1967, making him one of the latest shootdowns of those in the Phase II group. At the time of his shootdown, Floyd was in his late 20s, which made him one of the youngest POWs in the Hanoi Hilton. He had been married for a few weeks before he deployed to Vietnam and remains married to the same woman.

Gary

Gary was shot down in May of 1965. He was an Air Force Captain who was shot down over Laos; therefore, he was not imprisoned in Hanoi for much of his captivity. In spite of his youth and junior rank, he was the senior ranking officer in charge of a group of enlisted personnel. He is married and employed today.

Hal

Hal was shot down in December of 1968, making him the last shootdown of all the Phase II participants. He returned to a career in the Navy and has been in the Navy's ongoing study. He was married at the time of repatriation, but he has since been widowed and has remarried.

Larry

Larry was shot down in March of 1966. He was older and more senior than the average POW. At different times he was the senior ranking officer in a given area, but he was kept isolated from others for years at a time. He was married with children at the time of the shootdown and remains married to the same woman today. Larry returned to finish a career in the Navy, but he did not return to flying status. He has been one of the 138 aviators in the Navy's study.

Mike

Mike was one of the youngest POWs in Hanoi. He was shot down in August of 1966 and spent several years in solitary. Mike returned to finish a career in the Navy and flew until 1979. He has been participating in the Navy's ongoing study. Mike was single at the time of shootdown but has been married once since repatriation. Today he is married with children and employed full time.

Participant Responses

As would be expected, the homogeneous nature of the group led to similar responses. Most of the answers to questions concerning the participants' perceptions of what it took to get them through reflected the literature. This is not surprising. Most of the books were written by the POWs. Unlike other captivity experiences in which researchers attempted to outline and explain what the prisoners had endured, many of the Vietnam POWs wrote books themselves.

A difference between this group of survivors and other groups of survivors is that many of these people have been members of the Navy's ongoing study. Each year some of these men have reflected on their POW experiences and have submitted to psychological evaluation. Also, many have been asked to advise the survival schools about their experiences. In other words, unlike many other POWs, this group has had many opportunities to process the experience and to look at it through a variety of lenses that professional intervention and time have provided.

Segmenting the data from the interviews allows an exploration of different levels of complexity. This process of coding the data according to themes is a type of data-reduction task. Occasionally the themes are nested within one another; they overlap or they intersect. However, in order to organize the data into meaningful categories some decisions were necessary to discuss general thematic content. Specifically, an explanation of the intrapersonal coping behaviors that most helped the VPOWs weather the ordeal, their interpersonal communication of

support of one another, and their reliance on a well-defined system will be outlined as emergent themes from the interviews.

All interpersonal communication has its foundation in the intrapersonal communication behaviors of the individuals involved in the transaction, and all small-group communication has at its core both intrapersonal and dyadic communication. However, in order to simplify the task of presenting the communication comportments, each will be presented separately.

Intrapersonal Communication and Resilience

To avoid a fragmentation of self, the VPOWs marshaled their inner forces to help them create a framework from which they could derive meaning. The creation of this meaning involves the intrapersonal behaviors that seem to have helped these men enjoy resilience. The interview participants echoed many of the ideas and observations that have been mentioned in the books by the VPOWs, but they added numerous insights about the exact nature of the processes they used to find meaning within themselves, especially while in solitary confinement.

Specifically, the respondents mentioned the inner processes of making sense of the situation through faith in their country, a belief in God, a positive attitude and its relationship to finding a purpose. When asked what most helped him get through the POW experience, Craig outlined the results chapter most succinctly:

> Faith in myself and faith in my fellow prisoners, and faith in my country and our cause there, and faith in God, and the application of that faith in my daily life there. And secondly, the turning point, which is based upon actually understanding that there was a purpose for my incarceration.

Belief in the United States

Most of the participants indicated they had believed they were doing the right thing by being true to the commitments they had made to defend their country. The responses reflect patriotism in general, but they show specific allegiance to the Code of Conduct and the military system to which they belonged. As John indicated, life as a POW was not so bad in some respects because they "knew who the good guys and bad guys were." John's sentiments were repeated in different forms by many of the interviewees.

Andrew reported one of the factors that most got him through was his belief, "My country, right or wrong. And it probably can't be wrong, or couldn't be wrong." This reaction is more overstated than most, but it does reflect a segment of the population that found patriotism to be one of the most important ways for finding meaning within the self. Some of the respondents reported they did not always agree with specific decisions, but they did believe in the country in a more general sense.

John, in answering the question concerning what he perceived helped him through the POW experience, said his "belief in my country was great." His father had believed in the strength of America and passed that on to him. For John patriotism was one of the values he identified as key to surviving captivity.

Kurt mentioned "faith in government and the administration--we were part of what's right" was one of the four fundamental precepts that helped him get through. He reported having "faith in the establishment, in the command and

control for whom we worked." Eric ranked "faith in your country" as one of "the standard three things everybody says" most helped them make it through.

Brad did not refer directly to a belief in his country as a sustaining force; rather, he mentioned "the overall lifestyle that we live in America" contributed to his survival. He indicated the North Vietnamese could not comprehend the society from which the POWs had come, and therefore, "their thought reform program was a joke" because the POWs were not manipulated in ways the Vietnamese could have been.

Faith in God

There was no evidence of a religious conversion in either the Phase I or Phase II interviews. Just as the literature indicates, however, there was much religious awakening or intensification. Craig mentioned:

> Faith was based upon an ultimate faith in God to start with, which is really kind of a foundation for it all. God wouldn't have that for me in His plan if there wasn't some purpose.

Speaking in more general terms, Mike indicated how religion helped him and others create meaning for themselves, "Whatever you were, you came out more."

John identified patriotism and his church as the two key factors that helped him make sense of the captivity experience. He said, "Faith brought me through." He recalled he felt guilty after submitting to torture, and he had turned to God for support because he had not lived up to what was expected of him. He asked for a miracle, but none came. He was willing to see anything as a sign from God, even a frog would have been taken as a sign.

He prayed for three days and engaged in self-punishment such as not covering himself to the cold and not sleeping on his bed. On the third night he remembered Jeremiah 29:13. Then he realized his mistake was in asking for a sign because "the Lord wants faith." He remembers the feeling of comfort his prayers brought him on the third night, and at that point he developed the patience to endure the next six years of captivity. He described this day as the turning point for him.

Kurt, on the other hand, is not an intensely religious man. He considers himself "more scientific." However, he mentioned "faith in God" as one of his four fundamental precepts for survival. As he explained his beliefs, he believes "in a greater power," and he has faith in a "great being." He relied on praying and the religious services with others.

Optimism and a Positive Attitude

The respondents indicated having a positive or optimistic outlook was important in helping them make it through the POW experience. Most mentioned the role of attitude, in one form or another, impacting their ability to cope. Andrew reported, "Basic attitude of a person, of course, I think is the underlying thing of it all." According to Andrew, "attitude" was the most important factor that most helped him through.

John found "a positive attitude was most important." He wanted positive cellmates "who believed they would go home." He distanced himself from the negative pessimistic ones. He thinks he was an optimist, but "at first an unrealistic one." He looked for signs of the imminent release. If the food got better, he

concluded they were going home. Soon he quit building "such high towers," because it hurt so much when he fell off. He learned to be positive without being unrealistic. Negative people bothered him, but so did the overly optimistic ones. He found being "positive and hopeful without delusion" seemed to work best.

Kurt mentioned "more than others, I was the eternal optimist." He does not recall a turning point but credits a gradual change that made him "more appreciative of the free world." He had a "joie de vivre" that he still has more than most people. He takes pleasure from life.

Kurt thinks "keeping alert and physically fit" helped him keep his good attitude. He tried for three months to figure out a math problem involving the speed of sound. He remembered girls' phone numbers. He fantasized about walking down the street in his hometown. He fantasized about pleasurable things and kept himself "mentally busy."

