

MILITARY VETERANS AND THEIR MOTIVATION TO PERSIST IN DISTANCE
EDUCATION DOCTORAL PROGRAMS

by

Paula Ann Ross

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Lucinda S. Spaulding, PhD, Committee Chair

Amanda J. Rockinson-Szapkiw, EdD, PhD, Committee Member

Kevin D. Harkins, PhD, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

This transcendental phenomenological study examined military veterans' motivational experiences who persisted to complete distance education (DE) doctoral programs in the United States. The theory guiding the research was self-determination theory (SDT), a theory of human motivation, development, and wellness that frames how motivation influences behavior, in this case, persistence. Various data sources (demographics questionnaire, timeline, advice letter, and semi-structured interview) triangulated a snowball sample of nine participants' (six males and three females) motivational experiences. The SDT framework guided the answer to and informed the analysis of the central research question providing three theoretical constructs: (a) autonomy, (b) competence, and c) relatedness. After repeated data analyses, five textural themes emerged demonstrating what the participants experienced concerning this study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist: (a) a support system, (b) obstacles, (c) goal accomplishment, (d) a new culture, and (e) flexibility and autonomy of the DE structure and program type. Six structural themes emerged demonstrating how the participants experienced this study's central phenomenon: (a) engaging a support system, (b) overcoming obstacles, (c) goal setting and accomplishment, (d) navigating the DE dissertation process, (e) using military experiences to determine the dissertation topic, and (f) discovering and pursuing passion. With military veteran students' increasing participation in higher education and in DE, and with a concern for attrition rates in doctoral programs and DE, this study contributes to theoretical and empirical literature and assists administrators and educators of DE doctoral programs in determining support strategies for this population.

Keywords: autonomy, competence, distance education, motivation, persistence, relatedness

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Anna. Anna is my blessing from a teenage pregnancy. At the age of fourteen, I did not know this little baby would ignite a fire in me to persist through challenges. When I gave up Anna for adoption at just two days old, I promised her I would live my life as if we would meet again; I would not waste my life, and I would make her proud. My greatest joy after meeting Anna again fourteen years later was learning that not only does Anna have a wonderful life, but she is the kind of daughter any mother would be proud of. Just like her birth mother, Anna is pursuing her doctorate. Just like her adoptive mother, Anna is a beautiful soul.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my son, Jackson, as he was the initial spark for me to become a teacher. It was his challenging elementary school experiences that gave me the motivation to pursue my master's and, ultimately, my doctorate in education. Jackson helped me understand that every learner, no matter the age, gender, ethnicity, background, or challenge, wants to succeed. Every learner enters the classroom with unique circumstances that can encourage as well as thwart learning. I have witnessed Jackson experience both scenarios. Jackson persisted, although not perfectly, and he has been my greatest achievement and my greatest motivator.

Acknowledgments

My parents have had the greatest influence on my doctoral journey. They have always encouraged me to persist through challenges with precision and dedication and are the reason I push myself each day. They know my potential and expect me to work hard. My parents' faith in my abilities reminds me of Proverbs 2: 1–8 (New International Version):

If you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
indeed, if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.
For the Lord gives wisdom;
from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He holds success in store for the upright,
he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless,
for he guards the course of the just
and protects the way of his faithful ones.

In loving memory of my mom, Judith Dawn Rhodes (October 7, 1942 – February 23, 2018).

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List of Abbreviations

Academic Motivation Scale (AMS)

American Council on Education (ACE)

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)

Doctorate in Audiology (AuD)

Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)

Causality Orientations Theory (COT)

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)

Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Distance Education (DE)

Department of Defense (DoD)

Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Education Services Officer (ESO)

Doctor of Education (EdD)

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

Goal Contents Theory (GCT)

Government Issue (GI)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Intrinsic Motivation to Learn Scale (IMLS)

Instructional Systems Design (ISD)

Joint Services Transcript (JST)

Million Records Project (MRP)

National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Need for Relatedness at College Questionnaire (NRC-Q)

Open Distance Learning (ODL)

Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)

Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Student Psychological Needs Scale (SPNS)

Transition Goals, Plans, Success (TGPS) Program

United States Coast Guard (USCG)

World War II (WWII)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 3.1(d) defines a military veteran as an individual who served in the military and was discharged or released under circumstances other than dishonorable. However, this authoritative definition does not capture the essence and experiences of a military veteran who served his or her country. Other words used to describe military veterans while they served are *commitment, loyalty, duty, respect, honor, and courage* (Fall, Kelly, & Christen, 2011). This selfless service is a calling that requires each military member to be self-motivated and to perform all tasks with integrity and commitment. Any individual who is moved to act, is inspired, and is energized toward an end is characterized as motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000a), and while serving, military members are moved, inspired, and energized toward an end goal and are trained to carry out difficult tasks to execute a mission. The military organization trains its members to be self-motivated leaders (Fall et al., 2011), and this training influences many areas of their lives including learning experiences (Fall et al., 2011).

When military members separate or retire from service, they often enter higher education to increase civilian opportunities (Bergman & Herd, 2016) and to be more competitive in the job market (Student Veterans of America, 2016); online learning provides military veterans who are geographically dispersed greater access to higher education. In addition, online learning provides military veterans the convenience of completing their degrees at home along with the flexibility to pursue civilian opportunities. A 2016 census reported 66% of military veterans had taken online courses at some point during their academic pursuits (Student Veterans of America, 2016). In a 2011–2012 U.S. Department of Education brief, Radford, Bentz, Dekker, and Paslov

(2016) reported 41% of graduate military students (i.e., active duty and military veterans) took all of their courses online compared to 19% of graduate nonmilitary students with remaining graduate students taking some or none of their courses online. While online learning is only one avenue military veterans can take to access higher education, Allen and Seaman (2016) recognized the following four types of programs academic institutions offer: traditional, web-facilitated, blended/hybrid, and online. Seaman, Allen, and Seaman (2018), the seminal researchers of distance education (DE), define DE as the use of one or more technologies that deliver instruction to students separated from the instructor. A DE program is one where students can complete all the required coursework via DE courses (Seaman et al., 2018). The number of students participating in DE is growing each year (Seaman et al., 2018). For example, in 2012, 25.9% of the higher education student body participated in DE; in 2013, 27.1% participated; and in 2014, 28.3% participated (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Because of this upward trend and its role in military veterans' academic pursuits, this research study focuses on DE programs where 80% to 100% of course content is delivered online.

Military veterans leave the military organization goal-oriented and self-motivated, yet academic institutions and research classically characterize this population as nontraditional (Cate, 2014). Horn (1996) argued that if a student had at least one of the following characteristics, he or she was considered a nontraditional student and was 10% to 20% less likely to earn a degree compared to traditional students: delayed enrollment, part-time enrollment, financial independence, full-time employment, having dependents, being a single parent, and lacking a standard high school diploma. These characteristics describing nontraditional students place military veteran students from the post-World War II (WWII) era as the very first nontraditional student population to enter higher education in high numbers (Cate, 2014), yet

approximately 8 of 16 million post-WWII military veterans eligible for the Government Issued (GI) Bill attained postsecondary degrees or completed vocational training (Greenberg, 1997).

See Table 1 for a better understanding of today's military veteran student (Student Veterans of America, 2016).

Table 1

Military Veteran Student Profile

Information	Percentage
25 years of age or older	88
Has children	46
Single parent	16
VA disabled	51
Full-time student	86
Taken online or DE classes	66
Cumulative GPA ranging from 3.00–3.99	71
Working to complete doctoral degree	5

This student population is a topic of interest in today's research; however, accurate data on military veteran students are difficult to locate. Historical data provide some insight into military veteran students' academic achievements but do not provide valuable, current data for policy and institution decision makers today. In addition, current data collection methods are inconsistent and lead to confusion about how or if this student body is achieving (Cate, 2014). Adding to the confusion is the lack of studies conducted on the military veteran student population participating in DE doctoral programs.

Much of the research conducted on military veteran students focuses on their transition experiences from the military environment to the academic environment (Bergman & Herd, 2016; Gregg, Howell, & Shordike, 2016; Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014), while other research focuses on their experiences in higher education, not doctoral education (Tomar &

Stoffel, 2014; Wilson, Smith, Lee, & Stevenson, 2013) providing a wide range of results for understanding military veterans' educational experiences. For example, Olsen et al. (2014) found in their study that military veterans perceived their strengths when transitioning to and experiences in higher education as self-discipline, strong leadership and teamwork skills, and possessing valuable experiences and perspectives. Challenges included social interactions, financial strain, and cultural differences (Olsen et al., 2014). In the study Gregg et al. (2016) conducted, military veterans reported transitioning to higher education caused them to repurpose skill sets gained while serving in the military, rebuild their civilian identity, and adapt to new social interactions and tasking. Even though studies like these focus on the transition process in higher education rather than experiences at the doctoral level, they provide some insight into the uniqueness of this population.

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand and give a voice to military veterans' motivational experiences as they persisted to complete DE doctoral programs in the United States. This chapter provides the historical, social, and theoretical contexts as well as an explanation of the ontological, epistemological, axiological, methodological, and social constructivist beliefs that framed how I analyzed and described my research findings. The problem and purpose statements provide readers an understanding of this study's focus. Empirical, theoretical, and practical significances are explained in addition to the research questions guiding this study and technical terminology used throughout.

Background

For this transcendental phenomenological study, it is important to have an understanding of this study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist. Motivation as the driving phenomenon for this study is defined as the experiences that move military veterans to persist in

DE doctoral programs; specifically, military experiences and DE doctoral program experiences that inspire military veterans to act, energizing them toward doctoral completion. Operationally defined, motivation is a characteristic of an individual who is moved to do something, is inspired to act, and is energized toward an end (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Tinto (1982), a seminal theorist in academic persistence, defined persistence as continuous enrollment in higher education.

Operationally defined, persistence is a committed continuation of difficult tasks over time that result in a variety of behaviors (Roland, Frenay, & Boudrenghien, 2016). For this study, persistence is defined as military veterans' continuous actions that result in the completion of a DE doctoral program, despite circumstances having the potential to thwart this mission.

When examining military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs, it is important to consider the historical, social, and theoretical contexts to understand how and why they behave a certain way as well as how and why they experience this study's phenomenon. This study's historical perspective provides background knowledge on how military veterans' motivations to persist in higher education has evolved over time. The social context provides a high-level comparison of military veterans' experiences in the military environment to that of the academic environment. In addition to the historical and social contexts, important to this study are the concepts and principles that give the reader an understanding of the theory underpinning this study.

Historical Context

A historical context describing the military veteran student of the WWII era and Vietnam War era provides some understanding of the military veteran student today. President Roosevelt signed the Montgomery GI Bill on June 22, 1944. Its purpose was to provide WWII veterans, also known as GIs, immediate benefits dedicated to tuition and living expenses. WWII and the

Montgomery GI Bill created an influx of military veterans attending colleges (Wilson et al., 2013). Research studies conducted during WWII and the Vietnam War on military veteran students and their college experiences focused on the impact military experiences had on their academic achievements (Olsen et al., 2014). The academic outcomes from the WWII GI Bill resulted in “22,000 dentists, 67,000 doctors, 91,000 scientists, 238,000 teachers, 240,000 accountants, and 450,000 engineers as well as three Supreme Court justices, three presidents, a dozen senators, 14 Nobel Prize winners, and two dozen Pulitzer Prize Winners” (Cate, Lyon, Schmeling, & Bogue, 2017, p. 8). Love and Hutchison (1946) analyzed academic records of veteran students ($N = 219$) attending the School of Education and School of Agriculture at a university. Their analysis included a comparison of academic records before WWII and academic records once the veteran students returned to school after WWII. Love and Hutchison (1946) found academic performance improved after returning to school with a .66 average gain in marks, two-thirds of a letter grade. These surprising results led researchers to consider the positive impacts military experiences can have on academic experiences. Frederiksen and Schrader (1952) conducted a study comparing military veteran students’ academic success to nonveteran students. Their findings revealed military veteran students excelled in college achievement compared to nonveterans (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1952). The researchers attributed these findings to military veteran students’ maturity and a capacity for more intensive and prolonged effort while serving (Frederiksen & Schrader, 1952).

