NAVIGATING A NEW MISSION:
NARRATIVES OF STUDENT VETERANS EXPERIENCING COLLEGE

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education – Doctor of Philosophy

2019

ABSTRACT

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Many student veterans have experienced challenges in their college careers. To date, most academic literature on student veterans has focused on aspects of their transition to college, including financial and administrative needs, pursuing connections to other student veterans as an ideal peer group, high-risk behavior, hypervigilance and combat-related injuries (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2012; Bauman, 2013). Less research, however, has focused on how student veterans experience college post-transition, to include potential impacts of their past military experiences on their journeys as college students.

Impressions vary in current literature as to how salient military experience is to student veterans as they progress through college. While some scholars suggest that these experiences erode over time (Naphan & Elliott, 2015), others believe these behaviors shape veterans well after their transition from service to college (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Jones & Abes, 2013). Given the uniqueness of their backgrounds, student veterans require specific programming to serve their needs in college (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014; McCaslin, Leach, Herbst, & Armstrong, 2013). Despite these acknowledgements, academic literature still largely summarizes military backgrounds, with no identified differences between individuals. An increasing lack of civilian understanding of these experiences (Jones, 2013) creates additional support challenges for this population, as faculty and staff are not being trained to understand the diversity of student veteran experiences (Osbourne, 2014).

This study sought to expand the knowledge of student veteran experiences through a thematic analysis of military and college experiences. To accomplish this, qualitative research practices informed by narrative inquiry were used (Claindinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to guide questions to student veterans about their military and college lives. Participants were a sample of student veterans attending a large, midwestern institution, with defined student veteran support resources.

This study offers thirteen participant narratives of military and college experiences. These narrative sketches largely connected to four themes that depict transactional educational experiences for adult learners, comprised of experience gaps with non-veteran stakeholders, college social and cultural challenges, reflections on past military experiences as well as thoughts on the utility of relationships with other student veterans. This work is valuable for practitioners seeking to improve their understanding of student veterans through their military and college experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work shares the stories of some student veterans as they navigate their college lives and make sense of their military experiences. The journey that resulted in this dissertation began for me in 2008. As I experienced my own military transition, I had many questions about what my next professional journey would be. Those feelings lasted for some time. I felt similar concerns when I was an undergraduate fourteen years earlier, afraid I would not successfully finish college. In both instances, Michigan State University served as both an amazing support and a wonderful teacher, giving me the resources I needed to develop my path forward. I will never be able to repay this university for all it has given me, but will spend the rest of my career attempting to try.

To the student veteran participants of this project. Thank you for being so giving of your time and your willigness to share your life stories with me. I truly appreciate the chance to share your backgrounds with others in the hopes of continuing a converstation on how to understand and support student veterans as they continue to purse their educational and professional goals. I wish all of you the best in your future endeavors, and am thankful for the chance to know you.

Thank you to the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program for changing the trajectory of my academic and professional life. I am so appreciative of the mentorship of the faculty through this journey. To Dr. Brendan Cantwell, my academic advisor and my dissertation chair. Thank you for your tireless efforts and support of me through my studies and this dissertation. I am a better student because of you. To members of the dissertation committee: Dr. Cary Roseth and Dr. Matt Wawrzynski. I am truly thankful for your time, guidance and interest in my work. To Dr. Leslie Gonzales. You have been a constant advocate and champion of my work since our first meeting. My interests in qualitative work and narrative storytelling began in

your class, and are amongst the most memorable parts of this journey for me. You exemplify the best of what a faculty member should be. Finally, to a faculty member whom I have had the chance to learn a great deal from and whom I admire: Dr. Riyad Shahjahan. Thank you for challenging me to ask better questions rather than focusing on binary answers.

To my PhD cohort, you will never know how fortunate I feel to have met you and learned with you. Reflecting on our first two years together, I had absolutely no idea how difficult and amazing being in school again at this time in my life could be. Being in this program with all of you was a special experience, and I am truly grateful. To Nate, Marc and Voula, thank you for your constant support and your friendship. Wherever your professional futures go, you will shine as the superstars you are.

To my brothers: D'Juan, Mark, John and Nick. The U.S. Air Force is responsible for bringing all of us together, and I am truly grateful for that. You will never know what your friendship has meant to me throughout our lives. I love and respect each of you for the special people you are. Thank you for being my family. You are my brothers for life.

To my mom. I am so proud to be your son. Thank you for working so very hard to give me a great childhood, with the chance to go to college and work towards my future. You inspire me, more than you know. I hope I can give Haiden the same support and love you have given me throughout my life. You're the best mom I could ever ask for.

To my daughter, Haiden. As I write this, I have spent half of your life in this doctoral program. There have been many ups and downs, successes and challenges. Yet, no matter where this journey took us, you were always there to offer me encouragement and support, even when I was too wrapped up in myself to hear it. Thank you for sticking with me. You are an amazing human being, wise beyond your years. Being your dad is the greatest gift I could ever ask for, and

nothing I do in my life will be as important or as awesome. I love you so very much, and I am so excited to see what your future holds. Thank you for being you. You are a wonderful daugher, and a spectacular person.

To my angel on earth, my wife Jaimie. This would not have been possible without you. From the day we met, your love, support and wisdom have been the keys to unlock dreams. In our lives together, we have had experiences that I never imagined I could or would have, as your partner in love and life. Your willigness to do anything and everything to support our family through every day of the past six years, and all of the years before that, are beyond comprehension. You are the foundation of TeamHutch, and Haiden and I could not ask for a better mother and wife than you. You mean everything to me, and I cannot wait to see what the next chapters in our life story are. I love you with all my heart. Thank you for saying yes.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Student veteran enrollment continues to increase at colleges and universities across the country. The products of the most expansive federal entitlement program in higher education since WWII, student veterans pursue opportunities such as higher education to assist in a progression toward their civilian futures (Bauman, 2013; Danelo, 2014). More than 750,000 veterans and their beneficiaries have utilized benefits from the Post 9/11 GI Bill program since the law's inception in 2008 (Kim & Cole, 2013). These numbers stand to increase with recent policy changes that enable the GI Bill to be a lifetime benefit for many transitioning veterans.

However, student veterans' experiences in higher education are fraught with tensions and challenges that could make their journeys through college difficult. These individuals face social challenges interfacing with faculty, administrators, and non-veteran students (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). They self-report physical and cognitive health challenges that affect academic performance (Norman, et al., 2015). In many instances, their military experiences could be a factor in the disconnects they experience with other college populations, based on challenges in establishing relationships with non-veterans and bridging the information gap between veterans and civilians (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). Their physical and cognitive scars could also be products of those backgrounds; many do not wish to discuss how they received them.

As student veterans transition from uniformed service, their journeys forward, in many instances, appear influenced by their past backgrounds. Previous experiences as military personnel, while helping them grow into the people they are, could influence their interactions in their post-military environments. To understand how their military backgrounds could impact their way forward, it is appropriate to discuss how student veterans are depicted in academic literature in the present day.

Who are Student Veterans?

A standard definition of this population, to date, has eluded researchers (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Military service affiliations (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines) and types of service (active-duty, national guard, reserve) can cloud efforts to study this population. Also, student veteran demographics are diverse and varied. Seventy-three percent of student veterans are male, and 27% are female (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012). Forty-seven percent of student veterans are married. Forty-seven percent of student veterans have children. One in five student veterans is enrolled at a four-year public institution. Veterans are more likely to be first-generation college students than civilians (Kim & Cole, 2013). Eighty-five percent of student veterans are 24 years of age or older, which labels them "non-traditional" (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). These demographics qualify most of the student veteran population as adult learners. Student veterans must also balance their academic pursuits with job requirements, family obligations as well as other important aspects of adult life. Civilian adult learners manage their personal, professional and academic lives in similar ways (Mackeracher, 2004).

Student veterans bring these traits to the college environment with a maturity and focus attributed to their age and professional experiences (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). In turn, many student veterans initially approach their transition believing their military training prepares them to navigate college successfully (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). As they matriculate and begin acclimation to college life, this perception can change as their views and behaviors meet resistance.

Also, student veterans face challenges in college persistence and degree attainment that are shared by other college populations: delayed enrollment, pre-college education, attendance patterns, dependency status, family status, and work intensity during enrollment (Kelly, Smith, Fox, & Wheeler, 2013). However, non-military students do not face the mental and physical

changes that veterans face when they leave military service, which may also inhibit student veterans' ability to succeed (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Student veterans register the highest risk index for dropping out of any underserved population (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Their military backgrounds could be a contributor to this phenomenon, as the literature concerning this population indirectly implicates how student veterans' military backgrounds (and the physical and mental effects of military service) impact the in-college experiences of these students.

Some scholars discuss an expansive gap between the student veteran and civilian student experience on college campuses (Osbourne, 2014). Reasons for this divide involve administrators and faculty having a lack of knowledge of the veteran experience as well as disconnects between student veterans and non-veteran students for the same reasons (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Some scholars suggest the lack of accurate information stems from civilians becoming desensitized toward the veteran experience. Technology and the pace of a 24-hour news cycle sometimes downplay the scope and effects of military operations across the globe while dehumanizing veterans (Gross & Weiss, 2014). The information gap between veterans and civilians contributes to many student veterans' inability to fully connect to the institution, which Tinto (1993) asserts is essential to student success in higher education. Specifically, colleges and universities, some say, are deficient in training their administrators to meet student veteran needs (Osbourne, 2014), a point that amplifies this controversy. As the demographics of student veterans continue to diversify, these challenges could multiply if left unsupported.

Military Culture, Identity, and Connections to other Social Identities

Rogoff (2003) asserts that humans are characterized in terms of their participation in a culture. Through the transmission of language and the teaching of cultural practices, a person can become a recognized member of a culture. Concurrently, organizational culture is best understood

as a description of the dominant value and belief systems of a group of people (Newsome, 2007). These norms and behaviors can pass from generation to generation (Phinney, 1996). To both group members and outsiders, culture is not always recognized or understood. However, culture is important in providing human connections between structure and process (Newsome, 2007). In effect, as a group bonds over time, they can begin to form the foundations of a culture.

Military culture, an all-encompassing construct that goes beyond professional definitions (Cole, 2014), is organizational culture. Through intense physical, mental, and emotional experiences, military culture promotes these connections in preparations for the rigors of military service. This culture is comprised of a hierarchical, disciplined group of professionals who are defined by significant self-expectations of high moral standards, undergirded by a steadfast belief in self-sacrifice for the collective (Cole, 2014).

Some experts attest that military culture shares similarities with the academic culture in higher education in terms of structure and organization (Higbee, 2010). However, there are also significant differences that relate to the core foundations of military culture. For example, military culture is defined by a chain of command, a concept of operations, and legal system (Higbee, 2010). Individual service members all serve the larger organizational culture, regardless of their rank. Military cultural tenets permeate all aspects of service, irrespective of what one's primary duties are. This all-inclusive, single-group cultural system contrasts with the heterogeneous nature of groups within institutions of higher education, which aspire to identify and understand the nuances and differences their students and faculty possess. Engaging students in ways that account for these differences are critical factors in enhancing persistence (Renn & Reason, 2013). There are various authorities and governance systems in higher education, but many follow a track that is typically more matrixed than the linear path of military authority.

The military hierarchy is a critical piece of its culture that assists in defining an individual's military identity. The rank structure of every service not only establishes a clear chain of command; it intentionally creates deference between junior and senior personnel (Cole, 2014). Rank structures extend beyond the service member to the immediate family as well.

To fully mesh into the hierarchy, the development process that produces military personnel encompasses the holistic being, to ensure every service member possesses the necessary physical, emotional, and cognitive characteristics to execute the mission. As military members progress through the acculturation process they become closer, developing bonds of friendship and service that are strengthened by deployments and family separations. Some scholars attest that, because of the all-encompassing nature of the military experience, veterans view themselves as a distinct class within society (Gade & Wilkins, 2013).

Historically, military units are built on a masculine warrior paradigm that privileges males in military service (Pawelczyk, 2014). While this paradigm has contributed to the structure, discipline, and culture that has defined military service through the years, it has also caused tension amongst its members as each service has diversified its ranks in terms of gender, race and sexual orientation.

Acclimation to military culture can present challenges to those within its ranks. In recent times, women have become part of almost every combat-related role in the armed services. Some attest that this empowers women, given the long-held characterizations of military personnel in combat as ideal standards of discipline, strength, and performance (Silva, 2008). However, some scholars have examined gender identity in the military, and whether cultural meanings of gender change as women become more deeply immersed in all aspects of military culture. Experts have also questioned whether culturally-defined qualities of masculinity and femininity can exist in

military service (Bacevich, 1993), and the impact of this dynamic on female soldiers. The power imbalance between masculinity and femininity in military service creates tension amongst the genders in some work environments (Silva, 2008).

Despite the tensions between masculinity and femininity in military service, the positions available to women in the armed forces have grown to include combat roles (Iverson & Anderson, 2013), despite some internal and external unwillingness to fully recognize females as combat soldiers. As women continue to navigate the expansion of their roles in military service, they must also continue to operate within a system that stereotypes and judges them for their perceived level of masculinity, or the absence of it (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Pawelczyk, 2014). Also, female veterans continue to experience sexual harassment, sexual assault, and other forms of personal trauma, which have continued to increase (Skinner, et al., 2000; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). As they return home, they also face challenges from a public that questions their military backgrounds in ways they do not with men (Iverson & Anderson, 2013). These tensions can push women towards isolation and an urge to bury their military backgrounds, which could negatively impact their experiences in college.

As female student veterans transition to higher education, they must navigate what it means to be female, a veteran and a college student (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Pawelczyk, 2014). Men do not share the same transitional challenges. In addition, women are less likely to report their traumas to others, internalizing their burden (Skinner, et al., 2000; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Despite learning some of the differences in the female student veteran experience, military backgrounds are still not part of the discussion, as Diramio and Jarvis note in their work (2011). As researchers look deeper into the challenges of female student veterans and other demographics experience in higher education, one cannot solely investigate the masculine hegemony that

influences their military service. Scholars must unpack student veteran narratives, both during their military time and in college, to deepen understanding of this population. To neglect differences in veteran narratives could lead to a characterization of all student veterans as having the same military experience, widening the information gap between student veterans and civilians at all levels of the university structure.

Challenges in Institutional Support

As student veterans continue to matriculate in more significant numbers, they are supported by many resources to assist their transition and acclimation to the college community. However, this expansion in service, while in the best intentions of supporting student veterans, has not contributed to expanding the knowledge base for practitioners and faculty on the effects of military backgrounds on student veterans (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014). In effect, many college faculty and administrators work in continued support of student veterans without any firsthand knowledge of their experiences (Osborne, 2014). The lack of assessment data on these services amplifies the concerns as to if these efforts are beneficial (Kim & Cole, 2013). This dynamic reflects a national environment where fewer Americans have direct experience with military personnel than ever before (Bialik, 2017), offering programs that may not be effective. On a college campus, these information challenges are compounded by the lack of a defined baseline of campus services and resources that are deemed appropriate (Vacchi & Berger, 2014).

Some scholars suggest that student veterans must develop "bi-cultural literacy" to be successful in college (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). This is no easy feat. In some academic settings, the campus culture may be incompatible with military service, leading to discomfort for veterans when interacting with faculty, administrators, and other students (Elliott, 2015). Even in the absence of combat trauma, student veterans note challenges interacting with non-veterans in

college at a social level, the product of an information gap between the groups (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). As they continually navigate the aftereffects of their experiences, they present challenges to the higher education infrastructure that seeks to support them (Phelps, 2015). For example, concepts of teamwork and collective interaction are fundamental to military veterans; their culture both creates and sustains these dynamics (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). To thrive in military service, one must acclimate to military culture (Higbee, 2010) and adapt to institutional norms (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Interestingly, this process may not necessarily translate into success in higher education, an organizational culture with a matrixed leadership system and a great deal of flexibility and ambiguity amongst its processes. In effect, some higher education structures are antithetical to the compartmentalization that makes military operations successful (Higbee, 2010).

Most student veterans will manage these tensions by making their transitions to civilian life privately, not in the public ways of their predecessors from World War II (Gross & Weiss, 2014). Because they are no longer in uniform, civilian society may not associate them with their previous lives at all (Brown & Gross, 2011). A lack of knowledge of the impact of military experience on student veterans could be a contributing factor to increased dropouts, as student veterans may not seek needed support for fear of being misunderstood (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Student veteran engagement challenges have spawned several recent studies and contributions to the literature, in efforts to investigate and support this mysterious, diverse population (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Kelly, Smith, Fox, & Wheeler, 2013; Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014). Much of this work discusses the challenges student veterans have in their transition to college and managing physical and mental injuries. Despite good intentions on providing attention to this unique population, the scholarly

research on these topics falls short in describing the influence military service has on individual student veterans and how that experience influences their ability to make meaning of their college experiences.

Background of the Problem

When researching how student veterans interact on campus, one begins to see a group of academically-focused individuals looking to connect to college decision-makers who can assist them in meeting their personal and academic needs (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). These needs begin in university administration (confirming financial aid, enrollment, and living situation), and move quickly to academic needs (engaging faculty and navigating their classroom dynamics). However, this population undertakes this process with some internal challenges to manage, many stemming from their previous military backgrounds.

Military culture is a force of influence on military personnel behavior (Dunivin, 1994; Cole, 2014). Therefore, military cultural influences could affect student veterans after they leave military service, and as they navigate the complexities of college life. Student engagement literature over the last 10 years has begun to capture the engagement challenges that student veterans face in college, both in their transitions and persistence (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2012; Brown & Gross, 2011; Kim & Cole, 2013). However, there has been limited research or literature on the influence of military backgrounds on engagement. The literature review for this project will examine research that investigates how student veterans manage various tensions in the college experience.

Statement of the Problem

The academic literature concerning student veterans, to date, has not discussed the differences or influences of military backgrounds on student veterans in their journeys as college students. This literature gap impacts the ability of practitioners to understand student veteran challenges as well as pursue support strategies to improve their college experiences. While researchers have taken steps to understand the student veteran experience in college, the scope of their work has not included a recognition of the diversity that could be present in military backgrounds. In effect, researchers have studied some of the aftereffects of military backgrounds (i.e., combat effects, hypervigilance) without a concurrent focus on the events that created these outcomes. To consider the military backgrounds of student veterans as a fixed constant, or to not discuss them at all, is to consider all student veterans as having the same experiences in their military service. This characterization contributes to a gap in understanding of the student veterans' experience.

Scholars have made multiple attempts to research this population by studying battle-developed injuries and student engagement challenges in student veteran transitions to college. The current discourse on this topic seems focused in these two areas, potentially alienating individuals who do not exhibit or identify in the ways discussed in current literature. Even when scholars seek to identify racial, gender, and race differences amongst student veterans (and how these identities may impact their college experience) (Iverson & Anderson, 2013), assumptions are made about their military roles and lifestyles. Finally, while transition is certainly a salient piece of any student experience, an underserved population's ability to persist after transition (without subjugating the characteristics that give that group its identity) is also important to pursuing college completion (Renn & Reason, 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate the military backgrounds of student veterans and if those backgrounds influence student veteran academic experiences in college. The following questions will guide this study:

1. How do student veterans describe their college experiences?
2. How would student veterans describe the interaction of their military backgrounds with their college experiences, and how those interactions affect their college experiences?

Significance of the Study

By most accounts, student veterans are a growing population of matriculants who are sought by colleges and universities (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The opportunity to recruit a large pool of focused, motivated students, who come to campus fully-funded (through their military benefits) would seem a tantalizing proposition. This prospect, when paired with the reverence given to many military veterans, further validates an institution's efforts to provide resources to ensure student veteran transition, persistence, and success.

However, despite increases in services on campus (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), student veterans continue to be challenged in their process of acclimation and persistence. A piece of that process is largely absent from surveyed literature: the qualification of military experience, and how that experience affects the college experience. Per Whiteman and Barry (2013), scholarly investigations into student veteran adjustment and health-related issues are almost nonexistent. This dissertation is significant because it could begin to address how military backgrounds can differ from veteran to veteran, and how those differences can affect student veterans' ability to make meaning of their college experiences. This information is important to all institutional agents (faculty, administrators and students) in closing the knowledge gap and working to minimize

stereotypes that define many veterans (Osborne, 2014). The number of individuals working on college campuses with firsthand knowledge of military service (and its effects on veterans) continues to shrink, which could contribute to stereotypes, both positive and negative. Also, when scholars discuss military identity and civilian identity as separate components of an individual (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013), they suggest that the individual negotiates one identity over the other to blend into the college experience. This project is intended to investigate that assertion, as military experience could be consistent with a dimension of social identity (Jones & Abes, 2013) that, as opposed to needing to be minimalized, could exist as a dimension of identity in each person as other social identities do. Military identity may be stronger in some student veterans, but not in others, depending on how influential those behaviors are in relation to the individual's core being (Jones & Abes, 2013). For these reasons, military backgrounds should be studied to ascertain the level of impact on individual student veterans as well as their role in meaning-making in college. In effect, it could complement or enhance the student experience.

As a student veteran and a researcher, I also feel a responsibility to help increase the body of knowledge of student veterans' backgrounds through the collection of rich data that will assist fellow researchers in understanding how military service can impact meaning-making in college. This work, if successful, could help other researchers account for student veterans in traditional student engagement methodologies, by examining avenues to incorporate military backgrounds as a demographic trait of incoming students into engagement, identity and persistence models. Increasing the knowledge base of student veteran narratives will prove helpful to practitioners with limited experience with military veterans, fostering more opportunities to serve this population.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Student veterans find themselves internally navigating two environments when they enter higher education. Some have suggested leaving military service is akin to leaving an all-consuming lifestyle that encompasses self-image and worldview, such as the priesthood (Jones K. C., 2013). Behaviors that served these students well in military service could challenge their ability to be successful civilians (Danelo, 2014), potentially influencing their college experience. This disconnect was first reported in student veteran transitions after World War II. A massive influx of veterans returned to campuses as non-traditional, adult learners, navigating the aftereffects of deploying and serving in combat (Donahue & Tibbitts, 1946). Scholars noted some of the challenges this population was having in transition and proposed ideas for support and relief. After the Vietnam War, student veterans made similar transitions and experienced similar challenges. Unfortunately, colleges and universities were not as receptive of their presence as they had been thirty years earlier.

Over the past eighty years, student veteran tensions in higher education have continued relatively unchanged. Most student veterans are non-traditional, adult learners (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012), and scholars report similar challenges in managing their transition and persistence (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Institutions are once again being examined for their ability to offer support to this population (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Moon & Schma, 2011; Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Miller, et al., 2016; Osborne, 2014). In some studies, student veterans report lower levels of campus support than civilian students, a point of concern considering that student veterans are likely to be first-generation college students (Kim & Cole, 2013).

Despite the increasing influx of veterans attending colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012), perspectives vary as to how much of the veteran's past life makes its way into their civilian life. As a military veteran becomes a student veteran, some scholars believe they exit the role associated with their military experience, replacing it with a civilian one (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). This proposed cultural shift suggests that military experience has a diluted effect over time on these students as they move farther and farther away from their time in military service.

In contrast, others believe that the experiences of student veterans endure. Jones & Abes (2013) believe that military identity is a social identity, comparable to social class. These students comprise a unique cohort in higher education, pursuing higher education as part of a quest to find new metrics in their lives that provide an opportunity for civilian success (Danelo, 2014). This uniqueness requires specific programming to appropriately serve student veterans' needs (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014; McCaslin, Leach, Herbst, & Armstrong, 2013). The examined literature challenges the assertion that military experience is left behind when students leave the military. A significant number of student veterans exhibit mental, physical, and social conflicts, linked to their time in service. Unanswered questions exist as to how specific the approach to serving student veterans should be (Grossbard, et al., 2014), a result of the lack of accounts of what student veterans need. In effect, by not fully knowing the perspectives of student veterans, it becomes challenging to support them.

The literature suggests that many student veterans experience hardships in managing their previous life while in college, regardless of the size or type of institution. Disconnects can occur academically, socially, and personally, as military backgrounds begin to chafe against campus culture and the behaviors of non-veterans (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Some examples are: making

connections to peers, faculty and administrators, feeling comfortable on campus, and acclimating to institutional culture (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2012; Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Brown & Gross, 2011; Kim & Cole, 2013). In some studies, student veterans report lower academic persistence rates than non-veterans (McCaslin, Leach, Herbst, & Armstrong, 2013). One notable challenge student veterans have involves establishing relationships with non-veteran groups, stemming from a belief that civilians do not, or could not understand the veteran perspective (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Another challenge is that civilian students or cannot work with the same level of determination and focus (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). The military backgrounds of student veterans, it would seem, are implicated in this tension.

Colleges recognize some of the engagement challenges student veterans have experienced and have implemented processes to assist in bridging these gaps. Implementation has proven challenging for multiple reasons. Deficiencies exist in both physical resources (dedicated office spaces and programs) and knowledge level (amongst staff and faculty) (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Also, while there are national efforts to qualify what a "veteran-friendly" school is, there is limited data on if the requirements for this qualification truly serve student veteran needs on campus (Vacchi & Berger, Student veterans in higher education, 2014). Additionally, the student veteran population crosses gender, ethnic and other demographic boundaries, making understanding difficult. Interactions with campus stakeholders may be challenging because of unfamiliarity with military culture or backgrounds (Grossbard, et al., 2014). While some researchers feel specific interventions are needed for this population (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), others feel colleges are unprepared to act (Klaw, Demers, & Da Silva, 2016). These gaps can lead to consequences, such as student veterans not seeking campus resources when they need them (Grossbard, et al., 2014).

Despite increased attention on student veterans, academic literature tends to summarize military backgrounds (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), with no identified differences from individual to individual. There has not been an increase in understanding of the challenges student veterans face as their enrollment numbers climb (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014). While some distinctions are made between student veterans with combat trauma, or a visible sign of injury (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Grossbard, et al., 2014; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011), a lack of civilian understanding of military experience creates challenges in student engagement and support. Characterizations of military backgrounds also create tensions between student veterans and the institution, as it appears that many efforts to engage student veterans are standardized offerings, versus implementing adaptations to meet needs as they arise. Support efforts also seem to focus only on subsistence needs (financial aid, housing, and tuition) and students managing a medical diagnosis (PTSD, TBI). In turn, as veterans self-segregate to veteran-only peer groups (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), they could amplify this tension, and exacerbate the gap between themselves and their colleges, further impacting their college experience.

Finally, narrative accounts of student veteran experience in higher education literature are scarce. These omissions are particularly important because college and university stakeholders have less experience with military personnel than ever before (Jones, 2013), creating a knowledge gap on how best to serve these students. To assist in understanding the potential impacts of military experience in the meaning-making process, one must examine the challenges student veterans currently experience in higher education in different settings. While military experience may not be the instrument of tension in every situation, a review of this literature will reveal its presence in varying degrees.

Military Cultural Conflicts with Higher Education

Despite growing support programs (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012), scholars believe that institutions of higher education are not training faculty and staff about the diverse service experiences of student veterans (Osbourne, 2014). To understand student veterans, one must begin with understanding military culture (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016). Throughout the military's history, the male hegemonic society has influenced military culture (Danelo, 2014). This culture is defined by a combat, masculine-warrior paradigm that provides the framework for how military units operate (Dunvin, 1994). Military culture is disseminated through learned behaviors, broadly shared and exercised by all military personnel. These practices are also adaptive to change and symbolic (Dunvin, 1994).

Military culture is communicated through specific language (terminology and moral codes) and hierarchy (a defined chain of command). Through a defined system of rules and policies, military personnel develop a sense of self-sacrifice and high expectations for their conduct, because mission success depends on teamwork and discipline (Cole, 2014). As military culture has evolved (through external pressures) to incorporate gender, race and sexual orientation into its ranks over the years, the combat warrior ethos remains, maintaining a masculine, violent paradigm (Dunvin, 1994).

According to Danelo (2014), the transition from military service to civilian life involves taking skills and aptitudes from military culture and repurposing them into a new economic endeavor. The return from battle to civilian life (referred to as "exile,") is the most difficult part of the military member's journey (p. 6). Some veterans find becoming a civilian again very challenging, "and boring" (p.11). The civilian transition, to many veterans, creates fear that they will lose who they are if they commit to the transition (p. 18).

The challenges some student veterans experience in higher education can overwhelm them, affecting their ability to progress (Osborne, 2014). Many student veterans will selectively participate in events and activities on campus in efforts to manage these tensions (Kim & Cole, 2013). They are also more likely to focus exclusively on academic progress (to include individual interactions with faculty) than their civilian counterparts (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Their transactional, academically-focused approach to college life is consistent with adult learning principles common with civilian adult learners (Mackeracher, 2004). Because of their military training, many student veterans believe they will be academically successful and ultimately graduate (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). These assertions are challenged by how student veterans interact in the academic environment, both in their relationships with other groups as well as how they engage in the classroom.

Faculty to Student Veteran Interactions. As student veterans enter college and university classrooms, faculty comprise a critical connection group. The ability of student veterans to connect with academic agents on campus influences academic progression as well as their adjustments to the college environment (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013). A new study indicated that student veterans value their ability to meet faculty expectations (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). However, faculty connections are a difficult task for many student veterans, as they are less likely to engage faculty directly than their civilian counterparts (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

For student veterans to adjust effectively to higher education, faculty must also be prepared to engage with them. Unfortunately, instructors may default to working more closely with student groups that more concisely fit their belief system and model of learning. Faculty with high confidence in their teaching ability can adjust their styles to suit a diverse learner group (Barnard-

Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011). Faculty with lower confidence, that are unwilling to adapt their styles, can potentially alienate student veterans. If student veterans are also suffering from trauma that impacts their ability to engage, that will contribute to a disconnect with faculty, impacting the classroom dynamic.

Current literature indicates that some faculty cannot separate their personal beliefs and feelings from their ability to educate student veterans. A nationwide study of over 500 faculty revealed that over 25% could not separate their own biases about military service and warfare from their ability to teach student veterans (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011). More specifically, their self-efficacy for teaching student veterans was lower than their self-efficacy for teaching civilian students. In some instances, faculty behaviors (calling military personnel, "terrorists") created a hostile academic environment towards student veterans (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011).