Larry talked about how the importance of a positive attitude in his own survival. He was in solitary for months and years at a time and would periodically say to himself, "I wish I had never pulled the pin. It would have been easier. But I was determined....If one guy was going to survive, I was going to survive."

Floyd gave a somewhat different slant to the role of optimism. He relayed he held onto the

> thought that ...someday you'll be going home....We just always knew that some day, that no matter how long it took, that we would be going home....We finally came to consensus it probably would be another 10 or 15 years. We all just looked at one another and sort of shrugged it off....Whatever the conditions, you sort of accepted and made the best of it.

This function of acceptance is particularly interesting when it is juxtaposed to the role of control and mastery that was mentioned in both the review of the literature and the interviews. A balancing of the two reactions seems to have been occurring in many of the men. Perhaps one of the difficult aspects of resilience is knowing how to offset the drive for control with the "shrugging off" that Gary described and the "quiet acceptance as you see reality" Mike mentioned.

Gary gave a different explanation of the role of positive attitude. He had been shot down in Laos, so he "had no hope of repatriation....I was dead, never going to come out." In spite of his young age and low rank, he was the senior ranking officer. He observed, "They all seemed to think they were coming back, and I didn't want to bust anybody's bubble. But no, I didn't believe we were coming back." He says he was "absolutely pessimistic," yet he decided "it didn't hurt anything to have hope. I knew better, and I knew what I had to do, help the others and continue giving Charlie hell."

Gary's attitude might not seem optimistic. In fact, he called it "absolutely pessimistic," yet it seems to have served the same purpose as optimism. He felt a sense of responsibility to his subordinates to hold on to hope for their sake. "I was already dead," he explained, so doing what he thought was important was his driving force. Gary provides an important clue about the coupling of positive attitude, even when it does not involve optimism, and finding a purpose in the experience.

Creating Meaning Through Finding a Purpose

The creation of meaning is implied in most of the communication behaviors of the VPOWs; however, some of the participants specifically mentioned finding a purpose as one of the reactions that helped them cope. Craig's words are particularly important in explaining how this process occurred:

> I think it was a culmination of and a settling in process which involved the stripping of all the material trappings which we sometimes seem to identify and support ourselves in our own image as Navy pilots and macho guys, husbands, men....With very few distractions, other than pain and deprivation and loneliness which, in effect, become non-distractions, which in effect, become enhancing qualities of your environment when you are going through this process. And in the process you begin to understand your own humanness, certainly, and you become more realistic about your expectations for yourself, and in that process you begin to slough off the guilt that had built up that you had gone in there with and that you had built up because of having let your squadron mates down, having lost my crewman, having lost my airplane, having disappointed and put my family through an ordeal that they were going through, having not been as tough as I thought I'd be as following the Code of Conduct or whatever, as the macho guy that I thought I was....It's like the light bulb comes on and you begin to realize that everything is for a purpose. Everything is for a purpose....It may not be apparent, whatever they're going through, there's a purpose to their challenges, and to their adversities, and to their pain, to loneliness. There is a purpose to all of that; it may be apparent immediately or it may not be apparent. But just the acknowledgment and the faith that there is a purpose can do wonders to help you get through what you're going through.

Craig credits "faith in myself and my fellow prisoners" as the thing that most helped him through. He believes, "Just the acknowledgment and the faith that there is a purpose can do wonders to help you get through what you're going through."

Mike also mentioned the force that helped him make it was,

> the concept of faith, based on something, but a basic belief in yourself and the things that make you what you are....The something does include some concept of religion and some concept of a patriotism or a belief or devotion

to your country as well as to the family.

Mike went on to explain the process, from finding the purpose to putting it into action:

> You were well trained, but we were called on to do more than what we were, in some respects, capable of. And we did. I call it rise to the occasion. We did. We exceeded our capability, so to speak, although that seems to be a contradictory term. So yeah, you're believing in something bigger than yourself, individually, collectively, whether that be your family, your squadron, or the country and also spiritually....You finally realize that these things that I believe in are solid, and they are valid, and they are adequate....Yep, this is worth fighting about. This is what I believe in. And that is a very quiet acceptance as you see reality.

Mike's words give a new dimension to the discovery of meaning through finding a purpose. He mentions the words "solid," "valid," "adequate," and "acceptance" and their connection to reality. For Mike, apparently discovering that which was solid, valid and adequate allowed him to accept reality, and through that acceptance establish meaning. Mike went on to add,

> You gotta do what you gotta do, even when you don't like it, even when it scares the living crap out of you and you don't want to do it....You have to let your principles and beliefs dictate what you can do and you must do it in spite of being afraid, not because of being afraid.

Larry, one of the senior ranking officers, spent many years in solitary confinement. He suffered from amnesia for about 10 days. Once he regained his mental faculties, he took advantage of his solitary confinement:

> to really evaluate as I went along. I got stronger as I went along, particularly in solitary where I had time to really reflect. It was always a war, and I was determined that I was going to survive and why I was going to survive.

For Larry, part of figuring out why he was going to survive seems to be linked to his feelings of responsibility to the other POWs:

> Once I got into the POW community and had my very first contact, that was the change....I had another person, just one contact, and then it grew from

> there. I had some purpose and direction, and I had the Code of Conduct to go on....I found out pretty soon I was senior, and I found out the policy was, what Risner's policy was, and I just took over from there. That was my job.

Larry went on to explain the role of personal integrity in finding meaning:

> You gotta do it because it's right and you don't do it because it's wrong. When you take torture because it's the right thing to do, when nobody else knows about it. Then you've got this point in your life when you really understand what's meaningful. And that's where I really got to know myself ....You care because you know who you are and what you believe in, and if you don't know who you won't put your ass on the line in that situation. Okay, you will fall somewhere else. I could care less about what anybody thought. I don't care what people think about me. I don't run a popularity contest in the POW community. I was doing what I thought was the right thing to do....You look yourself in the mirror and say, "Hey, you lost all the battles, so what if you won the war. You're here. If I die tomorrow, I'm not going to have any regrets."

Each man's way of finding meaning was slightly different, but one thing was constant. Finding a purpose allowed each man to keep from giving up.

Avoidance of Apathy in Self

Larry provided some insights about the connection between finding meaning and not giving up:

> A lot of times I felt like giving up. You get depressed. You're in solitary. You're freezing; you're hungry; you're cold; you haven't talked to anybody in six months. It's hard to get up and keep yourself going....I didn't want to give up for myself, for what I believed in, the basic values. I didn't want to roll over....I would have been ignoring everything I'd ever learned or been taught.

Craig said he and another prisoner had joked through the wall that if "we're still here after five years, I'm crossing over," never in his wildest dreams thinking he would be there after five years. "But, of course, five years came along and I wasn't inclined to cross over, but I don't know what you would do to give up." He attested he never saw giving up as an option "because being deprived of all the

good things of life that we tend to take for granted, that determination and drive to regain those things is part of your drive to survive and to get home, to make it."

When asked whether he ever felt like giving up, Andrew recalled the initial days of captivity when interrogations were intense. He had been in solitary and had been tortured. The captors said they had decided they were going to kill him, and his attitude was "Thank goodness. They couldn't scare me by saying they were killing me; all it would have been was relief." However, he remembers when he stopped hurting, he was able to rebound and recover. Andrew mentioned he was able to:

> sort of disassociate my mind from my body, and I could sort of move my mind up behind me, up high back there and look down at myself and feel sorry for me and say, "Boy, that poor guy. I think he is hurting and I wonder what he is going to do."

Andrew claims he never had any troublesome effects from this "disassociation" process, and it "didn't seem to lower my desire to resist. But you can only resist to a certain point when pain is involved." At that point this mental distancing seems to help the person distance without giving up.