It is worth comparing the military environments of the WWII and Vietnam eras to today’s voluntary military environment. The voluntary nature of today’s military environment provides men and women not only a call to duty but also financial options when socio-economic standards cannot support them to enter higher education. Today, the Montgomery GI Bill

provides military veterans enrolled full time in postsecondary education benefits up to \$1,101 (Radford et al., 2016). In addition to the Montgomery GI Bill, the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act of 2008, better known as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, is the largest expansion of education benefits since the WWII GI Bill (Cate et al., 2017). The Post-9/11 GI Bill covers complete tuition and fee costs at any public college or university or up to \$17,500 for private institutions (Radford et al., 2016), and between 2007–2008 and 2011–2012, Veterans' education benefits used by military graduate students increased by 24% (Radford et al., 2016). Between 2009 and 2013, the Post-9/11 GI Bill funded approximately 450,000 post-secondary degrees and certificates (Cate et al., 2017). The United States Government supports military veterans in their endeavors through education benefits. For example, there are 945,000 veterans using education benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and 400,000 veterans using tuition aid (Olsen et al, 2014). Research indicates military students perceive government benefits as incentives to attend college and complete courses (Wilson et al., 2013).

These benefits are needed and timely for this population as military veterans are experiencing a reduction in combat forces (Bergman & Herd, 2016; Davis & Minnis, 2016). The U.S. military is expecting up to 25% in workforce reductions (Bergman & Herd, 2016) with 250,000 military personnel released per year over the next five years (Davis & Minnis, 2016). Military veterans are pursuing degrees in higher education (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Kirchner, 2015) as they represent 3% of the undergraduate and 4% of the graduate student body in American colleges (Starr-Glass, 2013). Additionally, and relevant to this study's DE setting, military veterans are using online programs more than non-military students to participate in higher education (Radford et al., 2016). Research suggests this student body is growing and may continue to grow while expanding the DE setting. See Table 2 for veteran period of service

statistics (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2018).

Table 2

Veteran Period of Service Statistics

Period of Service	Million
WWII (1941–1946)	0.6
Korean War (1950–1955)	1.5
Vietnam War (1961–1975)	6.7
Gulf War (1990–1991)	7.13
Peacetime Only	4.5

Social Context

To understand the military veteran student’s motivation to persist, one must understand social contexts he or she experienced while serving. Military training involves breaking down individualism so that soldiers, airmen, and sailors act and think as a unit (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Military life for a unit demands strict obedience to a chain of command to reach unit goals and effectively execute missions (Dillard & Yu, 2016). The military environment is highly structured and organized by government policies and regulated timelines. The military organization closely tracks performance progress of each military member. Aspects of the military environment may provide military veterans the skillsets needed to be motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program; however, following a chain of command while adhering to a specific military career path is different from an academic environment that is designed to encourage individualism, critical thinking, and questioning (Dillard & Yu, 2016).

Motivation to act under the guidance of strict policies and deadlines in the military environment does not align with higher education where most of the actual learning takes place outside the classroom (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Learning outside the classroom (i.e., autonomous learning) is when a student takes purposeful and intentional action in his or her learning (Ponton, 2014). For example, doctoral students demonstrate autonomous learning by forming and

learning from groups, enlisting the help of someone who can assist the doctoral student with a specific knowledge and skill, and purposefully learning on his or her own (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Unfortunately, purposeful and intentional actions towards autonomous learning do not guarantee that a doctoral student is self-directed (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). A self-directed learner regulates his or her learning by diagnosing skills and knowledge deficiencies, correcting such deficiencies, and reflecting on whether deficiencies are diminishing and learning is being realized (Ponton, 2014).

A military veteran student's learning outside the classroom may be a different experience from those experienced by a non-veteran student learning outside the classroom. While some researchers may argue that the individualistic nature of self-directed learning is not a cultural aspect of military life, there are aspects of self-directed learning that are reinforced in a military environment. For example, the military environment shapes military veterans to be self-directed learners by reinforcing distinctive capabilities and value skills such as self-discipline, leadership abilities, teamwork, and unique and valuable life experiences (Olsen et al., 2014). Military veteran students attribute their military training as the reason for their abilities to meet deadlines, prepare adequately for assignments, and coordinate group work in the academic domain. They have unique insight into the class content and are able to manage stress (Olsen et al., 2014). Military duties require one to assume a variety of professional roles that stretch and refine leadership skills (Olsen et al., 2014). Effectively communicating with subordinates as well as seniors, being responsible to their units, and managing group conflict military veterans learned while serving (Olsen et al., 2014) are most useful for a self-directed learner to be motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program.

The variety of roles and responsibilities while serving the military provides this student

population unique and valuable perspectives and experiences. Military veterans perceive these experiences as strengths in the academic environment (Olsen et al., 2014). Work ethic and time management skills military veterans perceive themselves as having (Olsen et al., 2014) translate well in the academic domain and can positively influence self-directed learning.

This social context provides a high-level understanding of the role military service plays in military veteran students' experiences in higher education; however, it does not explain the self-determination needed for a military veteran to be motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program. Social and cultural conditions can support or thwart individuals' experiences with performance, persistence, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). While individuals have the propensity to grow and improve, social nutrients and supports must be present for human flourishing, such as the case of military veterans who are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Theoretical Context

While there are well-documented research studies suggesting that military experiences enhance military veterans' academic achievements (Love & Hutchison, 1946), there are no research studies conducted currently on military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. This research study leaned on existing research and Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT) to understand and describe military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. Central to SDT is the examination of biological, social, and cultural conditions that enhance or thwart human flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and that human flourishing is associated with human motivation grounded in satisfying feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, individuals are self-determined when they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness

and are motivated and engaged in acts that result in enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity. Likewise, when internal or external forces do not support volition and well-being, individuals do not experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are not self-determined, and therefore are not motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the three fundamental and basic psychological needs on which SDT leans, and when one is not present, an individual cannot be self-determined (Ryan & Deci, 2017). To first understand autonomy, competence, and relatedness, it is important to understand Ryan and Deci's (2017) criteria for basic psychological need. Ryan and Deci (2017) borrowed from Baumeister and Leary (1995) the following criteria for identifying a basic psychological need: (a) readily produces positive effects; (b) has affective consequences; (c) directs cognitive processing; (d) when thwarted, leads to negative effects on health and well-being; (e) elicits goal-oriented behavior; (f) is universal; (g) not derived from other motives; (h) has an impact across an array of behaviors; and (i) has implications beyond immediate psychological functioning. Ryan and Deci (2017) posit that autonomy, competence, and relatedness fit the criteria of basic psychological needs and can apply to any social and cultural setting.

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness are very distinct but have the same behavioral outcomes when all three are met (i.e., motivation). Autonomy is an individual's need to self-regulate his or her actions (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Individuals experience autonomy when they are engaged in an activity that closely aligns with their interests and values (Guiffrida, Lynch, Wall, & Abel, 2013), and results are higher quality behavior and greater persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2017). For example, military veterans who are whole-heartedly engaged and interested in their dissertation topic may be motivated to persist in completing their doctoral journeys. Competence

is a core element for motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ryan and Deci (2017) postulate that individuals have a propensity to seek and experience challenging activities satisfying the need to be effective and capable. This is where individuals experience interest and gain competence. For example, military experiences provide military veterans challenging opportunities. These military experiences may equip this population with the competence needed for facing and overcoming challenges in their DE doctoral programs. Lastly, relatedness is when individuals feel socially connected and cared for and are contributing to others (Ryan & Deci, 2017). While serving, soldiers, airmen, and sailors are trained to act and think as a unit (Dillard & Yu, 2016). The need to satisfy this third and final SDT (1985) construct is one the military environment fosters. This research study considered how military veterans who were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs were able to satisfy their need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

SDT is a theory of human motivation, development, and wellness that describes types of motivation for satisfying basic psychological needs and how and why motivation influences performance, persistence, and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Ryan and Deci (2017) developed SDT to focus on types of motivation rather than amounts. For example, Ryan and Deci (2017) explained there is an important distinction between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomous motivation occurs when an individual experiences value in the activity and has integrated this activity into his or her sense of self. The individual is internally motivated as he or she is interested in and enjoys the activity. As considered earlier, a military veteran may be motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program when he or she is involved in coursework and research that is inherently valuable, interesting, and enjoyable. When an individual's motivation is externally driven, meaning he or she is completing an activity because

he or she feels forced in some way to do so, he or she feels controlled. This can occur when an individual experiences reward or punishment, approval, avoidance, or shame in the activity (Deci & Ryan, 2008). For example, a military veteran pursuing a doctoral degree because he or she feels pressured by an employer or wishes to gain recognition is motivated by control, is not as self-determined, and is, therefore, less likely to persist.

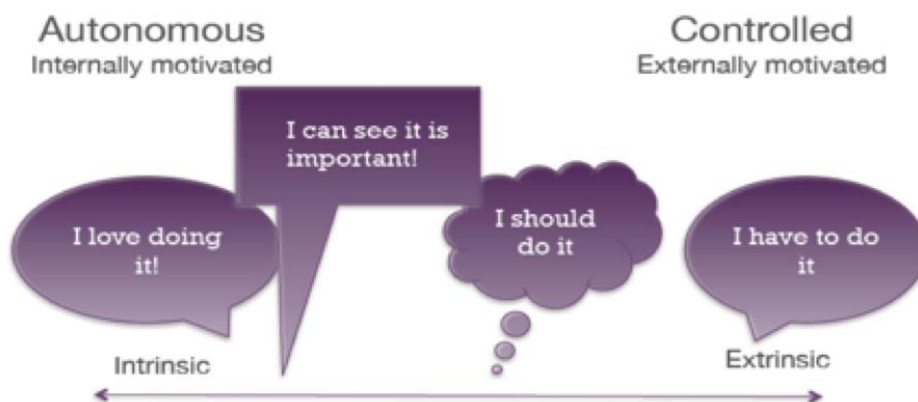


Figure 1. Continuum of motivation (Madden, 2016).

The theoretical context above provides a high-level explanation of and framework for Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT for understanding military veterans' motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs. This study examines military veterans' military experiences and DE doctoral program experiences and how a composite of those experiences satisfied their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness resulting in this population's motivation to persist to doctoral attainment.

Situation to Self

I have been in multiple settings where I witnessed others' motivation to persist. As a middle school and high school Language Arts teacher, I observed students demonstrate motivation that resulted in persistence in their reading and writing activities. For example, at the beginning of the school year some students did not enjoy reading or writing for a variety of

reasons. By providing them opportunities to face these challenges in an environment that was supportive, these same students not only came to enjoy reading and writing but also looked forward to free-choice reading and writing activities by the end of the year. As a mother of a child who has struggled throughout his elementary, middle, and high school experiences, I saw firsthand how human and social contexts thwarted his motivation by not providing an environment for him to satisfy his autonomous, competence, and relatedness needs. My son internalized negative interactions and experiences that occurred during his early school years that cracked his academic foundation for the remainder of his education experiences; however, a strong family support system offset those negative experiences by providing support and encouragement. He persisted and is now attending college with plans to enter Air National Guard. Finally, as a contractor for the United States Coast Guard (USCG) working with military veterans, I have witnessed military veterans transition from the military organization to civilian careers, which is a new and very different experience. This culture shift is challenging, and I observed these military veterans adjust to the culture shift in a supportive and encouraging work environment. I have learned that individuals of all ages and in a variety of settings can be motivated to persist when they are provided opportunities to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Like my students, child, and co-workers, I have experienced human and social contexts that supported my needs to be autonomous, competent, and relational and influenced my motivation to persist. For example, I was motivated to complete my DE doctoral program, and as I progressed through my doctoral journey, my motivation grew, leading to improved performance, increased persistence, and greater creativity.

As a researcher enrolled in a DE doctoral program who experienced and witnessed this study's central phenomenon (i.e., motivation to persist), I recognized and elucidated my

philosophical assumptions and worldview while undertaking this qualitative study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained a researcher's basic belief system (i.e., worldview) is simply faith that something is true as it relates to that researcher's world. Therefore, a researcher's worldview is present in his or her research study. Acknowledging my philosophical assumptions and worldview allowed me to give my participants space to demonstrate completely and explicitly their own philosophical assumptions and worldviews throughout the entire research process.