In efforts to smooth the academic transition to college (and prevent potentially adverse situations with faculty and peers), many student veterans will conceal their status and only discuss it when they deem it safe or appropriate to do so (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). An inability to establish a working relationship with faculty will negatively affect a student veteran's ability to feel as if they belong at the institution (Strayhorn, 2012). The faculty connection speaks to a student veteran's sense of authority and their need to complete their academic objectives (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), traits that connect to their previous military backgrounds: following leadership direction and working to complete the objective (Bacevich, 1993). As a result, student veterans have also begun to experience academic tensions, as they report feeling less supported that civilian students in a national sample (Kim & Cole, 2013).

Civilian to Student Veteran Interactions. Student veterans would prefer social support on campus to assist in dispelling feelings of loneliness and isolation (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013), promoting an increased connection to the institution (Strayhorn, 2012). This perspective is consistent with civilian student desires as well. However, connections to other students may prove challenging for student veterans for several reasons. Civilian students have little firsthand knowledge of the military (Naphan & Elliott, 2015), which could contribute to misunderstandings of a veteran's experiences. In some instances, it could become difficult for civilians to grasp the amount of impact and responsibility that military personnel have at young ages, or how embedded military culture can be in some student veterans.

Veterans, in turn, appreciate being acknowledged for their contributions and find it offensive for the uninformed to marginalize their contributions. Student veterans may go as far as to conceal their veteran status for fear of being labeled, misunderstood or persecuted (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Others may be managing trauma from military service, which could affect their behavior in establishing peer relationships. Some also have difficulty making or re-establishing relationships with civilians, noting this is a very stressful process (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014).

The college environment adds to these connection challenges. Student veterans come from a culture based on solidarity, teamwork and a group sense of purpose (Danelo, 2014). In contrast, college campuses are inherently designed for individual cultural preferences (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). This dynamic both benefits and challenges student veterans. Discipline and task-focused performance traits they learn in military service help them succeed academically. Their lack of tolerance for civilian peers that do not share their commitment creates tension between them. In effect, these individuals move from an environment where everyone understands them to new

surroundings where they may feel completely alien. As mentioned earlier, the civilian community could intensify this divide by stereotyping veterans negatively, without any firsthand knowledge of their backgrounds (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014). Recent studies indicate that student veterans receive less support than their civilian peers (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013) and that the support they do receive may not be enough to stave off the effects of psychological challenges they face.

In noting these points, to support this population, programs to assist student veterans in their transition to higher education have increased across the country since the Post-9/11 GI Bill's inception (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). However, despite increased resources, there is an information gap amongst colleges and universities on the experiences of veterans (Osborne, 2014), in part because so few faculty, administrators and students have firsthand experiences with the military. The roles of each military member are not readily understood by educators, as many are unfamiliar with military culture (Cole, 2014). Also, as student veterans transition into higher education, they experience challenges with a new, unstructured environment that is decidedly different from the highly structured environments that are common in the military (Osborne, 2014). Their military backgrounds could be a cause of some of this tension; however, the absence of these accounts in the literature creates questions that need answers.

Because most civilians associate military service with violence (Cole, 2014), it may be difficult to see the diversity in backgrounds that veterans have outside of combat experiences. This dynamic could complicate student veterans' ability to make connections outside their peer group (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014), affecting their ability to feel comfortable in the campus community (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Also, a divergence between the discipline and structure of the military and the looser structure of higher education also challenges the ability of student veterans to

complete their academic responsibilities by being largely self-sufficient. Information gaps could affect an institution's ability to support student veterans from the beginning of their experience, which by most accounts is a critical point in their transition (Naphan & Elliott, 2015).

While it is relevant to understand the military's roles and the framework that defines them, being able to delineate multiple perspectives within military culture is important, particularly when discussing student veterans and their military backgrounds (Osborne, 2014). Attempts to characterize all veterans as having the same backgrounds could lead to confusion and isolation. As veterans leave military service, military culture remains with the student veteran, but to what extent? Academic literature is unclear on this topic. To date, some of the most visible effects of those experiences on student veterans are the traumas they manage as they leave military service.

Trauma Effects on Student Veterans

As discussed, student veterans manage multiple challenges in their transition from the military to institutions of higher education. These traumatic events present unique challenges for the student veteran population. Some areas of focus that merit further investigation are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), hypervigilance and high-risk behaviors. These challenges are exacerbated in the student veteran population when faculty, students and administrators do not understand the hardships some of these individuals have faced, attempting to connect to individuals still managing a tremendous burden (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011). Studies have shown that one in three student veterans have one or more mental health issues that have persisted for two years or more (Elliott, 2015). Understanding these traumas could assist in deeper learning about some of the potential impacts of military backgrounds on student veterans' ability to deal with these challenges while attempting to progress through college.

Trauma and High-Risk Behaviors. Many student veterans continue to manage the aftereffects of their military service in ways that hinder their ability to move through their college experience successfully. They also bring more additional physical and emotional challenges to the college environment than their civilian counterparts. Studies estimate that twenty percent of recent combat veterans (those defined as having served in wartime and experienced combat) are diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression. Nineteen percent have experienced some form of traumatic brain injury (TBI) (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). While these traumas are visible enough to elicit attention from higher education support systems, the military experiences that lie beneath them can remain hidden.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety-based condition that can develop after experiencing traumatic events where physical harm occurred or could occur (Psychology Today, 2016). Usually, PTSD is linked to a veteran being in an active combat zone, or on deployment in a constant state of vigilance. While every service has members with PTSD, the highest concentrations are amongst Army and the Marine Corps (Nyaronga & Toma, 2015). Younger veterans (in their early twenties) exhibit higher rates of PTSD than older individuals. Divorced student veterans registered higher rates of PTSD than single individuals. African-Americans report more instances of PTSD than other races or ethnicities (Nyaronga & Toma, 2015).

Deployed military personnel exhibit higher potential for PTSD due to the hardships associated with the duty: Separation from loved ones, a potentially unsafe environment, a high operations tempo, and constant adaptation to new situations (Kimble, Fleming, & Bennion, 2013). Many of these individuals have seen the wounds of war firsthand; over 60% of combat veterans in another study reported seeing colleagues with battle injuries, missing limbs, and situations of

torture (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, Implications of postramatic stress among military-affiliated and civilian students, 2012).

Sadly, as these individuals return from the battlefield, their challenges do not end. Combat-related stress, paired with disconnects in managing their transitions, can be a steep road. Triggers can occur from seemingly insignificant stimuli, such as a car backfiring or a news report about the military (Nyaronga & Toma, 2015). Despite the cause of PTSD or the triggers associated with bringing about an incident, this condition can impact a person's capacity to work or engage socially, making any human interaction challenging. In higher education, these effects can definitively impact belonging, performance, and persistence.

This condition has been linked to student veteran class truancy, late assignments and increased propensity to fail course exams (Bryan, Bryan, Kinkson, Jr., Bichrest, & Ahern, 2014). These students are also more likely to earn lower grades during their first-year transition, which may connect to increased attrition rates. Recent studies linked PTSD to lower academic marks in a 400-student sample, even when controlling for gender and age (Bryan, Bryan, Kinkson, Jr., Bichrest, & Ahern, 2014). Being a deployed female student veteran exponentially increases the likelihood of PTSD or another mental disorder (Nyaronga & Toma, 2015).

A recent national study of 528 student veterans indicated that 46% of respondents suffered from significant symptoms of PTSD, with 46% of that total thinking about suicide (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). A recent study of over 600 veterans indicated almost half reported suicidal thoughts, with twenty percent having a plan to complete the act (McCaslin, Leach, Herbst, & Armstrong, 2013). As student veterans are at a higher risk of suicide than their civilian peers with or without PTSD being a factor (Iverson & Anderson, 2013), effective strategies for prevention are needed.

These afflictions, if unchecked, will have a significant effect on the student veteran's ability to acclimate to the college environment, to say nothing of their ability to continue to live a healthy life. Student veterans with PTSD may also need to navigate an emerging challenge that stems from the positive and negative aspects of their training: hypervigilance.

Hypervigilance. Many student veterans returning from deployments exhibit dysfunctional behaviors that cause them to be guarded constantly, even in safe situations (Kimble, Fleming, & Bennion, 2013). This behavior is labeled by the DSM–5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) as hypervigilance. Connections to hypervigilance begin in military training, as soldiers develop the instincts of vigilance, as well as other skills and abilities used to survive the trauma of battle. Some of these behaviors do not translate equitably to other settings, as discussed in Kelly, Smith, Fox, & Wheeler (2013):

1. Unrelenting Vigilance: Military members face constant physical and mental pressure from the need to be aware of the danger in combat environments. These traits can negatively affect veterans in civilian settings where there is no threat, but there are stimulants that will trigger a threat response (i.e., loud noises, large crowds of people, rooms with non-secured exit points)
2. Trust: Military personnel are trained to trust each other with their lives. This bond can then affect their ability to make significant connections to non-veterans.
3. Mission Focus. Goals and objectives for soldiers are clearly understood before any unit leaves to tackle a mission. In civilian society, that sort of clarity is in short supply. Role confusion and shifting priorities abound in work situations, family environments, and personal needs. Veterans can find this kind of variance challenging to handle.

4. Decision Making. Orders in the military are followed without question. This linear process is intended to promote mission success and preserve personnel and equipment safety, in combat or non-combat environments. When the environment moves to civilian society, this clarity of direction fades away for most of a veteran's everyday life, replaced by discussion and consensus for seemingly smaller tasks, which can create tension.
5. Emotional Control. Military members must train to manage their emotional reactions to combat stress to keep themselves safe. The aftereffects of these experiences, in many instances, lead to veterans self-medicating to continue to numb their pain, either with alcohol or drugs. These behaviors impact transition to the civilian environment, as veterans may have adverse emotional or physical reactions to intense interactions with family or friends.

Military acculturation partially centers around threat assessment. Many service members are educated on how to enter a room and label threats quickly while determining an appropriate response to mitigate the risk. These impulses are difficult to curtail when not needed in the civilian world (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Combat stress could contribute towards some service members experiencing hypervigilance in seemingly safe, non-threatening environments. The military lifestyle reinforces vigilance in each of its members through its culture, particularly when soldiers deploy to combat zones (Kimble, Fleming, & Bennion, 2013). For these reasons, hypervigilance in the veteran setting is unique from other instances outside this population.

PTSD and military deployment (non-combat) are predictors of hypervigilance (Kimble, Fleming, & Bennion, 2013). While there is some debate as to which of these stimuli is a higher contributing factor, studies reveal an even more assured predictor of hypervigilance is a

deployment to an active combat zone. Some attest that veterans use hypervigilance as a coping method to endure the constant threat of death, a situation that may not abate upon returning home.

Hypervigilance creates challenges in many interactions critical to success in higher education. Student veterans with hypervigilance experience challenges in their everyday lives, even in completing day-to-day tasks. While vigilant behavior is intended to reduce anxiety in a high-stakes environment, hypervigilance in the civilian setting increases it (Kimble, Fleming, & Bennion, 2013). Hypervigilance, left unchecked, can manifest in violent behavior towards a partner or spouse (Klaw, Demers, & Da Silva, 2016). Navigating a vast, unfamiliar campus could create several seemingly precarious situations both in and out of the classroom, to say nothing of the needed interactions with faculty, students or staff that increase student success. The steps taken to deal with veteran hypervigilance are in conflict with the behaviors required to become part of the campus collective.

For individuals suffering from hypervigilance, intervention would seem to be more critical. These behaviors would seem to enhance the student veteran's perceptions that they are alone on campus, complicating their engagement with students, faculty and the school. The question becomes, how to engage and address the situation? While scholars have begun to connect some of the causes of hypervigilance in student veterans (Kimble, Fleming, & Bennion, 2013), there are questions as to how these behaviors affect each student veteran, and how their military backgrounds could still impact those behaviors. A lack of narrative accounts from student veterans deepens this question.

Violence Toward Partners, Peers and Oneself. Student veterans find some social support influences helpful to adjusting to civilian life. Groups of individuals that help facilitate this adjustment are immediate family, other student veterans, and willing agents of the institution

(DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Despite these intentions, recent research has revealed that student veterans can sometimes hurt those closest to them.

Student veterans with PTSD have reported elevated levels of intimate partner abuse (Klaw, Demers, & Da Silva, 2016), defined as both psychological and physical violence toward their significant others. Klaw, Demers, & Da Silva (2016), found that two-thirds of student veterans in a recent study verbally abused their partners. More than half the surveyed student veterans reported moderate to high levels of anger, linked to deployments, PTSD and combat stress. Other surveys reported that student veterans suffering from PTSD were significantly likely to be involved in a physical fight during their college experience with a stranger (Widome, et al., 2011) or to have carried a weapon within the past year (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014).

While social support has been shown to reduce these behaviors (Romero, Riggs, & Ruggero, 2015), the researchers suggested that military training and culture, as they emphasize a hypermasculine environment, could be contributing factors to violent acts against others or oneself. However, this is another example where a lack of detail on the scope and depth of military backgrounds does not assist in substantiating this point. As student veterans have limited social circles to manage their challenges, some turn to alcohol for support.

Alcohol Use. Student veterans have turned to alcohol to self-medicate some of their stressors (Grossbard, et al., 2014). Increased alcohol usage has become a common avoidant coping strategy for many student veterans (Grossbard, et al., 2014 & Miller, et al., 2016). High-risk drinking (defined as five or more drinks in a sitting) was measured in student veterans afflicted with PTSD in recent studies. Of over 1,600 student veterans surveyed, 72% of respondents indicated they drank alcohol in the past month. One in three students in this study also reported high-risk drinking at regular intervals (Grossbard, et al., 2014). In another study, student veterans

used drugs and alcohol to cope with nightmares, depression, or to feel comfortable in social situations (Cucciare, Darrow, & Weingardt, 2011). Also, student veterans returning from deployment also consume alcohol and smoke cigarettes at higher rates than those that have not deployed (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2012). Military personnel are two times as likely to be heavy drinkers as their civilian peers (Cucciare, Darrow, & Weingardt, 2011). Finally, while student veterans acknowledge their drinking behaviors, many perceive that binge drinking on-campus is higher than what they currently consume, both for student veterans and non-veterans (Miller, et al., 2016).

It appears that these increased rates of alcohol consumption could stem from a need to cope with military experiences. Depression connects to PTSD in recent studies (Bryan, Bryan, Kinkson, Jr., Bichrest, & Ahern, 2014); alcohol could be used to cope with these hardships. Nightmares, stress management and alleviating social anxiety were also cited as reasons for increased alcohol consumption. These reasons are a clear contrast from civilian heavy drinkers, who largely participate for social motivations and novelty (Miller, et al., 2016). Experts believe these behaviors connect to a need for veterans to self-medicate against traumas built up from military experiences as well as attempting to reach equilibrium in their new environments.

While PTSD links to increases in alcohol usage, research has also connected increased drinking to student veterans who do not suffer from PTSD (Miller, et al., 2016), suggesting there is a component of military experience that is affecting the student veteran after their transition to college. This possibility should also prompt college administrators and faculty to ask more in-depth questions of how severely military backgrounds affect student veterans. Most literature concerning this population does not qualify the impact of military service on the individual, only the effects of transition or persistence. To best identify new strategies for student veteran support,

it is critical to begin to understand current practices and student engagement methodologies that can be used to work with this population.

Understanding Military Experience and its Effects

Given the increasing numbers of student veterans attending colleges and universities, challenges in supporting this population will continue to grow for stakeholders. A single approach to supporting these students is not optimal (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Consequently, the high-risk behaviors and traumas student veterans are experiencing (Grossbard, et al., 2014) make understanding their situations even more critical. As mentioned earlier, these discussions first occurred in academic literature over seventy years ago (Donahue & Tibbitts, 1946), and in the present day, the literature still does not reveal a depth of understanding regarding the military backgrounds of student veterans.

To work towards better insight, multicultural competency in student engagement should include an understanding of military experience and the effects it can have on this population (Romero, Riggs, & Ruggero, 2015). Despite many scholars corroborating this need (e.g., Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Brown & Gross, 2011; Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2012; Kim & Cole, 2013), there have been limited inquiries into the experiences student veterans have in military service, and how those experiences could affect the college experience. In examining student veteran physical, cognitive and social challenges, scholars are studying behaviors that come from military culture, without studying how the culture informs those behaviors.

Academic literature regularly discusses how veterans transition to college (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2012; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). While research into these transitions have identified that military experiences do have aftereffects

the student must manage to succeed in college, the common thread in the academic literature is that there are no distinctions given to individual military experiences and backgrounds. For example, Rumann and Hamrick (2010) and Schiavone and Gentry (2014) discuss situations where students veterans must disenroll from college to fulfill a deployment commitment, then later re-enroll in college to progress towards degree completion. In both studies, scholars suggested that student veterans needed to reconcile the differences between military culture and college culture so the student could continue in college. However, despite indicating that some military experiences could prompt a reexamination of individual social identities amongst some student veterans in the transition process, Rumann and Hamrick (2010) do not go further to investigate what those potential differences amongst student veterans could be. The student veteran, in effect, is left to make that decision themselves, it would seem.

In summary, while student veterans stand to enter institutions of higher education in greater numbers each year, the literature discussing their engagement and college experiences is focused towards combat trauma, high-risk behavior, transition, and scattered connections to social groups and faculty. The literature gap regarding student veteran military experiences robs practitioners of the cultural contexts needed to fully support this population as it moves through the college experience. The intention of this study was to uncover narratives that could provide information regarding some of these military experiences, and how those narratives could influence a student veteran's college experience. These narratives may provide useful contexts for practitioners that work with these students in various university roles.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study of student veteran military experiences and their potential influences in college life consists of qualitative research informed by narrative inquiry. Qualitative research is developed from researchers asking questions about individuals' life experiences, cultural and social contexts that they lived within, and the ways they interpreted their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The intentions behind these questions stem from interest in learning how people make sense of their worlds, in their own words. This research process was inductive, gathering information to build concepts and theories, rather than a positivist research process that relies on a priori knowledge.

Narrative Study Design

This study is grounded in constructivism, which creates meaning through social interaction and the interpretation of experiences (Creswell, 2009). In honoring the purpose of constructivism, to describe, understand, and interpret phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I utilize narratives and stories from student veterans. Narratives constitute the oldest form of sense-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Individuals use narratives to reassess fragmented, chaotic or misunderstood memories before narrating them (Riessman, 2008). These studies presume that a person has a life that can be studied, comprised of a self-aware person and their lived experiences (Denzin, 2011).

Narrative inquiry established a framework to collect, organize and analyze a large amount of information from interviews. This research methodology established a three-dimensional space to unpack the social and personal world: interaction (social behaviors between individuals), continuity (past, present and future, in terms of time), and situation (the place where interaction and continuity occurs) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To investigate an experience is to evaluate

it against each of these three dimensions to gain the richest possible description of the narrative in both context and time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

These aspects of narrative inquiry connect well to student veterans making sense of their military experiences across all three dimensions, as college students make meaning based on social interactions, specific points in time, or specific physical spaces in their collegiate lives (Renn & Reason, 2013). Interviews will be semi-structured to assist in developing comparability of data across individuals, and to focus on military backgrounds and person to person interactions.

Qualitative research informed by narrative inquiry will enable the accounts from several interviews (and the stories told in those interviews) to mesh into a single story. In some cases, the experiences student veterans had during military service are traumatic; many individuals bear the aftereffects of these experiences well after they leave military service (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Studies have focused on the traumas that come from these experiences, but not the experiences themselves. The ability for interviewees to provide context and depth in their stories makes this an appropriate framework to explore these phenomena, which could help to address a literature gap about the potential effects of veteran identity in higher education (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). In this way, this dissertation also connects to Hagopian's (2000) work that discussed Vietnam veterans who were invited into college classrooms to share their wartime experiences in the 1980s and 1990s (Hagopian, 2000). These sessions were intended to provide student narrative accounts of what occurred during the war, from people who experienced it firsthand. Students could then use these accounts to supplement their research, giving a depth to their inquiry that would not be possible without these stories. This study intended to use a similar process to obtain the military narratives of student veterans as they make meaning of the college experience today. As a reminder, the research questions guiding this narrative inquiry are:

1. How do student veterans describe their college experiences?
2. How do student veterans understand their college experiences in relation to their military experiences?

As student veterans discussed their military experiences, I asked interview questions designed to ascertain the extent of their interactions with other individuals (and who those individual are), the timing of those interactions (past or present), and the situation (place) those experiences occured. These protocols are listed in Appendix 1. The effects of military experience can be significant on student veterans in college (Bauman, 2013). The participants in this study were able to discuss their interactions within these three dimensions.

Qualitative research designates the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), a role I fulfill in this project. I also fulfill the role of storyteller, in retelling the accounts of student veterans who I interviewed in this study. Narrative inquiries involve a storyteller and an interviewer. Together, these two parties develop a narrative as the interviewer and storyteller acknowledge specific times, places, people, and demographic traits that reflect substantive moments and experiences taken from the storyteller's real-life experience (Denzin, 2011). By recording the narrative and retelling it to others, the interviewer is an important component of telling the story to any future reader as their ability to interpret information becomes part of the story. Next, I will discuss the interview process.

Interview Process

Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection. This collection method was intended to conduct each interview with specific foci as dictated by my research questions. I used an interview guide of structured questions; however, as each interview developed, follow-up questions were added to gain additional insight and context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Flexibility during the interview process allowed responses to situations or events

that manifested in the interviews that were unplanned or unexpected. Examples of this were changing perceptions or interpretations of an event by the interviewee, or an additional question that came to mind during the sessions. Interviews were conducted in dedicated, private spaces, one on one with each interviewee.

Informed consent was obtained with Michigan State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to recruiting participants for this project. Research participants were presented with the purpose, methods, and durations of the project, with any potential risks noted. Participants were told they could withdraw consent to participate at any time. Each participant's identity was confidentially maintained. Pseudonyms were used to name specific narrative accounts in the study. All participants were given the ability to review their transcripts after the interview (both the raw audio as well as the printed transcripts) to ensure the content created was consistent with their recollection of each interview.

Although narrative inquiry studies often do not have tightly scheduled data collection schedules nor highly structured data collection protocols, because I worked with a student population that had multiple commitments (e.g., work, family, potential active military), I modified narrative inquiry protocols to be more accommodating (which is consistent with a basic qualitative study). For example, although narrative inquiry studies usually involved extensive hours of informal and formal conversation and even observation, I relied on semi-structured interviews to ensure each interaction was focused in a defined timeframe.

The first interview session with each participant was in-person and roughly 60 minutes in length. The purpose of the first interview was to establish rapport with each interviewee and focus on topics related to the student veteran's impressions of the college experience (research question 1). Some examples of interview questions I used were:

1. Autobiographical History (College Experiences): In this next set of questions, I'd like to know more about your thoughts and experiences in college. To the extent you're comfortable, I'd like to focus on your experiences with campus populations as well as things you've experienced as you pursue your degree/certificate.

- **a.** Can you describe what a week in college is like for you, both in terms of the things you do and how you feel about doing them?
  - **a.** How much time do you spend on campus per day?
    1. In terms of a timeline, what does a day look like?
  - **a.** What kinds of interactions do you have with your faculty?
  - **b.** What kinds of interactions do you have with other students?
  - **c.** What are your interactions like with student veterans?
  - **d.** What are your interactions like with civilian students?
  - **e.** What kinds of interactions do you have with college/university administrators?
  - f. Have you had challenges interacting with any of these campus constituencies? What are examples of these challenges?

The second interview occurred after I transcribed and coded each participant's first interview. In the second interview, which also was 60 minutes in length, I focused on the following areas:

1. Revisiting the narratives in the first interview to ensure understanding
2. Military experiences' effects on the meaning-making experience in college for each student veteran.

Some examples of interview questions I used were:

1. Discussing Potential Military Background Effects: Reflecting on the previous interview we conducted, I'd like to refresh your memory on some of the things you said regarding your college experiences. I'd then like to ask you about your feelings as to if your military background had any effect on those experiences and/or your interactions with other people on campus.

- **a.** In our last interview, we discussed what a week in your life as a college student was like. Reflecting on that conversation I would like you to tell me if and how your military background shapes your student experience.
  - **g.** When you interact with faculty, what are the similarities and/or differences that you see, in reflection to previous experiences you have in your military background?
    - **1.** If you have had tension with a faculty member in the past, do you believe your military background was an influence, positively or negatively?
  - **h.** When you interact with students, what are the similarities and/or differences that you see, in reflection to previous experiences you have in your military background?

1. Are their differences in interactions with civilian students versus other student veterans? If so, what are they?
    1. Do you believe your military background was a factor in interactions with civilian students?
2. Can you describe a point of tension you have had with a student outside of class?
    1. Do you believe your military background was a factor in that interaction?

i. When you have interacted with college/university administrators, do you believe your military background affected those interactions?

b. Have you felt validated or marginalized for being a student veteran at your college or university? Can you give examples of this?

These narrative interviews had two phases: the narration phase and the conversation phase (Kim, 2016). In the narration phase, the interviewer is an active listener and observer, relying on the participant to drive this portion of the session. In the conversation phase, questions from the interviewer directed the session, allowing the interviewer to be an active co-constructor of knowledge rather than a bystander. This process was in step with qualitative research strategies that involve data collection representing a large group of ideas and perspectives in small sample sizes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because student veterans internalize many of their military experiences and challenges (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), a person-to-person interview in a dedicated space was an appropriate route to put the participant at ease.

Interview data were digitally recorded during interviews for later transcription. The constructed narratives from these interviews connected the experiences of student veterans into a sequence that was important during data analysis to look for themes and context (Riessman, 2008). While narrative interviews were the primary method of data collection, other data collection methods were also used. I asked student veterans brief informational questions through email as part of the participant selection process (gender, military affiliation, time in service, etc.). Also, I

took field and interview notes during the interview process to document my impressions and acknowledge my positionality as the study progressed.

Recruitment Plan. My initial goal was to identify and interview 10 student veterans through interaction with designated campus administrators (student veteran support officers) and student organizations that support veterans (i.e., college Student Veterans of America chapters). Thirteen students ultimately participated. These individuals possess specific characteristics within their college and military backgrounds:

1. These individuals all attend the same university
2. These individuals are undergraduate students
3. These individuals are either current or former enlisted military members, at two to eight years of active duty experience
4. These individuals have served in the U.S. Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, or a National Guard component of these services

The final participant group is listed in table 1 in summary form.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant Gender (self-reported)	9 men, 4 women
Service Backgrounds	4 Air Force, 2 Navy, 2 Marine Corps, 1 Army, 1 Army Reserve, 2 Army National Guard
Time in Military Service (low/high)	3 years, 3 months to 21 years, 9 months
Position Specialties	Infantry (2), munitions, intelligence, command and control, aircraft maintenance, nuclear weapons maintenance, linguist, accounting/finance, biomedical equipment technician, mobile missile team, military police

This sample size is consistent with a focus on collecting life stories, which could involve a more in-depth interview process (Kim J.-H. , 2016). This process is an effort to create a connection between a framework to tell a story and the events that would comprise that story (Kim J.-H. , 2016). These narratives contribute to addressing the dearth of firsthand knowledge of the student veteran experience in higher education.

In qualitative research, information-rich cases can provide the specific experiences needed to investigate phenomena with a small research sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These parameters support a need to pursue a purposeful sampling strategy, targeting participants who provide rich descriptions of their military narratives, their experiences in higher education, and how those military experiences influence their ability to make meaning in college. Purposeful sampling is also the ideal method to utilize narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008).

The student veteran participants provided the information-rich experiences needed to strengthen this research project. Purposeful, convenience sampling was utilized to ensure a healthy roster of participants and an information-rich dataset (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The location for this study was a large midwestern university in Michigan. This selection was appropriate for several reasons. As previously discussed, many colleges and universities look to offer resources and support to student veterans in ways that encourage their transition, engagement, and persistence (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Coupled with this increase, the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency created the *Michigan Veteran-Friendly Schools Program* in 2015 (DeVol, 2015) to recognize colleges and universities for their efforts and to signal student veterans about institutions that could better support their academic needs. Given the specific needs of student veterans, this clarity was useful in selecting a university for study.

Colleges and universities are evaluated in seven areas for veteran-friendly certification (Agency, 2018):

1. Established a process for identification of current student veterans.
2. Veteran-specific website.
3. Active student-operated veterans club or association.
4. Veteran-specific career services, resources, advising and/or outcome monitoring.
5. On-campus veteran's coordinator and/or designated staff point of contact.
6. A system to evaluate and award credit based on prior military training and experience.
7. Monitoring and evaluation of student veteran academic retention, transfer and graduation rates.

One institution in Michigan that has reached "Gold" status (compliance with six of these seven criteria) was the university chosen to conduct this research. Veteran-friendly criteria are significant in supporting student veterans both in transition and in college (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The decision to select only one institution was appropriate because of the potential variance

in student veteran resources from institution to institution. That resource imbalance could have influenced participant narratives in ways that were beyond the intended scope of this study.

Institutions offering support at "Gold" levels improved the viability of locating student veterans (of the designated background for the study) who were comfortable in discussing their college and military experiences. Examples of appropriate research sites in Michigan, given their reported student veteran populations, are Michigan State University (626 student veterans in 2017-2018 reporting), Western Michigan University (769 student veterans), or Eastern Michigan University (839 student veterans) (Agency, 2018). One of these institutions recently expanded their services, to include the recent establishment of a local chapter of a national veteran's peer advisor program. These program expansions suggested an increased focus on student veteran engagement. Therefore, that institution was an appropriate location to enter the field for this research project.

Narrative Analysis and Coding Protocols

All interviews were examined holistically, in efforts to understand the characteristics of human action for each student veteran, a process known as narrative cognition (Polkinghorne, 1995). This process produced an understanding of behaviors through a categorization of events, actions, and happenings (Kim J.-H. , 2016) that could then be narratively analyzed by synthesizing the data into a clear account (Polkinghorne, 1995). One overarching narrative connects all the data, but also expands on the data's meaning in a way that would not be possible by analyzing every piece separately. One linear narrative is more easily understood and accepted by the reader (Kim, 2016), because narrative cognition provides explanatory knowledge of why a person behaves a certain way (Polkinghorne, 1995), which in turn helps others understand their own actions.