In discussing whether prisoners tended to cut themselves off from the situation, John mentioned he had experienced "loftiness" while in captivity. He explained this is the notion that "Iron bars do not a prison make." He said he felt a need to "control the scenario and not let them control it."

Kurt also mentioned that some distancing behaviors helped him cope. He recalls he "learned to hypnotize" himself to go to sleep, especially when he was in pain. He still uses this technique today.

Kurt recounted his feelings about his injuries while in prison. He never thought he "wasn't going to make it mentally," but there were a few times he had been convinced his physical condition was so bad he could not make it. But he never gave up. He said he "would try to make it through this moment or day. Let's do the best I can to improve mental status. Try to go up instead of down."

Interpersonal Resilient Behaviors

The intrapersonal behaviors of the VPOWs has received much attention both in this dissertation and in much of the literature primarily because many members of this population spent years in solitary confinement, not talking out loud to another person. However, with few exceptions, these men were not without interpersonal communication in their lives. Certainly they lacked the face-to-face component often associated with dyadic communication and small-group communication, but they created other avenues for sharing their meanings with one another. Their interpersonal communication behaviors are most striking because of their intense need for them, their levels of self-disclosure, and their reliance on communication for sharing humor and disarming the horror of the situation.

Interpersonal Communication

Brad stated, "communications were an essential part of our lifeblood to maintain contact." In referring to the tap code he added, "I was in solitary. I had to learn it. It was my lifeblood. It was the only way I could communicate." He went on to add that this lifeblood of communication extended to the entire POW community:

> They could never figure out about how we could communicate between camps, and of course, the only way you could do it was to be exposed to somebody from another camp. So every time somebody was moved, you were put in a vehicle and there were 2 or 3 or 4 guys being transported. Guys would tap to each other, either with your knee or your elbow or your hand if you could get close to a guy in the dark. And you would tap out who you were, what camp you came from, and depending on the amount of time you had, you would tell them everything you could about where you came from. So that's how we were able to collect names from various camps.

Andrew ranked a good attitude as the most important factor of survival, but then said communication and social support would be next. He likened communication with other POWs to talking with a pastor, lawyer, or bartender. He found the value in "Anybody that will lend a supportive ear to relieve the load on your shoulders, a mental load."

> The more people that you can talk with and get communication with, just helps tremendously. Communication and cooperation and togetherness, whatever amount of it that you can get.

Andrew also addressed the role of self-disclosure:

> We got to know each other very intimately. For instance, I spent 8 months in a 6 by 9 foot cell with three other people. I've got a lot of good friends, very good friends here, but they don't know me that well.

Mike explained why self-disclosure played such an important role in the VPOW system:

> Small groups, under extreme pressure, where they have time, become very close and say all kinds of things that they would never, ever say in any other situation. And that's why we are so close today. There's a bond, not one of fear but of commonalty....Exactly why it happens, I don't know, but that is not unique to just the POWs, but any group that's under pressure over a period of time. Usually a life threatening situation, when suddenly these things are no longer so important.

Humor

Humor has its basis in the individual, but it manifests itself in interpersonal relations. When responding to what helped them make it through, the respondents

described humor from both an intrapersonal and interpersonal perspective. Hal's observation that, "The larger the group, the more lighthearted things were. The smaller the group, the more intense things were," reflected the comments of many of the participants.

Andrew reported, "Believe it or not, even under the almost worst of conditions over there, under the right circumstances, we could laugh." They would say, "Well, boy, we're going to look back on this and laugh, but boy, it sure does hurt now."

Andrew told a story of his roommate's grandmother who had been put in a nursing home. She called her daughter and said, "Come on, get me out of here. I'm not going to stay here with this bunch of whores." Andrew stated he heard that story 50 times and it always brought a laugh. He added, "We still laugh about it."

Dick said:

> The first five months I didn't have a sense of humor. I was having great difficulty finding anything very funny about the situation, and then I discovered by living with other people and the way we interacted, that we eventually started being awfully funny.

He recalls this discovery of humor as a type of turning point for him. He remembers his first true realization of the value of humor in December of 1966, about 10 months after his capture. He had been in solitary confinement and was peeking through a hole in the door watching the guards. One guard asked another a question, so the first guard took his rifle and handed it to the guy; and then took off his bullet belt; then he took off his great, huge coat and reached in his pocket.

He struggled forever to get something out of his pocket and pulled out a Baby Ben clock. The guy had obviously asked what time it was:

> And he had to undress to tell him. He didn't have a watch; he had a Baby Ben clock stuck in his pants pocket. And I'd been beaten pretty severely every day for most of a month, and I was just absolutely rolling on the floor. When this was all over I realized, I thought I was going to die today; and all I did today was have a good laugh. And so it became apparent to you that humor was going to play a major role. When you are really, really down you had to start looking for something funny in this.

Mocking Humor

Dick went on to clarify the kind of humor he often found valuable. He remembers, "I lived next to a guy in late '67 who had been beaten very severely." After several days of being beaten on a routine basis, the friend reported he had been threatened that he would have both his arms broken if he did not answer the questions the next day. Dick asked what he intended to do, and the man replied, "I don't know. I suppose I'll tap with my cast tomorrow." Dick described this as a "kind of almost a morbid sense of humor."

In explaining the role of humor during their captivity, John said there was a type of "in-house humor" that helped them:

> Those who have not experienced it could not understand how two men could find a discussion about the honey bucket so funny. Taking off the lid and commenting that one had diarrhea and one was constipated when they had both eaten the same thing was truly funny, but the humor is lost on outsiders.

Craig called this "had to be there" humor. In explaining what he meant, he mentioned an incident that the POWs found humorous. He had passed a worm of substantial length, so he gave it to the guard, thinking the guard would take it to a doctor and request medical attention for the parasites he obviously had:

> So I handed it to him through the little bars in the door on a piece of bamboo stick, and the water girls were on the cell block at the time, and I thought,

> "Hey, he's going to take it to the doctor," you know, and "I'll get some medicine here." So he closes the door and he starts chasing the water girls with it, screaming and laughing, and the water cans tipped over.

Another time Craig found an insect in his bread. In reaction to the incident, he wrote the following poem:

> Little Weevil in my bread. I think I just bit off you head. I see the place where you have bled. The dough around it is all red. But that's okay, for now instead. I know for sure you're really dead. I wonder if your name was Fred.

This poem brought laughs to many who heard it through the years of captivity.

Craig said he too remembers mocking the situation to find humor. He mentioned that one of the POWs with whom he was communicating tapped to him that when he gets out and "he fills out his critique sheet," he will tell them "The exercise is real and it lasted too damn long."

Ranking the Importance of Humor

On a scale of 1-10, John said he would give humor about a 5 or 6 in importance. He pointed out that "Needs were different. Some guys needed it everyday; some didn't." On the other hand, Dick said, "The importance and the value of a sense of humor" was probably first and foremost. He said, "Humor allows you to get up every morning and think this isn't the end of the world, so one's sense of humor is pretty critical." He had been next to Alvarez, the first man to be shot down, for about a year and a half, and Alvarez "used to tap a joke on my wall every morning. They were really, really bad, bad jokes."

Kurt too considers the use of humor "one of the top." He recalled that on Friday the 13th, 1971 he was the senior officer after the Son Tay raid. The captors beat him and later put him with a friend who had also been beaten. They ended up

telling jokes to each other in spite of the miserable conditions of the cell. Some others on the other side of the wall, who had also been beaten, tapped the question, "What's so funny?" Kurt and his roommate tapped back, "If you don't have a sense of humor, you shouldn't have joined up."