Ontological Assumptions

An ontological assumption brings awareness to the researcher that there are multiple realities as seen through the participants' eyes (Moustakas, 1994). I discerned my participants' varying descriptions and perspectives of their experiences while they served the military as well as their experiences in their DE doctoral programs. Each participant's perspective for how and why he or she was motivated to persist was recorded using multiple forms of evidence that revealed themes among all of my participants. Their perspectives are their truths, and I captured these perspectives using multiple data sources. My findings from these multiple data sources revealed how the participants view their experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Epistemological Assumptions

An epistemological assumption emphasizes a close connection between the qualitative researcher and participants. This study included a collection of data that provided me deep insight into participants' experiences, and I used participants' quotes from interviews and data sources to support and justify their experiences. While I did not conduct fieldwork (e.g., observations, etc.) for this study, I enhanced a close connection by using multiple data sources, by digging deeply into those data sources, and by spending sufficient and focused time with participants in semi-structured interviews to capture the essences of their experiences.

Participants used words in particular contexts as they described their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and it was important for me to understand the context of their language and capture those descriptions accurately.

Axiological Assumptions

Axiological assumptions are based on values and how values influence human flourishing (Heron, 1996). SDT underpins this study and aligns with axiological assumptions that human flourishing occurs when values are accepted and incorporated in environments that promote autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Raised by divorced parents and experienced teen pregnancy at 15 years of age, I was deeply motivated to persist no matter the obstacle. I did not realize the depth of this value until I entered higher education. While family members and friends were surprised at my motivation to attain an undergraduate degree, I never considered failure. My motivation and persistent behavior grew over the years as I faced personal and professional challenges and set higher goals of attaining a master's and ultimately a doctoral degree. Through personal, professional, and educational decisions based on my values, I understand that being motivated to persist is unique to each person navigating through and achieving challenging goals.

In addition to understanding my values for conducting research, this study may help military veterans, educators in DE doctoral programs, and researchers learn nutrients needed to support this population. My goal for this study was to provide its readers an understanding of the participants' experiences. This understanding may help readers' shift from their own understanding to a new and deeper understanding of how and why military veterans are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs. Additionally, my goal was to discover what military experiences and DE doctoral program experiences motivated my participants to persist

to doctoral completion and to be able to recommend strategies to further support this population as well as recommend strategies for all students participating in DE doctoral programs.

Rhetorical Assumptions

Moustakas (1994) advised researchers to write a brief and creative narrative that describes the essence of the study and how the study's findings inspired the researcher. While I used Moustakas' (1994) analysis approach and bracketed myself out of the narrative, I had the ability to position myself (i.e., reflexivity; Creswell, 2013) by restating the problem and writing my findings autobiographically. These findings brought value not only to my life as a non-veteran motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program and as a contractor engaging with military veterans professionally, but also value to my professional engagement with military veterans considering DE doctoral programs.

Methodological Assumptions

Researchers must consider methodological assumptions for the study to be inductive, emergent, and shaped by a particular set of ideas to form a general principle or theme. While collecting and analyzing data, I identified and noted common ideas of participants' experiences. From these common ideas, themes emerged that described how and why the participants were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs. These themes may provide insight to other military veterans, educators of DE doctoral programs, and researchers into how military veterans are motivated to persist in these programs.

Social Constructivism

Creswell (2013) explained that researchers who identify with a social constructivist paradigm completely lean on the participants' perspectives. Social constructivists understand their participants' perspectives are defined by interactions with others. I identified with a social

constructivist paradigm as I sought to understand the participants' perspectives. Interview questions were open-ended and broad, and the demographics questionnaire, timeline, and advice letter were designed to cause participants to think about their social contexts and behaviors while serving and while participating in their DE doctoral programs to form their own meanings as they relived their experiences. Since I was motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program, while not a military veteran, I recognized I could unintentionally interpret my participants' experiences according to my own experiences; therefore, I employed measures to bracket out my own experiences.

Problem Statement

Military men and women are described as loyal, respectful, honorable, and courageous (Fall et al., 2011). While serving, they are trained to demonstrate self-motivation and commitment to a mission while carrying out difficult tasks. With a 25% military workforce reduction every year for the next five years (Davis & Minnis, 2016), many of these men and women are separating or retiring from the military and are attending higher education institutions (Bergman & Herd, 2016; Davis & Minnis, 2016). Currently, they represent 4% of the graduate student body in American colleges (Starr-Glass, 2013). While this growing student body enters higher education equipped with their military experiences and capabilities such as leadership, discipline, and abilities to manage stress (Olsen et al., 2014), data on this population and their academic outcomes are unclear (Cate, 2014). What is known is that academic institutions characterize military veteran students as nontraditional (Cate, 2014), and theorists and researchers argue nontraditional students are less likely to succeed in higher education than traditional students (Horn, 1996; Olsen et al., 2014). While military veteran students are classically defined as nontraditional students as they share similar characteristics, there are

significant differences as well. Additionally, factors considered detriments to nontraditional students may be motivating to military veteran students. Nonetheless, military veteran students are participating in DE (Radford et al., 2016). From 2011–2012, 41% of military students took all graduate-level courses online compared to 19% of non-military students (Radford et al., 2016); however, attrition in DE can be 10 to 20% higher than in traditional education programs (Kennedy, Terrell, & Lohle, 2015; Terrell, 2005). Additionally, military veteran students are participating in doctoral programs. Radford et al. (2016) found that from 2007–2008 to 2011–2012 the percentage of military graduate students participating in doctoral programs increased from 15% to 19% and nonmilitary students participating in doctoral programs decreased slightly from 25% to 24%. While the number of doctoral degrees conferred between 2000–2001 and 2015–2016 increased by 49% (NCES, 2018), statistics demonstrate that 50% of doctoral students do not persist to completion (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015). These statistics are significant to all students; however, it is unclear how or if these statistics apply to military veterans participating in DE doctoral programs. Currently, there is very little to no research describing military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs; therefore, this topic deserves inquiry.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand and give voice to military veterans' motivational experiences as they persisted to complete DE doctoral programs in the United States. A DE program is one where students can complete all the required coursework via DE (Seaman et al., 2018). There are many forms of DE, including online education, which was the focus of this study and defined as a course or program in which 80% to 100% of course content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Motivation is a

characteristic of an individual who is moved to do something, is inspired to act, and is energized toward an end (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Persistence is defined as a committed continuation of difficult tasks over time (Roland et al., 2016). Persistence is defined for this study as military veterans' continuous actions that result in the completion of a DE doctoral program, despite circumstances having the potential to thwart this mission. The theory guiding this study is Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, a theory of human motivation, development, and wellness that provides a lens to explore how motivation influences behavior—in this case, persistence. Drawing upon this theory, I examined how the participants were motivated and ultimately persisted in their DE doctoral programs to completion.

Significance of the Study

While there are research studies examining doctoral students and persistence (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Di Pierro, 2007; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Lovitts, 2008; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Willis & Carmichael, 2011) and research studies conducted on military veterans persisting in higher education (Cate, 2014; Gregg et al., 2016; Mentzer, Black, & Spohn, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014; Richardson, Ruckert, & Marion, 2015), research has not been conducted on military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. This study fills that gap as well as provides empirical, theoretical, practical insight that military veterans, educators, and researchers can consider when learning how and why military veterans are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Empirical Significance

Research studies conducted on military veterans pursuing higher education indicate that military veterans are equipped for academic success; however, academic outcomes are unclear (Cate, 2014). Some research studies indicate military veterans are not succeeding at the same

rate as traditional students (Dillard & Yu, 2016) while other research indicates they are succeeding at the same rate or higher (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016). Research studies have been conducted on military veterans enrolled in higher education, attempting to learn more about this population (Bergman & Herd, 2016; Olsen et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2013). For example, Wilson et al. (2013) conducted a study on military personnel's descriptions of their college experiences. Bergman and Herd (2016) conducted a literature review to examine military members who are considering higher education for advancing opportunities in civilian life. Like Bergman and Herd (2016), Olsen et al. (2014) examined active duty and reserve component military veterans' perceptions and experiences as they transitioned to higher education. While these studies are significant to researchers and educators, there is no research describing the motivational experiences of military veterans persisting in DE doctoral programs. This is a significant topic that deserves attention, and this research study attempted to fill this gap.

Theoretical Significance

Deci and Ryan (2008) defined SDT as a theory of human motivation applicable to multiple domains (i.e., work, relationships, parenting, academia, sports, and healthcare). In addition, researchers have tested SDT in a multitude of studies in the academic domain (Devos, Van der Linden, & Boudrenghien, 2015; Goldman, Goodboy, & Weber, 2017; Taylor et al., 2014). Goldman et al. (2017) conducted three studies using SDT to "operationalize students' intrinsic motivation as a product of the basic psychological need satisfaction" (p. 20). Devos et al. (2015) conducted a study on doctoral supervision using SDT and suggested that doctoral supervision provides a support structure doctoral students need to be autonomous. Taylor et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of controlled, longitudinal studies using SDT to determine how types of motivation influence academic achievement. These studies used SDT to determine

how and why supports for autonomy, competence, and relatedness result in enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). While there is strong support for SDT (1985) in research studies concerned with motivation in academia, currently, there is no research examining military veterans' motivations to persist in DE doctoral programs using SDT (1985) to underpin the research. This study extends and supports SDT (1985), as well as provides insight to researchers and educators of DE doctoral programs by addressing this population demonstrating self-determination in these programs.

Practical Significance

Military support services personnel who assist military veterans as they transition from the military to academia can benefit from the implications for practice this study provides. For example, the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (TGPS) Program is a military program designed to assist military veterans in transitioning from the military to civilian life. Portions of the program are dedicated to accessing higher education, yet the breadth and depth needed to increase the likelihood of success in completing DE doctoral programs may be lacking in its design. Additionally, each armed military branch provides education services officers (ESOs) at every command to assist military personnel with academic needs; however, the ESO duty is collateral and begs the question of whether services provided are effective. Data from this study's research may provide military support services personnel best practices to incorporate in programs to better assist this population and contribute to increasing the likelihood of success in completing DE doctoral programs.

Military veterans considering doctoral degrees in DE programs and educators in this setting can benefit from the practical implications this study provides as well. Academic programs like DE doctoral programs do not provide military students, or any student, the same

level of direction they experienced while serving. Military veterans are accustomed to an environment that is regimented and monitored under a chain of command (Dillard & Yu, 2016), contrasting with academic environments where most of the learning occurs outside the classroom (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Military veterans are trained to be self-disciplined while serving the military; however, this type of behavior may be considered controlled motivation as explained under the constructs of SDT (1985) and may not translate as easily into an academic environment. Military veterans need to know how to transition into the self-directed setting required of students in DE doctoral programs, and educators in these programs need to understand the nutrients they can provide in the academic environment to influence this population's well-being and motivation to persist.

Research Questions

I chose participants for this study with the criteria that they were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs to successful completion. With increased numbers of military veterans enrolling in DE programs to participate higher education (Radford et al., 2016), there is a significant need to understand how and why military veterans are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs. In addition, giving a voice to military veterans and describing their motivational experiences while persisting can provide strategies to other military veterans, researchers, and educators who support this population. To that end, the following research questions guided this study:

Central Question

CQ: What are the motivational experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program?

The central question focused on three tightly connected concepts fundamental to this study. The first concept focused on military veterans—a student population considered nontraditional (Olsen et al., 2014) and, therefore, not succeeding at the same rate as traditional students (Horn, 1996). This study focused on military veterans who did succeed in attaining doctoral degrees in DE. It is important to explore their personal experiences in hopes of expanding the existing body of knowledge on this population. The second concept is the study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist. Motivation is defined as the experiences that move military veterans to persist in DE doctoral programs; specifically, military experiences and DE experiences that inspired the participants to act, energizing them toward doctoral completion. Operationally defined, motivation is a characteristic of an individual who is moved to do something, is inspired to act, and is energized toward an end (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Persistence as the second but equally important phenomenon is defined as the act of military veterans completing a DE doctoral program, despite circumstances having the potential to thwart this mission. Additionally, persistence can refer to continuous enrollment in higher education (Tinto, 1982). Operationally defined, persistence is a committed continuation of difficult tasks over time that result in a variety of behaviors (Roland et al., 2016). The third concept in the central question is DE programs, a nontraditional academic path for attaining a doctorate. Attrition rates for all students participating in these programs is 10% to 20% higher than traditional programs (Kennedy et al., 2015; Terrell, 2005), and 50% of doctoral students do not complete their doctoral programs (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015). This central question combines all three concepts (i.e., military veterans, motivation to persist, and DE doctoral programs) to understand and explain this population's experiences that led to their academic achievements.