To identify characteristics and trends in the data, I adopted a coding scheme to identify and annotate commonalities and themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This table is listed in Appendix 3. This process ensured I had a firm grasp of my data during all points in the study. Participant narratives, while very different in some instances, had nearly universal themes that were coded to determine the meaning of pieces of life experience that were shared between people having different experiences. These common themes connected to the referenced three-dimensional inquiry space utilized in my research methodology and in my interview questions: interaction (social behaviors between individuals), continuity (past, present, and future, in terms of time), and situation (the place where interaction and continuity occurs) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I analyzed how each participant narrated their perspectives on the college experience, new themes manifested, and I adapted my coding schemes. Narratives from my participants' past experiences provided a foundation to understand their current college lives through analogies as well as how human behaviors can change over time (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Trustworthiness and Validity. As the sole researcher in this study, I was the primary instrument in data collection, analysis, and reporting. I accomplished this work truthfully and holistically while continuing to reflect upon and acknowledge my positionality and biases in this study. Pursuing this path was a foundation for ensuring the validity of this work (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To focus this strategy further, I utilized member checking to solicit feedback from interview transcripts and findings to ensure that the data were reflective of each participant's intent. Taking this step ensured each participant could respond to their words, also adding additional context for their experiences. Member checking occurred throughout the research project. Each participant received a copy of the complete audio recording of both their interviews as well as a

written copy of both transcripts via email. I received their feedback via email as well. Finally, I used rich, thick descriptions of these experiences (Creswell, 2009) to both strengthen the data reporting and enable researchers to use this work in terms of transferability to future studies of student veteran experiences in higher education. These rich descriptions are reflected in each participant account discussed in this dissertation.

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers work to understand how humans interpret their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This interpretation is made possible through the gathering of data from individuals that reveal the holistic nature of life. Qualitative researchers undertake this process to make meaning of the human condition. Because I focused on a population I identify with, it was important for me to reflect on my positionality and how it shapes my research.

As a researcher, I understand my place in the meaning-making process. As the sole researcher of this project, my role was to investigate identified tensions in the research literature that I have studied on this topic, resulting in the creation of research questions for study. As I researched and interviewed in various ways to obtain the data needed to begin answering these research questions, my role had great significance to the project.

I am a former Air Force officer and a current student veteran. I still identify with my military experience, to the point I still feel as if I behave in some ways as I did on active duty. I also developed my passion for teaching and learning through my military service, as I had multiple opportunities to be in a classroom environment, training both subordinates and colleagues. These experiences shaped an intermingling between my military experiences and my life in educational environments that continues today. The connection between those parts of my life is what drove my passion for this research.

My background impacts the project in various ways. My interactions with student veterans were affected by my previous experiences. Each participant knew that I was a veteran before our interactions. That understanding prompted verbal and non-verbal responses to the questions I asked that implied they were comfortable with me. However, I was cautious to still approach this project with the investigative eye of a researcher, versus a former colleague in arms. In some cases, I asked additional questions to ensure I understood their perspectives on their own stories. This decision was a critical step to ensure that my military experience did not interpret my participants' narratives.

In reflecting on my military experiences in comparison to those I interviewed, there are clear differences. All the individuals I interviewed came from the enlisted ranks, a path I did not take. I also interviewed individuals from all of the four military services (Marines, Air Force, Army, Navy). These choices were important contributions to the richness of the data sample as well as in learning of experiences that differed from my own. I have never served in combat, was never deployed outside the United States, and do not suffer from a combat injury. Different military services, some say, have their own subculture (Cole, 2014; Strom, et al., 2012). These experiences were shared in some of the participant narratives. As I have limited experiences with individuals outside the Air Force, it was important to acknowledge any shortcomings I experienced in unpacking these accounts and coding research data. It was critically important that, as I processed these accounts, these differences served as reminders that will assist in guarding against biases.

Boundaries of the Study

While this study's goal was to investigate how student veterans make meaning of their college experiences (and how their military experiences impact this dynamic), there are limitations

to this work. While I intended to increase the number of narrative accounts of military experience in the student engagement literature, those experiences are the singular, specific journeys of my participants. As I stated in my literature review, and as readers will see in the participant narratives, military experiences are not constant from member to member. As such, one cannot take this work as an example for all student veterans, merely a point of comparison to other studies in the literature, and future studies. I hope this research will inspire others to learn more about the military experiences of student veterans as this population continues to be studied. While this work also links to student engagement processes, this connection should not be inferred as all-inclusive, used to justify any programming strategy an administrator or another stakeholder may take in attempting to increase student veteran engagement.

Finally, as student veterans discuss their narratives, their traumas and challenges may become part of this research project, consistent with studies I have reviewed previously on PTSD, TBI and combat-related injury. It would not be appropriate to analyze these challenges in these capacities, as that is beyond the scope of this work. These narratives are intended to convey military experiences on a scale that aspires to go beyond a single trauma or event. Expanding the understanding of student veteran experiences will assist practitioners in supporting them, both now and in the future.

Summary

This study has been developed to learn and tell some of the stories of student veterans as they navigate the college experience, potentially impacted by their military experiences. Collected at an institution that is supportive of student veterans and their specific needs, these narratives, by being developed and synthesized into a master narrative, can then be used to enlighten others as to new understandings of the influences of military experiences on student veterans in college, and

potentially affirm these experiences as a social identity. This is one of many potential usages of the narratives unearthed in this study. Ultimately, this research can be used to strengthen the depth of information available on this population of students, and how practitioners and researchers may investigate further.

Chapter 4: Student Veteran Narratives

The central purpose driving this research project was to understand more of the narratives of student veterans as they moved through their military experiences and make meaning of their lives in college. To uncover these pieces, I asked these individuals questions about their motivations for joining the military as well as their experiences both individually and in relation to other military members. As they transitioned out of military service, I asked questions about their decision to leave service, and their feelings about that decision. As student veteran narratives move forward to college, I asked questions about their college experiences as well as their impressions of how their military experiences could have influenced their college experiences.

The rich student narratives below are provided to identify each individual in the study as students and as veterans. Understanding veterans' perspectives will assist practitioners in their work supporting this population by improving their military cultural competencies, which can increase their credibility with veterans (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016; Molina & Morse, 2017) . Table 2 introduces the student veterans in this project in summary.

Table 2: Student Veteran Participants

Participant	Branch	Age	Time in Service	Specialty
Bobbi Jo	Navy	34	9 years	nuclear reactor tech
Carlos	Marines	28	4 years	infantry
Chandler	Air Force	26	6 years	aircraft maintenance
Dan	Army Reserve	23	active in reserves (5 years)	military police/detainee operations
John	Army NG	31	active in reserves (10 years)	mobile missile team
Marie	Air Force	29	3 years, 3 months	nuclear weapons tech
Mark	Air Force	28	5 years, 8 months	linguist
Michael	Army	23	3 years, 20 weeks	Infantry
Miranda	Army NG	22	active in reserves (4 years)	biomed equipment technician
Rich	Air Force	41	21 years, 9 months	munitions
Stacy	Marines	28	3 years, 10 months	accounting/finance
Steve	Coast Guard	30	4 years	command and control
Travis	Navy	28	6 years, in reserves now	intelligence analyst

Bobbi Jo

Bobbi Jo is 34 years old. Her decision to serve partially came from a need to be beneficial to society. She also did not like the life she was living at the time. She reflected on negative, stagnate relationships in her life at that time, and thought, "I wanted a new face. I wanted to move forward in a better direction. And I just kind of left everything behind and moved forward with my life."

In contrast, Bobbi Jo loved boot camp. She said, "It was kind of like a vacation, because I was getting paid to work out all day and just eat, sleep, work out and do a job." She took pride in every activity, flag details in particular. When she encountered challenges, she attempted to work harder and show even more focus, to affirm her commitment to being a good example for herself and others. Her lack of self-confidence compounded these challenges. The structure of the environment, as she reflected on it, enhanced her lack of confidence by discouraging her from explaining decisions or the rationale behind them. These challenges also began a disturbing trend of Bobbi Jo feeling marginalized for her gender. Bobbi Jo mentioned there were multiple incidents during her training where she was designated to be in charge of a task or activity, only to have her squad follow the directions of her assistant leader, who was male. Despite these challenges, Bobbi Jo worked to be the best naval seaman she could be. "I'm going to try to show with my actions that I'm not, you know, the joe dirtbag you think I am," she said.

Bobbi Jo attempted to make connections to other trainees whenever possible to ease her transition into each role, develop comfort within the group and increase her potential for success. This stance carried over into her training as a nuclear reactor technician, and while it did enable her to learn faster, the meager amount of individuals in her technical training class (five) capped her ability to make relationships at that time in her military career.

Bobbi Jo's transition to her duty position was a lengthy one. She was in training for roughly two years. Only thirty trainees attempted the class each cycle. The trainee failure rate was fifty percent. Bobbi Jo took to the work immediately. "I really liked the academic challenges of it," she said. Her sense of accomplishment came at a price. Socially, it was tough to connect to other trainees in the program because there was only one other woman in her training class. As Bobbi Jo remembers her interactions with this individual, she remembers feeling as if every interaction with her was a competition to see who was the best. When she was in a leadership role over male trainees, she was routinely ignored. The power imbalance continued to affect her confidence, despite her exceptional technical acumen for her work.

Bobbi Jo's role on the aircraft carrier involved responsibility for all the equipment that support the nuclear reactors that provide power to the entire ship. She was part of a small team of five people. The responsibility required of her team garnered them credibility on the ship, both in terms of the respect other personnel gave them as well as the autonomy they were given to focus on their work. Any error or accident could have drastic repercussions. Bobbi Jo said, "In my department, it's always a combat readiness environment because we're operating a nuclear reactor. If something happens, it could change the face of the whole world because this is one of the greatest war machines in the world. Even something small that just makes the public not trust the Navy can affect the entire balance of everything in the world."

An even more significant challenge for Bobbi Jo was to succeed in a career field and an environment where few females worked. Despite the respect given to nuclear electronics technicians as a group, women were commonly treated with limited respect. Disrespect amongst her peers created hurdles, mainly when Bobbi Jo was tasked to direct her male counterparts, which in some instances would ignore her directions, but consent to the same tasking from her less

qualified, male assistant. Also, Bobbi Jo noted there was an air of competition that undergirded interactions with other women in her career field, amplified by her decisions to keep to herself after work hours and not socialize with her peers. This dynamic continued throughout her time in the Navy.

Being the only female with a child further increased the divide from her colleagues. Bobbi Jo continually navigated the challenges of being a single parent and meeting the demands of working on the carrier. When her ship went out for sea duty, she placed considerable faith in her friends and family to look after her daughter, sometimes for months at a time, including combat environments. On every voyage, she was in a constant state of combat readiness, ready for any potential emergency, yet always mindful of what she left behind at home. Despite the hardships she endured, she loved her time in the Navy and felt her work served a much higher purpose. She was able to deal with the separations because, "There's a bigger picture than me."

Bobbi Jo's work enabled her to see much of the world outside the United States, a period that enlightened her to different cultures. Some of what she learned, in terms of male and female gender roles, shocked her. One particular experience was being abroad in a vehicle with other military members and host civilians, wherein the local culture, women were not allowed to speak to men. She learned this by attempting to speak to local, male residents and being ignored (women were only permitted to speak to their husbands), while watching her male colleagues interact freely, laughing at her challenges trying to be heard.

Bobbi Jo's time in the Navy ended in an injury, which disqualified her from her role in nuclear engineering. She was no longer able to lift the technical manuals required to do her job. It was a tremendous blow, as she wanted to leave the Navy on her terms. Her transition to civilian life did little to calm her emotions. Thinking about the future made her afraid, as she was

concerned about providing for her daughter, medical bills, her next career, where she would live, and many other factors. She navigated these uncertainties against a perception she learned in the Navy from colleagues and superiors that, "Being in the military was providing the best I could for my daughter." As she prepared for her transition, the anxiety of leaving the Navy persisted, even after she transitioned to college.

Bobbi Jo attributes her success with such a demanding college schedule to her previous military training, which enabled her to learn complex pieces of information on limited sleep. While her academic successes were a point of pride in our discussions, I wondered if she would have done more to enhance her college experiences outside of class if given the opportunity. Many student veterans, as discussed in the literature, focus on the academic components of college, eschewing the social (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). I asked Bobbi Jo whether or not she would have taken advantage of campus resources and social connections at a deeper level if her commute and family commitments were different. Bobbi Jo's expressions in the interview changed immediately, and she began to smile and become very animated. She spoke with enthusiasm and excitement about her college journey for the first time in our conversations. We discussed her perspectives on her university's culture of inclusion, and how she had never felt so free to be herself (a decidedly different perspective than she had in military service, a point she made multiple times). She felt increased agency, not only as a student but as a woman. While her military career challenged her confidence constantly, in college she could see the opportunity for growth. Civilian students responded to her, and she felt supported. She never reported feeling disenfranchised or isolated in class based on her experiences. "I don't think anyone treats you differently because of your past," she noted. However, as our interviews concluded, Bobbi Jo noted a regret even in these positive experiences, which appears to connect to the perceived age

gap discussed by other participants. "I've had very positive interactions with civilian students. Still, I feel like more of a parent to them than a friend."

While she acknowledges her lack of agency in the military, the college has shown her a new opportunity to be heard and express herself. Her noted successes in engaging faculty and other students give her confidence and strengthen her abilities to make sense of her college environment. These developments have been vital for her, as she views faculty as the authority figures in the college environment. This dynamic is another reason she feels more comfortable in college; she can talk to faculty about any situation without worrying about overstepping or being marginalized or disrespected.

Carlos

Carlos is 28 years old. He saw himself in the military since early childhood. "My brothers and I used to cut guns out of plywood and we were just always playing 'Army man.'" The military catered to his sense of adventure. Carlos came from a very conservative family, but he did not cite that as a reason for his military interest. "I'm proudest of doing something greater than yourself. Finding out you're somebody special, like Star Wars or something." Carlos wanted to reach higher, to be a United States Marine.

Before he entered military training, Carlos felt he would be ready for it. Reflecting on his childhood relationship with his father, he said, "My dad was clinically diagnosed bipolar. Mentally insane. One hundred percent legit. It was kind of always this joke that if we ever went into the military, we just laughed it off, like if someone was yelling, because of our childhood." When Carlos' military training instructor entered the bus, "I heard my guy come on. He must be new. And he kept stuttering and like messing up his words and we could tell he was kind of nervous. That killed it for me." That experience, as Carlos reflected on it, set the tone for his military

service. The menial tasks of learning basic group instructions and moving equipment gave him the impression his time was being wasted on unimportant tasks. While he followed all the instructions given to him, he never fully embraced the acclimation to his new environment. "If you just took a second and looked, you can see like houses and the city and you know this is only temporary. This isn't real. They're doing this because they have to, 'Break us down to build us back up.' I just never really bought into the whole thing. I felt like the whole thing was really kind of staged."

Carlos made a connection to one other trainee in his squad. He was from a city in Texas, and of a very different background. They helped each other with basic training requirements, such as how to pack the equipment in their backpacks. They stayed friends from training to infantry school, then connected on various tours around the world. While Carlos did not keep close touch, he checked in on birthdays.

Carlos' time in the military was comprised of training to fight. When he was not actively training, he was commonly playing video games or socializing with his squad mates. There was a great deal of down time because, "we couldn't train all the time." Carlos' was assigned with three other Marines in his unit to a small group called a fireteam, which he became very close with. Even today, these are the people he is closest to. "There's just a bond. You're sitting on watch or in the suck somewhere. You talk about home and your family. You know you can trust them." Fireteams serve together for a year or more, deepening that connection on and off duty. Carlos remembers fireteams treating each other like siblings, each trying to do the best job for the squad leader (labeled the parental figure).

Throughout his military tour, Carlos remembers how important integrity was to being a Marine. "Having the price and respect to put out your personal best all the time." Marine Corps

history, and the need to positively contribute to that history, was important, not only to Carlos, but his entire unit. Different individuals may have differing positions, but as he saw it, everyone was a Marine. This included his experiences with female Marines; Carlos saw no incidents of differing treatment between male and female Marines.

Carlos had multiple deployments, visiting the majority of the middle and Far East. His work is qualified as being part of a security force, ready to engage if the situation warrants it. His time on Naval ships mirrored his time back as his home station; training periods bookended by down time that he could use to work out, take classes or pass the time. He remembers good relationships with naval personnel on each of his deployments.

As Carlos has gained some distance from his service, he has reflected on it, and his childhood, a great deal. While he is very proud of his military service, he seeks for it to not define him. He is much prouder of his journey as the first college student in his family. An economics major, he chose his current university because he "Wants to make a difference in Detroit." He transferred from a smaller, two-year institution, a place he still looks at very fondly for its support resources, smaller class sizes, and commitment to service. "There were absolutely phenomenal people up there, who would bend over backwards when I talked about any issue, whether it was faculty or staff."

Carlos' beginnings were, in his own words, "Ten confusing hours in a one-day orientation." He felt as if he was being led from requirement to requirement with little regard for his own choices.

> They were just kind of checking the box on university requirements. I want to take classes I want to take. This is my education. So, they throw you around, confuse the hell out of you and then, say they'll see you for class in the fall. You come back in fall and stand

around like you have no idea what's going on. I'm a first-generation college student. I have no context, nothing to go off of. Very confusing. Very uninformative. Welcome to college.

Carlos has started to adjust as the year has gone by. "I am going because I refuse not to make it," he said. His passion for activity led him to become involved in his college quickly. He volunteered to be a part of student government and made efforts to engage student veterans as well as non-veteran students.

Carlos' engagements with faculty have varied. "I think I kind of feel like working with the faculty is like going to the DMV." He discussed examples of faculty that were minimally present and disengaged in class as well as others that were very passionate about their work. Carlos responds to faculty that are engaged in teaching, regardless of the subject matter. In relating to other students, he gravitates towards focused people, making it difficult to establish connections to other students in class, as he views many of them as undisciplined. "If you're coming to class 20 minutes late halfway through the semester, that irks me to no end. I know a lot of students are also not paying attention. A lot of them are on their phones and computers." These feelings compel Carlos to keep to himself, completing his work alone. "I research on the internet. I like Kahn Academy. I go there a lot."

Carlos engages with a small group of student veterans socially through the local Student Veterans of America chapter (SVA), of which he is a member. He feels comfortable with them, "Talking about being in the military, being in class." However, he feels that if he did not have those social connections, he may be a better student. "I think the ratio of work and play is a little off," he mentioned.

Carlos is open to accepting others and hearing their stories; however, he considers himself an introvert, so he prefers to engage in settings outside the classroom. In addition, some of the courses he is taking also contribute to his hesitancy to engage.

> It depends on the subject or situation. I'm in comparative religion class. That's a very personal thing. I'm not religious but some people are. So, you can't get objective; you need to be collegial. You want to be accurate with what you say, and not just roll something off your tongue. When I'm in student government meetings, marginalized groups can have conversations that get inflammatory very quickly. When you try to address those things, It's a very delicate matter.

Generally, Carlos does not disclose his veteran status because of his perspectives on how it may be received. However, as Carlos reflects, "I don't think people are intimidated of me." While he attributes some of his growth and development as a student to his military experience, "It wasn't just the military that harped on the pride and the work ethic. A lot of that came from my life."

Chandler

Chandler is 26 years old. He joined the military because he loved flying and did not enjoy school. A Civil Air Patrol member in his youth, being around airplanes fulfilled him. "None of my family is military, and it was something that really interested me." After high school, he took some college classes, but his lack of focus led him to join the Air Force.

Chandler's first military training experience was in a large auditorium in San Antonio, Texas. It was a blur of activity and energy, as equipment was issued, training instructors were yelling at trainees, and trainees were asked to look forward, sit at attention, and not speak. He recalled, "I was the first person in my flight to be put on their face. First one doing pushups and

everything." As Chandler reflected on his training experiences, he found comfort in the physical demands of each new day. "It was kind of peaceful running and doing cardio in the mornings. It was the only time you didn't have to think," he said. Training days were always an internal battle to stay awake and alert in his classrooms (the temperature was 85 degrees).

Chandler's acclimation to the Air Force was comfortable, because, "I knew what I was doing. I wouldn't say I was flying under the radar the whole time, but I managed my areas well and took care of myself. There was never a reason for anyone to get on me." As he progressed through training, he became close to his classmates, some of whom he is still in touch with today. However, he talked to everyone in his flight, as differing backgrounds or experiences of his colleagues did not concern him. He wanted to be part of the most complete team possible.

He spent six years in the aircraft maintenance field, as a crew chief working on F-16 fighter aircraft. He regularly worked 10 to 12-hour days maintaining the planes. His most memorable experiences in this space are of his team completing their missions whatever the situation. "The guys you worked with really made the job as awesome as it was." His past perspective is opposite his current feelings about life on campus.

In addition to maintaining a high quality of work, Chandler's integrity was beyond reproach. His crew, as he described it, needed to maintain the highest possible work standards, and not cut corners. "The bottom line is, you're putting somebody in an airplane and they're about to go fly it at the speed of sound and go pull eight G's. And if it falls apart, it's going to come down on you." These perspectives were the foundation for all of Chandler's military experiences. His biggest challenges during military service were in the times when he worked with a different crew, and they suggested compromising standards, a perspective Chandler never supported nor participated in.

Chandler also has deployment experience and has vibrant memories of preparing aircraft to fly in combat environments. His perspective on his teammates and his work did not change; in fact, they were strengthened, working and living with the same group of people for months. "I have the strongest friendships I've ever made when deployed. I don't know if being shot at has something to do with it." His most notable friendship developed from interpersonal conflict. Frank, an Airman six years senior to Chandler, began their relationship by ordering him to help with personal tasks off duty. They ended their deployment tour tighter than immediate family, as Chandler discussed. "His wife is having their second baby, and I'm flying to New Mexico to visit them. He's the only person I'll send a birthday or Christmas card to outside of my family."

Chandler struggled with the decision to leave military service because he felt so comfortable in the culture. Ultimately, his desire to fly compelled him to separate from the service and explore opportunities to complete his degree. His college choice and journey would continue to be influenced by this goal. Chandler's academic choices were shaped by his dream of flying.

> I chose business management as my major so I could graduate in four years. My first choice would have been mechanical engineering, but I think it would have been pretty intense, and I didn't want my GPA to suffer. The cutoff age for pilots in the Air Force is 29, and I didn't want to age out and be disqualified.

His college experiences were fraught with differences. "College is stressful," he said. "It's not the kind of stress you experience in the military. Being on an erratic schedule was challenging and coming home and not being able to relax like I normally would at night was challenging." These tensions were compounded by feeling surrounded by immature, unfocused students who he felt took academics less seriously than he did. The first few weeks were different and challenging.

> As far as relating to anybody, that was hard for a few weeks. You just don't know what to talk about. I tried to think about when I showed up at a new base, how I used to make friends. It was easy; you were in the same career field. People connect based on the job, then on a personal level. Here….part of me feels like I don't need to socialize. I'm sitting there to learn something and listen to a lecture. I'm not there looking for friends.

Chandler has made connections to some civilian students, but he does not discuss his veteran background.

> It's distracting, and I felt like I just did a job, fixing airplanes. It doesn't make me feel like I need a thank you," he said. When his veteran experience is a topic of discussion, "people are surprised because of my age. They don't often see a 25-year old freshman, and when I was at freshman orientation, people started asking what I was doing there. Soon after, in one of my college classes, people asked me about the screen background on my laptop, which was me in front of an F-16. That also led to someone in a group project asking about my service.

Chandler reported positive interactions with faculty, even if they know his status. One professor who knew made a notable impression on him. "It was a small class, thirty students. I felt like more of an individual and was comfortable telling him I was a veteran.

As Chandler reflected on his military experience and how it influenced his college life,

> I think it would be different in college without military experience. I see people in their late thirties and early forties, and it's impressive to me the they're here at that age because college is a bunch of young kids. I might have even less social interaction with people if I didn't have that military connection to ROTC kids. Academically, I've got a sense of

discipline knowing why I'm here, what my job is here. At 18, I wasn't ready for college. Now, I think it's important to have a degree. But I don't think it's meant for everybody.

As Chandler continued, his voice became sharper, and his tone elevated. He began to directly question the validity of higher education for today's students. "I feel at least 25 percent of students in a division-one school do not need to be there." He then discussed career paths that do not require a college degree, many of which (in his mind) persist unfilled.

During this interview, I learned that Chandler's views drove him to leave school before graduation. "I think I'm a bit of an anomaly; most student veterans don't want to go back to the military," he said. In the end, moving back to a military environment, and the cockpit of an airframe is the path that allows him to construct his best life narrative going forward. Nearly a month after our interviews, I received word from Chandler that he was accepted into helicopter pilot training in the U.S. Army, and had withdrawn from college to pursue his goal.

Dan

Dan is 23 years old. An Army reservist, he has served for five years as a military policeman and continues to serve today. He does not recall a compelling urge to pursue military service before he made the decision to join.

> I was a junior in high school and didn't have much going on. I was working at some local fast food joint, the summer came around, and I went to the American Legion for a sporting event. Then, an Army recruiter called me, and asked me to come in and talk. Once I knew they'd pay me to go to school, I thought it would be beneficial for me to enlist. I wasn't really Mr. Patriotic, and my reasons for staying in have changed since then.

Dan remembers the excitement of his first military training experience. "When the first sergeant started yelling at us, I had the biggest grin on my face." He took to training immediately

and excelled in the environment. "I'm pretty adaptable, so I anticipated a lot of what was going to happen." He established connections with his teammates quickly, despite many personal differences.

> My best friends in the unit were quite different from me. One was very conservative, religious. Another very liberal, and the third was twenty-six, much older than we were. Yet, we got along so well. There were definitely troublemakers around us, but we found ways to manage that and not let it affect us.

Twenty weeks went by in a blur, and Dan was soon deployed to Cuba in his first significant role as a military policeman, assigned to detainee operations, Guantanamo Bay. Interactions with other military personnel were very different from his stateside experiences.

> There were fifteen to eighteen of us. I joined the deployment late, so the majority of people in Cuba had been there for three months prior to my arrival. I had been sent there because some troops had been sent home for disciplinary reasons.

Dan experienced tensions with his new colleagues immediately. "It was difficult to find out who was who." He felt like an outsider, despite working 14-hour shifts. The work was demanding and dangerous, and there were times he felt alone, despite being constantly around his teammates. "Even though it was weird, we had to get along. I wasn't interested in creating enemies, so I put up with a lot." The work, in Dan's words, "Was something I tolerated." His job was to both serve and protect detainees. He provided them meals and monitored their wellbeing. It challenged him daily, mentally and physically. As he reflected on the experience,

> I wonder how I did it. I was just trying to get by and forget who the people I was protecting were. Imagine you hate this person; now give them a sandwich. It's not something you can mentally prepare for. But, you force yourself to. Sink or swim.

Deployment responsibilities were drastically different from Dan's experiences as a reservist stateside. He was part of a support element, providing resources to soldiers that were in combat. Training and other duties were almost mundane in comparison. On a typical weekend, "You're just drilling with your friends, two ten-hour days. Nothing happens."

Dan's voice shook discussing his deployment reflections. As he discussed his transition back to college life, his voice then changed to become frustrated, edgy. "The university pushed my graduation back, and I had to drop some classes. I said I didn't want to. They said, 'We don't care, you can't be gone for a month in a semester.'" Dan then diagrammed how his college life, and the resumption of his classes clashed with his continual military commitments (training, physical fitness, drill weekends). "It hits you like a tidal wave." Through the support of his host college, he was able to make it through, and is taking his final college class.

Dan is a student in a residential college at his university. All of the faculty who teach in his classes are tenure-track. The college specializes in public policy work. He chose it because it not only connected well to his military experiences, but it would continue to serve him as he transitions to work in the government, albeit in the civilian sector. Where some of the participants in this project indicated transactional faculty connections, Dan believes a crucial source of support in his experiences were his faculty. "Faculty were unbelievably supportive. If I could give an award to my professors for how understanding and committed they have been to my struggle, I would. This semester has been a whirlwind for me because I've been gone, and now I'm leaving again. I've missed dozens of classes just because I'm always having to go and they always say, 'We get it. Don't worry about it.' I'm so thankful. Could not have done this without them."

Dan worked to create connections to civilian students in his residential college. "The main focus of my classes is to share ideas. If you are not actively doing that, you can't develop as an

individual." He found it important to be part of the community, so he dedicated as much time as possible to being engaged. Unfortunately, much like his deployment experience, "I started in the spring, and people had already developed relationships. I also didn't live on campus, so that contributed to a divide."

That divide expanded when civilian students asked about Dan's military experiences. "No one really understands what I do, positively or negatively." Dan felt that many of his classmates thought he was deploying to Afghanistan on weekends, "Fighting in the war. Sometimes, I'm just in Jackson, drinking coffee." Dan often feels misunderstood by his peers because of these disconnects. When asked who he feels closest to, "I would say it's the civilians I know outside of college. There's no pre-developed relationships." Dan feels he can share anything with them. With his military colleagues, "They're closed off emotionally; I don't fit in with a lot of them."

As Dan nears graduation, he is contemplating extending his reserve appointment, becoming a military officer, or leaving the military entirely. His disconnection from military and civilian students are contributing to his vacillation between staying and going.

> College students that are cadets do not appreciate what it means to be a soldier. They put the uniform on lackadaisically and look lost in the sauce. I was embarrassed to see them in my uniform.

Despite the uncertainties he feels, Dan is appreciative of his military service and how it has influenced his life. "It's played such a major role in my life. I'm an entirely different person." As he reflected on his college experiences, the connections he has to a few student veterans made the difference. "If you don't have a good, supportive friend group, military or civilian, it can be impossibly difficult." Without those peer connections, Dan would not have had the support he needs to take the next step in his life.

John

John is 31 years old. An Army reservist, he has served for over ten years as a mobile missile team leader and plans to continue to serve until he is eligible for retirement. John pursued military service to have notable life experiences.

> I joined the military because I always wanted to live life, experience different things, and I thought the military would be the way. Obviously, all the financial and educational benefits came along with that as well. There's that patriotism, serving your country, that's a part of it too.

John's memories of his first military experiences have faded over time, but he remembered the emotions he felt during his first training camp. "Basically, you get a little shock. It's in your face. Lots of waiting around. It's a little different." John made efforts to adjust quickly and without standing out from the crowd.

> You just go with the flow and don't try to fight. Things are going to be different. You go in with that mindset that they are going to be different. I just do everything the way they tell me to. It's going to be a shock, but you get over it.

John enjoyed his orientation to military life. It helped him become stronger, mentally and physically. He connected to people in his unit quickly. "You connect quickly, both to the people in proximity to you and those you connect with emotionally."