Group Affiliation: A System at Work

Borden (1985) explained the human communication system as any dynamic set of interrelating components, at least two of which are humans, functioning to achieve an objective through communication among its components. All the participants referred to such a system among the POWs and its vital role in their survival. Some mentioned a type of social support or interdependency; others focused on the importance of understanding the Code of Conduct; and some concentrated on the significance of strong leadership. Each man's attention was on a slightly different aspect of group affiliation, but in one form or another, every participant mentioned the impact of the group's system on his survival and avoidance of apathy.

Interdependency

Andrew said, "the more people that you can talk with and get communication with, just helps tremendously." He went on to explain how the group was central to helping him survive the POW experience:

> Communication and cooperation and togetherness, whatever amount of it that you could get....The mutual support started that I'm talking about. It is soooo important, that mutual support from your peers, your buddies, people that are going through the same thing you are and that mutual support will get you through places where you can't do it on you own.

Brad addressed the value of relying on one another:

> When we got hurt...if you were in solitary and you would hear that tap on the wall and guys would get on the wall and tell you we'd all been through it. Just buckle up and don't feel bad about anything. You just have to bounce back....Fighter pilots have a propensity to be a little more independent, but nonetheless, when you get in prison you learn to cooperate.... What a tremendous boost that was to our morale to be put into a group. We formed all kinds of activities and clubs, which enabled us to start humanizing again. If we had been released at that point, I think everyone, medically and psychologically, back here would have been amazed at us because we were in bad shape physically and bad shape mentally. But it was a catharsis to get together and put us all together and get us healthy again."

Kurt remembers he "felt a lot of motivation to stay involved with other POWs. If we were to succeed, we couldn't do it as individuals. We had to have something to lean shoulders against." Kurt also mentioned "faith in fellow prisoners" as one of his four fundamental precepts for survival.

John made several references to VPOWs relying on each other for support and strength. One of his personal stories reveals the essence of the responsibility some of the VPOWs felt for one another. John recalls before 1965 he had been beaten but never tortured. In 1965 he was tortured for information. He gave them a lie and the captors let him go. However, the captors then took his friend and tortured him.

John felt tremendous guilt because his friend "was not in good shape and wouldn't be able to take much torture." When the captors had turned their attention to the friend, John "could hear what was going on." He discovered his "own weakness that day." He believed he had lost the right to claim America as his country, to ever set foot on American soil, to ever look his father in the eye again. He felt he should have had the captors working on him rather than on the

weaker friend. This experience left John feeling "as far down" as he ever got, but he never felt like giving up. "Through communication" he regained himself whenever he felt down. Eric agreed with John about the power of communication and ranked "faith in your fellow POWs" as one of the three most important aspects of coping.

Brad talked about interdependency from an inclusion standpoint, especially when the men were allowed to live with one another:

> We had that list of names, but everyone else was accounted for in there and it was marvelous that we had done such a religious job over the years of memorizing names and keeping track of front seaters, back seaters, what ship they were off of, what airplane, that sort of thing....I mean, the food didn't improve much, but the fact that we had companionship and were able to organize was such a shot in the arm for that last 2 1/2 to 3 years we were there.

Communication was mentioned in the interpersonal section, but the vital role it played in the group's cohesion warrants mentioning it again here. Creating such sophisticated systems for transferring and transmitting messages allowed the POW system to grow and flourish. Without the dedication to dyadic interaction, the POW system would never have existed, much less burgeoned. Brad explained how this part of the system operated in his previously mentioned words about how the VPOWs were able to transmit messages to each other and from camp to camp.

Competition

Belonging to a system that encouraged the POWs to rely on one another created a foundation for the men to discover ways of staying connected to each other. Competition was one of these ways. Some elements of competition existed on the

intrapersonal level as men struggled to create goals for themselves, but much of the value of competition was embodied in the group's processes.

Dick ranked competition as one of the two most important helpful reactions to captivity. As he said, when they arrived in prison, everything was taken from them, including their underwear. At that point the competition one ordinarily associates with sports or business enters a new realm of pure survival:

> Competition is the force that makes your life productive....There was no competition in prison except with the guard outside who had a gun. We did not have goals. We were totally unproductive.... Competition is the force that makes your life productive.

Dick's words that competition was "the force that makes your life productive" help explain how some of the men perceived competition creating meaning for them. Feeling productive apparently helped to define a purpose for the men, an intrapersonal purpose that helped the men relate on an interpersonal level.

Dick added that competition took the form of sit-up and push-up competitions. He reported he was able to do 2,000 sit-ups in one day because of the wager he had with another POW. Eric also mentioned contests among the POWs as important. He explained some of the contests took the form of physical competition, but often they involved word games and trivia questions too. He explained this kept them "alert and sharp."

Floyd provides an association among competition, intrapersonal communication, and interpersonal communication. He found competition with others to be beneficial since "you could focus on your physical conditioning," because, as he put it, "if you spend too much time thinking, you can actually start

convincing yourself of things that aren't really true." Floyd indicated that having an outlet prevented him from too much

> introspection and retrospection, which had it's benefits, but you can do too much of that....And if you spend too much time thinking, you can actually start, convince yourself, of things that aren't really true....Some people in there with too much time to think on their hands, they actually could end up with some distorted things, perceptions and things like that....I think basically when you had a chance to be with other people, that helped.

A Military System

The VPOWs formed groups that exhibited inclusion, affection, and control. Part of the control for these men was intrapersonal, but a large share of it is endemic in the military structure to which the VPOWs belonged. The interviews indicated different ways this military framework worked to help the men build a strong system for survival.

Most of the interviewees mentioned the Code of Conduct either directly or indirectly in their descriptions of what helped them make it through the experience. John said he would encourage the survival schools to "teach the Preamble to the Code of Conduct" because it says your country loves you and won't forget you. Several encouraged the survival schools to concentrate attention on the importance of teaching how and why this system of behavior must guide the POW experience.

The Code was born from the Korean War POW experience; it was fine-tuned after Vietnam; and it is now taught and advocated by the survival schools. Two Persian Gulf RPOWs mentioned in interviews the significance of POWs living according to the Code's guidelines.

One of the main tenets of the Code of Conduct addresses the senior person taking command. Several participants mentioned leadership and the Chain of Command playing important roles in their survival. Mike commented that the Chain of Command was a mystery to the captors. They just could not understand a system whereby removing a leader causes another to come forward. Isolating the high ranking officers or sending them to Alcatraz did not stop leadership from occurring. No matter how the prisoners where shuffled about, leadership was insured by the military system.

In addition to a well-defined Chain of Command, the particular leaders were noteworthy as well. Two RPOWs cried during the Phase I interviews as they remembered acts of heroism that either affected them personally or impacted the population generally. One man recalled an incident in which he had volunteered to drop a note for another POW to bring that new man into the communication system. Robbie Risner, the senior ranking officer, had told the younger man that he would not send a junior officer into a situation that was likely to result in torture. The junior man argued that if he were caught, the consequences would be less severe than if Risner were caught. Risner insisted on making the drop; he was caught and nearly killed. While crying and wiping tears from his eyes, the junior RPOW said, "I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for Robbie Risner."

Another RPOW recounted the story of Admiral Stockdale attempting suicide in order to protect the communication system. This RPOW was not able to finish the story without choking on the words.

Andrew mentioned,

> There were POWs that I admired greatly, that I was sure in my mind that I could not have done as well as they. Robbie Risner, Stockdale, a few people like that who received more than their share of attention from the captors because they were senior men.

The respondents mentioned strong leadership in general, and Risner and Stockdale in particular, playing an important role in the group's system. As Floyd pointed out, "There were certain people that you wanted to try and emulate." Apparently knowing what their leaders were willing to endure on their behalf somehow bolstered the others and kept them from wanting to give in or give up.

Support of Others to Avoid Apathy

The elements of the VPOW society seem to have worked to help the men stay connected to one another and to help them from fragmentation within themselves. This combination of essential factors apparently helped the men help each other avoid giving up.