Sub-questions

SQ1: What are the motivational military experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program?

This sub-question focused on the role military service in the United States played in military veterans attaining a doctorate. Soldiers, airmen, and sailors are expected to “exemplify the standards of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage in every aspect of their life” (Fall et al., 2011, p. 199). This expectation is a military standard whether a military member serves two years or 30 years, and whether a military member is a commissioned officer or an enlisted member. This sub-question not only addressed how the participants translated their military training into their learning experiences, but also if and how varying military experiences motivated these military veterans to persist. Participants’ experiences, as they described them for this study, revealed how the military influenced their DE doctoral journey and ultimately led these participants to be motivated to persist.

SQ2: What are the motivational DE experiences of military veterans who persist to doctoral completion?

The number of students participating in DE is growing each year (Seaman et al., 2018). For this study, DE programs deliver 80% to 100% of course content online (Allen & Seaman, 2016). While DE doctoral programs provide all students convenience for attaining doctoral degrees, attrition in DE can be 10% to 20% higher than in traditional programs (Kennedy et al., 2015; Terrell, 2005) and 50% of doctoral students do not attain their doctoral degrees (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015). The DE doctoral program settings under this study included the participants’ entire doctoral journey in their field of study (i.e., experiences during

the coursework and experiences during the dissertation phase). Worth exploring are the DE experiences that motivated this study's participants to persist to doctoral completion.

Definitions

1. *Amotivation* – Amotivation is a characteristic of an individual's lack of motivation to act due to lack of confidence, interest, or resistance (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
2. *Autonomous motivation* – Autonomous motivation is a combination of intrinsic motivation and certain types of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
3. *Autonomy* – Autonomy is an individual's need to self-regulate his or her actions and to have opportunities for self-direction and choice (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
4. *Competence* – Competence is an individual's need to feel effective and capable with respect to a goal (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
5. *Controlled motivation* – Controlled motivation consists of extrinsic motivation (e.g., rewards, punishments, etc.; Ryan & Deci, 2017).
6. *Motivation* – Motivation is a characteristic of an individual who is moved to do something, is inspired to act, and is energized toward an end (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).
 - a. *Extrinsic motivation* – Extrinsic motivation is an individual performing because of a separate consequence, external reward, or social approval (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
 - b. *Intrinsic motivation* – Intrinsic motivation is an individual performing out of interest (Ryan & Deci, 2017).
7. *Persistence* – Persistence is an individual's committed continuation of difficult tasks over time that results in a variety of behaviors (Roland et al., 2016).
8. *Relatedness* – Relatedness is an individual's need to feel a sense of belonging and significance to others, a group, or a culture disseminating a goal (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

9. *Self-determination* – Self-determination is an individual’s behaviors that are volitional, are accompanied by experiences with freedom and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000b), and “are experienced as freely done and endorsed by the self” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 55).

Summary

Military veterans enter higher education with a set of unique qualities (i.e., self-discipline, leadership skills, and new perspectives and experiences) (Bergman & Herd, 2016; Olsen et al., 2014). In addition, they enter higher education for a variety of reasons. For example, there are an increased number of military veterans attaining degrees to increase job opportunities (Bergman & Herd, 2016; Student Veterans of America, 2016) and DE programs provide the mobility these military veterans need to succeed. Regardless of the reasons for pursuing degrees in DE, data on the academic outcomes of this population are scarce, and what does exist is conflicting (Cate, 2014). Currently, there are no studies giving a voice to military veterans who persisted and attained doctoral degrees in DE. This study fills that gap. Under the tenets of SDT (1985), the purpose of this study was to understand and describe the participants’ experiences in an effort to provide other military veterans, educators of DE doctoral programs, and researchers insight as to how and why they were motivated to persist.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides a theoretical understanding of human motivation as well as related literature on military veterans who persisted in higher education. This body of knowledge, while helpful to researchers, highlights the literature gap that exists concerning military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. The theory framing this inquiry is Ryan and Deci's (2017) macro-theory which leans on three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued emphatically that "one of psychology's most critical questions concerns the internal or external conditions necessary to support human flourishing" (p. 80). This review of the literature demonstrates how experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters volition, motivation, and engagement that result in persistence (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and how to apply SDT and research to the experiences of military veterans who are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Theoretical Framework

The role of a theoretical framework for qualitative inquiry is significant as it influences the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). SDT (1985) provided a theoretical framework for explaining how self-determination relates to autonomy, competence, and relatedness and how these constructs can influence this study's central phenomenon (i.e., motivation to persist). The SDT (1985) constructs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) framing this study provided an understanding of how military veterans experience them in a way that either fostered or thwarted intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as how these motivation types influenced their persistence. The SDT (1985) constructs are applicable to motivational behaviors that lead to doctoral persistence enabling researchers of motivation to persist to predict and control this

phenomenon, especially in DE doctoral programs. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) argued that a researcher cannot prove a theory, but that research can support it. The SDT's (1985) framework demonstrates its relevance when studying human motivation.

Persistence

Research studies conducted on persistence are prevalent and increasing (Metz, 2004; O'Neill & Thomson, 2013; Taylor et al., 2014). Many seminal researchers have provided theoretical frameworks on persistence for today's researchers to test and extend. For example, Astin's (1975) theory of involvement provided researchers a framework for studying persistence by emphasizing the importance of student involvement (i.e., input, environment, and outcome) in college. Tinto (1987) leaned on Astin's groundbreaking research and is most cited by researchers conducting persistence studies (Guiffrida et al., 2013; Metz, 2004). Tinto's (1987) theory of student integration suggested the degree of academic integration and social integration predicted student persistence. Tinto (1987) explained that academic integration included grade performance, academic self-esteem, and valuing academics, and that social integration included social interactions with peers and faculty.

Many researchers lean on Tinto's (1987) theory of student integration to understand student persistence, yet this theory has received critical reviews over the years (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Davidson & Wilson, 2013; Metz, 2004). For example, Wilson et al. (2013) concluded from their qualitative study that Tinto's (1987) theory of student integration is not as useful for understanding military students who persist. Using Tinto's (1987) theory of student integration to underpin their study, Wilson et al. conducted a qualitative study at a well-established Education Center located on an army installation that housed faculty and staff from a community college, two state colleges, and a proprietary college. This Education Center

provided college credits to go toward 2-year degrees, bachelor's degrees, and master's degrees. The study focused on veterans, reservists, and active duty personnel ($N = 13$) and their college experiences as well as the experiences of education counselors and administrators ($N = 5$). The participants experienced academic integration (i.e., grade point average [GPA], relationships with faculty, and peer study groups); however, Wilson et al. found very little evidence of social integration (i.e., extracurricular activities, athletics, and campus visits). Wilson et al. found these participants focused on higher education to earn promotions, prepare for civilian life, or further develop skills for their military jobs. Wilson et al. believed the lack of social integration evidence was due to participants meeting those needs within their military culture, family, and friends. The researchers emphasized the need for education institutions to be more flexible and understanding of military culture leading to academic integration (Wilson et al., 2013), and concluded that Tinto's model of integration, while useful for understanding traditional students attaining college degrees, is not as useful for understanding military students who persist.

Other researchers argue Tinto's (1987) theory of student integration does not make the distinction between student integration and motivation (Guiffrida et al., 2013). Guiffrida et al. (2013) suggested Tinto's (1987) theory emphasizes student commitment but lacks descriptions of motivational orientations that influence academic commitment. Though this research study did not address military veteran students, Guiffrida et al. argued that research needs to "recognize the impact of student motivational orientation on student persistence decisions" (p. 136). Guiffrida et al. surveyed colleges students ($N = 2,520$) to examine the relationship between academic achievement and motivational orientation. Using SDT (1985) to underpin their research, Guiffrida et al. found that participants who attended college and were motivated to satisfy their needs for autonomy and competence were more likely to persist and have higher

GPA's than students who were not motivated to satisfy needs for autonomy and competence. The researchers concluded that SDT contributes to understanding college students and persistence and has the potential to advance Tinto's (1993) theory (Guiffreda et al., 2013).

Motivation

While Tinto's (1987) theory of student integration is seminal for the study of academic persistence, Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT is a broad theoretical framework of human motivation resulting in persistence that researchers can apply to multiple cultures and settings. Since the 1970s, researchers have conducted a plethora of studies on motivation and its influences on behavior and learning (DeCharms, 1968; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand et al., 1993). Researchers, teachers, coaches, and organizational leaders have longed to understand how to motivate individuals to follow through with life and work tasks (i.e., persist). Deci (1971) conducted social-psychological experiments to examine how rewards, feedback, or opportunity choices affected intrinsic motivation and the types of behaviors that resulted. These experiments led to the development of SDT (1985). In the 1980s, SDT (1985) was recognized and accepted as an empirical theory that can be applied to a variety of domains including academia, organizations, sports, goals, and relationships.

SDT (1985) is founded on three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and researchers have tested SDT (1985) in multiple domains, especially academia. SDT (1985) has extended researchers' understanding of students' intrinsic motivation to persist in higher education. An extensive body of research indicates intrinsically motivated students are more likely to persist successfully in higher education than students who are extrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Likewise, a breadth of research suggests educators can

influence students' intrinsic motivation by providing environments that support students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Goldman et al., 2017).

Ryan and Deci (2017) developed SDT while leaning on other seminal theorists and philosophers' groundwork. For example, Ryan and Deci (2017) leaned on Husserl (1980) to first understand self. Husserl (1980) described self as one who finds significance and meaning from his or her perceptions and experiences and how his or her worldview is specifically related to those perceptions and experiences. Ryan and Deci (2017) believed that self-achievement is best done by examining self-functioning. Ricoeur (1966), a seminal theorist, viewed self-functioning as complex interactions between will and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ricoeur applied self-determination "not only to spontaneous self-initiated choices but also to acts of willfully consenting to, or being truly receptive of, external obligations or legitimate demands and moral responsibilities" (p. 54). Therefore, with the help of these seminal theorists, Ryan and Deci (2017) defined self-determination as self-endorsed tasks that are accomplished freely.

To study self-determination under a phenomenological lens, Ryan and Deci (2017) leaned on two additional seminal theorists: Heider (1958) and DeCharms (1968). Heider believed an individual's behavior is shaped by subjective attributes (i.e., motives, beliefs, and interpretations). He focused on how individuals perceived themselves and others in social interactions and how those perceptions determined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ryan and Deci (2017) grounded SDT's roots in Heider's attribution theory—a theory concerned with how individuals perceive cause and effect relationships to social events and how their perceptions guide their behaviors. Heider argued, and Ryan and Deci (2017) agreed, that individuals behaving for personal or impersonal reasons heavily determined subsequent behaviors.

DeCharms (1968) supported and extended Heider's (1958) theory positing that an individual's intended behaviors are not always freely chosen as an individual will behave a certain way because of external pressures or causes (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ryan and Deci (2017) agreed with DeCharms and developed SDT under two additional claims DeCharms made: one, an individual has a primary motivational tendency to behave a certain way; and two, an individual instinctively knows when his or her behavior is supported or coerced. In addition, DeCharms argued that self-determination can take the form of "exploration, curiosity, creativity, and spontaneous interest" and factors that thwart these forms will discourage self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 67). Ryan and Deci (2017) advanced DeCharms' theory by postulating that individuals who are extrinsically motivated (i.e., externally controlled) will experience less intrinsic motivation (i.e., perceived choice).

SDT defines intrinsic and extrinsic motivational sources and explains the roles these motivational sources play in cognitive and social development (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). In addition, SDT (1985) provides an understanding of how social and cultural dynamics influence individuals' decisions and goals as they pertain to their well-being, performance, and persistence. SDT (1985) is a fitting theoretical framework when considering how and why motivational sources and social and cultural dynamics relate to military veterans' experiences in shaping their decisions and goals, particularly when pursuing and attaining doctoral degrees in a DE program setting.