John's military role is to provide direction to a mobile missile system that is deployed to designated locations. When in the field, "We usually run 24-hour ops. I sit in the Fire Direction center, where I create the missions that the launcher crew will execute." As a traditional reservist, the majority of John's military service is conducted on weekends, particularly when he is not deployed overseas.

We have drill weekends typically once a month in the National Guard. My unit is in Detroit, and that is where we do our admin stuff. A lot of boring stuff you don't want to do. We do the majority of our work in the field in Grayling, which involved getting the missile trucks ready and doing dry-fire missions with the launchers (no live munitions). Basically, we practice up to when we do our live fire in the summer which is usually during our annual training, where we use with real munitions. Annual training is supposed to be two weeks; however, I think I've only had a two-week annual training once in my ten-year career. It's usually three, like this year.

John's relationship with his squad mates is very close. "We're all pretty tight. There are three-man crews who are sitting in a truck together for the majority of the day. He makes a point to engage less-experienced personnel regularly, because "I know what needs to be done in the field. Less experienced guys need someone like me telling him how to get there."

When our discussion moved to John's deployment experiences, his focus sharpened; information poured out of him quickly.

It can be a lot to manage. I have had a few deployments. In Kuwait, I was part of a security force. We weren't doing our job as artillery. We were at a seaport, on a Navy base, and we were running security for equipment coming out as gate guards. In this last 2016 deployment, I began in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). We were on our launchers, training regularly, with coalition soldiers from other countries. We actually did a live fire exercise with them. In a combat zone, you shoot practice missions every day for months. You're really good at it. Do it real fast. To the point where you're not messing around the whole time. In combat, the mindset gets different. You can't have these mental lapses. People get killed.

John's military experiences, "Opened his eyes to things." Reflecting on his service, he thankful for his experiences, and believes the military has been a positive impact on his life. His college narrative differs in intensity and scope. His weekly schedule is purposely overloaded a few days a week "To allow for more time off." His interactions with faculty have been positive, noting, "I've never had an issue," including when he has deployed and had to be away from campus for significant time periods. Faculty worked with him to ensure his requirements were met, and he could move forward in his studies.

John's interactions with non-veteran students are sporadic. As we discussed his interactions with these students, his voice was noticeably quieter.

> I have interactions with non-veteran students, but I'm kind of quiet and keep to myself. Being older, it's hard to relate to the younger kids in college, and I've had interactions with them, group projects and stuff, but for the most part I've kept it to a minimum. We just don't share the same interests. I don't volunteer my status as a veteran, either. It was something I felt I didn't want to disclose to anyone. If I bring my background into a class discussion, I kind of look around and gauge people's reactions to it.

In contrast, John's discussions about student veterans were more energetic and detailed. "A lot of people in the military have college experience, despite what most think." When on weekend guard duty, he speaks often about college life with people in his unit that are also attending at different schools. Common discussion topics involve administrative requirements and military benefits as opposed to academic contexts.

John is currently serving in a volunteer leader position in the local Student Veterans of America (SVA) chapter on his own campus, which connects him to other student veterans. While he feels the veteran's support on campus "Isn't the best, it's definitely there, and getting better."

John socializes with a small group of student veterans he met through the organization. "We get along pretty well." He works with his colleagues to develop social and academic engagement events for veteran's on campus in efforts to strengthen and expand the community, to include the surrounding off-campus community. "We're hopefully building towards our professional careers and networking with that outside community." John feels the work he is doing to connect other student veterans to campus resources is more important than spending time engaging civilian students. "We don't relate to other people." Finally, some of the student veterans John socializes with come from other military branches. They sometimes kid each other about their service experiences, particularly if from a different branch of service, a point John notes, "Is not anything anyone takes personal." In effect, John interacts with this small group of student veterans in a similar way to the personnel in his military unit.

John is a kinesiology major and has a keen interest in owing his own fitness center someday. He attributes his focus and time management skills to his time in the military, and he prides himself on being a mentor to junior military members in his unit about their college choices. When reflecting on his time in college, he also feels being a student has helped him be a better military member as well, particularly as he progresses through midlevel leadership training (which is conducted in a classroom environment, with traditional assignments). His overarching memory of college life is, "The open dialogue in class. In military class environments, that's not the case." As he nears graduation, "It's been a long journey. But, life experiences are extremely important to me and my college and military careers have been excellent at facilitating them."

Marie

Marie is 29 years old. Marie's desire to serve came from her family's military background. Her father served in the Army; her uncle served in the Air Force for 28 years. This history paired

with an internal desire to give her life purpose as she believed that, "My life wasn't going anywhere." Her desire to serve in the Army at 18 was dashed by a sports asthma condition assessed in her youth, delaying her enlistment, and increasing her motivation to serve. She joined the Air Force at 24-years old, "And was much happier," as a result of that decision.

Marie's training experience, as she reflected on it, was not a negative one. Her first memory is of how much older she was than her counterparts. Many of them came from small families, with little support. She remembers, "Crying going on from the girls," regularly, and taking on a matriarchal role very early in her experience. This was the most difficult aspect of her military training, despite coming from a large family. "I have three sisters. In my household, there was five girls and three boys. But having all those females and the chattering that they do was ridiculous." While she did become friends with one woman in her training group, Marie preferred socializing with men. This stance continued as she came on active duty.

Marie's position in the Air Force involved maintenance and upkeep of nuclear weapons at a location in the southwestern U.S. The work was highly sensitive; a majority of it was classified. She was a shift maintenance worker, trained to analyze and interpret complex information sets to ensure all her equipment was available at a moment's notice. Her unit was comprised of over one hundred people; however, in her daily work life, her crew was only five to ten individuals.

Her acclimation into her position was not without challenges. Immediately, she noticed, "Females are looked at differently in maintenance career fields. It's just that they don't know whether or not you're going to come in and be like a "Barbie doll" girl. So, they don't know how to treat you." Female treatment in the unit was determined by the perceived tolerance of their male counterparts. Marie quickly noticed, to be part of the group, she would need to "Be ready to fit in with their weirdness," and attempt to be comfortable with the existing standard of behavior in her

unit. In some cases, this involved other members of her unit drinking after hours. "To fit in, if you don't drink, you have to be really cool and funny." Marie found this type of social environment challenging because social drinking was not common for her at that point in her life.

Marie had some additional challenges acclimating to her new unit because she was also uncomfortable in large groups. To fit in, she created a space in the middle of the group where she could feel strong in her work and the group, but not be a focal point of any conversation. She made every effort to be the best military member she could be and volunteered to deploy overseas twice. She was denied both times, her biggest regret in her military service. "Part of the reason I joined the military was to be over there and help defend our country."

Marie's military service ending was awkward. Her last year in service was defined by negativity and marginalization from her unit's leadership team which made for a challenging work environment. Sexism and chauvinism began to impact the unit in ways that affected her personally, increasing her discomfort with engaging her colleagues in conversation. Also, the empowerment she felt in her work faded as, for the first time in her military service, she began to question the quality of her work. As her tour ended, a medical situation resulted in her discharged from the Air Force, which left her heartbroken, as she had intended to make the military her career.

Marie believes her military service has had positive and negative effects on her life. "I owe it to myself to be the best I can be. I have to give 110%." She attributes her increased task motivation and pride in her work to her military training, her comfort in the military structure and her commitment to the mission she was tasked to complete. In contrast, socially and personally, her military service also left her questioning her self-confidence and her worth, as her interactions with her leadership contributed to increasing her discomfort with talking to others and feeling

disenfranchised. "I didn't want to talk to people as it ended because those people made me feel like crap."

An accounting major, at the time of our interview, she had made the decision to drop her major after studying it for three years. Marie had a difficult time acclimating to her university as well, because she felt it was too large, and students are not a priority. She has difficulty interacting with students that are younger than she is, and her self-confidence has wavered as she continues to process the effects of her military service. She is fiercely proud of her military service and touts it as both a key instrument of her success, and a contributor to the challenges she currently faces making social connections and being in public settings. As she nears college completion, she may have to move to Florida to care for her ailing father, muddying her postgraduate path.

Marie's goal-oriented mindset, honed during her military career, followed her to college and appeared to sustain her academic efforts for the majority of her college career. Her discussions regarding her academic experiences connect to the attitudes and behaviors she exhibited during her military work. To be successful in college, she prioritized her academics, took charge of groups when she needed to (despite it being a challenge for her), and requested accommodations when she needed them to succeed in class. She pursued a connection to her academic advisor, joined a student organization, and attempted to attend social events when her schedule allowed. It was tough for her to connect to other students. Ultimately, the one connection she has been able to sustain is with her academic advisor, whom she feels more comfortable with than other students, who are notably younger than she is.

Unfortunately, it appears that Marie's reduced confidence to interact interpersonally has also followed her from military service. Marie's challenges in navigating gender bias during her military service (e.g., her references to being a "Barbie doll,") and her irritations with younger

trainees appear to have contributed to her tensions in establishing any social connections to other students. She noted during our interviews more than once, "I have a hard time talking to people." She also critiqued how other students would go about their academic work, and when there was an opportunity to help, she would pull back, particularly in group work. She said, "Why should I step on their toes then they need to learn how to do it?"

Marie's challenges interacting with other students crested when we discussed her reflections on how civilian students around her viewed the military. "I let them talk, because it is such a personal, sensitive thing to me. Her voice became higher, and more tense, as she continued.

> You can tell the students are liberal. There have been younger students in my classes that have talked very negatively about the military, when we have been in wartime. I just don't feel connected to civilians anymore. They just don't seem to have a real life.

Mark

Mark is 28 years old. His decision to serve stemmed from a wish to have a career that was both interesting and made a difference. "I talked to a recruiter, and they told me about being a linguist, and that sounded like what I wanted to do." Interestingly, this was Mark's second choice of a military role, as he arrived at the recruiter's office that day intent of working with drones, and was convinced that this new role would best suit his interests.

Mark's welcome to military service was a shock to his system. "I remember being nervous, because this was a new experience. Before the military, the only time I lived outside my family home was with a roommate ten minutes away." The stress of being truly away from home for the first time affected him both internally and in how he interacted with other people. "My parents never really yelled at me. Boot camp was the first time that happened. It was totally new, and extremely stressful."

Mark's adjustments to his new life took time. Basic instructions challenged him in ways he did not expect. As he remembers his first lessons in marching in a group, "Marching is just a formal way to walk, but you overthink it. It took time to understand the sequence." Fortunately, making friends quickly helped in his acclimation; however, Mark did not make friends quickly. "I was probably one of the slower people to get acclimated to everything. I'm a really introverted person, and being in this new environment was a little harder for me than it would be for extroverted people." Today, Mark has no connection to his colleagues from that time in his life.

Mark's challenges in acclimating to his military life continued after his training experience, when he was ordered to learn Farsi, versus being able to choose the languages he would be asked to interpret. As he reflected on this experience, "they give you a dream sheet to put your top six languages. I put Korean, Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, Hebrew and Spanish. Then, I got Farsi." He faced immediate challenges in learning the structure of the language. "I struggled, because the letters are all connected."

After Mark was qualified to perform his duties, he worked as a linguist for six years. he described his military work environments as,

> Great places to work. I really liked the people. We worked in small groups, and did not have to deploy because Farsi linguists did not deploy. I was really quiet and shy. This work definitely broke me out of my comfort zone, and speaking in public became so much easier.

Mark transitioned to college with the expectation of re-entering the military as an Air Force officer after completing his computer science degree. His time as a college student is similar in some ways to his military experiences, particularly in how much he keeps to himself. "I've only gone to talk to professors a little. I don't talk to too many people in class." Mark's interactions

are primarily with students in the ROTC program. His affection for military life is a large part of his comfort there. As he discussed this time in his college experience, it was the first time in our interviews his body language became animated. He smiled and said, "I just love being in the Air Force. You do cool jobs. The military had my back when I needed them."

Mark's focus on his military service also came out when he discussed the military's impact on his social life in college. "I don't have friends on campus that are not ROTC cadets." In times where he finds life challenging, "I talk only to my wife, and she always has good advice for me." Aside from these connections, Mark keeps to himself on campus. A father to two daughters, he looks to spend as much time with his family as possible. In some instances, Mark's distance from other students is attributed to feeling out of place, or older than his classmates. "I don't engage socially with cadets because many of them are just turning 21 and they are doing the 'brand-new' 21-year old thing. Going to bars. I tried to do that with them once, and felt uncomfortable." Mark's identified separation between himself and other ROTC students also extends to their lack of experience on active duty. "Cadets are not student veterans. The go to school and put on a uniform. But, it's not actually serving. Something I've definitely noticed is there isn't the same passion and motivation from cadets as I saw in enlisted service. I'm not sure they grasp everything that will be required of them."

Mark credits his military service for helping him develop the structure and discipline needed to be successful in college. However, despite his identified challenges in establishing social connections, he believes having a peer group is important, "Even if it's civilians. In the Air Force, it's the wingman concept, where you have each other's backs and take care of each other. That's a big one for me." As he prepares for the last two years of his computer science degree, he is excited for his return to military service, where he will stay until he is eligible to retire. "I'm a

lot more passionate about going to class, because what I am studying relates to my future job. We're studying topics that I know I'm going to be doing in the Air Force."

Michael

Michael is 23 years old. He wanted to join the Army for as long as he could remember. Educational benefits and post-Army life were not concerning at the time. Other military branches did not interest him, as they could not guarantee the position he wanted on active duty. He said, "I chose the Army over the Marines because I really didn't want to be a cook or whatever horrible things they could come up with." He had two goals: to serve in the infantry and to deploy to combat.

Michael's training experience began in silence on a bus in Georgia. He remembers being nervous, despite being in the Army's future soldier program before enlisting. His nervousness slowly turned to apathy, as he spent roughly a week receiving equipment, standing in formation, receiving vaccinations, silently. He questioned his decision to enlist. As the focus shifted to training, despite the hardships, he began to embrace the military life he wanted. Michael actively participated in all infantry training activities and relished his weapons training. He felt that the youngest trainees seemed to do the best in training because, "they were used to getting bossed around and yelled at by their parents."

Michael made connections to other people in his training group. He grew close to another trainee from his hometown, and then became friends with five or six other trainees in his squad, all from different backgrounds. His reflections centered on their financial situations (one trainee was from Detroit and lived on food stamps) and some of their lifestyle choices (he learned to dip tobacco from another trainee he was close with). These connections helped him adjust to military structure and discipline more quickly, although Michael readily admits his peer group was not a

group that readily took charge of their experience. He spent the majority of that time, "lost in the sauce" (struggling to adjust) with four or five colleagues. No one in his small circle took charge for the group, a key reason for their struggles. He also saw some other trainees that were unable to adapt to military standards and discipline and had a difficult time in training. Some never adapted. Through his persistence in looking for leadership and connections to other trainees, he began to see success.

Over time, Michael began to notice that the youngest trainees typically were the most successful. He believed this was,

> Because they were used to getting bossed around and yelled at by their parents and whatnot. Going straight from high school to the Army is pretty conducive to that. You kind of respect authority in general because you're seventeen or eighteen. I met guys who were twenty-five who didn't like the idea of someone bossing them around and didn't adjust with that.

As Michael reflected on his training experience afterwards, he remembered being relieved it was over, and was very excited to begin his infantry training, which began immediately after he graduated basic training. This was not because he felt a sense of accomplishment in completing his first training experience (he still questions the utility of some aspects of his basic training), but because he felt that after infantry training, he would be, "a real soldier." He also felt he was treated better by his instructors and leadership team in infantry school and relished his new stature.

Michael's infantry training was a bit strange at first. He remembers the same training staff from his first field training experience completely changing their behavior for infantry training. "It was very gentlemanly," he said. The drill sergeants that were yelling at him a week earlier were praising his efforts to learn new tactics. Despite this change, some of the aftereffects of

Michael's first training experience endured. For example, he stayed in the same barracks during infantry training, which made it difficult to take time away from squad mates to rest, or just for a mental break. Without a release of that tension, tempers flared.

> I think one of the issues is like when you're around that many people for so long, for that many hours a day, you know something's going to happen eventually. There was definitely a fair amount of fights that broke out.

As Michael transitioned to his position in Army infantry, his experiences comprised a mix of extreme activity and inactivity. As an infantry member, his primary duty was to train to fight, which involved a mix of field operations (simulated combat operations) and weapons training. He was eager to experience as much of this as possible, as it was his driving motivation to enlist in the Army. However, resource limitations did not allow infantry to train in this way every duty day. Resources were optimized for units that were actively preparing to go to Afghanistan or another location overseas. As a result, there were significant periods of time where Michael and troops like him were asked to pitch in on vehicle maintenance or other laborious tasks that were necessary, but not in their primary job description. In other instances, there was no work to be done, and troops were asked to remain in their dormitories, sometimes for days at a time. The only times that these units would leave their rooms was to eat their meals at the chow hall or to go to the gym for physical training. As Michael reflected on these times, "there were some days where nothing was going on, so you're like, 'alright, I guess I'm going to play Xbox.'"

The malaise and boredom bothered Michael. He did not see the value in what he perceived as busy work. As his tour progressed, these additional tasks became more and more common. His first sergeant prescribed more physical training, or more additional duties to pass the time between field operations, such as cleaning weapons multiple times before they were used, which was

unnecessary to their operation. This continued to frustrate him. Furthermore, the conduct of the leadership, as he described it, was beginning to affect unit morale. The additional physical training (sometimes running as much as thirty miles a week) began to break down his unit, and many soldiers came down with injuries. Twenty-five members of his unit failed drug tests in one year. Eight people attempted suicide. As the relationship between Michael's unit and its leader continued to break down, it became toxic. Michael said, "I'm pretty sure that if we would have deployed, our first sergeant would have been the first casualty. And it was not going to be from an AK-47. Somebody would have fragged him."

Michael looked forward to deployment as an escape from this environment. Unfortunately, the boredom he hated at his home station followed him there. "You learn what real boredom is. You can't retreat to your room and play Xbox, or you can't go to Pizza Hut, or you can't go for a hike." The isolation he felt at home increased when he was deployed because when he was not seeing active combat, he was in close quarters with other soldiers with not much to do. "If you don't like somebody, and you're stuck around them 24 hours a day, seven days a week for months, stuff's going to start to get people angry." Despite the closeness he felt to some of the people in his deployed unit, he began to feel similarly to how he felt at home because he had no purpose.

Michael made the decision to leave military service, in large part, because he knew he would not be deploying to combat locations regularly. The prospect of staying home, and persisting through a weekly schedule of menial tasks, training but never utilizing his skills, wore on him. As he reflected on that time in his service, he felt he entered the military a few years too late, as his predecessors were constantly deploying. He understood the infeasibility of using too many resources to train in the field regularly (particularly when other, deploying units needed those resources first). However, the leadership challenges and low morale he experienced during

the end of his tour changed his perspective on what it was like to be a solider that was not in combat. He felt his time would be wasted if he was to continue to serve in that environment. "I didn't want to sign up for another three or four years and then not do anything; you know, I'd rather get out."

Additionally, Michael had a significant medical issue that hastened his urge to leave military service. He was navigating a serious hip injury that made it difficult to walk, much less fulfill all of what was expected of him. As he discussed the next steps with his leadership, he was told that he needed to do everything he could to stay on duty, even if he was hurt. His interactions with the doctor on his military base were ineffective in addressing the situation. While he was given the option for restricted duty, Michael never felt he was receiving the best treatment possible for his condition. "I described the symptoms and I'm like, 'Ok, it's probably muscular, can I get an MRI?'" The doctor refused and offered an x-ray to put his mind at ease. Michael continued to worry about his health. It was only after he separated from active duty and worked with a new doctor that he learned he had a torn labrum (after his doctor ordered an MRI that revealed the damage). Unfortunately, Michael was not the only soldier in his unit that suffered from a medical situation like this. Another colleague had significant knee issues that also led to his separation from service, and his interactions with medical personnel were similar.

These experiences negatively affected Michael's perceptions of the Army, as he did not feel cared for by the organization, as the second he was injured and not able to perform, he felt inadequate and disposable. However, he credits the Army for teaching him how to get along with other people, and how to subjugate personal feelings, biases and judgements of others for the sake of accomplishing the mission. Finally, while he credits the Army for improving his work ethic, he has difficulty assigning full credit to the military, as he had so many negative experiences seeing

colleagues not live up to military standards, with no consequences for noncompliance. Ultimately, while Michael is glad he made the decision to serve, his military experiences strayed very far from what he thought they would be. As he considered his next steps after military service, his goals led him to college, and a new host of questions.

Michael's college experiences unfolded in a comparable way to his military experiences. His medical hardships and dissatisfactions with his military unit led him to pursue college in the hopes of obtaining a career in law enforcement. His movement through college would seem to be even more challenging, with fewer positives. In his mind, college directly conflicts with his belief system and how he sees the world. "Being a student veteran isn't a thing for me. This is a means to an end," he said during his interview. Michael's college goal is to earn just enough credits (38) to apply to a police academy somewhere in Michigan. He began searching for a college or university to meet that goal. He settled on his current institution because he was a fan of the football team, grew up in the Midwest, and wanted to go to school relatively close to his family in the Chicago area. Michael chose to study criminal justice, to simplify his application and ease his transition into the police academy.

As Michael began attending his classes, he quickly felt difficulties identifying with other students, particularly during courses outside his major. His isolation came from a belief that other students, particularly those without military experiences, are ideologically different from him, skewing towards liberal tendencies. He said, "I feel like a minority on campus because I'm conservative and I like guns." Michael's perspectives about his college environment influence his ability to connect with nearly every other group on campus, as he feels the entire system is incongruent with his conservative belief system. "I'm politically different than probably 85 percent of the people in my classes," he said. He also feels the college environment focuses on

benefits and support that are unnecessary. For example, he discussed safe spaces on campus as, "reverse discrimination" to individuals that were not the specific targets for that space. Michael believes that his background contributes to his perspectives. He notes, "I've yet to meet a liberal veteran, and college campuses are generally meant for liberal 18-year-olds." To help isolate himself, in his interactions with other students and faculty, he never purposely revealed his previous military experiences, considering them irrelevant to his current situation.

Michael's interaction with other student veterans have also been limited. He has not attended campus events intended to support student veterans, and, with one notable exception, has not made efforts to connect to other student veterans. He has befriended another student veteran (a former Marine) who he felt shared his beliefs and attitudes. His first connection to this student was that, "He was wearing a Heckler and Koch hat (which is a handgun manufacturer), and two minutes into class the professor asked him why he was wearing that hat. I thought it was hilarious." They became friends soon after, connecting to the belief that "Our lives don't translate to college students to live in a bubble." They have also connected on their shared understandings of eleven-hour workdays and their appreciations for time management and structure.

Michael's classroom experiences with faculty consisted of challenges dealing with shifting academic expectations and a lack of formality that he found different. He said, "I just never had a teacher who would talk about their personal life before." Noting challenges with math and science, his struggles in those subjects juxtaposed with other, easier classes that he found unnecessary. While he made no tangible efforts to establish rapport with his faculty, he noted their efforts to connect with him and other students, noting several instances where different faculty would socialize in class and discuss their personal lives. Michael found this strange and made no real

efforts to engage in kind. He stated multiple times that he did not care for the personal stories faculty would tell and would have preferred they move through the material instead.

Michael's most notable effort to connect with a faculty member came from a disagreement. He engaged his sociology professor during a discussion of whether or not women should be in combat (the professor has no military experience). Michael found fault with the professor's impressions of the topic, said he was incorrect and challenged his assertions in front of roughly five hundred of his classmates. As the conversation intensified, Michael revealed his military experiences to the class in more detail, providing firsthand rationales for his perspectives.

While Michael made the decision to de-escalate the conversation in class, he made a point to research the topic on his own, finding roughly thirty scholarly articles on the topic, that he gave to the professor in a PowerPoint briefing a week later. The next class, the professor indicated he had reviewed material on the topic, and that his previous assertions were incorrect. Michael, while feeling validated in the moment, never engaged his professor in this class again. As Michael took other courses, he followed a pattern of quiet isolation, believing his perspectives would place him in the minority of all his classes, making it difficult to feel heard.

Miranda

Miranda is 22 years old. She came to her current college after nearly two years on active duty in the army reserve. Miranda's sole reason to pursue military service was, "To be a doctor, and have the army pay for everything." She did not come from a military family and had very limited knowledge of what to expect.

Miranda's first experience was challenging, but manageable. "It was the classic example of drill sergeants yelling at you. I felt prepared for it, so I tried my best to help other people." She felt adjusted quickly, because she subjugated her personal perceptions for the sake of her unit. In

her words, “You’re there to serve and not be a leader. I just kept my head down and was fine.” Coming from a small farming town in Michigan, Miranda had no experience with diversity. Her colleagues were all from different backgrounds than she was. She connected immediately with them. “It was so interesting. I made great friendships that I still have today.”

Miranda’s primary role in the reserves is a biomedical equipment technician, repairing x-ray and anesthesia machines. She has not deployed, and conducts the majority of her military work within an hour of her college. Her rapport with her colleagues on duty is close and supportive. Miranda feels most comfortable in this environment, more so than in her college life.

Miranda’s college experience is interlaced with her military life, as she is also in Reserve Officer Corps (ROTC) training to become a military officer. In contrast, her experiences in ROTC have been dissimilar from her time on reserve duty.

> ROTC is night and day compared to reserve duty because ROTC trains Army soldiers for the infantry, which is very different from my work in the reserves. ROTC has you in the mud every day, doing drills. Reserve duty is in an air-conditioned building, and you hardly work. I think everybody should go through infantry training to truly be considered a soldier. Kind of a rite of passage.

Miranda credits her military experience with success in her college life. “Discipline and self-motivation definitely came from my military experience.” An undisciplined child, Miranda feels the military changed her life for the better by teaching her how to deal with challenging situations in a strategic way, versus just expecting life to fall into place. As she reflects on her weekly schedule, military discipline is a key component of her success.

> Weekends are 100 percent studying. Monday, Wednesday and Friday I have physical training, so I wake up at five a.m. on those days. Immediately after those sessions, I shower

and get ready for class, then go to my first job, then my second job, then my first job again, then class. I usually don't get home until 8 p.m. I go to bed immediately, then repeat. 14 hours straight on campus.

Miranda's college experiences have included varying levels of interaction with faculty. "I've had professors that didn't care in large classes and I've also had some old professors that have been in constant contact with me, asking me about my personal life. Those are my favorite classes." As Miranda reflected on her interactions with other students, she became noticeably pointed in her tone. Civilian students have made her uncomfortable at times with the questions they have asked about her military service. She noted that students' behavior patterns change around her as they ask these questions. Examples she gave were, "Have you killed anybody? Do you carry a gun at all times? Have you seen dead people?" However, despite the questions she has been asked about her service, civilian students have treated her respectfully, and in her words, "Once students find out I'm a veteran, they put me in charge of what the project is."

Miranda's military experiences, as she reflected on them, continue to frame her interactions with peers and other groups on campus. In her student jobs on campus, she has trouble connecting with other students, who she views as unserious. A recent example she noted was, "Civilian students tend to overthink little problems and make them bigger than they really are." Interestingly, she has the same perceptions of her adult colleagues at these jobs, and notes considerable challenges establishing common ground with them. She notes, "Once, I was criticized for not being social enough at work." As they see her moving between classes and multiple jobs, instead of giving words of support, Miranda experiences constant critiques.

> Are you supposed to be working right now? Then, I'll say, 'No, I'm supposed to be in class now.' They usually just think I'm flaky. Yet, I'm keeping my own schedule, you can trust me.

While Miranda calls some of her ROTC classmates her friends, a divide exists between them, created by the lack of firsthand military experience many of them have. As she reflected,

> It seems a lot of ROTC cadets who don't have prior service make a lot of assumptions about what service is, and they think they understand what it means to serve. They're entitled.

In looking for other student veteran connections on campus, Miranda has attended some of the social events on campus designed to promote connections amongst student veterans. Tension has come out in those environments as well, as some student veterans have tendencies to critique the service of others. As Miranda remembers this happening to her, "There's veterans on campus that will see you at an event and go, 'Why are you here? You're so young and you're in the reserves.' They say it like it's nothing. These thoughts have Miranda reflecting on and interrogating her own service. "I tend to agree that I haven't done anything. I've just been in the reserves as a medical enlisted person for four years. It's not very much."

As Miranda reflected on her college interactions with peers and others, she said numerous times that, "The Army makes me feel like I'm older than my actual age group." She does not feel she relates to many people very well. She feels that, "All of my identity is based on my time in the Army. I feel like college is not going to be that memorable to me, in comparison to now." As she prepares to conclude her studies, she looks getting back to her military lifestyle, and a diverse group of people that is committed to a common goal.

Rich

Rich is 41 years old. He joined the military because he encountered severe financial and personal hardships. The company he worked for went bankrupt; his car was stolen. Jobs in his hometown were limited, and there were no others in easy biking distance. "I had a burning desire to leave the house. I loved aviation, so that's what landed me on the doorstep of the Air Force." Rich spent over twenty-one years in the U.S. Air Force.

Rich discussed his training environment as, "Shock therapy." An even-keeled person, he was immediately tested by the rules of his new environment and the expectations of perfection in all areas. He felt uncomfortable for almost a month. Reflecting on this time, Rich equated the experience to, "A trauma, and any time you get a large group of people together, it's a different level of trauma. It's your rights, your personality taken away." To further ease his transition, he befriended other trainees, and that enabled him to grow and perform to military standards. He said, "I guess it worked, for the most part."

Rich's primary duties in the Air Force were as a munitions officer, maintaining weaponry for aircraft. This involved shift work in highly sensitive areas with a small team of people within a larger organization. Given that his work involved the handling and movement of highly dangerous ordinance, operations tempo was consistently high. The work demanded discipline and focus, from all members of the organization. Rich grew to embrace these aspects of his military career.

Rich spent nearly his entire career overseas. As a result, his units were very close, and the military base served as their connection to home. Early in his career, he noted that to fully become part of his unit, he took part in high-risk behaviors, some of which involved alcohol and late nights in questionable situations. Rich discussed this rite of passage as, "The ammo way," a social

component of the acculturation to his career field. It was a difficult adjustment. As Rich reflected on his early years in military service, he considered these behaviors one of his negative military memories. "That wasn't me before the military," he noted. As Rich progressed in the military, he made a point to focus more on his work and the development of his colleagues, and as a result, he began to progress in his career field. As Rich thought of that time in his career, he talked a lot about the responsibilities of mentoring and leading young people.