Craig related, "some of the guys just dropped out of the picture, the best we can determine, because they quit communicating, and they quit eating." He estimates about 15 to 30 men were lost because others were not able to reach them to help them.

In describing how the POW tried to help each other, Craig described the gradual death of one of the Alcatraz Eleven, Ron Stortz. Craig was not himself a member of the Alcatraz Eleven, but he described what he thought their efforts had been to save Stortz. He said,

> Those guys did their very damnedest to reach him and get to him and keep him going. It's like a person who had a heart attack. You're pumping their chest and, "Don't you leave me you son of a bitch. Hang in there. Stay with me."

Craig was speaking metaphorically since the members of Alcatraz had no face-to-face contact with one another and had to rely on tapping their support to Stortz.

Conclusions

To prevent a disjunction of the self and to find meaning in a situation void of meaning, the VPOWs relied on resources many of them did not know they had. Their intrapersonal processing, their interpersonal reliance on one another, and their group interaction all combined to create a system for survival. Their education and moral maturity provided the framework for discovering how to derive meaning in captivity, but their active participation in their own survival provides a very different perspective about what coping is made of.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Coping with the trauma of captivity challenged the captives' basic sense of identity as human beings. Maintaining a semblance of security requires a multidimensional process that calls on an army of intrapersonal, interpersonal, psychological and systematic factors. RPOW Jerry Coffee (1990) described how this happened for the VPOWs:

> The only real security we have is the certainty that we're equipped to handle whatever happens to us. Too often we try to build strength through position, possessions, family or friends, social and religious rituals--all the outer trappings by which we form our identities. Stripped of them all, we have to draw from what is left: our basic sense of identity as human beings. From there true security is born. (p. 59)

Listening to the words of the POWs, the personal narratives of the men who have bounced back from trauma, allows an appreciation of the richness personal accounts can add to impressive statistics. Similarly, the statistics that indicate so few VPOWs have experienced psychological pathology builds confidence that the subjective accounts are important. With the personal narratives of the VPOWs in mind, this chapter discusses the uniqueness of this group, reexamines the literature, offers the interviewer's personal impressions, explores unexpected results, offers implications and suggests further research.

Explaining The Uniqueness of the Group

The literature, the impressive mental health statistics, and the interviews all point to the conclusion that the Vietnam POWs are different from other POWs in their unusual capacity for resilience. Less apparent are the reasons for this

conclusion. The maturity, education and professional status of the individuals probably helped them; but some other factors presumably played roles too.

First, most of the men had received formal survival training. Prior wars had taught the survival schools some important lessons, and these lessons are represented in the schools' curriculums. Those who did not receive formal training quickly learned from those who had. Second, recalling the nature / nurture controversy, one could infer that these men are just genetically elite; they were born with a proclivity to be resilient. However, the literature does not support this conclusion.

Fine and Hartman (1968) indicated that the typical pilot has an IQ of 119 and was a firstborn child of a stable, middle-class family from a city of fewer than 50,000 people. In his work with outstanding jet pilots, Reinhardt (1970) reported the findings of the Maudsley Personality Inventory, which measures two pervasive and relatively independent dimensions of personality, (*E*) extroversion-introversion and (*N*) neuroticism-stability. The pilots' *E* raw scores were identical with norms of American college men. Their *N* scores were lower than those of 78 % of American college men. In short, the VPOW group was indeed *not* genetically or culturally elite, superior, or outstanding in any of the areas studied. Yet, they were capable of realizing exceptional results, results that are seemingly tied to stability. The VPOW *system* during their captivity experience seems to have also played an important role in making these men, who were not exceptional, capable of exceptional outcomes.

For example, the functioning of the VPOW system is apparent in one of the most impressive men imprisoned in the Hanoi Hilton who was not an aviator. He was a 19 year-old Seaman Apprentice, Doug Hegdahl. He had received no survival training, nor any formal education after high school. During a night attack, in violation of procedure, he had gone to the deck of the ship to which he was assigned He was washed overboard and picked up by a passing fishing boat. He was subsequently sent to the Hanoi Hilton, where he was able to convince the captors he was a feeble-minded child.

During his captivity Hegdahl memorized over 200 names of known POWs. He was coached by roommates, such as Dick Stratton, and groomed for early release. In compliance with the Code of Conduct, no prisoners were to receive early release, except when ordered to do so by the senior ranking officers. After much consideration, the leadership determined Hegdahl, because of his obvious youth and questionable mental capacities, could provide a vital service to the POWs by taking early release under the guise of an humanitarian gesture.

In anticipation of the release, the captors attempted to fatten Hegdahl with more and improved food. The starving Hegdahl, however, threw the food in the toilet bucket and continued to starve himself until the time of release. In the summer of 1969 an emaciated Hegdahl was freed and returned to the United States where he informed the U.S. Government and many worried families about the existence of known POWs, thereby accounting for them and making their execution much less likely. Furthermore, Ross Perot sent Hegdahl to the Paris

Peace Talks where he was able to detail the torture and starvation of the POWs and gain world attention to their plight.

Hegdahl's behavior provides a convincing argument that ordinary people can do extraordinary things when they are in a *system* or culture that encourages the development of interdependency and other resilient behaviors. Because he was a member of a system based on affection, inclusion, control, interdependency, and community; and because he was taught by others how to live in accordance with the Code of Conduct, this 19 year-old became one of the most remarkable characters in the annals of American military history.

Findings Related to the Literature

Not surprisingly, the interviews overwhelmingly reinforced the existing literature. Since much of the literature was written by the VPOWs themselves, 12 participants, chosen at random, were likely to reflect the feelings expressed in the written narratives. Moreover, three of the participants are authors of books and one is the author of a cited article; their works are quoted in the review of the literature. The personal accounts did, however, add rich, recent, perspectives and profundity to the specific topics under consideration.

Consistencies With the Literature

Making Meaning

Littlejohn's (1983) idea that meaning is the concept that links symbols with humans, and Langer's (1972) contention that humans possess a need to symbolize are strongly supported in the interview responses. Langer maintained that

symbol-making is tantamount to eating and sleeping, and the VPOWs indicate, in some cases, it was even more important than either.

The meaning theorists address meaning as *intention* and as *purpose* or inner significance. Each meaning was evident in the interviews. The VPOWs indicated that much time and attention was given to learning the communication systems and to teaching them to new arrivals. They knew they would need channels for communicating their intentions to one another, so they recalled some and invented others. The creativity indicated by communication, such as the "oral tap code," is impressive. For men to invent ways to cough, sweep, snap clothes, touch and hand signal in code shows an appreciation of the value these men placed on having links to one another and avenues for sharing symbols.

As the meaning theorists suggest, the way people communicate and the fact they do are related to how they think and behave. In turn, the way people think and behave affects their quality of life.

Deaton (1975) provided a clue about the link between meaning as intent and meaning as purpose. As Deaton reported, once the VPOWs discovered channels for conveying intent, they ostensibly opened channels for discovering purpose as well:

> Communication, utilizing the tap code, was one of the four most useful items used during solitary, and appeared to be the key factor in the utilization of a number of items. Until communication networks could be established, many self-development activities (e.g., learning new skills, games, and memorizing stories) were not available to the men. (p.105)

All of the participants confirmed they found some way of making meaning during their captivity. Their answers reflected the literature in that most of them

reported finding strength in their faith in God, country, family, and each other. Most mentioned finding a purpose in their captivity as well, with at least two stating they are better men today as a result of the experience.

Deaton's 1975 quantitative study identified several forms of faith that seemed to sustain the VPOWs while they were in solitary. Other works regarding the Holocaust, and prisoners from World War II., the Korean Conflict, and the *Pueblo* also refer to a meaning making process that was similar to having faith in something and making sense from trauma. Apparently, looking within self, finding the purpose, and then having the faith that there is meaning helps to ameliorate the unspeakable. Furthermore, being able to rely on others for support seems to augment the coping that occurs within the individual, especially if this support occurs within the context of a well defined system such as that of the VPOWs.