Though not applicable to a DE program setting, Williams and LeMire (2011) surveyed Air Force commanders ($N = 116$) considering the pursuit of a doctorate in traditional doctoral programs. Williams and LeMire described this population as highly educated holding multiple master's degrees and having multiple years of leadership experience. The survey findings

revealed time was the biggest deterrent (Williams & LeMire, 2011). Specifically, Williams and LeMire identified motivation and persistence as important factors for this population to be able to overcome challenges managing their time during nonworking hours to attend classes and complete assignments. While Williams and LeMire did not specify SDT (1985) as the theory underpinning their research, their findings echoed fundamental principles on which SDT (1985) leans. Williams and LeMire argued that students who are motivated to persist to degree completion are those who have a strong internal desire to complete the program and earn their degree in a timely fashion.

At the heart of SDT (1985) is an individual's behavior based on intrinsic motives and extrinsic forces (i.e., self-motivation and self-determination) that satisfy or thwart three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The following explanation of autonomy, competence, and relatedness demonstrates how these basic psychological needs drive certain behaviors and how these needs are applicable to military veterans' motivational behaviors that lead to or thwart persistence in DE doctoral programs.

Autonomy

Ryan and Deci (2017) defined autonomy as a need for individuals to self-regulate experiences and actions. Ryan and Deci (2017) explained further that autonomy is not the same as independence but is present when an individual's behavior is fully engaged in an activity; however, they believed there are very few deliberate actions that are truly autonomous. One example of autonomy is when a student (i.e., military veteran) chooses to become engaged in learning because the subject and activities are closely aligned with his or her interests and values. Students feel autonomous when they "internalize their behavior as an expression of their own freewill" (Goldman et al., 2017, p. 175). For example, Roland et al. (2016) argued students

should not participate in studies that do not suit their interests and values. Roland et al.'s quantitative study on first-year college students ($N = 727$) examined whether social norms are a determinant of persistence. Roland et al. argued that social pressure can be the external force driving a student to persist in studies where he or she is not fully engaged. Roland et al. explained students should disengage from studies that do not support their well-being. Results suggested students' perceived social pressure may impact students' decisions to persist or stop their studies. This study emphasized the importance of students ensuring a good fit between them and their program. An argument could be made here that students participating in DE doctoral programs can be autonomous when this program type fits their needs and ensures a sense of well-being in that they are still able to work and provide for their families without relocating their families while pursuing their degrees. Persisting in a DE doctoral program is challenging; therefore, to apply the claim Roland et al. made in their quantitative study, military veterans, like college freshmen, should choose a program structure and field of study that supports their need to be autonomous where they are more likely to be motivated to flourish and persist.

Competence

Ryan and Deci (2017) defined competence as the need to feel effective and capable. Competence, the need to test and challenge one's ability, influences a wide range of behaviors, from leisure moments of play to persisting in extremely challenging tasks (i.e., participating in a DE doctoral program); however, competence can easily wane when negative influences occur (e.g., challenges that are too difficult or negative criticism). For example, a doctoral program requires students to be autonomous and self-directed as there are long, unguided hours that must be applied to finish coursework and complete the dissertation process (Rockinson-Szapkiw &

Spaulding, 2014). This can be a challenging task; however, students feel competent when they are given opportunities to challenge themselves and experience their true capabilities (Goldman et al., 2017). Walsh and Kurpius (2015), like Roland et al. (2016), conducted a correlational study on college freshman ($N = 378$) focusing on factors that impact academic persistence decisions. Their findings revealed that self-beliefs (i.e., greater educational self-efficacy, self-esteem, and personal value of education) significantly enhanced ($R^2 = .228$) academic persistence decisions (Walsh & Kurpius, 2015); therefore, when students perceive themselves as effective and competent, they are more likely to persist. O'Neill and Thomson (2013) conducted a literature review of research-based strategies supporting persistence. O'Neill and Thomson learned from their literature review that persistence is predicted by self-efficacy. These findings on competence may apply to military veterans' motivations to persist in DE doctoral programs. The coursework phase of a doctoral program should provide opportunities for students to discover interesting and possible dissertation topics (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The dissertation phase of a doctoral program should be time spent digging deep into a topic that is of great interest and value to the student. If military veteran students personally value the topic they are researching and are challenged in a way that allows them to experience competence, they will become subject matter experts on that topic and persist to doctoral completion.

Relatedness

Ryan and Deci (2017) defined relatedness as “belonging and feeling significant among others” (p. 11). Relatedness is also when individuals contribute to something outside themselves. In addition, relatedness is the need to establish close, secure relationships. Students experience relatedness when they are able to connect with their peers, community, and others

they respect (Goldman et al., 2017). Goldman et al. (2017) developed and validated the Student Psychological Needs Scale and the Intrinsic Motivation to Learn Scale and used SDT (1985) to frame student motivation and evaluate how social environments influence motivation. Findings demonstrated the importance of relatedness to encourage students' intrinsic motivation and supported SDT (1985). For example, when students' psychological needs are met in a social environment like the classroom, students are intrinsically motivated, allowing them to demonstrate their capabilities and overcome challenges (Goldman et al., 2017). While Goldman et al. focused their study on undergraduate students ($N = 1,067$), their findings may apply to military veterans and highlight other studies conducted on military veterans and relatedness. For example, Olsen et al. (2014) found that undergraduate and graduate military veterans perceived relatedness as a challenge; they perceived themselves as not having common ground with traditional students, that maturity and attitudes differed with traditional students, and different experiences and backgrounds made relating to traditional students difficult. While this study is noteworthy when considering relatedness for military veterans attaining higher education, evidence of how military veterans are able to satisfy this need in DE doctoral programs is lacking and needs further investigation.

Like Goldman et al. (2017) and Olsen et al. (2014), Walsh and Kurpius (2015) conducted a study that demonstrated the importance of relatedness. Walsh and Kurpius argued that not only did students' self-beliefs influence persistence, but also those living on campus made more positive persistence decisions. Walsh and Kurpius learned from their hierarchical regression analysis of first-semester freshmen identified as at-risk for dropping out ($N = 329$) that residential status (i.e., on-campus residence) predicted positive academic persistence decisions. Military veterans motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs have very little to no exposure to

on-campus living. The demographics of military veterans are quite different from demographics of first-semester freshmen in that military veterans are generally older, married, work fulltime, and most importantly, have military experiences. Military veterans may choose a DE doctoral program as its benefits align closely with their lifestyle. Even though military veterans could be considered at-risk as they lack the camaraderie they once had with a unit, military veterans' experiences with relatedness compared to Walsh and Kurpius' participants may be quite different.

While military veterans at DE doctoral programs may not experience relatedness like students who live on campus, there are other experiences that may encourage relatedness for this population. Gregg et al. (2016) conducted a study on military veterans and their experiences with relatedness. Their phenomenological study was conducted on military veterans ($N = 13$) transitioning to postsecondary education. Their findings showed that military veterans often seek out other military veteran students to satisfy needs of relatedness (Gregg et al., 2016). From these interviews emerged three themes that military veterans revealed for satisfying the need for relatedness: repurposing military experiences for student life; reconstructing civilian identity; and navigating social contexts and interactions (Gregg et al., 2016).

Researchers have conducted studies on students and their motivation factors. For example, Madhlangobe, Chikasha, Mafa, and Kurasha (2014) conducted a case study on open distance learning (ODL) students' ($N = 11$) persistence, perseverance, and success in master's and doctoral programs. Four of the participants were doctor of philosophy (PhD) graduates. These participants described using a number of motivating factors that helped them persist through institutional challenges that caused other students to drop out. These motivational factors included family relationships and backgrounds; supportive study groups that created a

sense of belonging; having regular contact with and support from academic tutors; and the ability to self-regulate to meet goals (Madhlangobe et al., 2014). Researchers must consider these motivational factors and many other factors when examining military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs as they bring a unique set of experiences and attributes to the learning environment.

Research suggests autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential nutrients for all students to be self-determined. When students are provided an environment where they can satisfy these basic needs, they flourish. Military veteran students bring specific skill sets and experiences to their learning environment and may have distinctive ways of satisfying their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Additionally, a DE doctoral program is a unique learning environment that can be supporting or thwarting for all students. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that how and why one is motivated to satisfy autonomy, competence, and relatedness are critical to an individual's performance, persistence, and creativity.

Motivation Types

How and why an individual experiences autonomy, competence, and relatedness correlate with that individual's motivation and engagement with activities (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ryan and Deci (2017) theorized that an individual's performance, persistence, and creativity depend on how and why one is motivated and conditions that support or thwart motivation. Ryan and Deci (2017) emphasized the importance of considering the type of motivation one has rather than the amount of motivation, specifically how autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation predict performance and well-being. There is a clear distinction between autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). For example, the more intrinsically and autonomously motivated an individual is, the more self-

determined. The more extrinsically motivated (i.e., controlled or amotivated), the less self-determined. The following information on autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation is needed to understand how motivation impacts self-determination.

Autonomous motivation. Autonomous motivation, a combination of intrinsic and types of extrinsic motivation, impacts motivation that leads to persistence and maintains healthy behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2017). For example, extrinsic motivation is multi-dimensional and has varying degrees to which it is autonomous (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivation can positively impact learning when the learning goal is self-endorsed and adopted (O'Neill & Thomson, 2013). However, studies show intrinsic motivation has the strongest positive impact on learning as personal desire more so than external influences drive persistence (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009; Pintrich, 2003).

SDT (1985) proposes that intrinsic motivation—motivation driven by personal satisfaction—positively impacts learning more than extrinsic motivation—motivation driven by external rewards. People employ autonomous motivation when they see personal value in their activities (Ryan & Deci, 2017), improving psychological health and influencing effective performance on activities that enable people to learn for themselves. Therefore, studies conducted on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation suggest students are to be encouraged to pursue subjects for which they are passionate (Taylor et al., 2014). This suggestion applies to military veterans in DE doctoral programs. It is through the coursework phase of a doctoral program where students, through structured guidance of their professor and online community, discover a topic about which they are passionate and pursue for their dissertation. The dissertation process is less structured and more student-driven rather than driven by a professor or others in positions of authority. Difficulty completing the dissertation phase is compounded if a student is not

passionate about his or her topic (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). The dissertation phase is a difficult one for all students but may be particularly difficult for military veterans who have experienced motivation predominately in a military environment that encourages motivation through structure and guidance. If a military veteran leans less on autonomous motivation and more on controlled motivation via guidance from professors and faculty, he or she may experience more difficulty. The following information provides an examination of controlled motivation and its possible effects on military veterans and motivation to persist.

Controlled motivation. Controlled motivation consists of extrinsically motivating factors. Controlled motivation influences people's actions with external contingencies (e.g., rewards or punishments). For example, approval, self-esteem, and shame avoidance are considered controlled motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that controlled motivation produces specific behavior outcomes: "When people are controlled, they experience pressure to think, feel, or behave in particular ways" (p. 183). Research conducted on controlled motivation indicates that this motivation type negatively influences learning, is a predictor for behavioral problems, and increases the likelihood of disengagement or dropout (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Military veterans use government financial benefits to participate in higher education as a way of broadening civilian opportunities. External factors such as financial benefits and procuring civilian work may bring added and external pressure to a military veteran pursuing a doctorate in a DE doctoral program. This external pressure may be internalized as controlled motivation causing military veterans to be less likely to persist. While autonomous motivation may be highly beneficial for persisting in DE doctoral programs, and controlled motivation may be beneficial or thwarting depending on the motivational factors,

amotivation can be completely debilitating for a military veteran as well as all students participating in DE doctoral programs.

Amotivation. Autonomous and controlled motivation contrast completely with the third type of motivation SDT (1985) recognizes—amotivation (i.e., a lack of motivation). Ryan and Deci (2017) described amotivation as “people’s lack of intentionality and motivation—that is, to describe the extent to which they are passive, ineffective, or without purpose with respect to any given set of potential actions” (p. 16). Ryan and Deci (2017) described three forms of amotivation. One form is when an individual feels he or she cannot attain the outcome. The second form is when an individual lacks interest or does not see the value in the action. The third form is when an individual displays oppositional behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Military veterans cannot be motivated to persist if they feel they cannot attain a doctorate. Nor can they be motivated to persist if they lack interest and do not see value in the long and complicated doctoral process. A military veteran, or any student, displaying amotivation cannot be successful in a DE doctoral program.

Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that the amount of motivation one has is not the determining factor for self-determination; however, the type of motivation (i.e., autonomous, controlled, or amotivation) is a determinant. Additionally, they argued individuals seeking to increase motivation in others must consider ways to create environments that may encourage others to be intrinsically motivated; simply trying to motivate others rather than providing the tools and support is the wrong course of action (Ryan & Deci, 2017). For example, an employer offering a promotion or tuition assistance if an employee completes a prescribed course or degree is not as motivating (i.e., controlled motivation) than if that employee decides to enter higher education of his or her own free will and under a course or degree of his or her choice (i.e.,

autonomous motivation). Therefore, individuals are more likely to complete courses or attain degrees when they are autonomously motivated. To show the role these motivation types play when considering SDT's (1985) basic psychological needs, social contexts, and specific behaviors, Ryan and Deci (2017) developed the following six sub-theories.

Six Sub-Theories of SDT

Ryan and Deci's (2017) approach to human behavior focuses on how individuals evolve as they master challenges and new experiences as well as the support individuals receive to develop and grow. Ryan and Deci (2017) purport success or failure of an individual functioning optimally is determined by the extent of basic psychological needs being met. While SDT (1985) leans on the three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—and how these needs result in persistence, SDT (1985) has expanded over the years to include six sub-theories to formalize its propositions. Each sub-theory applies to the three basic psychological needs SDT identifies, types of motivation, social contexts, and the roles specific behaviors play (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In addition, each sub-theory is applicable to military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. The following table provides a brief description of each sub-theory, examples of resulting behaviors, specific disciplines and fields of study applicable to that sub-theory, and research conducted on each sub-theory. Following Table 3 is a more detailed explanation of each SDT sub-theory.

Table 3

Self-Determination Theory Sub-Theories Summary

SDT Sub-Theory	Description	Behavior	Discipline/Field	Research Studies
Cognitive Evaluation	Concerned with: Intrinsic motivation. Effects of social environments/ contexts that motivate, i.e., rewards. The <i>why</i> of behavior.	Exploring, creating, and playing.	Academia, arts, sports, etc.	Riley (2016)
Organismic Integration	Concerned with: Internalization of extrinsic motivation. Social environments/context that enhance or thwart internalization. The <i>why</i> of behavior.	Assimilating to external sources' values and beliefs by internalizing those values and beliefs as their own.	Religion, organizations, etc.	Malhotra, Galletta, and Kirsch (2008)
Causality Orientations	Concerned with: Individuals' abilities to orient and regulate behavior. Three types of orientations. The <i>why</i> of behavior.	Acting out of interest; <i>or</i> focused on rewards; <i>or</i> not motivated due to anxiety and lack of competence.	Parenting, sports, academia, etc.	Kusurkar, Ten Cate, Vod, Westers, and Croiset (2013)
Basic Psychological Needs	Concerned with: Satisfactions and frustrations to well- being and ill-being. The health of the self. The <i>why</i> of behavior.	Functioning optimally as autonomy, competence, and relatedness are being met.	Cross- developmental. Cross-cultural.	Trenshaw, Revelo, Earl, and Herman (2016)
Goal Contents	Concerned with: How individuals organize their lives around goals and aspirations. Distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic goals. The <i>what</i> of behavior.	Achieving intrinsic goals (e.g., close relationships, personal growth, etc.) Achieving extrinsic goals (e.g., financial gain, physical appearance, etc.)	Health, physical activity, academia, etc.	Deci and Ryan (2000)
Relationships Motivation	Concerned with: How relationships and interactions influence well-being and relatedness.	Developing and maintaining close relationships. Belonging to a group.	Close relationships, virtual environments, academia, etc.	Renaud-Dube, Talbot, Taylor, and Guay (2015)

Cognitive evaluation theory (CET). CET is the first sub-theory Deci and Ryan (1980) developed and focuses exclusively on intrinsic motivation. CET is concerned with social environments that influence intrinsic motivation leading to high performance and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). While CET focuses on intrinsic motivation, it is concerned with using extrinsic rewards to positively influence intrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued “events that negatively affect a person’s experience of autonomy and competence will diminish intrinsic motivation, whereas events that support perceptions of autonomy and competence will enhance intrinsic motivation” (p. 124). Researchers can apply CET to military veterans when considering a DE doctoral program’s social environment (e.g., cohort, collaborative group work, etc.) and how it aligns with or differs from the military social environment (e.g., military unit, moral group, etc.). If the military veteran finds motivating social environments experienced while serving align with social environments in the DE doctoral program, a military veteran may be motivated to persist; however, if the DE doctoral program’s social environment is one that is not intrinsically motivating based on the military veterans’ needs for high performance and well-being, that military veteran may not be motivated to persist. The DE doctoral program’s social environment may influence military veterans’ performance and sense of well-being.

Organismic integration theory (OIT). OIT, SDT’s second sub-theory, is different from CET in that it focuses exclusively on extrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2017) described it as “the development of extrinsic motivation through the process of integration, thus describing the means through which extrinsically motivated behaviors become autonomous” (p. 20). Ryan and Deci (2017) recognized that not all behavior that leads to successful outcomes is always intrinsically motivated. OIT helps researchers understand how individuals engage in activities that are not inherently enjoyable, or are deemed as valuable (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Individuals

can assimilate to certain events. They do this, according to Ryan and Deci's (2017) OIT, through internalization—"the process of taking in values, beliefs, or behavioral regulations from external sources and transforming them into one's own" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 180). Military veterans enter higher education for a variety of reasons and with a unique set of experiences and characteristics (Bergman & Herd, 2016; Olsen et al., 2014) that may influence how they internalize activities. To apply OIT to this student body motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs, researchers and educators in these programs must consider how military veterans internalize DE activities to find them valuable. The goal for military veterans to persist is to internalize externally motivating DE activities as activities that military veterans will deem as valuable and therefore become autonomously motivated.

Causality orientations theory (COT). While CET and OIT focus on social contexts that influence motivation in others, COT focuses on individual differences in motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Specifically, COT pertains to individuals' differences and personalities within particular social contexts, and the way people adjust to their social environments over time. For example, individuals who are highly autonomous seek events that support choice and self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Individuals high in the control orientation focus on external rewards and pressures in their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Lastly, individuals who are amotivated focus on uncontrollable aspects of their environment (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Researchers and educators of DE doctoral programs must consider military veterans' differences and personalities as compared to other students. A military veteran who is oriented to be highly autonomous may be motivated to persist in these programs because he or she has been able to seek out a learning environment that matches learning to his or her military experiences that resulted in persistence. A military veteran who is control oriented may be

motivated to persist because he or she focuses on external pressures such as deadlines for assignments and individual responsibilities for group projects. A military veteran who is unmotivated may not even consider pursuing a doctorate because military experiences are so far removed from experiences in a DE doctoral program. There are consequences to each orientation (Ryan and Deci, 2017), and behavioral outcomes may be predicted by assessing military veterans as to how they are self-determined in general, across situations, and in various domains.

Basic psychological needs theory (BPNT). BPNT, SDT's fourth sub-theory, extends SDT (1985) with regards to basic psychological need satisfactions and frustrations to well-being and ill-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). BPNT refers to how psychological needs evolve and relate to individuals' well-being. It also refers to how "need support promotes and need thwarting undermines healthy functioning at all levels of human development and across cultural backdrops and settings" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 21). Ryan and Deci (2017) purported that happiness is a symptom, not a cause, of well-being. Anyone motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program may encounter moments of unhappiness but maintain a sense of well-being. BPNT, as well as SDT (1985), focuses on the health of the self. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that increased satisfaction of a basic need results in enhanced well-being, but increased frustration from a basic need not being met results in diminished well-being.

Military veterans have experiences that make them unique when compared to other students. These military experiences can range from loss and disappointment during combat to experiencing inspiration and competence from executing a mission. However, according to BPNT's framework, if this cultural backdrop was one that supported healthy functioning and human development for a military veteran, this military veteran may be more motivated to

persist than a military veteran who did not maintain a sense of well-being during those military experiences.

Goal contents theory (GCT). The four sub-theories discussed above focus on why individuals engage in certain behaviors. GCT, the fifth sub-theory of SDT (1985), focuses on the “what” of individuals’ behaviors, that is, individuals’ life goals (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Ryan and Deci (2017) developed GCT to explain that individuals organize their lives around goals as they relate to satisfying basic needs and well-being. For example, long-term goals people use to guide their activities fall into two general categories: intrinsic aspirations (i.e., affiliation and personal development) and extrinsic aspirations (i.e., wealth and fame; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). O’Neill and Thomson (2013) conducted a literature review on GCT and argued that students who are motivated and persist to reach their goals are those who have clearly defined academic goals. In addition, their literature review suggested that extrinsic and intrinsic motivation impact learning, and extrinsic motivation can positively motivate learning when the learner’s goal is self-endorsed (O’Neill & Thomson, 2013).

Researchers and educators must consider goal-developing behaviors military veterans display when motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs. Military veterans’ training while serving was to execute the mission. Every action was orchestrated to meet this end goal. Researchers and educators of DE doctoral programs must consider the following: Is the military veteran organizing his or her life to be motivated to persist? If so, how is he or she organizing his or her life in pursuit of this life goal? Answers to these questions may help researchers and educators of DE doctoral programs understand how to best support military veterans.

Relationships motivation theory (RMT). RMT, the sixth and last sub-theory of SDT (1985), addresses one basic psychological need—relatedness. RMT frames how relationships

and interactions influence well-being and relatedness. Relatedness satisfaction “is associated with more secure attachment, authenticity, and emotional reliance, as well as higher relationship-specific vitality and wellness” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 293). While military veterans in DE doctoral programs are physically separated from other doctoral candidates and educators who support them, those relationships still exist; however, the nature of those relationships, no matter the distance, is important to consider.

Military veterans are trained to be motivated in a mission with their unit and under the direct guidance of their chain of command. While the mission is a means to an end, the process of executing the mission can be one that leads the unit to be a tightknit group. This environment can differ from relationships found in DE doctoral programs. Military veterans, even though physically separated, interact with other students and educators. Military veterans may place relationship expectations on doctoral students and educators that align more with their military experiences than relationship experiences from an academic domain, or they may satisfy the need for relatedness outside their DE doctoral programs. The dynamics of these interactions can be convoluted within this program’s format, and maintaining a sense of relatedness with other students and educators may pose a challenge.

Related Literature

Research studies provide consistent evidence that intrinsic motivation—a subset of autonomous motivation—has the strongest positive association with students persisting in higher education (Goldman et al., 2017; Guiffrida et al., 2013; Walsh & Kurpius, 2015). This evidence supports SDT. Ryan and Deci (2008), through their decades of extensive research on motivation and developing SDT (1985), confirmed that autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation yield varying behavioral outcomes, and it is autonomous motivation that leads to

greater well-being, enhanced performance, and long-term persistence. Although there is no research on military veterans motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs, an abundance of research studies suggests autonomous motivation is a factor when examining military veterans persisting in higher education (Gregg et al., 2016; Olsen et al., 2014; Wilson et al., 2013). An examination of literature on motivation to persist in higher education, in doctoral programs, and in DE doctoral programs is needed for laying a foundational understanding of military veterans and their motivation to persist.

Motivation to Persist in Higher Education

An analysis of multiple research studies indicates that autonomous motivation, specifically intrinsic motivation, consistently and positively influences students' persistence in higher education (Devos et al., 2015; Goldman et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2014), and amotivation consistently and negatively influences persistence in higher education (Taylor et al., 2014). For example, Goldman et al. (2017) argued that self-determination is not the result of general intelligence, but rather the result of one's intrinsic motivation to learn. This intrinsic motivation can be seen in students' attitudes, behaviors, and academic achievement (Goldman et al., 2017). Goldman et al. developed and validated instruments—the Student Psychological Needs Scale (SPNS) and the Intrinsic Motivation to Learn Scale (IMLS)—to assess students' ($N = 1,067$) psychological needs and intrinsic motivation to persist in higher education. The items in the scale contained the following four factors: autonomy, competence, relatedness with classmates, and relatedness with instructors. In addition to these new scales, the researchers used the Intrinsic Goal Orientation Subscale, the Student Motivation Scale, the Affective Learning Scale, and the Revised Cognitive Learning Indicators Scale. Using confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) and parallel mediation models to analyze data, the researchers determined that students

are able to satisfy their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness encouraging their motivation to learn when education is personalized (Goldman et al., 2017). The researchers suggested instructors should be available to their students, integrate their interests in course content, and communicate with students effectively as ways to encourage intrinsic motivation (Goldman et al., 2017).