> I've gone over it a few times and there's times where I dwell on whether or not I could have done more to protect my people. I say at a certain point they become, 'your people' and I don't know when that happened. Somewhere along the lines they become your people and that's where you shifted from just doing the job to making sure that they did the job but also that you protected them. So, you think of your leadership failures. What could I have done differently?

Those reflections also revealed frustrations in Rich's career. Rich's best efforts to do his job well and take care of his subordinates resulted in a demotion of his position before a significant inspection, despite his consistently excellent job performance. The incident that drove this demotion, according to Rich, was refusing a request from his commanding officer to falsify inspection reports to show his unit was mission ready when it was not.

> We had 80 percent of our people assigned to escort duty. And we had an inspection coming up in six months. I spoke up and said, 'We're not going to get there. We're going to fail.' My leadership said, 'If you go through all your books, you won't fail.' I said, 'It doesn't matter how much I go through all my books, we will fail. We can't do both jobs.' So, I was immediately removed from my management position and put in charge of the weapons stockpile at the base. Four months down the road, we completely fail the inspection. They

> fired every senior member of the unit except me, because I was put in charge of the weapons stockpile, and they couldn't reassign me. I learned that the Air Force was becoming a CYA culture, which was a factor in my decision to retire.

Despite Rich's validation after a lengthy investigation, and the firing of his commander, in his mind, he felt his military career was ending. Another significant factor in his potential transition was a need to establish a firm home base for his family, as his children were about to enter high school. Because his family was living in Britain at the time, Rich had concerns about his children having to adapt to two educational systems within their high school career. He petitioned his host unit for an extension to his tour and was quickly denied, despite a request for family hardship. So, after nearly 21 years of military service, nearly all spent outside the U.S., Rich retired from military service and prepared to enter college and explore a civilian career.

As Rich underwent his college transition, he learned the dynamics of a new group, a process that he equated to military training. "College is just another set of rules I had to follow. When people leave the military, they find out they can't live without the structure of it. College is great for that," he said. Rich does interact with other students in his major (which has less than 20 students overall), but he limits these interactions to during the week. "I try to be another student with the kids there because I'm just learning." He spends the majority of his time studying in the library or in another place he can keep to himself. In addition, Rich commutes roughly two hours each way to his home, so he rents an apartment during the week and only goes home on weekends. The majority of the week, he is managing his life as a student alone.

Despite his belief he was in the right program (an aptitude assessment indicated landscape architecture was an ideal fit), his academic experiences were not without challenges. Rich indicated a steep learning curve in retraining himself to study and structure his classwork in a way

that would be successful for him. A medical situation from his military years inhibited his ability to accomplish his goals, and he sought and obtained accommodations from the university to assist.

> I remember reading something, and remembering what I was just told, then forgetting it. For example, if you were to tell me the pencil is blue when I walk away, I will say, 'Pencil blue, pencil blue,' and then I'll come back and say, 'What color was the pencil?' In my current situation, I have to learn 250 plants by identification, as well as five characteristics of each plant. Eventually, I can identify the plants, but the characteristics have been a struggle.

Rich's landscape architecture program is very small, a factor that also increases his pressure to succeed. "This is a time-intensive degree path. We started my year with 15 people, and we will probably lose some because this is an intense degree path. A lot of times, there's been multiple nights where we are up until 2:00 a.m. working on a project. Not just me, but seven or eight of us.

Fortunately, Rich has found ways to succeed despite the long hours and academic rigor. "First semester, I was Dean's list." While he performs better in laboratory environments than on lecture exams (the product of his memory challenges discussed earlier), he is confident he can continue down this path if he continues to work hard. However, Rich continues to manage tensions with university policy and administration. Although he brought nearly 60 credits into the university from his 20-plus year military career, his university classified him as a college freshman in his chosen major. This frustration was a prominent discussion topic in both our interviews.

As Rich began to become more comfortable in his studies, he began to develop impressions about his faculty. "There are instructors here that are not qualified," he said. Rich then began to describe in detail how a recent online course involved a number of online resources and video clips

that the faculty member linked from resources. When Rich struggled with aspects of the course and had questions, "She couldn't answer them." As he asked about the instructor's credentials, he learned that the instructor's husband was also teaching in the program. "The answer I got was that she was a package hire."

Rich was upset at this turn of events. "She is grossly inadequate as an instructor. I was an instructor in the Air Force for three years. There are certain things you do and don't in teaching. When people ask you direct questions, you don't give them grey answers. This wouldn't happen in the Air Force, where a husband that is the director of the program hires his wife to teach in it."

As Rich continues in his education, he seeks opportunities to lead and mentor other students as he did his military subordinates. Rich feels that military experiences can directly impact other students through leadership courses or coaching in university athletics. He feels that universities do not fully comprehend the value of having student veterans on campus. He explained towards the end of his second interview that, "Utilizing our military experiences is not there. Utilizing that experience to further the education of other students is not there. There isn't an opportunity to do that. So, that's what I think they're doing to grossly underutilize the student veteran population."

Stacy

Stacy is 28 years old. When Stacy reflected on her first training experience in the Marines, one word came to mind. "Chaos. Yeah, a lot of chaos. You know, being yelled at, go here, go there, little to no sleep. It's pretty much chaos and transition from like, 'Ok, you're a civilian. And now, you're becoming something else.'" Stacy described the discomfort from the continued pursuit of perfection in training, the benchmark for success in the Marines (or so she believed she was being taught). Her key to enduring the challenges in front of her was to suspend her

expectations and work as hard as possible, preparing for the worst. She summarized those first experiences of military acclimation as, “Awesome, but also scary, but I don’t know, fun.”

Stacy made connections to other military trainees during her time in field training. One of her squad mates was a mother. In contrast, the majority of her colleagues were eighteen or nineteen. It was also a very ethnically diverse group based on her reflections. Coming from an all-white town, she noted these differences in her training group immediately. Being an inclusive person, she made efforts to engage as many of her squad mates as possible, regardless of background. She did not focus on differences between people in training in relation to her work. She still keeps in touch with many of her colleagues from that time in her life today and celebrated that accomplishment as her first validation of success in military service.

An education major, she is graduating with honors this year. A single parent, she prioritized her family time after academics, leaving little time to engage on campus.

> I have my son, and sometimes it sucks. This past weekend, I sat down, and I said, ‘I’m sorry, you’re going to play by yourself.’ And I sat there for six hours, and did all of my work, and then said, ‘Ok, I can play.” For me, it’s been hard to find a consistent schedule, and it is so complicated, but I just make sure I do it.

Stacy’s primary interactions on campus have been with the student veteran resource center, a place she has always felt comfortable. After she made the decision to work there, she began to make connections to other student veterans, including her best friend on campus. As she reflected on her times on campus, her memories of this place made her smile.

> Everything was so much easier after I began to work there. One day, I walked through the door, and there was a guy sitting there, who said, ‘You look familiar.’ After some time

talking to him, I remembered he was formerly in the Air Force, and we had a class together in California, where we both talked about going to college!

Stacy had found a place where she was comfortable, with other student veterans, in a dedicated campus space. Over her college career, this was the place she felt most at home.

Her connections to other veterans continued with faculty. Stacy talked at length about one faculty member, a Navy veteran, who recently passed away. "He's the first teacher I had that showed an interest in who I was." While the subject matter was outside her specialty, Stacy felt motivated to engage the faculty member based on their connection, even offering to help him prepare for class each session, as he was in failing health. "He was an awesome teacher. I've had the other side of the spectrum, where teachers don't care. He really took an interest in helping me."

In contrast, Stacy felt disconnected from civilian students in college, given their age and her family situation.

> I don't talk to civilian students much. I've been here more than three years and probably have two students that aren't veterans that I have interacted with outside of class requirements. We're just different. They're like, 'let's go bar crawl,' and I'm too old for it.

While Stacy makes no effort to reveal her veteran status, she has also been in some uncomfortable situations when others have learned of it. She has been asked, "Have you killed anyone?" She refuses to answer, because both the question and its answer are awkward for her.

Steve

Steve is 30 years old. His decision to join the Coast Guard reserve, as he reflected on it, was attributed to, "A fair bit of not necessarily direct family pressure, but my dad was the only one

in my family that hadn't went into service. My grandfather was in the Army, my grandfather's brother was in the Army, my mom's dad was in the Army as well as the Marines." Steve balanced these effects with the knowledge that financial support from his family for college would not be available, and that he could use some structure in his life. His decision to pursue the Coast Guard reserves was intended to fulfill some of those plans while allowing for the flexibility to have a civilian life outside of his service.

Steve's discomfort with military training began when his bus drove through the front gate. "All of a sudden, a switch got flipped and I'm like, 'Oh, God. This is real.'" The military training environment was a complete culture shock for him. As he reflected on his childhood, he indicated that he was at liberty to do whatever he wanted because, "I didn't do anything I shouldn't have." The structure and discipline of military training, where every action is scrutinized, was something foreign to him, at least at first. Steve's experiences in the Coast Guard auxiliary gave him a basic understanding of military processes and customs. However, the pressure of understanding and applying so much new information in a tense environment with new people (where he had limited agency) was different and difficult for him. Steve summarized his feelings on the environment, "I don't know why it felt hostile, it just did."

To help quell the distractions from his new work environment, he asked for clarification from colleagues as well as leadership in efforts to focus on his work. He also attempted to, "Play the wallflower," to not attract attention to himself. Rather than make connections with other trainees, Steve decided to distance himself from any trainee that would cause trouble or attract attention to him. As training neared its end, "They still had to look at my name tag to know who I was." Steve considered this one of the notable achievements of his training experience, and

essential to keep a clear head during his acclimation. As he moved toward his first military duty station, he was happy to leave the training environment as fast as possible.

Steve was part of a Coast Guard command post watch crew that surveyed Lake Huron to ensure the safety of the waterway. In some instances, he would dispatch emergency assistance for boats in distress. In other instances, he would relay weather and other related information for his sector up his chain of command. Other than the occasional private boating mishap, he described his work as reasonably mundane.

Steve's relationships with other personnel and his leadership varied between casual to negative. His first command staff was open, accessible, and worked to build group cohesion, on and off duty. His second command staff, towards the end of his tour, reversed the majority of those positive steps, with an authoritarian, aggressive approach towards the unit. One memory of this behavior was, "A gate was not working, so the Chief shattered it, then stormed to his office." Morale declined quickly. "Half the crew immediately started smoking again." Steve had challenges keeping a positive attitude. When there was an opportunity to deploy, he was passed over on a technicality.

Steve's frustration toward his command intensified when he earned an opportunity to accept a $120,000 annual salary with a new civilian position. All that was necessary was the approval of a transfer from his command to a new Coast Guard station. They refused, stating, "If you want a stable job, serve full-time." As Steve reflects on his military duty, he considers it, "Kind of a waste of time. I didn't really get anywhere. All the training did was enough for me to do minimum wage security." He also noted that his service caused him personal issues as well. He recalled wearing his uniform to dinner with his family one evening and stopped at a store on the way to the restaurant. People walked away from the registers, refusing to sell him anything.

Outside the restaurant, people would pass him on the street, making comments. He soon stopped wearing his uniform in public places as much as possible.

As Steve discussed his time in the Coast Guard reserve, he indicated multiple times how little he felt it impacted him, both during his time in service, and the years since. As he moves forward in his college career, he intends to leave his service firmly in the past, connecting none of it to who he is now, nor whom he aspires to be.

An English major, Steve has had difficulties starting and continuing in college at more than one time in his life. Steve mostly kept to himself throughout his college career citing the age gap between himself and other students as being a driving factor. His perspective developed through a continued pattern of feeling let down by his classmates. Steve indicated that while he feels that he is not a driven student, and has questioned his place in college life, he has been disappointed by the work of other students on more than one occasion. He said, "It usually comes down to counting on people to get something done and then it not happening. Usually, I try to avoid working with other students as much as I can. I tend to find a lot of people very unreliable."

Throughout Steve's student experience, he indicated that if there was one aspect of student life at his institution that he could change, it would be, "The attitude of pushing inclusiveness," that he felt disenfranchises any student that is not from an underserved or unsupported population. He said, "If you're a straight white male, you should feel bad about it." Because Steve had limited resources and access to pursue college, he feels lumped in with a more substantial characterization that his college experience was more comfortable than that of other students, a perspective he does not share. As he moves through his college experience, challenges continued, and appear to stem from circumstances that are similar to his time in the military. In both environments, he made comments about, "moving slower than others," or not fitting into the overarching group. This

phenomenon occurred both within student veteran circles and in civilian student circles, lending to the perspective of him existing as if alone on campus.

Travis

Travis is 28 years old. In 2010, he was pursuing an associate degree in accounting at a community college. The area was still in recovery from the economic crash of 2008, and his community was slow to recover. During that year, his father's homebuilding business went bankrupt, and the family home was lost to foreclosure. Travis felt he had no options, and that the military could give him some structure, discipline and a funding source to pursue college after a six-year enlistment.

Travis began his Navy service in Chicago, in January during the dead of winter. His first memory of training was the culture shock of leaving the bus, and the disorientation of all his instructors yelling at him, paired with the exhaustion from sleep deprivation. It took roughly two to three weeks for him to get his bearings; his success strategy became to work not to be noticed by military trainers. He made connections to other trainees, many from different backgrounds. He made his first African-American friend during boot camp.

He followed all directions as explicitly as possible, but internally questioned the rationale behind all the menial tasks he was asked to do (ironing his underwear was a notable example). Despite his internal questions about the utility of some aspects of his military training, he persisted, believing that as he neared his graduation, "They'll treat you like a person after boot camp." Unfortunately, Travis' completion of boot camp was pushed back for medical reasons, resulting in a position change. While he would still be involved in military intelligence, his duty station was changed from submarine duty to living and working in Washington, D.C.

Travis was assigned to submarine duty until a medical situation reclassified him to intelligence analyst duty in Washington, D.C. His primary function was to analyze military intelligence as part of a global watch team and prepare briefings for senior-level officials as well as 60 other analysts, many of whom had terminal degrees. Given his lack of experience, high stress and a lack of confidence were normal feelings most evenings. He adjusted through not only gaining experience in his roles but also by bonding with his fellow intelligence analysts, a mix of officers and enlisted personnel, many of whom came from different backgrounds. He was repeatedly struck by how interpersonal everyone was, despite rank and authority differences between officers and enlisted personnel. "You were conditioned in boot camps that offices were above us. However, on duty, we saw them as equals to the extent where you're doing the same job and completing the same task."

Travis' work received several accolades, and he was chosen for special duties multiple times, including two deployments with Navy SEAL (Sea, Air, and Land) teams. As he progressed through his first tour, he volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan for 12 months. Upon arrival overseas, Travis served on an unmanned aerial unit (UAV) company for the duration of his combat tour. He immediately felt differently about the military and his role in it. He felt an increased significance in his work. Life and death decisions were made daily, sometimes many times. There were no days off. Travis repeatedly was pushed into situations where his help was needed to complete complex tasks that he had no prior training for (satellite malfunctions, technology breakdowns). He also made close relationships with some of his colleagues, stronger than even his squad mates as his home station. These new colleagues were a mix of military personnel and civilian contractors; however, during mission operations, all harmoniously meshed as a team. Travis misses these people, even today.

> I met a great group of people and formed a family bond. Actually, it's pretty bittersweet about coming home because you missed that relationship and the bonds that you made. The routine of making coffee every day. Cigar after a mission. The little stuff you looked forward to every day.

Travis' mental state during his deployment experience consisted of a mix of discipline and vigilance. He received limited support from his leadership. His immediate superior was abusive and challenging, and threatened him with personal harm more than once during his tour. Also, his work location on his military installation, by his estimation, had relatively little security. It was protected only by the personnel on station and a few layers of razor wire, as opposed to other, more fortified venues. While he never felt unsafe, he was always aware that security was tenuous. His remembrance of a Taliban attack on his base is one of his more vibrant memories of this time in his military career.

> Prince Harry was on the same base at the same time as us and they sent ten suicide bombers to get him and they blew up a whole harrier squadron. They killed the Harrier squadron commander. It was pretty crazy.

As Travis reflected on this particular experience, I noted that his affect did not change from other experiences he shared with me. It was clear, devoid of emotion, and logical. His body language also was unchanged. His sensitivity to violence, as he reflected on it later on in our discussions, had changed. Travis indicated that after his deployment and his work with UAV's, he felt no emotional or psychological effects from participating in missions where individuals lost their lives. "I'm kind of detached from death because you watch it on a TV screen," he said.

Travis' overall approach toward his deployment began to change roughly eight months into his twelve-month tour. Burnout was a real concern, as he felt his work started to become mundane.

While his colleagues helped him stay focused and perform well, he felt he was ready to go home at nine months, and the remaining three were very difficult on him. As he returned home, he continued to miss the connection he felt to his deployed unit. He also was navigating a significant change in his personal life. Travis married his girlfriend shortly after transitioning out of Afghanistan. They spoke nearly every day when he was deployed, and in his estimation, "I realized how valuable she was in my life because she helped me get through a lot mentally, emotionally. She's very supportive, has a good career, and she's very driven. We have the same goals. I figured that if we could make it through 12 months of me moving to Afghanistan, I think we have a pretty strong connection." This connection has also been Travis' primary support as he moves through college in his electrical engineering program.

Travis has continued to reflect on his active duty service as he has transitioned into the naval reserve to save money for his college education. His feelings about the military have wavered over time, and whereas once he thought he would be a career military professional, "If I had a bad day, I might say get me out now. I'm ready." While he loves the training and experiences he received, Travis is now living a different military life, one that he is still learning to manage. To him, the naval reserve comprises the least attractive parts of military service in one weekend. Endless paperwork takes up his duty time, and his unit is made up of many traditional reservists who have not seen active duty. As such, their focus, according to him, is less serious than his. "They make all these assumptions and they behave in a way that they think the military is supposed to behave and might not be acceptable in an active duty component. So, I know the reason for the stigma active duty people have with reservists. They don't necessarily realize why people on active duty dislike working with them so much." As Travis navigates his new, different military service relationships, his foundations of military training and his active duty tours

continue to guide his decision-making. "The military has helped me realize I'm capable of achieving a lot more than I previously thought I could."

Travis is an electrical engineering major, looking forward to a technical career after graduation. He currently balances his military commitments with a full course load. His college experience has been positive and challenging. His key connections are to his wife and to his engineering study group, which is solely comprised of non-veteran students. He has limited to no interaction with student veterans, as he does not feel he has the time for those connections if he intends to graduate on time. To keep on track, Travis has set up a disciplined schedule to keep up with his studies. He credits his work in military intelligence for his focus, assertiveness, and directness in class. "Faculty are taken aback by my directness and ability to communicate with them. I can tell they think that I'm not a traditional 19-year old."

Travis' key support group within his classes has been a small group of civilian engineering students. While small learning communities have been effective for many students in college across demographics (Tagg, 2003), student veterans do not typically seek out civilian students in this way. Travis credits this group for both personal support and academic assistance, keys for his continued success in engineering. "Without them, I would have failed one of my classes. This semester, I definitely realize the importance of creating friendships in these fields because we all can rely on each other's strengths and weaknesses and a lot of times I had the answer and no one else did." While Travis made efforts to attend student veteran social events when he first matriculated to college, "I definitely don't have time to go to those meetings anymore. Engineering is way too hard." While Travis wanted "the full college experience," his wish has been secondary to completing his academic requirements.

One notable aspect of Travis' college experiences that connects to student veteran literature concerns the personal decision to reveal or conceal one's military experiences. Many will withhold their perspectives for fear of judgment (Elliott, 2015). Travis' perspective on this topic has changed as he has moved through college. This change began when he was asked by other students and faculty to discuss his experiences in Afghanistan during a class his freshman year. His descriptions of watching people die during airstrikes were ones he told in a direct, matter of fact manner. From his perspective, these events were part of his work. He noted, "I don't really have a lot of remorse." Because he saw these events on a screen, "They didn't affect me psychologically or emotionally." However, his classmates immediately became quiet, and the faculty member changed the subject immediately. After this occurrence, Travis felt, "I might have overshared," and made the decision not to share these experiences in future classes. "I didn't want to make people feel uncomfortable or think that I was a crazy war veteran or something."

Chapter 5: Analysis

In the previous chapter, I presented rich narratives from 13 student veterans over 26 hours of interviews. A qualitative research design was used, framed by narrative inquiry (Polkinghorne, 1995) and rooted in the constructivist perspective (Creswell, 2009). This perspective enabled understanding of the life experiences of these participants in their own words (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through these narratives, information was obtained from research questions regarding college and military experiences, identity, social relationships, and military influence to understand the perspectives of each participant as they navigated their college experiences. Themes connected to age, experience, social and cultural challenges, reflections on past experiences, and student veteran relationships emerged through these participant narratives.

In this chapter, I present my findings and analysis. As a reminder, the research questions guiding this narrative inquiry are:

1. How do student veterans describe their college experiences?
2. How do student veterans understand their college experiences in relation to their military experiences?

These findings were developed through narrative cognition, which is appropriate for theming narrative style interviews that discuss and strive to understand human actions (Polkinghorne, 1995). Through analyzing the data, information obtained from specific questions designed to understand the impact of military experience on college life revealed that while military experience impacts varied from person to person, military experience was salient to 12 of the 13 people in this project. All participants indicated a propensity to isolate from others and focus on academic progression, based on their military experiences, age, or other factors. When these individuals chose to engage other college students or practitioners, it was limited in scope and in support of their college goals. Many participants also reflected on the differences between

their past military experiences and their current college experiences. Finally, participants discussed their interactions with other student veterans and their feelings about these interactions. The following thematic analysis is organized in these four themes, detailed in the code table in Appendix C, that respond to the research questions of this study.

Traversing the Age and Experience Gap

Student veterans enter institutions of higher education with the memories and experiences of their military careers still fresh in their minds. They enter an environment that can be decidedly different from their military backgrounds. As the participants in this project navigate college, they found challenges establishing themselves in their new spaces.

Of the 13 student veterans interviewed in this project, nine indicated they keep to themselves on campus, making little to no connection to other individuals, both in and out of class. Participants offered different reasons for their isolation. A resonant point with a majority of participants was the perceived age gap between student veterans and their younger, non-student veteran counterparts. Eight of 13 participants (six males, two females, aged 23-41), made regular references to being older, perceptively more mature and academically focused than their fellow students. Others had negative interactions with civilian students that contributed to patterns of isolation. Some female student veterans in the project sought professional help to deal with confidence problems in engaging other students, in part because they felt marginalized when they were in the military. Others felt civilians could not begin to understand the life experiences of military members, even in general terms, so they made few efforts to attempt to educate them.

Additional examples that connect to these narratives involve internal perceptions amongst the majority of participants toward civilian students. Student veterans feel they are more serious

about being in class and giving the faculty member their attention than their non-veteran peers. Observed examples of this behavior were: student veterans observing non-veteran students arriving to class late, and leaving early, watching YouTube videos or browsing the internet instead of actively participating in a lecture or a general lack of communication in group work that led to assignments languishing half-complete. Marie, Miranda, and Chandler discuss their perspectives on some of these points below:

> **Marie.** I have negative interactions with students because of their age. There were some honors students in one of my classes. They were turning in papers; I had missed the class the day before and asked if we had an assignment due. They then said they were turning in honors papers. When I said, 'I didn't know that,' they responded, 'obviously; you wouldn't be an honors student.' Attitudes like this were common in my classes. There are students that kick the back of your chair for no reason. They're the ones that talk all through the class and they sit right up front, making it hard for me to hear and understand. I just don't care for them.
>
> **Miranda.** The Army makes me feel like I'm older than my actual age group. So, I don't really relate to my age group very well and pretty much all my identity is based on the Army. I think civilian students tend to overthink little problems and make things into a bigger problem than they are. I would say civilian students are more entitled for sure. There are those people who usually at the end of the semester are asking for extra credit even though they haven't come to any of the classes. I've never seen a student veteran show up late to a class and disrupt the class. But so many other students do.

Chandler. Chandler had challenges connecting with other students because of his age. "It was very difficult to relate to people as a 25-year old freshman," he said. In his first math class,

he described seeing a student watching a movie on their laptop instead of focusing on the lecture. It shocked him, and he had difficulty understanding why someone would waste their time in such a way. "Maybe the military made me this way. Students, ten minutes prior to class ending, they zip up, close notebooks, and it's very distracting," he said. Also, he saw a difference in the attention span and motivation of civilian students in many of his courses, when they were present in class. The absence rate of his colleagues disturbed him. On multiple instances, he found himself completing group assignments nearly single-handedly, both because he could not connect to his group mates (despite continuous attempts to keep everyone informed), and he did not want to miss deadlines.

Marie, Chandler, and Miranda all discussed examples of feeling disconnected from non-veteran students despite being relatively close in age to them. Their differences, as explained in their narratives, are experienced-based, the products of being in environments where attention to detail, commitment to the work and collaboration were key to success. The frustrations they felt stem from a lack of connection based on that experience gap.

Lack of Agency of Military Experience in College. Some student veterans isolate themselves from their civilian peers because of a perception they do not have common interests or beliefs, or that their military experience is unwanted or unappreciated. Some participants indicated they felt judgment from civilian students because the campus was perceptively "liberal," which gave them various levels of discomfort in expressing themselves, both as student veterans and as individuals. Some feel their peers are unable to separate military experience from political or social agendas. Age may not be a contributing factor in this divide, given that some of these interactions were amongst student veteran participants who were relatively close in age to their civilian counterparts. However, given the intensity of the narrative, and its

connection to life experience, it is appropriate to include it amongst the age-related narratives. Michael discussed his impressions of these phenomena below.

Michael. Michael has mostly kept his military experiences to himself in his classes, feeling they are largely irrelevant in his college life. He cringed at the thought of leveraging his experiences to stand out or receive an acknowledgement from his classmates. "I don't want to be that guy," he reflected. Michael reserved that aspect of his life for circumstances that he felt necessitated that perspective, such as when military topics came up in class. The experience he shared was a discussion on Black Lives Matter, in connection with a television commercial depicting military personnel. The faculty member facilitating the course solicited Michael's perspectives. Michael then was able to illustrate how the commercial, in his mind, reflected the diversity he saw in his military service, "I think the reason the military was chosen for that commercial is because we're not segregated. We're integrated and come from all walks of life."

When we discussed Michael's classroom experiences, this experience was notable, as the majority of his experiences differed from other participants in the study. He purposely isolated himself from other students. He believed that he had nothing in common with them and would be judged for his beliefs, both in and out of the military. Michael is 23; his differences from other students connect to his experiences and personal beliefs, versus an age gap, points he makes throughout his interviews. "Aside from this military example and conversation, I was largely at ends with every single person in that class. That probably plays as much into my experience as me having military experience, because how much could I possibly find in common with a group of 18-year-olds who are very fresh out of high school?" Michael's feelings influenced his reactions in every one of his classes. Michael felt his views and beliefs placed him in the minority on

campus, contributing to him intermittently contributing to classroom discussions. His reflections on his decisions follow:

> I'm not an uber-conservative. I'm a libertarian. But I like guns, and I think people need to stop being pussies. And I think the fact that people are trying to control what you say, that really pisses me off to be honest. Sometimes, I swear to God, it's like when I read in the news or I hear people talk on campus I'm like, 'am I the only one who read 1984, and got a logical conclusion?' I conclude that, yes, I'm the only one in my classes who did. Even if everyone is not, 'super-liberal,' most people are. And that's clearly the vocal majority of people who are in my classes. They say, 'Trump's an asshole, so all conservatives are assholes.' There is clearly a disdain for conservative learning thought and even if it's not like uber-progressive on a campus. It's generally not much welcomed.

Michael's experiences highlight a challenge many student veterans share when they matriculate to college. They enter a new culture, with differences from their military backgrounds**.** (Iverson & Anderson, 2013). Finding their bearings in this new life is not without challenges.

Cultural and Social Challenges of Being in College

Student engagement literature discusses that for student veterans to be successful in college settings, as with other student groups, they should consider engaging in the college culture (Tinto, 1993). Engagement commonly consists of: a commitment to academic success, engaging university stakeholders for guidance and support (Renn & Reason, 2013) and establishing a small peer group of other student veterans to support them through their experiences (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Student veterans encounter difficulties engaging in these ways and at these levels. Many student veterans are older, focus on academic work, refrain from social connections, and live away from campus (Mackeracher, 2004; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Student veterans also model self-

protective behaviors that can lead to personal isolation from others, making social connections difficult (Kimble, Fleming & Bennion; Kelly, Smith, Fox, & Wheeler, 2013).

Student veterans experience differences in their college lives from the first time they enter a college class. These individuals engage in college only to the extent needed to progress through their courses or to meet their defined goals. Each potential connection is contrasted against the need to progress academically and not waste time. Many veterans will complete their work alone, foregoing study groups and other student connections, a phenomenon experienced by many of the participants in this study.

Voluntary Isolation from Other Students. Half of the participants in this project indicated they voluntarily isolate from other students. While these individuals have given several reasons for their isolation, they connect on a common thread of feeling disconnected from the college and its students. Steve's narrative helps unpack these tensions.

Steve worked on coursework alone. Connections with other students are not familiar, which he attributes to the age gap between himself and traditional undergraduate students. However, his lack of comfort goes deeper than that. His hobbies and social interactions all take place off-campus, and with either his close family and friends or in his hobbies (he participates in role-playing games at an off-campus store downtown). Steve's interactions with faculty are transactional and only necessary to clarify academic expectations. He downplays disagreements with other students because "there's nothing to be gained by having them." He makes no effort to make connections to other student veterans, civilian students, or faculty. He does not actively seek to involve himself in any aspect of the campus that goes beyond his core need to complete his classes.

Steve's experiences suggest that there are questions about how best to engage student veterans with limited motivations to attend and complete college. There are consensus perspectives in the literature that suggest that student veterans need a student veteran peer group to persist (Bauman, 2013; Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014; Danelo, 2014; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013;). Steve's tensions in college would not abate if he joined a student veteran peer group. His narrative compels practitioners to look broader when investigating potential peer supports, to include family and other individuals not affiliated with the college.