In recalling his address to his church congregation, Coffee (1990) put the ideas about finding meaning through faith in succinct form:

> Faith was really the key to my survival all those years. Faith in myself to simply pursue my duty to the best of my ability and ultimately return home with honor. Faith in my fellow man, starting with all of you here, knowing you would be looking out for my family, and faith in my comrades in those various cells....Faith in my country, its institutions and our national purpose and cause....And , of course, faith in my God--truly, as all of you know, the foundation for it all. (p. 278)

In his book, which includes reflections of the POW experience and the subsequent years, RPOW Edward Hubbard (1994) discussed the value of finding and making meaning. He recalled the words of wisdom a fellow POW shared with him concerning discovering the purpose in one's life:

> "I know something that you don't know but something you desperately need to know." He continued with this admonishment, "What we are receiving in this

> prison is the most expensive education you are ever going to get in your entire life. We came dangerously close to dying to be enrolled here. In this school each day for the last five years you have had an equal opportunity to die or to stay enrolled here. We have paid a very high price. Now is the time to reap the rewards. The day you leave here is going to be critical. You must leave the horrors of this experience behind, and you must take the valuable lessons we have learned home and use them to improve the rest of your life." This has to be the most intelligent thought I have ever heard in my life. (p. 48)

The continued mental and physical health of the VPOW group implies that many of these men were able to heed the advice given to Hubbard. Finding a purpose, perceiving a design, and making meaning from a situation are all ways of following the advice given to Hubbard and of recalling Bateson's (1972) observations as well.

Bateson's' ideas concerning people not only possessing but *being* self-corrective systems are particularly cogent to this discussion. As Bateson maintained, part of creating meaning is using the mechanisms to edit that which stands in the way of creating meaning. By editing that which is disturbing, people are able to rid themselves of information that would make a nuisance of itself and to put their energies toward making sense of their lives. The interviews support Bateson's contention that selective perception can work for the individual and does not have to lead to pathological denial or apathy.

Gary provided a notably insightful description of how the process of balancing selective perception and meaning making can work. Since he had been shot down in Laos, and the United States was supposedly not involved in Laos, he concluded he was already dead, never to return home again. After wallowing in self-pity for about a month he said to himself, "Okay, I probably won't die today. I might not

even die tomorrow, so what am I going to do between now and when I do die?" After pondering the question for a few days, he thought, "Well, isn't that the same question that every newborn baby has? What am I going to do between now and when I die?" He then made a conscious decision to "give them as much hell as I can."

This VPOW was able to find a meaning in his life by discovering a purpose for it. Through a process of communicating with himself, he was able to uncover the reason he had to survive and be strong. He said, "I did what I had to do to help the others and continue fighting." His symbolizing caused him to create a purpose; his discovery of the purpose caused him to find meaning; and finding meaning allowed him to use symbols and actions to indicate his intent. All this intrapersonal communication took place within a well-defined system, a system that gave the VPOWs power in a powerless situation.

Rules Theories

The men whose stories are told in this study showed applications of the rules theories as well. However, in addition to applying some of the rules they had learned previously, the VPOWs seemingly created new rules to fit their captivity experience, rules that were in direct conflict with those they had learned formerly.

For example, the participants indicated their level of self-disclosure during captivity had been unusually high. In general, women tend to exceed men in giving information about interpersonal relations (Baird & Bradley, 1979). However, during captivity these men did not seem to fit the norm identified by Baird and

Bradley. The interviews of both Phase I and II indicate these men considered themselves typical with regard to self-disclosure prior to their captivity situation, and have viewed themselves as typical since repatriation.

When asked about their reliance on each other and their intimates disclosures, the participants in both Phase I and II indicated they had depended on their wives and girlfriends prior to captivity. When they wanted to discuss something personal they turned to the women in their lives for support. Since relying on wives was not an option, the VPOWs turned to each other. Most report they consider themselves typical in their relationships to men now, but they still disclose personal information to a select few of their POW friends. As they explain their reaction, people who have not been through what they have endured cannot really understand certain things.

During a time of crisis, however, the VPOWs created a system based on affection and openness that allowed and encouraged them to exercise flexibility in their relationships, a behavior Paul Friedman identified as a construct of communication competence (Friedman, 1978). The group's system promoted a discovery and activated a type of flexibility they may not have known they had.

Contradictory Findings

Since much of the literature has been written by the VPOWs themselves, finding blatant contradictions between the writings and the interview responses would not be likely, and indeed that did not happen. As would be expected, each man emphasized his unique blueprint for coping, but this combination or

amalgamation of strategies did not depart drastically from the many offered in the review of the literature. However, some of the other literature written about coping and aviators does seem in conflict with the interview findings.

In their classic studies of the typical Air Force pilot (Fine & Hartman, 1968) or the outstanding jet pilot (Reinhardt, 1970), the authors described a man who differs drastically in some respects from the VPOW. For example, Fine and Hartman reported that the typical pilot finds "it undesirable to take care of others, to be taken care of" (p. 5) and their relationships with men "tend to be unemotional and smooth" (p. 28). Reinhardt said, "Lacking in either altruism or dependency, they make friends easily but intense friendships rarely. This tendency toward interpersonal and emotional distance causes them not to be touched too deeply by life" (p. 743). Perhaps since their relationships with each other did not take place in "smooth" circumstances, these men ceased being unemotional and learned to be both altruistic and dependent.

Countless examples exist in the VPOW literature and in the interviews to indicate these men readily and generously took care of one another. They went on hunger strikes to demand medical treatment for the sick and wounded. They gave each other their food or refused extra food if others did not receive it too, even though they were starving. They attended to each others' wounds and toilet needs when circumstances demanded they do so.

One man said in an interview, "I don't like Dick Stratton; I love Dick Stratton. He saved my life." The POW in this interview had been suffering from tetanus and

was unable to chew his food. Stratton chewed the food for him and fed it to him until he was able to chew himself. (Dick Stratton is famous for his picture on the cover of Life Magazine in which he is bowing. The picture stirred enormous controversy and began speculation about the treatment of the VPOWs.) Interpersonal and emotional distance were not hallmarks of the VPOWs perhaps because they were in a situation that caused them to be touched too deeply by life.

At the conclusion of their article, Fine and Hartman observed:

> there is a relative emotional inflexibility which can lead to difficulties in adjustment for people in this group. In any of these situations pilots on the lower end of a continuum of personality strength could be expected to develop psychiatric symptoms. Outstanding individuals might adjust, albeit unhappily and inefficiently, to any situation. (p. 36)

The absence of psychopathology in the VPOW group certainly contradicts these observations concerning psychiatric symptoms. Moreover, the continued mental health and measurable success of these individuals implies they have far exceeded "unhappily and inefficiently" reacting to their captivity because of emotional inflexibility.

In her research on resilience, while acknowledging the role of supportive others, Jonas (1996) contended that survival is an individual experience. She stated, "survivors are not particularly attractive when caught in the act of surviving. We know they are out to save themselves. Everyone else is just standing in their way....this blazing self-interest has a distinctly acrid odor" (p.54). Victor Frankl's comments about the capos, the Jewish guards in concentration camps, appear to support Jonas' observations. Bettelheim (1953) and Muller (1979) seemingly

agreed with Jonas, with Muller observing, "Anybody who did not know how to use his elbows sank like a stone" (p. 14).

However, the VPOW interviews offer a radically different picture of survival. These findings suggest survival involves a collective effort; resilience is comprised of universal ingredients; and resilience is contagious The homogeneous nature of the VPOW group and their immersion in a well defined system may account for much of the commonalty in responses and the construction of a social support network, but more needs to be said.