Like Goldman et al. (2017), Guiffrida et al. (2013) also focused on students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They surveyed college students ($N = 2,520$) using the following scales: Competence Motivation Scale derived from the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS), the Need for Relatedness at College Questionnaire (NRC-Q), and the AMS. These scales, as well as demographics and GPA analyses, were used to examine "the relationship between intrinsic motivation for attending college as defined by SDT and academic success, while considering the possible moderating effects of student and institutional characteristics" (Guiffrida et al., 2013, p. 122). Findings indicated autonomy and competence positively influenced students' persistence in higher education while psychological relatedness varied with specific outcomes (Guiffrida et al., 2013). For example, fulfilling relatedness needs with peers as a motivation to persist in college negatively influenced GPA while fulfilling relatedness needs with faculty and staff as a motivation positively influenced GPA (Guiffrida et al., 2013). In addition, the researchers identified significant institutional and student characteristics related to persistence in higher education. Guiffrida et al. determined the type of institutions students attend has the strongest correlation to persistence (i.e., students are more likely to persist and graduate from a 4-college than a 2-year college). Like the study Goldman et al. (2017) conducted, this study contributes to SDT in that "students who attended college motivated by intrinsic needs for autonomy and competence were more likely to have higher GPAs and greater intentions to persist than students

who were not motivated to attend college to fulfill these intrinsic needs” (Guiffrida et al., 2013, p. 139).

Doctoral Persistence

Doctoral persistence, continual enrollment in a doctoral program resulting in the attainment of a doctoral degree (Bair & Haworth, 1999), is a phenomenon that has been thoroughly researched (Cockrell & Shelley, 2011; Di Pierro, 2007; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Lovitts, 2008; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Willis & Carmichael, 2011). This phenomenon is of great interest to researchers and educators as, historically and presently, 40% to 60% of doctoral candidates do not complete the dissertation phase (Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). With motivation being one of the most significant factors for doctoral persistence (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014), researchers, educators, and doctoral candidates must consider many contributing factors that may influence who persists and who does not.

In an effort to understand doctoral students’ struggles and how they overcame them, Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) explored factors that influenced a purposeful sample of doctoral students ($N = 76$) in education who successfully attained their doctoral degrees. Three themes emerged from this phenomenological study that revealed specific challenges these students overcame: personal sacrifice, significant life events, and dissertation challenges (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Personal sacrifice included time lost with family and lack of rest affecting emotional and physical well-being; significant life events included a variety of scenarios ranging from job promotions to family deaths; and dissertation challenges were reported as one of the greatest obstacles to persisting in a doctoral program. Specific challenges involving the dissertation phase were autonomy, managing time, conducting the research and

writing process, and working with the dissertation committee (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012).

SDT provides a theoretical framework for understanding individuals' life goals and how intrinsic and extrinsic goals affect performance and well-being. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) reported that their participants attributed their doctoral persistence to personal factors, social factors, and institutional factors (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Personal factors to earn a doctorate included having an opportunity to "prove something to themselves" (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012, p. 209), or what Ryan and Deci (2017) would describe as an opportunity to satisfy the need for competence. Other participants described personal factors as modeling behavior after other family members who earned doctorates and the desire to make family members proud (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). While this type of motivation is extrinsic, extrinsic motivation can positively impact behaviors when the learning goal is self-endorsed and adopted. Professional reasons for earning a doctorate for these participants included promotions, expanding career opportunities, and compensation (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). These professional reasons may be similar to what Ryan and Deci (2017) described under SDT's sub-theory, goal content theory, where individuals organize their lives around goals.

According to Deci and Ryan's (1985) SDT, when individuals are provided environments to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness, they are more likely to engage in activities that result in enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity. For example, the participants in the study Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) conducted attributed their persistence to having supportive family and institutional networks. Participants experienced emotional stability as a result of family members and friends helping with childcare and

household duties. Additionally, participants attributed their persistence to having highly engaged and qualified faculty and dissertation committee members as well as meaningful collaboration with cohorts (Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Without these supportive networks providing environments for these participants to be self-determined, these participants may not have persisted.

Analyses of doctoral students who showed persistence like the study Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) conducted are essential for individuals considering earning a doctorate, educators in DE doctoral programs, and researchers to understand how and why certain students persist. Also essential are analyses of students who did not persist. Willis and Carmichael (2011) conducted a grounded theory research study on doctoral non-completers ($N = 6$) from counselor education programs. All participants for this study withdrew during the dissertation phase. When participants were asked to describe their experiences of doctoral attrition, two distinct experiences emerged: a negative experience and a positive experience. Five participants described their doctoral attrition experiences as negative. One participant described her doctoral attrition experience as positive. The first analysis phase of the interviews' open coding revealed the following codes: depression and futility (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). The second analysis phase clustered codes into one—personal emotions and family emotions. The third analysis phase refined clustered codes into the following theme: emotional consequences of dropping out. Two distinct experiences emerged from these findings: a negative experience termed dropping out and a positive experience termed leaving (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Participants who had negative experiences identified the following barriers as reasons: problematic chair relationship and focusing on their career as “a place of refuge from doctoral study” (Willis & Carmichael, 2011, p. 206). These participants admitted to still valuing

a doctoral degree and living for years with regret of not persisting; however, they believed their experiences prevented them from reaching their goals (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). One participant reported a positive experience leaving the doctoral program. This unexpected finding suggested not all attrition is a negative experience but is contingent upon how an individual experiences it. The participant admitted to pursuing a doctoral degree to “prove to her father that she was capable of doing it” (Willis & Carmichael, 2011, p. 206). This participant reassessed her motivation for pursuing her doctoral degree and decided it was no longer important to her. She described leaving as “relief and peace” (Willis & Carmichael, 2011, p. 206).

The most significant finding from the study Willis and Carmichael (2011) conducted was that while five out of six of the participants described themselves as having the desire and energy to complete their doctorate programs, they experienced outside forces that prevented them from persisting. For example, participants described dissertation chairs being a barrier in that there was no support for navigating through the dissertation phase and participants felt neglected by the chair (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Other external forces included faculty members (i.e., advisors) who did not keep appointments and did not support these participants by making them a priority (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). These participants leaned on their experiences with their professions as refuge from the instability they experienced in their doctoral programs (Willis & Carmichael, 2011). Finding an environment where one is able to satisfy basic needs to experience well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017) is evident in these participants focusing on their professions rather than doctoral persistence. These experiences resulted in participants feeling long-term negative emotions (i.e., regret, depression, and shame). These participants experienced social conditions that diminished their motivation for fulfilling their basic psychological needs possibly resulting in what Ryan and Deci (2017) would describe as

amotivation. One participant described leaving as a positive experience (Willis & Carmichael, 2011) in that she did not internalize her father's desire for her to earn a doctorate. Her leaving enhanced her well-being as she stopped behaviors that did not satisfy her need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The studies described above show that individuals pursue doctoral degrees for a variety of reasons; also, individuals leave doctoral programs for a variety of reasons. While there is no research describing military veterans who are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs, these studies provide a theoretical and research framework on which to build. For example, Ryan and Deci (2017) argued individuals who experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more motivated and engaged in ways that result in enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity. Also, Ryan and Deci (2017) emphasized the importance of providing individuals the social contexts and environments in which they are able to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The following provides an explanation of the variety of social contexts and environments that can foster motivation and result in persistence in DE doctoral programs.

Doctoral programs and degrees. The number and types of doctoral programs and degrees offered have increased substantially over the years. Doctoral programs can fall under one of two categories: professional and research. A professional doctoral program awards doctorates specific to fields where advanced study and research align with a profession (e.g., psychology, engineering, law, etc.). Columbia University introduced the first professional doctorate (i.e., doctor of medicine [MD]) in 1767. A research doctoral program awards doctorates specific to publishable research in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Yale University introduced the first research doctorate (i.e., PhD) in 1861 (College Atlas, 2017). A doctoral

degree is the highest degree a student can achieve in a field of study, and can take anywhere from two years to 10 years to complete. A doctoral degree requires a student to complete 60 to 120 credits hours or 20 to 40 college courses. The most common doctoral degree in the United States is the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Between 2004–2005 and 2014–2015, conferred doctoral degrees increased by 33% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The following fields are the largest number of doctoral degrees conferred during this timeframe: health professions, legal professions, education, engineering, and biological and biomedical sciences.

Program structures. Today's student has a variety of program structures and designs from which to choose. Allen and Seaman (2016) recognized the following four types of programs academic institutions offer: traditional, web facilitated, blended/hybrid, and online. In addition, DE has evolved over time. The first generation of DE delivered print media via correspondence (Taylor, 2001). DE evolved from print to multimedia with some computer-based delivery, to video conferencing, to interactive multimedia, to what DE is today, delivered via online (Taylor, 2001). This study focused on DE where 80% to 100% of course content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Today's student must consider learning preferences and technology skills needed to be successful when choosing a program structure. Researchers have conducted studies to determine which program structure is most effective for students attaining degrees, and studies suggest online programs can be just as effective as traditional programs (Bernard et al., 2004; Russell, 2001). Bernard et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 232 studies and determined there was “no difference in student achievement between distance and traditional courses” (Bernard et al., 2004, p. 11). However, not all online programs are created equal as not all online programs are

designed effectively. Additionally, online programs are not the best learning modality for all students (Baker, 2014). The same can be argued for DE doctoral programs. DE doctoral programs based on design require students to possess strong technology skills, communicate effectively, use time management wisely, and self-regulate efforts in the study environment. As a result of their military experiences, military veterans are self-disciplined and possess leadership qualities, time-management skills, and maturity. All of these attributes are indicators of persistence and are valuable to motivation in a DE doctoral program. Also worth noting is Ford and Vignare's (2015) literature review on scholarly and grey literature published between 2000-2014 that addressed military learners and their college experiences and outcomes. Their literature review suggested that military learners were more likely to seek out degrees in technical fields. In addition, their literature review revealed that military learners are increasingly selecting education offerings in online learning formats (Ford & Vignare, 2015). While all program structures and designs are developed with student success as a goal, it is essential the student chooses a structure and design that fits his or her personality and preferred learning style.

Faculty. Students become familiar with faculty members during the coursework of the doctoral program. This familiarity often leads to trusting and collaborative relationships that doctoral students can lean on when deciding on a chairperson for their dissertation committee. Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) argued that students should seek out faculty members as potential chairpersons early in their doctoral program. Doctoral students can ensure the most appropriate chairperson by continuously modeling desirable characteristics (e.g., self-directed learner, responsible, focused, etc.) as they interact with faculty members (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Deshpande (2017) examined 22 years' worth of qualitative and quantitative

studies on faculty best practices for supporting online doctoral students. The following themes were discovered and can be characteristics doctoral students can consider when interacting with faculty: provide timely and good-quality feedback; provide continuous support and promote peer-to-peer facilitation; pair new and experienced faculty members; provide supportive mentoring; develop sensitivity to cultural issues (Deshpande, 2017).

Cohorts. As doctoral students transition from coursework to the dissertation phase, they must become self-directed and independent in order to persist to completion (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). This is a difficult transition for some doctoral students, and military veterans may need to lean on their military experiences of leadership and self-discipline for completing the doctoral mission. Structures and supports that were once a part of progressing through coursework are not as finite during the dissertation phase as the doctoral student drives the pace and effort level. Additionally, the dissertation phase may be particularly difficult for students who have a strong need for relatedness, especially for military veterans who are accustomed to completing a mission within a command or unit. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued “there is no full functioning without relationships” (p. 295), and studies suggest doctoral students are less than satisfied with their experiences with connectedness during the doctoral process (Terrell, Snyder, & Dringus, 2009). Rovai (2014) argued, “Where sense of community is weak, less will be shared and students will struggle to persist” (p. 87). Likewise, students can thrive and persist when they are a part of an academic community (i.e., cohorts). Cohorts provide doctoral students a sense of belonging where ideas and values can be shared and learning enriched. Students can seek assistance from and collaborate with their peers on areas where skills are weak, as collaboration “promotes socialization and sustains volition, motivation, and persistence” (Rovai, 2014, p. 91).