Commuting Increases the Divide. Commuting to campus has promoted isolation amongst the majority of student veterans in this project. Seven of the student veterans in this project commute to college regularly and spend time on campus only for a class or to study, which is consistent with non-traditional, adult commuter students (Mackeracher, 2004) as well as student veterans as a group (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). However, commuting also inhibits the ability of students to establish connections on campus, perpetuating their isolation. Bobbi Jo discusses her commuting challenges during a typical week in college below.

> **Bobbi Jo.** It takes a lot of discipline to do this; I'm not sure everyone could. I don't know another word except crazy. I commute every day from far away. It's usually an hour and forty-five minutes each way. But if you put in perspective of getting on a military base, that's nothing. You can wait outside the gate for two hours to get on base, especially when there are multiple carriers in port. So, for me, it was just another day driving to work. So, it starts off pretty early in the morning. I have to leave my house at five a.m. for my eight o'clock class. Then, I have a babysitter who meets me at 5:45 in the morning. And then, I get here, and I do class all day. Every time I have a break in-between classes, I'm trying

to work on homework while I'm kid-free. It's like an hour between classes is so sacred compared to an hour at home when you're trying to do something. Of course, when the day is over, I commute home. And of course, on certain days of the week, my daughter has soccer practice and games on Saturdays. So, it's just the balance of everything. On top of the papers, lab reports, and the exams, it's a balance. Last semester, there were some nights I wasn't getting home until eight or nine at night.

Bobbi Jo's challenges in establishing connections on campus are a direct result of her situation. Despite her narrative identifying some tensions in her military experiences, her college life is one that she feels good about and wants to engage in. However, the distance she must travel to school every day, paired with her responsibilities, make that level of interaction improbable. As a result, she must solely focus on her academic requirements.

"Fit" Concerns in College. While there are gaps in academic literature involving student veterans, a robust area of scholarship concerns the transitional challenges student veterans can experience as they navigate from military service to college (Ackerman & Bauman, 2013; Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; DiRamio & Mitchell, 2009). However, there is a dearth of literature discussing the military narratives of student veterans as they experience the college, interact with university stakeholders, and make meaning of their college experiences. Questions exist as to the time when transition ends, and the college experience would then progress for student veterans. Is there a perpetual transition? Are student veterans continually navigating their previous experiences within their current environment? Participant narratives suggest these individuals are continually evaluating their college situations against their previous experiences. In the participant narratives, each individual discussed their connections to their military units in detail, and many indicated strong bonds amongst their military colleagues. Interestingly, their

reflections on their college environment and those social connections are less rich, fewer in number, and seemingly less impactful.

While many student veterans were clear in their reasons for attending college and their paths to success, they also indicated challenges in finding their individual fit in their new surroundings. They exhibited a lack of personal self-confidence as well as a belief that they have no one to relate to, which can contribute to challenges in sustaining focus on college success. Given the richness of the participant military narratives in this project, it speaks to reason that some of the experiences student veterans have had before matriculating to college could have shaped their identities enough to contribute to tensions in their new environments. Marie discusses these phenomena in some of her college narratives.

Marie. Marie always wanted to attend college. Comfortable with numbers since childhood, she saw herself working in accounting after her military service. However, our first interview began with Marie at a crossroads.

> Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to become an accountant. I'm really good with numbers. The old school system, with ledgers and stuff, was something I loved to work with. As of about two weeks ago, I decided I don't want to be an accountant. I don't know what I should study anymore.

Her first college experience, at a local community college, was a memorable one. She felt connected to the college community and did very well academically. However, when she then transferred to a larger university, her confidence was shaken due to the size of the campus and the number of students in her classes. In her previous narrative account, she discussed the lack of seriousness she felt from other students and her feelings about that dynamic in class. That perspective pairs with her daily internal conflicts.

In classes, Marie does not feel comfortable talking to other students since she has come to the university. When she reflects on why she chooses not to engage, she refers back to her time at the end of her last military tour, and the negative relationships with her commander and first sergeant. She stated, "In my opinion, it's because of the way my first sergeant was towards females in my career field." Marie felt continually marginalized in her work and her standing in the organization. To work towards feeling comfortable in college, she joined two student organizations, one of which supported student veterans. She attempted to talk to other students at meetings, even agreeing to text with some of them during the week. She was comfortable at these meetings; she even found an academic mentor through the student organization she joined. To the current day, she feels her mentor is the most substantial connection she has to another person in college.

Despite those connections, Marie continues to have challenges engaging with students. She acknowledged feeling out of place at her university, indicating she favored the smaller community college she previously attended. At her current institution, "one hundred students a day walk by you and don't say hello," she noted. She cites her age as a factor, as she is much older than her undergraduate counterparts (29 years old). She does not feel mistreated by her classmates, but she does have trouble identifying with them. Group work is a challenge, as she sees a lack of focus and seriousness from the civilian students in her classes. She continually sees other students leave class early, come unprepared, and outwardly act as if they understand the material. As she moves forward in her education, she prefers to isolate herself from other students to preserve her own learning experience. In some instances, she would allow her colleagues to stumble before offering to help.

Some of Marie's choice to disengage is connected to removing herself from uncomfortable situations in class, citing that she does not feel connected to civilians anymore. During our second interview, Marie indicated that she has heard younger, civilian students criticize the military in class multiple times during her tenure, which she finds upsetting. She feels ideologically different than her classmates, labeling them "very liberal, and other words you could use." Marie internalizes her feelings about their critiques.

> I let them talk because it is such a personal and sensitive thing to me. I'm afraid I'll get very angry. So angry it will make me cry, and I don't want to cry, because that's kind of ridiculous.

During Marie's interviews, as discussed above, she indicated that she recently decided to change her major from accounting and was evaluating her next steps to progress in college. Her goal to make a future in Florida after graduation has not changed. Her day to day priorities are to continue to progress in her schoolwork and care for an ill family member while continuing to work to expand her comfort zone in engaging with other people. The uncertainty about her future is a phenomenon student veterans experience as they look to connect to life goals beyond their military service (Kim & Cole, 2013; Danelo, 2014). If student veterans are having challenges finding a healthy mindset to pursue college, they will inevitably have trouble feeling comfortable interacting in college. Steve discusses some of these discomforts as well.

Steve. Steve's college experiences consisted of daily challenges to stay motivated and feel comfortable on campus. "I am not one of those people that gets to go to college," was one of the first things he said to me during our first interview. Before his military service, he tried on multiple occasions to start a college program, only to quickly withdraw each time. He repeatedly felt uncomfortable and out of place, regardless of the institutional size or the courses he took. In

discussing his past, it became clear that his lack of self-confidence affected his ability to persist. His military experiences are similar to other participants in that he did not seek opportunities for recognition. His primary goal was to divert all attention away from himself. In our discussions about military service and about college life, Steve consistently chose a path where he did not create social connections to others. His confidence to enroll in college at this time in his life stemmed from motivation from his girlfriend. He said, "a need came from her that, 'you need to try this.'" The support of his girlfriend and his family have kept him persisting to graduation.

As Steve began his studies at his current institution, he immediately felt uncomfortable. The school was very intimidating and foreign to him when he arrived, almost as if other students moved at a faster pace than he did.

> I came back to school like a decade later than a lot of people who would be in the same boat I was. So, it's like there's two different people: there's the responsible adult who makes dinner and then there's the person who goes to class. I sort of have this subconscious ability to be a different person at different times. I grew up with my parents being divorced my whole life, so you just switch roles depending on who you're dealing with.

Faculty Interactions. As discussed previously in the literature review and some of the narratives shared earlier, student veterans seek connections to faculty, at a minimum, to ensure work completion and academic progression (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011). All participants in this project affirmed the need to connect to faculty at a basic communication level. However, the faculty experiences participants discussed in their narratives varied from little to no communication, to some participants actively engaging their faculty in positive and negative interactions. After reviewing all data from all interviewees, detailed examples of

faculty positives were limited to a few participants. Notably, Marie and Bobbi Jo had positive relationships with their faculty, as they discuss below.

Bobbi Jo made a clear distinction between her military supervisors and the interactions she has with faculty and teaching assistants on her campus. Where military leadership in her life focused on mission completion over personal needs, she felt that dealing with faculty was a holistic interaction.

> Faculty act like they care about you and they know there are other things going on in your life besides school. I cannot think of a time where faculty have not been supportive. Teaching assistants speak to me respectfully, versus what I've experienced in the past. I like to know everything inside and out, so I'm always asking questions about things after the lecture and they're always super happy to answer my question so I really like that. They even ask me how my daughter's doing. So, it's nice because they actually care about you.

Marie's efforts engaging staff and faculty have also been positive, a welcome holdover from her time in community college. They know of her military service and have supported her learning. She is most comfortable engaging with these groups. She said, "The advisor I see in the business college, I email her personally, and she gets back to me. Every time. She's a sweetheart. If she sees me in the hall, she asks me how I'm doing. It's great." Marie and Bobbi Jo's narratives help to visualize positive engagement techniques that faculty can use to support student veterans in their classrooms by actively listening and engaging students in ways they are comfortable.

Faculty Tensions. Other participants indicated considerable tension with faculty interactions during their college experiences. In some instances, student veterans questioned the credibility and experience of the faculty teaching their classes. Some participants challenged a

faculty member's knowledge of a topic, or how they conducted themselves in their teaching roles, based on their own military experiences. This situation is best explained further by Michael's and Rich's narratives, both discussed below.

Michael's classroom experiences with faculty consisted of challenges dealing with shifting academic expectations and a lack of formality that he found strange. His challenges with math and science courses juxtaposed with other, easier classes that he found unnecessary. While he made no tangible efforts to establish rapport with his faculty, he noted their efforts to connect with him and other students, noting several instances where different faculty would socialize in class and discuss their personal lives. Michael found this strange and made no real efforts to engage in kind. He stated multiple times that he did not care for the personal stories faculty would tell and would have preferred they move through the material instead.

> My first semester, I took a writing class. The professor, she was very personable, maybe a little bit too much into talking about her personal life. I mean, whatever floats your boat, but I've never seen anything like it. I've never had a teacher who's like, "oh, here's what's going on with my 18-year old daughter right now." That's cool I guess. I mean, I don't give a crap.

Michael's most notable effort to connect with a faculty member came from a disagreement. He engaged his sociology professor during a discussion of whether or not women should be in combat (the professor has no military experience). Michael found fault with the professor's impressions of the topic, said he was incorrect and challenged his assertions in front of roughly 500 of his classmates. As the conversation intensified, Michael revealed his military experiences to the class in more detail, providing firsthand rationales for his perspectives.

> One of the topics in my sociology class was women in combat. My professor clearly had no idea what the hell he was talking about. It's like he watched a two-minute news segment on it and just remembered those talking points but completely neglected to use any of his own critical thinking and any sort of experience. He didn't seem to dig any deeper than the two-minute segment on CNN. He said quite possibly the dumbest things I've ever heard anyone say. He wasn't in the military. Why am I supposed to give a shit? Your opinion is you've never served. If you're going to talk about women in combat, you should either have been in the military or in combat. So, I confronted him after class.

While Michael decided to take the discussion outside of class, he made a point to research the topic on his own, finding roughly 30 scholarly articles on the topic that he gave to the professor in a PowerPoint briefing a week later. The next class, the professor indicated he had reviewed material on the topic, and that his previous assertions were incorrect. Michael, despite feeling validated initially, never engaged his professor in this class again. He said, "I lost respect for him as a human. I never had reason to ever talk to him again." As Michael took other courses, he followed a pattern of quiet isolation, believing his perspectives would place him in the minority of all his classes, making it difficult to feel heard.

Rich's classroom experiences were tempered by his continued frustrations with university policy and administration. Although he brought nearly 60 credits into the university from his 20-plus year military career, his university classified him as a college freshman in his chosen major. This frustration was a prominent discussion topic in both our interviews. Despite his belief he was in the right program (an aptitude assessment indicated landscape architecture was an ideal fit), his academic experiences were not without challenges. Rich indicated a steep learning curve in retraining himself to study and structure his classwork in a way that would be successful for him.

A medical situation inhibited his ability to accomplish his goals, and he sought and obtained accommodations from the university to assist.

As Rich began to become more comfortable in his studies, he began to develop impressions about his faculty. "There are instructors here that are not qualified," he said. As Rich explained the situation further, he noted discomfort with one of his instructors that he felt was running her course in an ad hoc fashion, supported by weak material. As he asked about the instructor's credentials, he learned that the instructor's husband was also teaching in the program.

Rich was upset at this turn of events. "She is grossly inadequate as an instructor. I was an instructor in the Air Force for three years. There are certain things you do and don't in teaching. When people ask you direct questions, you don't give them grey answers. This wouldn't happen in the Air Force, where a husband that is the director of the program hires his wife to teach in it." This example introduces a cultural difference between interpersonal dynamics in military service and the college environment. Student veterans sometimes view faculty as authority figures (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011), which may not be a role faculty seek nor accept. In Rich's example, he is stating his perceptions based on his experience in a military training environment, despite now being in college. His perceptions of how an instructor should act may not be shared by others, which could complicate their interactions.

Rich's narrative prompts a question that connects back to the core of this project. What impacts does military service have on student veterans in college? Academic literature does not delineate one student veteran's experiences from another, unless related to injury, deployment, combat, or other high-risk behaviors (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Cucciare, Darrow, & Weingardt, 2011; Bryan, Bryan, Kinkson, Jr., Bichrest, & Ahern, 2014). However, as discussed in the preceding literature review, participant military experiences all begin with an

acculturation process that strengthens over time (Bacevich, 1993). The resonance and importance of that acculturation process is exhibited through the narratives of this project.

Michael and Rich's narratives regarding their faculty experiences give points of reflection in both how faculty can choose to interact with students as well as prepare for their classes. While it speaks to reason that faculty assertively prepare for each class session, Michael's example suggests that some interactions with students can shift quickly if the accuracy of a lesson is in question. In casual interactions with students, personal anecdotes and information may be important to conceal, depending on how a class of students chooses to engage.

In addition to questions about faculty engagement and teaching styles, some participants expanded their critiques to college and universities at large. Four participants questioned the necessity of college, both in terms of it being the optimal path for veterans, as well as the rationale behind its content and structure.

Questioning the Utility of a College Education

Some student veterans navigate the social and cultural challenges of their new surroundings still questioning the utility of their college experience in their civilian lives. Because funding for student veterans is accessible and substantive (Kim & Cole, 2013), it speaks to reason that many student veterans would take advantage of these resources in pursuit of a higher quality of life. However, the decision to pursue a college education is one that some student veterans continually evaluate, as Chandler described.

Chandler pursued a college education to receive an opportunity through the military to fly aircraft in some capacity. After leaving military service, he knew he wanted to return, but only if he could pursue that goal. He selected his current university because he had never lived in the

Midwest before, and wanted that experience. He studied business management because it fit within his ideal schedule; if given more time, he would have pursued mechanical engineering.

His first impressions were eye-opening. He had difficulty relating to anyone and did not feel empowered to discuss his background with other students. Chandler reflected on when he would move to a new military base, and how a ready-made peer group was immediately available, as everyone had the universal connectivity of military service, even if their positions and roles were different. In his new surroundings, while everyone was a college student, the similarities ended there.

Chandler did not seek personal connections to other civilian students in his classes. "I'm not in class to make friends. I want to learn and then go home." He did make connections to students who, like himself, were studying to become military officers through Army ROTC. However, he still felt as if a piece of himself was hidden, as the overwhelming majority of students in those programs did not have previous military experiences. Instead, these students made assumptions about what military service was like, many of which were incorrect or inappropriate. Given these students will ultimately become military officers, Chandler was concerned about their naiveté and decided not to continue to converse socially with them. In one instance, he did socially connect with a student veteran who was following a similar path back to commissioned military service. In their conversations together, they referred to the knowledge gap of their peers about what the military lifestyle is. However, they kept these conversations to themselves, so as not to make their peers uncomfortable.

The flexibility and variety of his college schedule was a challenging adjustment, as he longed for the simplicity and clarity of his military schedule. Chandler's difficulties in these areas were that his work and his life were continually occupying the same times, whereas, in his military

life, work had fixed start and end dates. Ultimately, Chandler decided to leave college and resume his military career as a Warrant Officer in the U.S. Army, a position that does not require a college degree. "Maybe it's reckless to leave college before completing it," he noted. However, during our last conversation, after he left school, Chandler indicated no regrets in leaving college and was excited for his life ahead. This choice allowed him to pursue his goal of being an aviator; he is now training to be a helicopter pilot.

Veteran Past, Student Veteran Present

In searching for an understanding of student veteran experiences in relation to their military experiences, we must examine both periods. Participants discussed their military acclimation process in vivid details in chapter 4. Each individual was able to remember significant components of their reasons for joining the military, their training and acclimation process, how they engaged peers, and what their work was like during their military careers. These descriptions depicted a challenging environment where individuals were pushed outside their comfort zones, yet found equilibrium through training, social connection, persistence, and commitment. In contrast, college has presented its own challenges, and many student veterans in this study discussed leveraging military skills and experiences to persist and succeed.

Using Military Experience to Succeed in College. As student veterans moved through their college experiences, their acculturation process consisted of their interactions with different individuals on campus, learning the rhythm of being responsible for going to class, preparing for assignments and tests, and ultimately how to set goals to progress towards their postgraduate futures. My discussions with participants on how they structured their college experiences began with how they progressed through a weekly schedule. In military service, most military

personnel have a structured routine. Their leadership holds them accountable for following that schedule.

In contrast, many student veterans in college structure their days alone in a transactional fashion, holding themselves accountable (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). The majority of participants in this project indicated a comparable path, discussing the differences between military and college life both structurally and culturally in how one would complete a military objective versus a college-related academic one. The unstructured, individual nature of college life created tensions for some participants in this study. The lack of clarity and standardization of some university processes also created challenges. Half of the participants in the study missed both the structure and the discipline associated with military life.

Military Teammate, Solo College Student. The majority of individuals in this project indicated that their military careers would not have been successful had they not created and maintained connections with peers on duty. This process began in their training environments, where they made a social connection to at least one other trainee. It repeated itself as each person moved to a new location or unit, which would inevitably involve developing professional relationships with other individuals, in support of mission accomplishment. As participants reflected on their military service, eleven of them spoke of connections with former colleagues in substantive ways that enhanced how they felt about their work and their place in the group. The lessons learned in these experiences served as the foundation for the strategy that many participants utilized to be college students. However, participants also regularly discussed tensions and perceived differences in the way they conducted themselves in relation to the way they view how others behave in college. Whether it was a negative perception of civilian student academic focus, discomfort with faculty that appeared too personal towards students, or a

perception that age and experience mean that student veterans take things more seriously, participants saw a clear divide between themselves and their colleagues. These thoughts contributed to the majority of students moving away from teamwork whenever possible, electing to complete academic work alone, or with minimal interaction with other students. To assist in understanding how participants' military narratives can connect to their lives as college students, I will discuss Bobbi Jo, Steve, Michael, Marie, Travis, Chandler and Rich's military and college experiences.

Bobbi Jo's military and college narratives appear to connect in interesting ways. Her journey connects to other student veteran transitions of commuter students (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011) and her learning habits are consistent with adult learners who commute to campus (Mackeracher, 2004). She holds her military service in high regard, and yet appears to be still managing some aftereffects from her military service. Her age and life situation, as she sees them, create distance from other students in her classes.

While she acknowledges her lack of agency in the military, the college has shown her a new opportunity to be heard and express herself. Her noted successes in engaging faculty and other students give her confidence and strengthen her abilities to make sense of her college environment. These developments have been vital for her, as she views faculty as the authority figures in the college environment. This dynamic is another reason she feels more comfortable in college; she can talk to faculty about any situation without worrying about overstepping or being marginalized or disrespected.

In reflecting on Bobbi Jo's military and college narratives, she appears to have successfully acculturated to college, despite considerable personal, familial and logistical challenges. When she reflects on what it means to be a student veteran, Bobbi Jo replied, "I sacrificed a lot. That's

pretty much; I just, I've sacrificed a lot." These words suggest that, even in positive navigations of military and college experiences, so much exists within a student veteran that only they know.

During this research project, Steve's narratives separated themselves from the rest of the group, as he indicated very little connection from his military experiences toward his current college experience. Steve feels that his military experiences do not impact his current life at all. Reflections on that time in his life yielded considerable regret as if joining the military hindered his plans. As Steve moves through his college experience, his challenges continued, and appear to stem from similar circumstances. In both environments, he made comments about, "moving slower than others," or not fitting into the overarching group. This phenomenon occurred both within student veteran circles and in civilian student circles, lending to the perspective of him existing as if alone on campus. Given his continued pattern of isolating himself and working alone, there could reason beyond his military experiences for the choices he continues to make. His age in relation to other students could be a factor, as he made a note of the gap between himself and his contemporaries. As Steve nears graduation, his relative satisfaction with his choices remains ambiguous. His frustrations with college seem to be similar to his military challenges, in the sense that success in both paths required the completion of some requirements he felt were unnecessary (he discussed military training requirements and an overabundance of required college courses, both in negative terms).

As discussed earlier, when seeking avenues to support student veterans as they make meaning of college, the literature suggests finding common ground through establishing a student veteran peer group. Sharing military experiences can promote connection that can sustain these individuals as they make sense of college (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

Steve's narrative directly conflicts with that assertion and promotes questions about how to support student veterans that absolve themselves of their service yet may still be affected by it.

Michael's college experiences are unfolding in a comparable way to his military experiences. He entered both environments to pursue an important goal, then was faced with significant questions in both instances. Michael's military narrative vacillates between small points of satisfaction (when he was actively training to fight, then when he was deployed) and long periods of dissatisfaction (during his service at his home station, he indicated feeling bored and underutilized). His medical hardships and dissatisfactions with his military group led him to pursue college in the hopes of obtaining a career in law enforcement. His movement through college would seem to be even more challenging, with fewer positives. In his mind, college directly conflicts with his belief system and how he sees the world. "Being a student veteran isn't a thing for me. This is a means to an end," he said during his interview. Michael's college goal is to earn just enough credits (38) to apply to a police academy somewhere in Michigan.

Michael's perspectives about his college environment impact his ability to connect with nearly every other group on campus, as he feels the entire system is incongruent with his conservative belief system. "I'm politically different than probably 85 percent of the people in my classes," he said. He also feels the college environment focuses on benefits and support that are unnecessary. For example, he discussed safe spaces on campus as, "reverse discrimination" to individuals that were not the specific targets for that space. Michael believes that his background contributes to his perspectives. He notes, "I've yet to meet a liberal veteran, and college campuses are generally meant for liberal 18-year-olds."

Michael's military experiences are a connection point to how he experiences college. His interactions with faculty support his agency in ensuring military service is correctly represented,

whether someone is knowledgeable about that service or has no experience. His connection to one other student veteran who could empathize with his experiences is another reference to this stance. However, there are other salient factors to his college tensions, as his military background does not necessarily validate his conservative beliefs. Michael's conservative perspective might have caused tension even if he was a civilian. Also, his pursuit of a law enforcement career could have affected his necessity to establish peer and faculty connections in college, as these supports may not be needed for individuals who approach college in a transactional way. As practitioners and faculty seek to explore ways to support students like Michael, Chandler's narrative discussed a similar perspective, which further support the stance that graduation may not be the primary goal of a student veteran's college experience.

Marie's goal-oriented mindset, honed during her military career, followed her to college and appeared to sustain her academic efforts for the majority of her college career. Her discussions regarding her academic experiences connect to the attitudes and behaviors she exhibited during her military work. To be successful in college, she prioritized her academics, took charge of groups when she needed to (despite it being a challenge for her), and requested accommodations when she needed them to succeed in class. She pursued a connection to her academic advisor, joined a student organization, and attempted to attend social events when her schedule allowed. It was tough for her to connect to other students. Ultimately, the one connection she has been able to sustain is with her academic advisor, whom she feels more comfortable with than other students, who are notably younger than she is.

Unfortunately, it appears that Marie's reduced confidence to interact interpersonally has also followed her from military service, a notable point from her military narrative. Marie's challenges in navigating gender bias during her military service (e.g., her references to being a

"Barbie doll,") and her irritations with younger trainees appear to have contributed to her tensions in establishing any social connections to other students. She noted during our interviews more than once, "I have a hard time talking to people." She also commented on how other students would go about their academic work, and when there was an opportunity to help, she would pull back, particularly in group work. She said, "why should I step on their toes when they need to learn how to do it?"

While Marie also believed that other students did not treat her differently because of her gender or her military experiences (she noted these factors multiple times as well), her under-confidence seemed to inform all her college decisions, including her decision to drop accounting. Marie made this decision despite acknowledging her past successes in accounting. During our conversations about her college choices, the tone of her voice was noticeably different during our college discussions as opposed to discussions on her military background. Even when discussing tense subjects, her voice was measured, proud, and direct when discussing military topics. When discussing college topics, she was reserved, quiet, and I noted a sort of vibration in her voice that sounded unsure. It seems that her military experiences could have both positive and negative connections to how she makes sense of her college experience. The negatives are affecting her ability to persist at this point in her experience. Her situations will inevitably make this dynamic more challenging (needing to care for an ill parent out of state, as discussed earlier).

The uncertainty Marie expresses regarding her future promotes questions about the college environment's ability to influence the transition from military service and to support student veterans in their college pursuits. Also, while there are many established support resources for student veterans on many college campuses (that extend into coaching and human service), the lack of confidence that fuels Marie's isolation would be difficult to unpack for a university staff

or faculty member, given Marie's unwillingness to engage other people. As with many other aspects of supporting this population, the best way to support and serve Marie in her college experience remains an open question.

Travis' military experiences have resonance in his approach to college. He indicates that he has set up a disciplined schedule to keep up with his studies. He credits his work in military intelligence for his focus, assertiveness, and directness in class. "Faculty are taken aback by my directness and ability to communicate with them. I can tell they think that I'm not a traditional 19-year old."

However, some aspects of Travis' military and college experiences both support and challenge certain aspects of current academic literature concerning student veterans. The literature suggests that student veteran peer groups enhance student connection, either in a class or on campus (Bauman, 2013). In contrast, Travis' key support group within his classes has been a small group of civilian engineering students. While small learning communities have been effective for many students in college across demographics (Tagg, 2003), student veterans do not typically seek out civilian students in this way. Travis credits this group for both personal support and academic assistance, keys for his continued success in engineering. "Without them, I would have failed one of my classes. This semester, I definitely realize the importance of creating friendships in these fields because we all can rely on each other's strengths and weaknesses and a lot of times I had the answer and no one else did." While Travis made efforts to attend student veteran social events when he first matriculated to college, "I definitely don't have time to go to those meetings anymore. Engineering is way too hard." While Travis wanted "The full college experience," his wish has been subjugated to complete his academic requirements.

One notable aspect of Travis' college experiences that connects to student veteran literature concerns the personal decision to reveal or conceal one's military experiences. Many will withhold their perspectives for fear of judgment (Elliott, 2015). Travis' perspective on this topic has changed as he has moved through college. This change began when he was asked by other students and faculty to discuss his experiences in Afghanistan during a class in his freshman year. His descriptions of watching people die during airstrikes were ones he told in a direct, matter of fact manner. From his perspective, these events were part of his work. He noted, "I don't really have a lot of remorse." Because he saw these events on a screen, "They didn't affect me psychologically or emotionally." However, his classmates immediately became quiet, and the faculty member changed the subject immediately. After this occurrence, Travis felt, "I might have overshared," and made the decision not to share these experiences in future classes. "I didn't want to make people feel uncomfortable or think that I was a crazy war veteran or something."

Travis' narrative helps us understand some of the reasons student veterans withhold discussing details about their military experiences. When the focus of these discussions shifts towards what military personnel may do in deployed environments or towards questions on PTSD, TBI or other combat-related injuries, one can begin to rationalize why student veterans do not reveal the details of these narratives unless they can do so in a safe, supportive environment. The potential anxiety and judgment of other students could inhibit both the transition and engagement of student veterans in college. Practitioners must be ready to listen if student veterans feel comfortable enough to reveal their experiences while reserving judgment on what they may hear.

Chandler's military experiences strongly resonate with his life choices, both before he entered college and as he transitions to a new military opportunity now. In his military and college decision-making processes, his end goal was the same; to fly aircraft. Chandler's military

experiences were smooth because he was near aircraft, loved his work, and consistently modeled excellence in each opportunity to show his talents on duty. He also became accustomed to working with a team of people that both performed and behaved similarly to him.

His college experiences were fraught with differences. "College is stressful," he said. "It's not the kind of stress you experience in the military. Being on an erratic schedule was challenging and coming home and not being able to relax like I normally would at night was challenging." These tensions were compounded by feeling surrounded by immature, unfocused students who took academics less seriously than he did, a point he made to me more than once. When paired with a mindset that prioritized academic success and work completion above making connections (Chandler's reflection of, "not being in class to make friends" resonates here), it speaks to reason that Chandler's military service influenced his college experiences. Furthermore, Chandler directly questioned the validity of higher education for today's students in our second interview. "I feel at least 25 percent of students in a division-one school do not need to be there."

This mindset could have been a contributor to Chandler's decision to leave school before graduation. "I think I'm a bit of an anomaly; most student veterans don't want to go back," he said. In the end, moving back to a military environment and the cockpit of an airframe is the path that allows him to construct his best life narrative going forward. Chandler appears to view his college narrative as a temporary stop in that pursuit.

In looking forward, it speaks to reason there will be more student veterans who, like Chandler, head to college without a clear end goal in mind. Graduation from a defined certificate or degree program may not be their goal. Scholars believe persistence to completion of a degree program is the primary goal of a college program (Tinto, 1993; Renn & Reason, 2013). As university staff and faculty continue to discuss how best to serve and support student veterans in

their college pursuits, they must reflect on narratives such as Chandler's to help expand their perceptions on what success can look like for these students. The answers may be more diverse than graduation.

In Rich's interviews, he revealed that, while he is developing comfort with his college experience, and feels that his academic path suits him, he feels that his military experiences are not correctly credited as transfer credits at his university, as he will spend longer in college to graduate than anticipated. In his perspective, this is a significant point of tension and if he could restart the process to enter college, he would have chosen a different institution. His academic path makes him uncomfortable because of how difficult he feels it is (he discussed having to memorize 200 different types of plants for an examination), yet he persists because of his internal drive, which he attributes to his military background and experiences.