The small incidence of psychopathology in comparing the VPOWs to any other group of prisoners in history demands a thorough investigation into how this group differed. When stark contrasts are noted, as they are concerning individual versus collective survival strategies, the behavior of the group that was able to avoid problems becomes enormously important. Much can be learned from analyzing the system that encouraged taking care of one another, even at the possible expense to self-preservation.

Unforeseen Results

The Phase II interviews did not reveal any startling results or complete surprises; however, there were some unanticipated responses. Two of the participants spoke at length about the role of competition in survival and resilience. One man in particular found competition to be one of the most important strategies for coping. Given the nature of the typical VPOW, that is, of a fighter pilot, this love of competition and the desire for victory are not really astonishing.

In the literature outwitting the guards and strategizing to avoid torture or to gain desired results is blatant. The word competition is not usually used; however, the description of the behaviors seems to imply a form of competition. In support of this observation, Deaton (1975) reported that the VPOW used "an active, direct confrontation with his captors as his primary method of coping in solitary" (p. 105).

Competition is mentioned in one form or another in many of the written accounts by the VPOWs, but it is not named directly as a resilience building behavior. Rather, the authors referred to the physical and mental contests that filled the hours and gave them a sense of accomplishment. Collaboration is overwhelming in the literature as well, so recognizing competition as also being important does not happen automatically. Furthermore, the competition in question is of a different ilk than one might automatically identify as competition. The men cooperated and coached each other to rise to new levels of performance, even when this level of achievement meant the coach would lose a first place position.

Push-up and sit-up competitions were among the most common. Several written accounts and at least three of the interviews revealed many of the men were able to exceed the number of push-ups or sit-ups they had formerly been able to do. Sometimes the contest was within the individual to increase his own number, and sometimes the rivalry was with another in the cell or cell block.

Mental competitions often involved bets. Some of the RPOWs joke about the kinds of things they would use for collateral in these betting situations, making the

mocking humor again apparent. One interviewee said he once heard a man say to another in a card game, "Well, I now own your wife and kids. What else are you willing to bet?" One participant reported he owed another man a case of Korbel Champagne when he missed the repatriation date. He priced a case and sent a check to cover his losses, but it was the game of strength or wits that seemed to hold the appeal.

Personal Impressions

Capturing the swagger of the more than 50 men involved in the Phase I and Phase II portions of this research project and realistically and accurately reflecting their personal narratives was almost like a religious retreat. Hearing their stories, witnessing them crying openly and unashamedly, and inferring lessons from each of them have provided a true glimpse of what resilience and hardiness look like in concrete human forms. These men redefine human relationships and set new standards of excellence. They provide an example of how to create a sense of family with people not related to one another; they teach about the power of good attitude; and they show how to behave in honorable and loving ways.

The most striking thing about the group, upon first meeting each of them, is their continued healthy appearance. Most of the participants are in good physical condition; few of them smoke; most of them drink moderately; and most would be considered nice looking or handsome. They now range in age from mid-50s to late 60s, and each still has a sparkle in his eyes and a spring in his step.

After the healthy physical appearance, the most striking characteristic of the group is their attitude. There is almost no anger. There is limited resentment toward the captors, toward fate, or toward God. There is little animosity toward former wives and those who do not agree with them. Bitterness seems to elude them to the point that they seemingly do not understand why anyone would choose to be angry or bitter. Their adjustment to life is almost shocking.

On the other hand, almost all of them seem to possess a kind of devil may care attitude. As one RPOW observed, "What are they going to do to me? Put me in Hanoi for seven years and torture me?" Apparently once a person has overcome terrible adversity most of what the average person finds annoying or troublesome, the RPOW can dismiss. For these men, the ante seems to have been upped far beyond what the typical person would find normal.

Part of this attitude shows up in communication behavior too. Without exception, each member of both Phase I and Phase II was extremely open during interviews. There did not appear to be any off-limits topics, and the level of self-disclosure was unusually high.

Another pronounced behavior of the group is their cohesion. The members of the group often disagree about political and social issues, particularly those surrounding the MIA controversies. Yet, they are fiercely loyal to one another. They have formed an organization called NAM-POW that keeps members informed of new research and news of one another.

They mention with pride the RPOWs who have gone into the political arena, three of whom were members of the Alcatraz Eleven: Congressman Sam Johnson from Texas, Senator Jeremiah Denton from Alabama, and vice-presidential candidate Admiral Stockdale. The Alcatraz Eleven have a separate reunion each year, at which time the men and their wives socialize.

Applications of the Findings

Vicissitudes of memory might cause questions about the reliability of personal accounts of endurance, survival, and resilience. However, when personal narratives offer subjective appraisals to support objective facts, the importance of the individual stories becomes more apparent. Knowing *how* and *why* people are resilient is just as important as realizing they are. The voices of the VPOWs have been heard through the writing of their own books, but there is so much more wisdom in these men that can help others.

The most obvious direct application of the findings is by their use in the survival schools. The military schools that train potential POWs how to cope with captivity are constantly trying to improve the curriculum to add information that might help someone in the future. New findings provide a different lens through which to view resilience in order to understand it better. Since coping behaviors are not universal and since reactions to captivity tend to vary, the more information about alternative coping behaviors the schools can provide, the more likely a student will discover personal strategies for survival.

In addition to providing knowledge for others, the VPOWs are interested in research findings that can help them throughout their lives. By participating in projects that help uncover the constructs of the VPOW system, the participants create opportunities to become more active agents in their own continued hardiness.

Far more widespread are the lessons the VPOWs have for each of us who will never be a prisoner of war. Knowing that we do not have to be exceptional in order to accomplish exceptional things with our lives creates optimism that we can overcome adversity if we learn from those who have succeeded. Uncovering the reactions that served the POWs well allows others to apply these findings to their own lives. Information about healthy reactions to stress is important to anyone experiencing trauma or even the existential dilemmas of life.

Suggestions For Future Research

The possibilities for future research on the VPOWs are almost infinite. Never before has a group of physically and mentally healthy POWs existed. Moreover, since this group is enjoying health more than 20 years after repatriation, the opportunities for research are limitless. Learning about recovery from trauma, gender differences in reactions to trauma, and overcoming anger are a few areas that warrant more investigation.

Recovery From Trauma

Much research has been conducted on bouncing back from trauma (e.g. Lifton, 1993, Vaillant, 1977, Kobassa et. al., 1982; O'Connell Higgins, 1994).

Consequently, the constructs of resilience have been studied from many different angles. However, much more needs to be said. Studying different ages, varied causes of trauma, reactions to crisis, and responses to shock and adversity can shed some light on how best to help others faced with similar problems. Much of the literature seems to imply than trauma during childhood is much more problematic that crisis later on. Finding out how and why this seems to happen will provide important information about human development.

Gender Differences

All of the VPOWs are men, but the Persian Gulf War created a situation in which women were POWs. Not too much has been research has been conducted concerning how women might differ from men in captivity situations, yet women are now in combat-ready positions in the military. Providing information to the survival schools about how men and women differ in their general reactions to crisis and in their specific communication patterns would prove valuable to women who might find themselves in captivity.

Since research indicates women generally disclose more easily than men, what inferences can be drawn about how they will rely on others during times of crisis? Can women be taught to capitalize on their natural tendencies to form support networks? Female military members would benefit from knowing how they can become active agents in their own survival efforts.

Overcoming Anger

U. S. Ambassador Pete Peterson recently visited the site where he was captured by villagers after his Navy fighter plane was shot down during the Vietnam War. While in the village, former Congressman Peterson met with the two men who had found him, stripped him and marched him to the village. On that day in 1966 Peterson was taken to the Hanoi Hilton where he spent six and a half years.

In spite of his ordeal in Vietnam, Peterson was named the first U.S. ambassador to communist Vietnam, at which time he vowed to "bridge the river of pain" left by the war. Peterson said he returned to Vietnam "to signify to the entire world that reconciliation with a former adversary is not only possible, but absolutely the way to reach out" ("Envoy Visits Site of Capture," 1997).