In unpacking Rich's college narrative in comparison to his military narrative, there are some potential similarities in terms of his paths in both parts of his life. In his military path, he came to service driven to do better in life, which involved undergoing a difficult transition process where he needed to learn and understand a new system of behavior. It was difficult at first (his descriptions of that process as "trauma" is an indication of the tensions he felt), and although he had some missteps, he learned and grew within his group, developing both as a member of the group and as a leader. His success ultimately was paired with regrets, as he longed to do better for his group and those who served under him. As he departed military service, he had questions about the validity of his leadership perspectives, as he saw the environment around him changing. This process unfolded similarly to Rich's college experiences.

As Rich underwent his college transition, he learned the dynamics of a new group, a process that he equated to military training. "College is just another set of rules I had to follow,"

he said. Rich made that transition without the support of classmates and with varying levels of support from authority figures. Furthermore, he made this transition largely alone. Rich commutes roughly two hours each way to his home, so he rents an apartment during the week and only goes home on weekends. His college experience was more isolating than his military experience. His negative faculty experience, articulated earlier, is another example of his military experiences directly challenging his current environment. This point reemerged in Rich's second interview, giving further connection to this aspect of his experiences. Rich feels that military experiences can directly impact other students through leadership courses or coaching in university athletics. He feels that universities do not fully comprehend the value of having student veterans on campus. He explained, towards the end of his second interview, that, "Utilizing our military experiences is not there. Utilizing that experience to further the education of other students is not there. There isn't an opportunity to do that. So, that's what I think they're doing to grossly underutilize the student veteran population." In both cases, he wanted to leverage what he has learned to benefit others. Although Rich has retired from military service, his experiences there compel him to discuss ways to serve and lead others, albeit in ways that support his primary goal of college progression to graduation. At present, like many other student veterans, Rich persists in his studies nearly alone.

Relationships Between Student Veterans

Current academic literature frequently discusses student veteran peer connections (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Scholars discuss this linkage as being important to student veteran success in college. Eleven participants in this project identified student veteran interactions on campus as being comfortable. However, the variance in how regular these interactions was is notable, in that only four participants indicated they had a

regular connection to other student veterans (Michael, Carlos, Stacy, and John). Only three student veterans actively wanted to connect with other student veterans (John, Carlos, and Stacy). This small number of participants is notable, given continued recommendations from scholars that student veterans should find a student veteran peer group to succeed in college. Some participants in the project specifically avoided interaction with other student veterans, either because they did not connect with any other students, or because they indicated that interacting with student veterans could take focus away from their studies. Carlos, in his reflections, said, "I would actually probably be a little more successful, a little more focused, if I didn't have relationships with other student veterans." Only Stacy and Michael indicated that they knew of other student veterans in their courses, perhaps due to the tendency to conceal military service in an environment of uncertain support.

Questioning Service in Relation to Other Student Veterans. As veterans socialize, some critique the service of others, perhaps to raise comparisons or critiques, related to deployment, combat, or someone's position description. In this project, Marie, Steve, Dan, and Miranda had all experienced some degree of internal or external criticism of their service, feeling it was less valued than another's service. Miranda and Mark felt that, in the presence of combat veterans, their service did not matter at all.

In the handful of times Steve has talked to student veterans, he critiqued his service, feeling as if he is not a "real" student veteran. While he noticed, "There seems to be a communal sense of responsibility" student veterans have, he did not feel connected to it, because of his feelings about his service.

> I'm always a little self-conscious with being around other military people, because I don't know. I ended up not getting to do a lot of the same things that they did. And so, I'm always like, 'I'm a rung down from you guys.' I've always found it a little hard to mesh.

Steve's narratives indicate his constant motivation to distance himself from his military experiences, yet his college life also depicts patterns of personal isolation and dissatisfaction. His continued references to feeling out of place or somehow inadequate appear to have continued even after his military transition.

Summary of Findings

The findings in this project cluster into four themes that respond to the research questions of this study. Student veteran participants discussed their military and college lives in vivid details, focusing on gaps in age and experience in relation to non-veteran students, college cultural and social challenges, reflections on their military pasts, as well as relationships with and feelings towards other student veterans. Thematic analysis of narratives revealed that military experiences influenced participants' isolation from many aspects of the college experience, including limited interaction with civilian students, faculty, and other aspects of college life. In many instances, participant military narratives (comprised of structure, support, and teamwork) were very different from their college narratives (comprised of isolation, limited social connections, and inconsistent support). These student veterans largely focused on transactional academic or professional goals, consistent with traditional adult learners (Mackeracher, 2004). The inconsistencies of these narratives could impact practitioner efforts to support student veterans during their college experiences.

For these student veterans to manage their military environments, they relied on establishing connections to veteran peers to navigate the sophisticated palette of requirements

essential to induction into military life and culture. As they learned how to survive and thrive in military culture, those experiences impacted their lives and shaped aspects of their identities. As these individuals now move through their college experiences as student veterans, there is another continual acclimation taking place. Students are deciding to pursue fast, familiar avenues for comfort that are outside of established student support structures. Many strategies are rooted in trust. Participants in this project have made clear their trust circles are small. In some instances, their isolation is because they only trust their abilities. Student veterans in this project have chosen to situate themselves in college in ways that are inconsistent with notable aspects of current academic literature on this population. Scholars and college personnel must both understand military veterans' pasts and their college present to support their needs while adapting to non-traditional student engagement patterns.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

The student veteran narratives in this project show near-universal accounts of engagement that differ from the way student veteran narratives are discussed in academic literature. Scholars have characterized student veterans as academically-focused students who seek a preferred veteran-only peer group (of other student veterans), specific faculty connections as part of their academic progression, designated university support resources, and a defined path to degree completion. Experts suggest student veterans do not make connections to civilian students because they cannot be themselves when interacting with that population (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Finally, some suggest faculty interactions, should be defined and consistent with enhancing student veteran engagement (Bauman, 2013). The participant narratives in this project indicate student veterans can successfully navigate the college experience by choosing a path that differs from these suggestions, yet still suits them. These narratives also indicate that some student veterans choose to attend college unsure if it is the best option for their futures.

Discussion

Why Are Student Veterans Not Engaged?

Student veterans in this project predominantly narrate an isolated college experience, with limited social connections, focused on progression goals that include graduation or another post-college professional goal. Their reasons for this decoupling from traditional student veteran support resources involve their current life stage, misalignment of military culture and college culture, judgments about civilian students, and political differences. Female student veterans experience some of these challenges while also dealing with self-confidence tensions stemming from a loss of agency in their personal lives, attributed to their military experiences.

Life Stage. Student veterans in this project are predominantly non-traditional students and adult learners. This research sample is consistent with the majority of student veterans in higher education, 85 percent of which are 24 years of age or older (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012), qualifying them as adult learners (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). Nearly half of student veterans nationally are married (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012). The participants in this project also fit this description, as the average age of individuals in the study is 29 years of age. Only three participants in this project were younger than 24 years old. Five of 13 participants in the study are married, nearly consistent with the national average of married student veterans (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012).

Adult learners eschew interactions that inhibit focus on their academic goals (Mackeracher, 2004). The educational seriousness student veterans exhibit also connects to this behavior, as their age and experience enable them to prioritize their academic goals over other activities (Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2014). This path is inconsistent when compared with traditional civilian student engagement in college (Osborne, 2014).

Student veterans in this project also prioritized their academic goals. However, some participants indicated challenges in maintaining that focus due to the lack of structure in college (Chandler, Steve, Michael). Nine participants noted concerns about their "fit" in college (Michael, Rich, Carlos, Steve, Miranda, Marie, Bobbi Jo, Chandler, Mark). The majority of these individuals indicated that their decision to isolate was because they did not see a place in college they fit, given their age and backgrounds. Nearly half of them indicated that how old they felt in relation to their student colleagues was a source of this tension. Their military backgrounds contributed to these challenges because they did not feel others would understand their experiences or perspectives.

Concealing Veteran Status. The majority of student veterans in this project indicated they would not outwardly reveal their veteran status to civilians or others they did not have a preexisting relationship with, stemming from two primary concerns: being judged or questioned about the specifics of their status, as well as receiving unwanted notoriety in their courses. For these individuals to maintain their comfort levels on campus, they wanted visibility as college students, albeit older, more experienced ones. Twelve of the 13 participants were not ashamed of their military identity; however, they sought to conceal it from a group that would potentially not understand it. However, 11 of the 13 participants indicated comfort in interacting with other student veterans. By withholding veteran status from non-veterans, student veterans are protecting themselves, be it from judgment, or some other perceived bias.

This perspective resonated vividly with Rich's narratives, describing a more than a twenty-year military career. As he continues to deal with the tensions stemming from his interactions with university administration, he is navigating a steep learning curve from being removed from a civilian classroom for over twenty years. As he discussed his narratives in chapter 4, he identifies both military and age-related reasons for his impressions. While he is not ashamed of his service, he does not intend for it to be an instrument of bias to be used over him as he navigates the college experience. He regularly decides to conceal his veteran status, save for when he needs an academic accommodation to attend a VA appointment. Similar concerns were discussed by Carlos, Travis, and Steve, albeit for different reasons. Carlos, although proud of his Marine Corps service, wants recognition for being the first person in his family to go to college. Travis, given his previous discussions with civilians about his feelings toward combat and death, is now careful not to reveal his service to others. Steve, on the other hand, expresses wanting to forget his service entirely and does not consider it a formative influence on his current life. Marie, given that she has experienced

civilian students in class making negative judgments about the military, isolates herself to contain her emotions toward those situations.

While these student veterans all seek to minimize their military service on their current lives by not disclosing it to others, they acknowledge its importance in their academic success. All indicated that military training and processes assisted them in goal setting, structure, and discipline that give them a heightened sense of focus in college. All acknowledge on some level that they would have been different types of students without their military training, with some of them indicating they would be performing worse, or not have attended college at all (Rich, Carlos, Bobbi Jo, Stacy, Marie, John).

Disconnecting from Unreliable Civilian Students. There was a paradox of participants in this study not having a dedicated peer group of student veterans, or non-veteran students, to assist in college engagement and persistence, despite every student veteran in this project having an identified military peer group during their military careers. This phenomenon led me to ask questions about the contexts where student veterans would interact with other college students. The participants' perspectives were that, in many cases, doing academic work alone was better than dealing with immature, unfocused civilian students.

Nine of thirteen participants indicated they prefer completing their classwork alone and would refrain from group work whenever possible. They made these decisions because they perceived a lack of focus from their civilian classmates. As discussed in the previous chapter, many student veterans felt that their civilian colleagues were not serious students (Michael, Rich, Carlos, Dan, Miranda, Marie, Chandler, Mark). Both older student veterans (between 28-41 years old) and the youngest participants in the group (22-23 years old) viewed their civilian peers this

way. They observed tardiness, disrespect to faculty and lack of attention as common traits that continually bothered them during class (Carlos, Rich, Marie, and Chandler).

Also, while six participants indicated they would take the lead in a group assignment if necessary, some only participated in group work when necessary to ensure academic completion (Steve, Marie, Chandler). This behavior is a direct contrast from their military experiences when twelve of thirteen participants actively sought out at least one other teammate or colleague to develop a social connection to help them succeed in progressing through their military training.

However, when the participants' lives shifted to the university setting, nearly all students did not take this stance. Admittedly, there were some aspects of their lives in college that made these connections challenging. Many student veterans do not live on campus and model more as commuter students. One student commuted over two hours in each direction to attend class (Bobbi Jo), making establishing peer connections difficult, despite her interest in making them. Others had familial obligations that would have inhibited their ability to take the time to establish connections with other students in any group (Rich, Travis, Mark, Stacy). Others would prefer to study in places where they could maintain a singular focus with no distractions (Chandler, Miranda, Travis). Finally, there were still others that felt wholly disconnected from their civilian peers, not identifying with them at all (Marie, Michael). The commonality amongst these perspectives is that participants predominantly disengaged from civilian students to preserve their academic focus, and in some cases, their comfort level as student veterans.

Transactional Faculty Relationships. The majority of student veterans in this project indicated transactional, neutral interactions with faculty. A few participants indicated positive interactions (Bobbi Jo, Dan, Steve), but they were still transactional. Faculty were generally very amenable to the accommodations that student veterans would ask for to handle their college and

veteran's administration requirements (Marie, Rich). These transactional relationships do not equitably connect to current literature, in terms of a defined faculty connection being important to student success (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011).

Some of the faculty interactions were tense, as discussed previously in Michael and Rich's narratives. Their discussions connected in that they both felt that an individual assigned to teach them was unqualified to be in the role they were, albeit for different reasons. Given that these concerns connect to student veteran classroom impressions of faculty being authority figures (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011), it speaks to reason that student veterans look for leadership and credibility from their faculty. If there are perceptions an individual is unqualified, student veterans may not engage, choosing to only interact with faculty transactionally, as some of them did in this project.

Student veterans encounter challenges acclimating to university classrooms because, for most, it is a foreign experience, one that their military backgrounds did not prepare them for (Brito, Callahan, & Marks, 2008). Because of those differences, students question the utility of some aspects of their coursework, which can lead to disengagement in the classroom (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009).

A possible symptom of the cultural connection challenges identified earlier; student veterans have reported challenges interacting with faculty at deeper levels. A national study has indicated that this population reported that first-year student veterans have lower levels of faculty engagement than non-veteran students (Kelly, Smith, Fox, & Wheeler, 2013). Another study indicates that some faculty may have difficulty teaching student veterans due to personal biases about military service (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011). While many of the participants in this study characterized their faculty interactions as positive or neutral, their faculty

connections are limited and lacking depth. The majority of participant narratives in this project indicate that student veterans can have positive interactions with their faculty. That interaction appears dependent on whether those faculty are supportive of their veteran status. Nine of the participants indicated that they felt supported enough as students to ask for help when they needed it.

This belief in faculty support is reassuring, given that only five students in the study indicated they had true academic confidence in their studies (Travis, Dan, Miranda, Stacy, and Chandler). However, even students who felt unsure in the classroom believed their military backgrounds impacted their success. Twelve of thirteen participants indicated that military experience made them better students than if they have never entered the military. This belief is rooted in the military veteran's focus and penchant for mission accomplishment (Bauman, 2013). Faculty who seek to establish a better rapport with student veterans can pursue two tracks. Seeking cultural competency training will strengthen the faculty's knowledge base on veteran experiences. Also, faculty can show a willingness to embrace these individuals where they are in their college experience, versus making assumptions about who they are from their veteran status. Faculty have agency in these relationships to drive change (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011).

Political Beliefs Causing Tension. While military personnel are trained to subjugate their political beliefs in the performance of their duties, veterans have diverse political beliefs that they can discuss, particularly after they leave military service. Although it was not a research focus of this project, some student veterans initiated discussions of their political beliefs during their interviews (Carlos, Michael). In Carlos' case, his political beliefs were both parts of his motivation to serve and part of how he would like to leverage his college education after he graduates. He said,

> I'm pro-free market. I want to fight what's not fair. I'm passionate about economics, development and trying to better everyone. I care about people's liberties. I'm kind of on this idea I'll go to Detroit, kick in the door, and say, 'Give me a job, I'm here to do work.'

In Michael's case, his political views caused him tension throughout his college experience, including his interactions with faculty and other students. Michael felt his college was hyper-sensitized toward beliefs that were inconsistent with his own. He cited examples of faculty and student behavior that caused him to feel isolated in his classes. He noted that his only student connection was another veteran who felt as he did (conservative, pro-gun). When paired with his transactional feelings about college, Michael felt less inclined to discuss his beliefs in any public college setting, opting to only persist long enough to earn enough college credits to apply to a police academy.

While some of Michael's challenges could be connected to his unwillingness to embrace the college experience, his beliefs about the political climate on his college campus, and how those feelings influence his behavior, warrant continued discussion when researching this population. Discussions about student veteran political beliefs do not present themselves in student engagement literature, potentially because veterans are trained to keep these beliefs private and personal. However, given that many student veterans no longer serve in the military, they may seek to actively discuss their political beliefs in public settings, including in college. These individuals should be supported. A rich academic discourse is best served by ensuring all students have the agency to participate.

Female Veterans: Navigating Multiple Roles With Limited Self-Confidence

The narratives shared by the female student veteran participants in this project, given some of their acute and specific reactions, merit discussion and consideration. Colleges are often unaware of the specific needs of female student veterans (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). Participants indicated a mix of college experiences that were influenced by their military backgrounds. Each came from a different military service background (Air Force, Marines, Navy, and Army Reserve). All expressed pride in their military service and what they accomplished there (Marie, Stacy, Bobbi Jo, and Miranda). However, they all indicated personal challenges, developed in military service, that challenged their ability to be their best selves in college.

Warrior Ethos Could Marginalize Female Veterans. As reviewed in the literature, military culture is based on a combat warrior paradigm, immersed in male hegemony (Pawelczyk, 2014). This masculine perspective leaves female veterans feeling inadequate in many military settings, despite being excellent at their work. Miranda, Marie, and Bobbi Jo all indicated they felt this way. Each of these student veterans indicated pride in their military performance as well as validation as being great at their jobs. However, their interactions with male superiors and colleagues during their military careers made them feel as if they were a lower class of servicemember, marginalized for their gender.

Specific examples of this phenomenon were when Bobbi Jo was formally designated a supervisor over male subordinates, yet did not feel empowered to lead, because they disrespected her position. In another instance, Miranda noted she was subject to sexual harassment in addition to the challenges in being heard by her male superiors. Marie felt that when her leadership group changed, a superior marginalized all women in her unit, was verbally abusive to them, and because the commander supported this individual, she would never be heard or treated with respect.

Aftereffects of Marginalization Felt in College. Despite women performing better academically than men in college since the 1990s (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018), it is unclear if this dynamic has translated to female student veterans. As female participants experienced college, they indicated still feeling the aftereffects of military life in their new environment. Marie talks to as few civilians as possible convinced she cannot identify with them anymore. While she was definitive in dropping her accounting major before her senior year began, Marie had no future academic plan at the time of her interviews. She acknowledged being unsure of her future, and it provided her a great deal of anxiety. Bobbi Jo, while attempting to step outside her comfort zone to be a cheerful, amenable person in college, still struggles with a lack of confidence stemming from her treatment during military service. She sees her role with civilian students as more of a parent than a peer, finding social connections difficult. Miranda acknowledged her negative military interactions, yet still felt more comfortable in a military environment than college, even with these added burdens. In her work-study job on campus and in her courses, she feels as if she is not part of the group, with one exception. She notes, "Military trainers in Army ROTC favor female officer candidates over males," an interesting change from her time on duty in the enlisted ranks. When she is back on duty for the Army reserve, she knows to expect sexist treatment. Despite Miranda acknowledging the sexism she has felt (and continues to feel) in the military, she prefers the military environment to college.

Challenging the Service of Female Veterans. In contrast, while Stacy loved being a Marine, she expresses contentment that her military career is over. Stacy does not indicate negative relationships with campus peers, yet still feels she has nothing in common with traditional, civilian students. She has been marginalized for her service. Some believe she is not a veteran. One of the first things she said in her first interview was, "No one believes I'm a Marine

when I tell them. Someone on campus once said I was too pretty to be a Marine." She remembers being asked more than once, "Have you killed anyone?" She has one close personal friend on campus, a female student veteran. She, like most individuals in this project, only spends time on campus for academics or work. She is particularly excited to begin a civilian career as a teacher, thankful that she has found a new calling.

Navigating Multiple Roles. These narratives suggest that female student veterans are navigating multiple social identities at once: being female, being a student veteran, and being a college student. Questions about how these relationships interact and intertwine with each other are complicated by research that identifies females as exponentially more likely to be mistreated in military service than males (Dunvin, 1994). Furthermore, their service is more likely to be questioned or invalidated by others. These challenges stem from being part of a culture that still stereotypes and marginalizes based on gender. When discussing these topics with male student veterans in this project, their responses suggest an enduring gender double-standard exists.

Male Hegemony Could Contribute to Marginalization. While having women in combat roles is a relatively new occurrence considering the long history of the U.S. military, women in military roles have been common for some time. Unfortunately, women have experienced many challenges in navigating military culture that their male counterparts have not. The masculine warrior ethos in military service has contributed to labeling female soldiers as inferior (Dunvin, 1994). A focus on physical strength and male dominance has undergirded this culture, helping secure male privilege in military service. Examples of this at work are the physical fitness standards for male and female service members, which differ by sex, reinforcing the stereotype that females are a weaker gender (Pawelczyk, 2014). To receive equal treatment, some female soldiers have worked to pass physical examinations at the male standard in efforts to earn respect

and acceptance. However, women do not secure agency at the same level as men in the military, even if they model the same behaviors. The male assertion of authority is considered normal and commonplace. When women do the same, they are perceived to diverge from traditional social or professional norms (Pawelczyk, 2014). Female veterans experience constant ambiguity as they self-evaluate how masculine or feminine they should be in the performance of their duties.

Compartmentalizing Womanhood. In trying to navigate these barriers, female soldiers continue to compartmentalize their womanhood from their military service, whereas men do not (Silva, 2008), making collaboration in co-ed situations challenging. Female soldiers, in recent phenomenological studies, have said they experience combat differently from men, even in the same military units, an indication they attempt to navigate their intersectionality as females and military personnel even in the most challenging situations (Pawelczyk, 2014). Examples in this study came from Marie and Bobbi Jo, who both indicated tensions within their military organizations based on their genders. If females cannot feel comfortable in their own defined military groups, their ability to do their jobs is compromised.

As practitioners consider student veteran engagement challenges in this project and the literature, gender should be a point of continued inquiry. These narratives suggest differences between males and females on how females serve in today's military, both affirmed by participants in this project and surveyed literature (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013). The effects of military service, and the differences in how both genders process those experiences, could have an impact on self-confidence and how student veterans establish social connections both in and out of military service. If male student veterans in more significant numbers view female student veterans in similar ways, this cycle of sexism in college will perpetuate, leading both to have disrupted college

experiences. As practitioners consider service strategies for student veterans, we must consider how gender and military culture continue to influence this group of students.

Summary of Discussion

This study provided an opportunity to see student veterans through some of their narratives. The military experiences of these individuals influenced their college engagement decisions in ways that differ from current depictions in academic literature. While these individuals exhibited academic focus and a motivation to progress to a defined goal in college, some student veterans do not see graduation as their primary college goal. While all participants deemed college the optimal path to post-military success, their narratives suggest that student veterans will have variance in what success in college means to each.

Many student veterans experienced challenges in their academic paths, despite feeling their military experiences contributed to their successes as students. These tensions are not the factors focused on currently by most researchers (PTSD, TBI, and high-risk behaviors). Instead, participants indicated that personal isolation, limited social connections, spurning traditional support resources, and scattered engagement strategies permeated their college experiences, causing disengagement.

Participants' reasons for disengagement involved life stage, cultural misalignment, disconnecting from unreliable students, transactional faculty relationships, and political isolation. Also, female student veterans indicated specific tensions in under-confidence and marginalization related to the sexism felt in their military backgrounds. A few male student veterans in this project also exhibited sexist tendencies when discussing female veterans, despite not indicating they behave in sexist ways.

These individual narratives depicted some of the variances of military experiences and student experiences student veterans can have in college. Despite possessing motivation to succeed toward a defined goal, these students experienced many tensions that can influence that experience. Some participants felt a lack of fit in college as well as pursued post-college goals that do not involve graduation. Practitioners that seek to serve this population must work to understand military cultural differences, non-traditional student paths, student veteran engagement challenges, and varying definitions of student success.

Implications for Academic Literature

Many experts have also chosen to focus on student veteran engagement through the lenses of high-risk behaviors and defined medical conditions they sustained in combat, such as PTSD and TBI, versus a more inclusive discussion on how student veterans engage (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). The narratives in this project reveal a common wish to complete college amongst the majority of the participants. However, individual experiences then diverge from this point into other experiences that warrant specific discussions on goal progression, establishing peer connections, and in-college behaviors. These factors directly challenge current scholarly perceptions of student veteran college engagement (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013).

Student veterans in this study indicated varying college goals, social connection choices and engagement strategies that do not connect to current student engagement literature concerning this population. A broader discussion on these areas will enrich the overall discourse on student engagement, assisting practitioners with a more-inclusive base of knowledge to draw on in support of this population.

Consider Studying Social Supports Beyond Student Veteran Peers. Scholars believe student veteran peer groups provide optimal support to student veterans as they progress in college (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013). The mutual understanding that veterans have about their backgrounds provides comfort in social interactions that would not be available from non-veterans (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Practitioners regularly pursue formally establishing a student veteran-based peer group as part of a larger initiative to support student veterans on campus. Civilian students, experts believe, do not have the military knowledge to be fully supportive to student veterans (Naphan & Elliott, 2015), sometimes resulting in tense interpersonal interactions (Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2012).

However, student veterans in this project did not pursue social connections consistent with the current literature. The majority of students chose limited social connections, focusing on one person (Michael, Mark, Chandler), family (Bobbi Jo, Steve, Stacy, Travis, Rich), or students in their designated academic circles. Participants made these social connections based on what made sense in their lives at the time, irrespective of how long they had served, or how important their military backgrounds were.

Student veterans rarely sought out connections to other student veterans, although when they did, they expressed comfort in doing so. However, in a few cases, those who created limited social connections to other student veterans (Carlos, John, Stacy) felt a dedicated student veteran peer group would have been detrimental to their academic progression, for several reasons:

1. Social interactions were commonly about sharing on-campus grievances, without offering solutions for those challenges
2. Interactions were overly social (involved alcohol), and there were many planned social events, which some students felt took the focus away from their studies.
3. Some student veterans felt others unfairly judged their service if they were from certain military branches. Coast Guard and Air Force student veterans (Steve, Marie, Mark), for example, felt marginalized by student veterans from the Navy, Army and Marine Corps.

4. Some student veterans judged their service negatively amid other student veterans (Miranda, Stacy) based on their military roles, and whether or not they had deployed.

Student veterans overwhelmingly expressed pride in their military service. However, participants also universally stated they would not reveal their military experiences to other students unless a situation warranted it, for fear of judgment or misunderstanding. Current literature supports student veterans taking this protective measure (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Participants indicated when they did discuss their military experiences with faculty or civilian students, they felt tension and judgment (Michael, Travis), compelling them to conceal those experiences in subsequent peer interactions.

Student veteran peer groups may not help all students**.** Some student veterans actively sought out other student veterans for camaraderie and social support (Stacy, John, Carlos). In some instances, this connection was their sole student support on campus (Michael). However, some of these same individuals indicated that their connections to other student veterans sometimes led to a lack of prioritization of their studies (Carlos), or focusing on commiseration on perceived microaggressions or inadequacies of campus support (Stacy). Some student veterans minimized their service in the presence of other student veterans (Steve, Dan, Miranda). They minimized their experience because they had not deployed, were part of a reserve component (as opposed to active duty), were in an administrative role versus a combat role, or were perceived to have served in an inferior military branch (e.g., the Coast Guard). In effect, while these individuals indicated comfort around other student veterans, these decisions suggest they were not wholly comfortable.

Also, some students had connections to groups of Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) cadets, as they were enrolled in college electives, training to rejoin the military as officers in various military branches after they graduated from college (Chandler, Mark). Two other

participants (Miranda and Dan) had interacted with ROTC cadets through enrolling in a military training elective. All four of them did not consider their connections with these cadets to be a veteran peer group. Miranda, Dan, Mark, and Chandler strongly asserted that ROTC cadets are not veterans, as they had not actively served in any military branch. Each of these individuals noted the lack of seriousness and gravity that some ROTC cadets assigned to their future roles as military professionals (Chandler, Miranda, Mark), a point that provided them perspective about their service backgrounds. They felt better prepared than their civilian colleagues to be future military leaders.

Given the inconsistencies of student veteran peer groups with these research participants, I inquired about other support individuals from other backgrounds. These answers were equally eclectic. Some individuals did make connections to civilian peers, albeit only in limited instances (Travis, Rich, Michael). Others identified their family's support as their principal source of social connection (Bobbi Jo, Mark, Steve, Travis). For those still serving in the National Guard, some indicated their military colleagues were their primary source of college support, despite there being no connection between those individuals and the student veteran's academic experiences (Miranda, John). These findings suggest questions as to whether there is indeed an ideal peer group for student veterans in higher education, as previous academic literature suggests.

When considering the variance in the ways the individuals in this project socialized with other students, there may be multiple viable social connections for student veterans on or off-campus. Additionally, given that participants did not reveal their veteran status to classmates unless they were also student veterans, it is difficult to ascertain how important military identity is in the establishment of these peer groups. While the literature suggests that student veteran peer groups enable the student veteran to have a more fulfilling college experience (Barry, Whiteman,

& Wadsworth, 2014)**,** the narratives of these individuals compel us to question that stance. Some student veterans do not prioritize their veteran identity when looking to make new social connections in college. Minimizing veteran identity, as discussed in this project, can be a protective measure that keeps student veterans from engaging in uncomfortable conversations with non-veterans. Also, concealment can be intended to keep a student veteran focused on academic goals. Travis' narrative discusses this perspective below.

Notably, Travis spent a great deal of time discussing his engineering student peer group, comprised entirely of civilians. He credited these individuals with helping him through his studies at difficult times with challenging courses. His military service is not a factor in these relationships, as he did not disclose his status when he began working with this group. As Travis experienced the increasing complexity of electrical engineering courses, he went from being very social in student veteran settings and during events to entirely leaving the group, moving closer to his private study group in the engineering building. Had he not taken this action, he felt he would not have been able to keep up with his studies. When his study group was not able or available to support him during challenging times, Travis leaned on his wife, both for academic and social support. She has been with him since he began military service and understands Travis' military and college experiences. Travis' family connection is even more critical because of his discomfort in sharing his military experiences with others. His wife is his peer group.

Many scholars have suggested in recent years that dedicated student veteran peer groups are an ideal social connection to support student veteran engagement in college (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Hamrick & Rumann, 2013; Jones K. C., 2013). The narratives of Travis and other participants indicate that veteran peer groups are not the only means to provide student veterans with a social connection that could enhance their engagement. The majority of

participants did not pursue student veteran peer groups, despite indicating a high comfort level with other student veterans. Participants that did discuss their student veteran peers (Carlos, John, Stacy) indicated those connections sometimes hampered their studies. Instead, individuals elected to seek social connections in areas that either enhanced their ability to complete their studies (civilian students in their academic major) or their quality of their personal lives (family members or civilian friends).