Peterson's absence of bitterness was echoed in the interviews and is supported in the literature written by the VPOWs. The lack of anger is almost astonishing since these men were held captive, starved, isolated, tortured and nearly killed. Their failure to feel anger may be conscious or unconscious, but it serves them well. One has to suspect one of the reasons this group has enjoyed such good mental health must be tied to this ability to let loose of their resentment. Looking at the VPOWs in terms of their ability to cope with and overcome anger might have far-reaching implications for others trying to conquer adversity, disappointment or feelings of betrayal.

Conclusions

Speculating about the causes of resilience allows avenues for understanding what might contribute to the development and sustaining of it. Perhaps the 138 RPOWs who have participated in the Navy's study have benefited from the continuous monitoring and assurance that the Navy cares about their well-being, but that does not explain the number of Air Force RPOWs who are now being studied who also do not have any significant PTSD. A more plausible explanation is a main construct of resilience is communication, and until now, no one has studied the VPOWs and the role of communication in making meaning.

This new perspective, which is a theoretical frame for thinking of resilience as a communication phenomenon, provides an alternative for understanding resilience. Making meaning within oneself and with others allows for making sense of a senseless situation and for establishment of community. When that community is based on a well-defined system that encourages and demands inclusion and control, affection is a likely byproduct. Such a community existed for the VPOWs. Through the creation of social support and interdependency these fiercely independent men learned to rely on their own power and to draw a sense of mastery from one another. Ordinary men were able to do extraordinary things.

The military system, with its related discipline, acted as a type of anchor in humanity for the VPOWs. Because they were cemented in a strong social structure, they had a buffer against dedifferentiation. The tight, disciplined

adherence to group norms was a powerful civilizing force that discouraged any antisocial slip into a kind of jungle mentality.

Certainly human reactions are complicated, and personal uniqueness must be balanced against species commonalty. However, conjecture can often lead to new data. Whether explicitly taught or reinforced by subsequent experience, resilience seems to be contagious. Even though they are recovering from unspeakable adversity, the VPOWs offer too many examples of people thriving for their numbers to be ignored.

RPOW Mulligan offered some concluding thoughts about the importance of learning from the VPOW experience:

> For out of the miseries had come strength; out of the suffering, compassion; out of hate, love. If nothing else, I would come home a better man than when I entered there. Life would be more meaningful in every aspect from now on. (Mulligan, 1981 p. 279)

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. Looking back at your captivity, what would you say most helped you to make it through?

2. Was there a turning point for you, a time when you felt changed or different?

3. How do you think you might have reacted differently than the other POWs did? (How were you different? Were there others who did better or not quite so well? How would you explain that?)

4. Was there much variation in the "light" and "heavy" times? Can you tell me about any of the lighter times and the role that might have played in your handling the situation?

5. Were there things in prison that seemed funny that might not have been funny at other times?

6. Were there any times when you felt like giving up or really didn't care what happened to you? (How did you deal with that? What turned it around for you?)

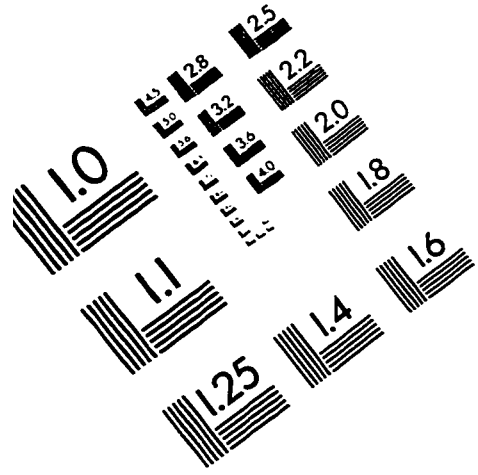
7. Did others have those times too? How did you know they were on the verge of giving up? What seemed to turn it around for them?

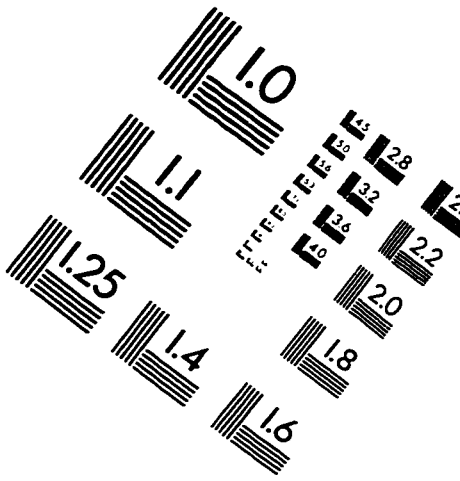
8. Some POWs have indicated that having imaginary conversations with people helped them. Were there any people that you would bring into your world through conversations?

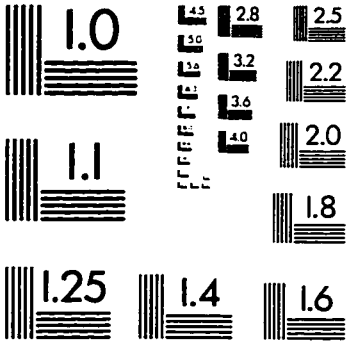
9. It has been many years since your imprisonment. Have your perceptions changed through the years about what is truly essential in order to survive?

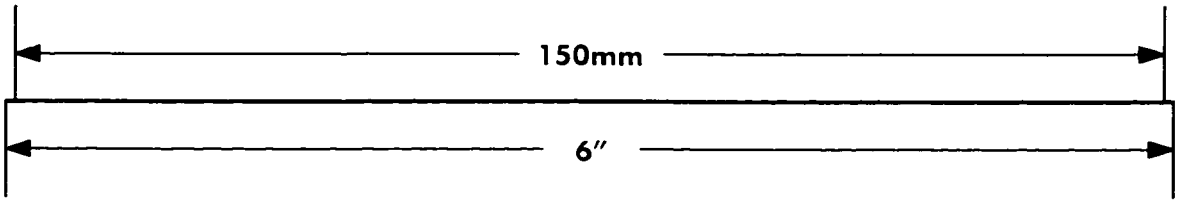
10. What advice would you give someone in survival school who is trying to understand what it takes to make it through an experience like this?

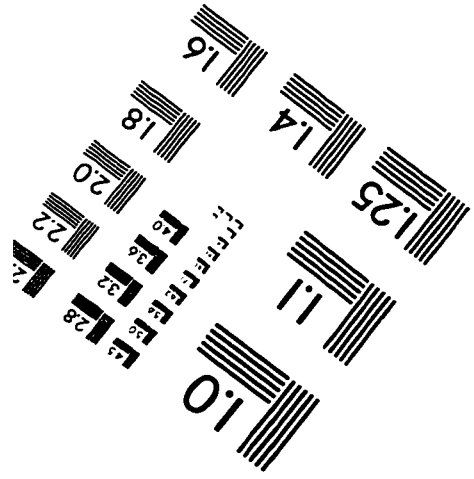
IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA-3)

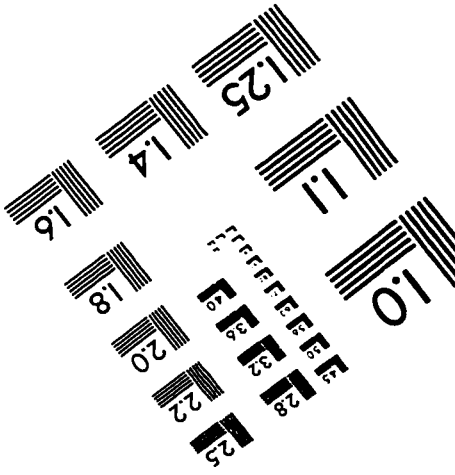












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