Underserved student populations sometimes seek peer connections outside of college populations (Renn & Reason, 2013); student veterans also model this behavior. Student veterans may leverage familial connections because there is not a need to explain their military backgrounds. They may also pursue academic peer connections with civilian students for two reasons: it assists in their academic goal completion, and they may be purposely intending to subjugate their military identity to focus on their college experiences. Participants in this project felt pride in their service and also wanted agency as college students. Many felt their service did not define them as individuals, despite acknowledging that their military experiences impacted them.

Consider Examining Student Veteran Behavior Holistically. Currently, student veteran physical and mental traumas are studied in academic literature. Hypervigilance, high-risk behaviors, PTSD, and TBI are all significant challenges that can affect student veteran engagement in higher education (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011; Elliott, 2015). However, student veterans in this study did not discuss high-risk behaviors in their narratives. They chose to isolate, establish limited social connections, and aside from their academic requirements, mostly remove themselves from large campus social situations. Universally, participants did not discuss hypervigilant behaviors in their college narratives. However, some student veterans did discuss

high-risk behaviors during their military experiences (e.g., Rich), particularly concerning deployed experiences (e.g., Travis, Dan, Carlos) where their lives were at risk, causing them heightened states of concern. While participants spoke vividly of how deployment felt in the moment, they conveyed a sense of calm in retelling their narratives. These individuals expressed relief at surviving those challenges, each seeking to move beyond their military narratives to focus on their civilian futures. However, all acknowledged that military experiences gave them expanded perspectives on world affairs they would not have otherwise.

Interestingly, this expanded perspective was felt by others in the project, including some student veterans who had deployed but not seen combat. Over a third of participants questioned the relevance and seriousness of college life, given their previous military experiences (Travis, Chandler, Rich, Michael, Marie). This perspective leads to a more extensive discussion on the college disengagement of student veterans in this project, personally and socially.

An improved understanding of military backgrounds and the college experiences of student veterans contributes to the literature concerning student veterans. This understanding also assists student affairs practitioners who will serve student veterans now and in the future. Given that the influx of student veterans to colleges and universities shows no signs of abating, practitioners need as much information as possible to support and empower this population to succeed in college.

Implications for Practice

Student affairs practitioners are in a position to serve student veterans by connecting them to college resources, student peer groups, and faculty in efforts to support and enhance their engagement in their studies. As the number of student veterans on college campuses is expected to continue to grow in the future (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012), many practitioners have looked to best practices and academic literature to strengthen their support strategies for this

population. The findings in this project suggest a continued expansion on this strategy is necessary to develop support resources that are inclusive of a larger group of student veteran perspectives.

Consider Flexibility in Student Veteran Support Resources. As scholars focused on student veteran transition to college, some state that a dedicated group of support resources is optimal for student success. Some colleges and universities have worked diligently to pursue certifications as, "veteran-friendly" institutions to showcase their willingness to help this population. Practitioners have begun to understand that student veterans have specific needs both academically and administratively (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009), and have developed strategies to assist in these areas.

However, the participants in this project did not consistently seek out targeted student veteran support resources on campus, aside from ensuring their financial and administrative benefits were approved. Many individuals in this project were commuter students, some also had families, and those factors influenced their ability to take advantage of on-campus resources that would have been more available to on-campus students. Others cited the location of the student veteran resource center as a reason they did not seek out these resources. Even the student veterans who lived on campus took limited advantage of available resources, both because of their academic schedules, and the designated location of the facility, which was in the basement of the student services building, somewhat distant from the majority of the buildings on campus that they frequented for class.

While nearly every student veteran in the project indicated they communicated with the university administration to ensure administrative and academic requirements were complete, less than a third of student veterans in the project (Stacy, John, and Carlos) indicated more than a transactional relationship to the veteran support representative. Interestingly, these same students

indicated their student-veteran peer relationships did not help support their academic persistence goals.

Student veteran support resources sometimes consider specific faculty and academic advising supports in their service portfolios (Kelly, Smith, Fox, & Wheeler, 2013). Student veterans discussed their interactions with faculty and administrators at many points in this project. Many did not indicate that they sought strong connections to these resources. However, in Marie's narrative, she indicated that her advisor in the business college was the primary support for her, one that she could not do without in her college experience. Another similar interaction was noted in Dan's narrative when he discussed his feelings about his residential college. He seemed relaxed, comfortable, and proud to be in that environment. When discussing his university interactions outside his residential college, the tension he expressed was palpable, most notably when discussing the administrative challenges in stopping and starting his enrollment to deploy. While student veterans have noted this tension between their military and college requirements before (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010), Dan's perspective suggests that there may be other potential support resources on campus that practitioners should consider in the future. Residential colleges may have a smaller, defined cultural and social structure that student veterans could find helpful to their success, as Dan has.

Overall, the participant narratives in this project present a challenge to colleges seeking to strengthen or expand their support offerings to student veterans. While acknowledging the traditional support strategy involves assigning dedicated administrators, defining a student-veteran space and the creation of a veteran-specific peer group on campus, many participants in this project did not indicate using these resources in their daily lives in college. Because these choices could be linked to the majority of this sample being commuter students, a larger question centers on how

to support a population that does not have a regular campus presence, aside from academic requirements. Furthermore, these commuter students do not appear to want a stronger campus presence. The challenges in supporting student veterans may be even more connected to adult learners and commuter students than previously thought.

Student veterans may also be managing many stressors unrelated to combat injuries or high-risk behaviors. Practitioners must evolve their understanding of the ways that student veterans may choose to engage on campus, given their various personal situations and the aftereffects of their military experiences. This challenge compounds because student veterans vary in how they ask for support if they ask for support at all. The differing narratives of participants in this project indicate a general engagement strategy to connect these students to the college would be ineffective. Practitioners must pursue a holistic approach that accounts for student veteran military backgrounds, varied social connections, and their college goals.

Student affairs professionals must understand that comprehending military experiences and establishing a defined student veteran peer group may not be sufficient to support this population. These professionals should also look to academic advisors, residential college personnel, and other staff in the student affairs realm to explore service delivery models that connect student veterans to civilian students as well as other student veterans. Furthermore, in military service, family support is a critical piece of supporting military personnel. Practitioners may find benefit in expanding their focus to supporting this group with on-campus programming as well.

Practitioners must also revise negative assumptions that college should not be a transactional experience for student veterans**.** Many student veterans enter college to pursue degrees or certificates. Their military backgrounds and goal-oriented behaviors favorably connect to completing the college experience. However, student veterans also leverage their college

benefits in ways that stop short of degree completion. Some only wish to take a few classes to learn a new skill in preparation for a civilian career. Others need a certain number of college credits to apply for a training academy, as discussed by Michael. Some veterans enter college only to leave for a job opportunity (Chandler). Finally, some student veterans must stop and start their college enrollments to continue to fulfill military service requirements (Dan). The variance in these experiences suggests that student veterans may view their college experiences differently than traditional students that enter college with only intent to graduate.

When examining individual narratives in this project, practitioners can see that some student veterans view college in transactional ways. Scholars suggest that students stopping out of college is an inherently negative decision (Tinto, 1993), or that student engagement should always end in graduation. Student veterans in this project do not indicate an unwillingness to set a goal for a successful civilian life after their military exits. However, Chandler and Michael are not sure that college is the ideal route to create that life. The individuals who do plan to persist and graduate are doing so on their terms. They have chosen to renounce traditional social connections and only engage with others to further their academic goals. Their strategies are conscious engagement decisions, albeit untraditional ones for undergraduate students.

Practitioners should evaluate these engagement variances holistically and look to support student veterans where they are comfortable, versus adherence to traditional student engagement strategies for a larger student population. Advisors and faculty can support student veterans on a course-by-course basis if that is in support of their goals. Flexibility is critical to ensure these individuals understand that they can follow a defined student engagement path or one that flexes as their comfort level changes.

In the future, civilian knowledge of veteran experiences will shrink as student veteran enrollments grow**.** As student veterans continue to matriculate to colleges in higher and higher numbers (Kim & Cole, 2013), the amount of individuals with firsthand military knowledge continues to decrease. While there were over twenty million veterans in 2016, the share of the U.S. population with military experience is declining. Only 7 percent of adults in 2016 were veterans, an 11 percent decrease since 1980 (Bialik, 2017). This phenomenon coincides with an overall decrease of active-duty military. Military staffing levels have shrunk 66% since 1968 to their current level of 1.3 million personnel. This number represents less than 1% of the adult population in the United States. As these service members transition to civilian life, the Veterans' Administration projects that there will only be 12 million veterans in 2045 (Bialik, 2017). Inversely, the number of female veterans will increase, from nine percent today to 18%.

These numbers could influence how practitioners engage student veterans in higher education moving forward. When considering the overall decline in military service, there will be a widening knowledge gap between individuals who have firsthand knowledge of veteran experiences and those who do not. This knowledge gap, if allowed to persist in higher education, will affect the ability of practitioners to serve student veterans who need their support systems to understand their backgrounds without being told. Furthermore, the increase in female veterans compels institutions of higher education to pursue specific strategies to support this population, as their journeys through college could bring a collection of challenges that are uncommon to male veterans.

Also, while nine student veterans in this project indicated faculty were generally supportive of their veteran status, some student veterans indicated tension in their relationships with faculty. Military culture uses power and authority to define its teaching relationships between instructors

and trainees (Cole, 2014; Danelo, 2014). In contrast, the non-hierarchical structure of college classrooms sometimes presents challenges for student veterans seeking clarity (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011). Rich's discussion on his faculty interactions and his judgments about a few of them are influenced by his military impressions of what an instructor should be, versus what may typically occur in college. Michael shared similar beliefs in his narratives, as he was uncomfortable hearing professors discuss their personal lives in class. Michael also directly questioned a faculty member's credibility when they showed a lack of knowledge of the military. Although the faculty member publicly acknowledged his error in a later class, Michael never engaged him again in the course, an indication he lost confidence in his teacher. When considering these examples, the rigid approach suggested by military culture is challenged by some of the ways knowledge is shared and discussed in a college classroom, such as a learning community, where knowledge is created by the exchange of ideas between individuals with faculty support (Tagg, 2003). This approach appears incompatible with some student veterans that choose to maintain the academic approach they learned in military service. Scholars should continue to research faculty engagement of student veterans in the classroom, particularly concerning students not serving from combat-related injuries or hypervigilance. Military experiences may prove to be as relevant a tension to that relationship as an injury can be (Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, & Sulak, 2011).

Finally, given the articulation of differing levels of influence of military identity in the participant narratives, practitioners should pursue a measured, holistic response in engaging student veterans by not solely focusing on their veteran status. Some participants in this study did not emphasize the importance of their military identities in their lives as college students, despite acknowledging they were different people after they left the military than when they entered. One

wanted to forget his military service entirely (Steve). Participant decisions to self-isolate also support this point. For practitioners to successfully engage this population, a measured approach is helpful to connect to this population. While practitioners may be excited to connect to student veterans to thank them for their service and understand their experiences at a deeper level, student veterans may not respond in kind. Discretion and restraint are useful tools for these interactions.

Recommendations for Research

The majority of academic literature on student veteran engagement has taken place in distinct periods, traditionally following a significant military conflict. After the creation of the Post-9/11 GI Bill in 2009, there was a significant increase in the academic literature concerning student veterans. As of 2013, this entitlement has removed the 15-year time limit for transitioning veterans, making it a lifetime benefit for qualified future veterans (and their families). It speaks to reason that this expansion will lead to even more students pursuing higher education. In turn, colleges and universities must adapt to serve this population.

The study of student veterans in higher education also stands to increase as the population of veterans matriculating to college will continue to rise as these individuals utilize their educational benefits (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012). Scholars have begun to define primary areas to consider when enhancing the learning environment for student veterans on campus: GI Bill administration, medical insurance availability, financial requirements, academic advising processes, and faculty processes (Vacchi, 2012). This study revealed additional opportunities to study this population further.

Participant narratives revealed the influence of military experiences on each student veteran, given their isolationist stances and social connection choices in college. In some instances, participant narratives suggested that their self-confidence levels could be a direct result

of their previous military service. Additionally, events that unfolded during their college experiences suggest new questions about the impacts of other personal characteristics on student veterans in college, such as age. Scholars should continue this research to specifically investigate age other personal characteristics as separate components, to learn if one aspect is more salient or agentive than the other on student veteran engagement. For example, while there were no individuals of color in this study, race could be a salient component of a student veteran's background as they engage in college.

Second, female student veterans are an overrepresented group within the student veteran population (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2012), yet are a relatively smaller population within the military. The multiple identities and perceived lack of agency that female student veterans identified in this project suggest there are more profound challenges these individuals are navigating in their college experiences. There is also an uninvestigated question between civilian and veteran performance in college amongst females (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). Both participant narratives and current events indicate that a marginalization between male and female service members still exists (Munn, 2019), which could perpetuate this tension amongst future groups of student veterans. Additionally, there are opportunities to analyze female student veteran experiences through critical or phenomenological perspectives, as their narratives encompass what it means to be female (Josselson & Harway, 2012), a veteran and a student veteran. Given that female student veterans are much more likely to subjugate their veteran experiences than their male counterparts (Hamrick & Rumann, 2013), there could be even more to learn about the challenges they face in college.

Also, a significant amount of state and federal resources are given to colleges and universities to support student veterans (Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). Additional

research on student veteran support offerings in relation to institutional segments of higher education would be helpful to scholars, practitioners and student veterans. There is a lack of consistency in student veteran support programs nationally (O'Connor, et al., 2017). Some institutional approaches indicate a lack of commitment to fully supporting this population (Hitt, et al., 2015). Evidence suggests these resources are not fully utilized by student veterans (Molina & Morse, 2017).

This study was situated in a research-one institution where there was an active student veteran resource center, staffed by one university employee and a student assistant. The agency was in the basement of the student services building and was cited by some individuals (Marie, Stacy, John, Bobbi Jo) as inadequate for student use, both in terms of location and utility to students. To date, one significant study has assessed student veteran resource levels in various institutional sectors (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). As resources in institutions shift, and college populations change, further study is needed to investigate if available resources are truly supporting this population. As researchers look to other institutions for inspiration, they may find new perspectives to serve student veterans on their campuses.

As an example, community colleges may showcase other support resources that could help student veterans. Many student veterans attend community colleges (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012) due to the cost savings over private or state universities (O'Connor, et al., 2017). Some studies indicate community colleges have developed student services offices as well as defined student veteran peer groups (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Williams-Klotz & Gansemer-Topf, 2018). In addition, a recent study assessed the infusion of VA mental health services in a community college student veteran resource center (O'Connor, et al., 2017). Findings indicate that providing these services on campus can benefit student veterans that may not otherwise engage

the VA for medical care. Given the resource constraints of some community colleges, a point noted by O'Connor, et al. (2017), exploring partnerships with the VA and other institutions could prove beneficial to other community colleges looking to expand student veteran support offerings. Also, other institutions have implemented transitional assistance, both programmatically and financially, expedited administrative processes, rolling admissions, tuition waivers, as well as augmented support services for dealing with unseen challenges that student veterans may face (Hitt, et al., 2015). Other institutions may find these approaches beneficial.

Finally, scholars can better support student veterans by working to close the knowledge gap on campus between civilian practitioners and student veterans by researching the impacts of incorporating military cultural competency training in student affairs. This recommendation was amongst the *8 Keys to Success* developed by the U.S. Department of Education (2013) to better serve student veterans and their families as they transition to college. Others have noted the need to move beyond the classifications of "veteran" and "nonveteran," and for practitioners to work to understand the differences in military service amongst student veterans and how those differences may impact their college experiences (Molina & Morse, 2017). Several curricula have been developed and distributed to health and human service agencies to provide insight into military culture and the need to be mindful of that culture when determining treatment strategies (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016). Online and in-residence programs, including certifications, are offered by the Veteran's Administration and other non-profit agencies to assist colleges in learning this content and sharing it with their practitioners (Nedegaard & Zwilling, 2017).

Scholars have begun to study the acculturation of civilian practitioners working with student veterans (Arminio, et al., 2018). This work is important, given the noted cultural differences between military personnel and civilians. For example, there are legal requirements

that direct some military personnel to give up their privacy in the performance of their duties (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016). Civilians do not have the same requirement, which can create confusion between veterans and non-veterans in civilian settings. Also, earlier discussions on high-risk behavior, hypervigilance and alcohol use and their impacts on student veterans were informed by military culture and experiences. Providing military cultural competency training to civilians may promote an increased understanding of some of the symptoms that can drive those conditions.

Health care professionals are discovering that the quality of care and the patient relationship are both enhanced by an understanding of military culture, as this information helps connects them more directly to their patients (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016). Furthermore, in the veteran's eyes, the more the practitioner can understand military culture, the more credible they are as a doctor, and more able to be trusted (Meyer, Writer, & Brim, 2016).

This perspective suggests that colleges could adopt a similar strategy to strengthen connections between student veterans and practitioners. Cultural competency training is becoming more common at "veteran-friendly" institutions, as literature has validated these resources as beneficial to student veteran engagement (Brown & Gross, 2011). Implementing this curriculum for practitioners and faculty on a larger scale will enhance the opportunity for more institutions to provide insightful, measured service responses to student veteran needs (Molina & Morse, 2017). Furthermore, a commitment to learning more about student veterans furthers an important discourse on the need to continue to learn about multicultural competencies on campus to better serve all students (Osbourne, 2014).

Conclusion

This study examined the military experiences of thireen student veterans as they made meaning of their college experiences. Throughout this investigation, it became evident that these student veterans gave varying levels of significance to their military experiences, and in turn, how those experiences impacted their college lives. It was also clear that the narratives discussed in this project challenged many assertions made in current student engagement literature about student veterans. This study shone a light on some student veterans who were affected by their military experience in other ways.

Thematic analysis of these student veteran narratives connected the journeys of the participants in four areas, consisting of experience gaps with non-veteran stakeholders, college cultural and social challenges, reflections on military experiences, and perspectives on the frequency and utility of relationships with other student veterans. While nearly all student veterans in this project no longer serve, the vivid memories of that service both resonate and remind them of the importance of their former careers and the impacts those careers have on them today. While the influences of military identity differ for each member of this group, military identity has influenced how they experience college.

The participants in this project did not indicate experiencing physical and mental injuries related to their military backgrounds. They did not suffer from hypervigilance nor model high-risk behaviors. The majority of these participants experienced college transactionally, focusing on academic progression over other aspects of being a student. Participants looked to establish peer connections consistent with their academic goals and comfort level. In many instances, these limited peer connections were not with other student veterans. Faculty interactions were in service to academic goals, with little outside connection factoring into the dynamic. Female student

veterans experienced many of these tensions paired with a lack of self-confidence created from being marginalized in their military careers. While nearly all participants exhibited pride in their military service, they collectively kept that service to themselves in civilian settings, for fear of misrepresentation or misunderstanding from others. When some participants were in settings with other student veterans, they felt judged for their experiences or lack thereof.

Understanding student veterans holistically, while expanding the available knowledge of military experiences amongst non-veterans, can help shape the system of service that is intended to support this population's goals and aspirations as they progress through college. Through their narratives, the individuals in his project provided insights to understand their military and college lives, and how military identity has influenced them both. For practitioners to understand more student veteran perspectives on higher education, they should continue to listen to the accounts of other veterans, while supplementing those accounts with improved knowledge of military culture. These strategies can yield increased insight into this population, leading to better service opportunities that will enhance persistence toward the students' academic and professional goals.

APPENDICES

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Consent Forms
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Investigating the Effects of Military Backgrounds on Meaning-Making in College
Researcher and Title: Wayne Hutchison, Ph.D. Candidate
Department and Institution: Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education, Michigan State University
Address and Contact Information: 645 N. Shaw Lane, Suite 215, Michigan State University, 48824
Sponsor: Dr. Brendan Cantwell, Associate Professor, Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education, Michigan State University

1. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
The purpose of this research study is to investigate the military backgrounds of student veterans and how those backgrounds impact student veteran meaning-making in college. The goal of the study is to understand how student veterans describe their college experiences and how they would describe the interaction of their military backgrounds with their college experiences, to include interactions with other student veterans.

2. WHAT YOU WILL DO
This study will consist of two semi-structured, sixty-minute interviews where you will be asked to recall and discuss your college experiences, military backgrounds, and impressions of how these aspects of your lives interact with one another. In the first interview, you will be asked a series of informational questions regarding your military background and college experiences. In the second interview, you will be asked questions about your impressions of if your military background shapes your student experiences and interactions with other collegiate stakeholders. These interviews will be conducted between the researcher and the participant in a location comfortable for you. In the event that the interview cannot be conducted between the researcher and the participant in the same location, the interview could be conducted via Skype or another internet software tool, provided: the participant is visible, able to be heard (and subsequently recorded), and they provide consent in advance (via stating they verbally provide consent to be audio recorded before the interview begins). In all interview sessions, consent will be established in the audio recording before any interview questions are asked.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS
You may benefit personally from being in the study with the opportunity to reflect further on your experiences as a military member and a college student, and how those experiences intersect and affect one another. Additionally, I hope that other faculty and administrators could benefit from this study by learning of some of the experiences student veterans may experience

as they transition to and engage in the college experience. Furthering the knowledge surrounding this increasing population of college students will assist the academy in supporting this group by influencing how student engagement programming is designed, executed and audited for future students.

4. POTENTIAL RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study.

5. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY
Some of the questions in this project will ask you to answer questions that may involve personal life experiences. To ensure confidentiality, your identity will be replaced with a pseudonym. Personal/contact data for each participant will be stored separately of study data, accessible only to the researcher, via a password protected file. Interviews will be digitally audio recorded, transcribed by an intermediary (agency or hired individual), and analyzed for research purposes. There will be provisions used to safeguard recordings, coded material, and participant identities. Any data and identifying information including signed consent forms will be kept for five years. Audio recordings will be kept for five years and will then be destroyed. All transcripts from recorded interviews will be stripped of identifying information from the participant.

6. YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW
Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions or to stop participating at any time. Choosing not to participate or withdrawing from this study will not make any difference in the quality of any services you may receive.

7. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY
You will receive an honorarium for each interview you participate in. For the first interview, this honorarium will consist of a $10.00 gift card. For the second interview, this honorarium will consist of a $15.00 gift card.

11. CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher: Wayne Hutchison, 645 N. Shaw Lane, Suite 215, Michigan State University, 48824; hutchis2@msu.edu; (517) 898-7833.

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, te Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

12. DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature Date

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

13. **CONSENT TO RECORDING**

- I agree to allow audiotaping/videotaping of the interview.
  ☐ Yes ☐ No Initials_____
- Audio recordings will be saved by the researcher for five years. After this time has elapsed, the recordings will be destroyed.

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide

Interview One:

Opener questions: In this section of questions, I'd like to ask you a few questions about how you came to MSU as well as some basic questions about your military background.

1. How did you decide to attend MSU?

2. What is your program of study? Why did you choose that specialty/major?

3. What are your professional plans after graduation?

4. To the degree you feel comfortable, will you please describe some characteristics of your military service and background?

- **a.** Branch of service?
- **b.** Time in service?
- **c.** Rank upon leaving military service?

1. Autobiographical History (Military Background): In this section of questions, I'd like to learn more about your military background, in terms how you became a military member, the work you did and some of the experiences you have had.

a. Can you describe the training you received when you joined the military?
   a. What was your "boot camp" experience like?
   b. When you reflect on the training, what thoughts come to mind?
   c. Did you make any connections to any other trainees? Can you give an example of one?

b. What kind of work did you do in the military?
   a. What was your position description?
   b. What sort of hours did you keep in the performance of your duties?
   c. What was the structure of the unit/organization you belonged to?
      1. Can you describe how people in your unit worked and interacted with each other?
      2. If you have worked in more than one military unit, what were the similarities and differences in those organizations, in terms of how people worked and interacted with each other?

c. Have you deployed or served in combat?
   a. (If Yes): To the extent you are comfortable, can you describe the similarities and differences of working in a combat zone versus in your home duty location/station?
      1. How was your daily life different in a combat location versus at your home duty location/station?
      2. How did the members of your deployed unit interact with each other, both on and off duty?
      3. What was the duration of your dedicated military training for deployment/combat duty?

c. If you were to summarize your military experiences, in terms of their impact(s) on you as a person, what would you say?

6. Autobiographical History (College Experiences): In this next set of questions, I'd like to know more about your thoughts and experiences in college. To the extent you're comfortable, I'd like to focus on your experiences with campus populations as well as things you've experienced as you pursue your degree/certificate.

b. Can you describe what a week in college is like for you, both in terms of the things you do and how you feel about doing them?

b. How much time do you spend on campus per day?

1. In terms of a timeline, what does a day look like?

a. What kinds of interactions do you have with your faculty?

b. What kinds of interactions do you have with other students?

c. What are your interactions like with student veterans?

d. What are your interactions like with civilian students?

e. What kinds of interactions do you have with college/university administrators?

f. Have you had challenges interacting with any of these campus constituencies? What are examples of these challenges?

1. **Connecting Experiences to Meaning-making in College:**

a. If you had entered college without any military experience, do you think your current college experience would be different? Why or why not?

Closing/Wrap-Up: That concludes our pre-planned questions about your military experiences and background, as well as some of your thoughts regarding your college experience. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like me to know about you, your service, or your student experience?

Interview Two:
In this interview, I would like to discuss your statements in our previous interview, as well as ask you additional questions about your military background in relation to your experiences as a student veteran on campus, and your impressions of fellow student veterans and their experiences on campus.

2. Discussing Potential Military Background Effects: Reflecting on the previous interview we conducted, I'd like to refresh your memory on some of the things you said regarding your college experiences. I'd then like to ask you about your feelings as to if your military background had any effect on those experiences and/or your interactions with other people on campus.

- **b.** In our last interview, we discussed what a week in your life as a college student was like. Reflecting on that conversation I would like you to tell me if and how your military background shapes your student experience.
  - **a.** When you interact with faculty, what are the similarities and/or differences that you see, in reflection to previous experiences you have in your military background?
    - **1.** If you have had tension with a faculty member in the past, do you believe your military background was an influence, positively or negatively?
  - **b.** When you interact with students, what are the similarities and/or differences that you see, in reflection to previous experiences you have in your military background?
    - **1.** Are their differences in interactions with civilian students versus other student veterans? If so, what are they?
      - **1.** Do you believe your military background was a factor in interactions with civilian students?
    - **2.** Can you describe a point of tension you have had with a student outside of class?
      - **1.** Do you believe your military background was a factor in that interaction?
  - **c.** When you have interacted with college/university administrators, do you believe your military background affected those interactions?
- b. Have you felt validated or marginalized for being a student veteran at your college or university? Can you give examples of this?

3. Discussing Perceptions of Other Student Veterans: In some of our previous discussions, we have discussed your experiences with civilian students and student veterans. I'd like to focus on your interactions with other student veterans in more detail, including some of your thoughts regarding the experiences of your colleagues.

- **1.** (If connections to other SV's): What are your perceptions of how your fellow student veterans move through their college experience?
  - **a.** Do they discuss any positive or negative aspects of their experiences with you? Can you elaborate?

b. When discussing interactions with other stakeholders on campus (i.e., faculty, students or administrators), what are their perspectives?

c. How do they view their college experiences, in terms of what it is like to be a college student?

d. Do they discuss their military service with you? What are those discussions like?

e. Do other student veterans treat you differently because of aspects of your military background? I.e., your previous military affiliation, gender, or other characteristic?

4. **Connecting Experiences to Meaning-making in College:**

1. Given your military experiences and your college experience to date, would you summarize your college experience at this school as a positive or negative? Does your military background play a role in that perspective? Why or why not?

5. **Closing/Wrap-Up:** That concludes our pre-planned questions regarding our second interview, as well as discussing perceptions of your fellow student veterans' experiences in college. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like me to know about your experiences as a student veteran in college?

APPENDIX C: Code Table

				Michael (23)	Rich (41)	Travis (28)	Carlos (28)	Steve (30)	Dan (23)	Miranda (22)	Marie (29)	Bobbi Jo (34)	Stacy (28)	Chandler (26)	Mark (28)	John (31)	
	Details	Themes															
RQ 1																	
How do student veterans describe their college experiences?	Keep to oneself	Traversing the Age/Experience Gap		X	X		X	X			X	X		X	X	X	9
	Caretaker/leader				X						X	X	X				4
	Take charge in groups				X	X	X				X	X		X			6
	Disconnect to youth			X	X	X	X	X			X			X	X		8
	"I Feel so much older"				X			X			X	X		X	X		6
	Lack of seriousness of other students			X	X		X		X	X	X			X	X		8
	Lack of agency of military experience			X	X				X	X	X			X			6
	lack of agency in class			X	X		X	X		X	X	X			X		8
	Reveal SV status in college?				X					X	X		X		X	X	6
	College life easy versus military life hardship	Cultural and Social Challenges of Being in College		X			X			X	X		X	X			6
	Faculty Challenges			X	X		X				X						4
	Faculty Support				X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	9
	Educational confidence					X			X	X			X	X		X	6
	Educational non-confidence			X	X		X	X			X						5
	cultural induction process (did you fit in)					X	X		X	X		X	X			X	7
	challenges in the unstructured			X	X		X							X	X		5
	commuter student mentality			X	X			X			X	X		X	X		7
	voluntary isolation from other students			X	X		X	X			X	X			X		7
	Questioning student "fit"			X	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	X		9
	Questioning the Utility of a College Education			X				X		X				X			4
	Would have considered a smaller school				X		X	X			X	X					5
RQ 2																	
How do Student Veterans Understand their College Experiences in Relation to their Military Experiences?	Process of cultural induction (military)	Military Past, Student Veteran Present		X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
	Part of a Military Team; solo College Students			X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	11
	High performance in challenging situations				X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10
	Attention to detail/structured days				X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	11
	College experience enhanced by service?				X	X	X				X	X	X				6
	Reflections on Service?			X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
	Military Service Regret?			X				X	X								3
	Comfort level in interacting with other student veterans	Relationships With Other Student Veterans		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	11
	Questioning your service with other student veterans (mine is not as good as yours)							X	X	X	X				X		5
	Desires connections to other SV's						X						X			X	3
	Do you have Student Veteran Peer Connections			X			X						X			X	4
	SV's in your classes (that you know of)			X									X				2
	Do other SV's actively reach out to you?				X	X	X	X				X	X			X	7
	Gender Bias observed or perpetuated			X	X				X	X	X	X	X				7

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