Studies have shown cohorts not only meet students' needs for connectedness but also positively impact students' satisfactions with doctoral programs. For example, Bista and Cox (2014) conducted a case study on a cohort model doctoral program in Educational Leadership (EdD). This cohort model focused on three themes: change process, organization, and leadership (Bista & Cox, 2014). Change process was defined by action patterns used to develop the culture. Organization focused on people's interactions, values, needs, expectations, and accomplishments. Leadership was recognized when interaction was encouraged and the vision inspired. The model required an additional 99 credits beyond the bachelor's degree and the comprehensive exam included a cohort project, individual written exam, capstone narrative, and publication or grant writing (Bista & Cox, 2014). The researchers used open-ended survey questions to explore the experiences of EdD graduates ($N = 48$) participating in this cohort model. Bista and Cox's (2014) research questions focused on participants' perceptions of the cohort model as well as their overall experiences while attaining their doctorates. Specifically, the researchers measured students' perceptions of the following: curriculum ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.71$), program structure ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.48$), faculty ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.83$), learning environment ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 0.53$), outcomes ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.65$), and overall evaluation ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 0.65$). Participants reported in their surveys that the cohort model doctoral program provided a framework of support from professors and peers; the curriculum was comprehensive, manageable, and challenging; and the EdD program was relevant to their profession (Bista & Cox, 2014).

Advisors. Advisors play a critical role in doctoral students' progression of their degree programs. One reason why advisors' roles are so critical is because they are the interface between the student and the department and are contributors to students' "socialization, the

quality of their doctoral experiences, and their post-graduate options” (Barnes & Austin, 2009, p. 315). In fact, the terms advisor and mentor are often used interchangeably in doctoral education literature (Barnes & Austin, 2009). The term mentor suggests a distinguishable relationship that exists between advisors and their doctoral students. This relationship builds upon an academic community “which involves engagement, trust, dedication, and thus, persistence” (Pratt & Spaulding, 2014, p. 106). Barnes and Austin (2009) conducted an exploratory research study to understand how advisors see their roles as they interact with their doctoral advisees. Through qualitative interviews, the researchers asked participants ($N = 43$) how they perceived their roles and the following three themes emerged: helping advisees be successful; helping advisees develop as researchers; and helping advisees develop as professionals. The participants identified the following four functions of their roles: collaborating, mentoring, advocating, and chastising. Lastly, the participants described the characteristics of the relationships between advisor and advisee as the following: friendly/professional; collegial; supportive/caring; accessible; and honest (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Military veteran students may need to apply experiences leaning on their chain of command or unit for motivation to gaining access to and help from their academic advisors. These interactions cannot only positively impact military veteran students’ socialization with their departments, but also positively impact their civilian and professional paths and research skills and knowledge.

Dissertation committees. While a doctoral student has ownership over the dissertation itself, the dissertation committee and the doctoral program under which the committee resides owns the dissertation process. Therefore, it is crucial for military veteran students to understand their role as well as the role of their committees. Rovai (2014) explained dissertation committees can create a strong sense of community in doctoral programs. The first step any doctoral student

must take to ensure a strong doctoral community is to research and select a chairperson. Studies suggest students' motivation to persist during the dissertation phase is linked directly to their relationships with their dissertation chairpersons (Neale-McFall & Ward, 2015). The doctoral student determines through research the best-suited chairperson based on personality, accessibility, and areas of expertise. Neale-McFall and Ward (2015) surveyed counselor education doctoral students ($N = 133$) to determine the most influential variables in predicting students' overall satisfaction with their chairpersons. Results indicated collaborative style significantly contributed to students' overall satisfaction. Collaborative style included the following: work ethic, personality match, previous work with chairperson, and willingness to serve as chairperson (Neale-McFall & Ward, 2015). Additionally, work style and personal connection significantly predicted overall satisfaction, and a chairperson's success and reputation did not contribute to satisfaction (Neale-McFall & Ward, 2015). Pratt and Spaulding (2014) argued similarly in that students should select dissertation chairpersons and committee members who are qualified, accessible, supportive, and encouraging.

There are many considerations when a military veteran decides to pursue a doctoral degree. For successful completion, military veterans must consider their interests and passions when choosing a field of study. Military veterans may be able to lean on experiences when they were highly engaged in activities while serving. Program structures are significant as military veterans must choose a platform that best suits their personalities and preferences for learning. For example, if a military veteran leans on the academic community to satisfy the need for relatedness, he or she may be more likely to persist in a face-to-face doctoral program. Also worth considering are the academic and social factors that are important to an individual to be motivated to persist. Military veterans may be able to lean on their military experiences for

finding faculty, cohorts, advisors, and dissertation committees that provide opportunities for experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness as these experiences can result in persistence.

Motivation to Persist in DE Doctoral Programs

Availability of online learning is one outcome of the Internet and is growing in popularity. By the early 2000s, most major colleges and universities offered fully online accredited degree programs. A third of all college students (i.e., nearly 7 million postsecondary students) had experienced online learning by 2011 (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Working professionals are among this large student body participating in online learning as these web-based online education programs are an affordable and convenient way (i.e., synchronous and asynchronous learning) of earning a degree. The military veteran student is considered a part of the working professional student body, and the Department of Defense (DoD) has reported that military veteran students are using tuition assistance more for online learning than face-to-face learning (Ford & Vignare, 2015).

DE doctoral programs add another layer to this study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist. For this study, a DE doctoral program is a structure where 80% to 100% of course content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016), students are separated from instructors, and instructional courses are delivered through one or more technologies that support synchronous or asynchronous learning (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2016). Synchronous learning is convenient in that students experience learning and lectures at the same time with other students taking the same course. Synchronous learning can occur via videoconferencing, web conferencing, live streaming, etc. Asynchronous learning is more convenient and flexible than synchronous learning in that students access course materials at their pace. Asynchronous learning can occur

via e-mail, message boards, stream video, etc. While, many colleges and universities use a blend of synchronous and asynchronous learning, asynchronous is more commonly used for providing working professionals the most convenient learning experience possible.

Despite these conveniences and growing popularity, attrition for students participating in these programs is 10% to 20% higher than attrition of students participating in traditional programs (Kennedy et al., 2015; Terrell, 2005). This attrition awareness among researchers has resulted in a plethora of studies conducted on online doctoral programs (Berry, 2017; Kumar & Coe, 2017; Milman, Posey, Pintz, Wright, & Zhou, 2015; Rockinson-Szapkiw, Spaulding, & Spaulding, 2016). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) argued that “while doctoral attrition can occur at any stage, the largest degree of attrition in online and residential programs is documented during candidacy” (p. 101). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) investigated how institutional factors such as financial support and support services and integration factors such as academics and family predict online doctoral persistence. A synthesis of analyses on archival data ($N = 148$) suggested doctoral candidates participating in online doctoral programs are more likely to persist if they perceive the program, curriculum, and instruction as high quality (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). Also, a prediction for doctoral persistence was faculty providing feedback, encouragement, and role modeling (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). Additionally, doctoral candidates who experienced integration with family members were more likely to persist (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). Integration with peers was not a contributing factor for the doctoral candidates in this study, as they were able to satisfy this need with friends and family (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016). Likewise, financial support was not a contributing factor as these doctoral candidates were able to maintain financial stability by participating in an online doctoral program platform (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2016).

Like the study Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) conducted on online doctoral persistence, Berry (2017) focused on social integration as a means of influencing doctoral students' persistence. Berry argued that "a sense of community, defined as feelings of closeness within a social group, is vital to retention" (p. 33). Berry conducted a qualitative case study on first and second-year doctoral students ($N = 20$) to explore how online doctoral students create learning communities. Berry used 60 hours of video footage from six online courses, message boards, and 20 interviews. Findings indicated "online doctoral students experience community in ways that differ from their counterparts in traditional, face-to-face programs" (Berry, 2017, p. 44). Specifically, Berry's findings indicated students of online doctoral programs are not as impacted as their counterparts by social integration with faculty, but formed the following four social groups to create a sense of community: cohort, class groups, small peer groups, and study groups. Participants identified the following social supports for encouraging online doctoral persistence: talking, texting, and studying together. This study emphasized a cohort structure as "particularly essential in supporting doctoral students' virtual relationships" (Berry, 2017, p. 44). In addition, Berry (2017) recommended faculty facilitate peer-to-peer social integration for supporting online doctoral students.

SDT is a macro-theory for studying the role motivation plays in developing self-determination that results in persistence. While these studies described above did not focus on military veteran students, they examined persistence in online doctoral programs and identified constructs that could apply to SDT. For example, predicting factors of online doctoral persistence, Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2016) identified factors (i.e., institutional and integration) that may fall under SDT's propositions of how social and cultural factors support or thwart doctoral students' sense of volition and initiative. Likewise, Berry's (2017) focus of social

integration as an influence of online doctoral persistence may lean toward one of SDT's tenets—relatedness. There is evidence of SDT's relevance when studying doctoral persistence and its application to future studies conducted on military veterans who are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Military Veterans and Motivation to Persist

Research studies on persistence in higher education, doctoral persistence, and online doctoral persistence like those discussed previously, do not examine the military veteran student motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program but should be considered when studying this population. Researchers have investigated military veteran students in higher education (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Ford & Vignare, 2015; Gregg et al., 2016; Mentzer et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2014; Richardson et al., 2015), and the literature suggests “military learners adapt and persist in college by drawing upon deeply engrained military traits and tendencies, including self-discipline, mission-first focus, and reliance on fellow military learners” (Ford & Vignare, 2015, p. 7). Current research on the military veteran student combined with studies discussed previously is worth noting to gain insight into this population and to determine ways to encourage their motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Some research studies conducted on military veterans in higher education indicate veterans struggle to connect with the school as well as with other students (Gregg et al., 2016). Gregg et al. (2016) argued “veterans feel underprepared for academia” (p. 6). These researchers conducted a descriptive phenomenological study and interviewed veteran students ($N = 12$) persisting in postsecondary education. The purpose of their study was to give a voice to the lived experiences of military veterans transitioning from active military service to postsecondary education. The following themes emerged from the analysis: repurposing military experiences

for life as a student veteran; reconstructing civilian identity; and navigating postsecondary context and interactions. The researchers were surprised and encouraged to learn that while literature suggests that military veterans isolate themselves from their student peers, this study's participants reported positive experiences that "became more manageable with participation in social networks and group activities involving fellow student veterans" (Gregg et al., 2016, p. 7). In addition, participants explained they felt more connected to their university when they surrounded themselves with others who identified with their life circumstances.

Olsen et al. (2014) noted that their participants ($N = 10$) struggled to connect with other students. They examined "student veterans' perceptions of their transition to and experience in higher education" (p. 107). Olsen et al. interviewed active military and reserve student veterans ($N = 10$). The researchers asked participants to discuss perceptions of strengths they brought to the classroom, challenges veterans faced when transitioning from the military to the university, perceptions as to why veterans did not participate in social and academic support programs, and their thoughts on how programs can benefit future student veterans. Olsen et al. described the following strengths as themes emerging from the interviews: self-discipline; leadership and teamwork abilities; and possession of valuable experiences. Participants reported the following to be challenges in higher education: social interactions with other students; financial burdens; and cultural differences (Olsen et al., 2014).

Mentzer et al. (2015) investigated persistence for the military student population, and their findings do not align completely with those of the persistence studies discussed previously. The researchers measured "financial, social, and academic supports provided to the military student population to determine the correlation of these elements to student persistence" (Mentzer et al., 2015, p. 35). While this study did not focus on military veterans' motivation to

persist in DE doctoral programs, findings are worth considering. For example, this correlational study included 294 students, 30 of which were military veterans; 80% of participants were working on their master's; the remaining 20% of participants were working on a specialist or doctoral degree. All participants were attending a nonprofit university that emphasized online education (Mentzer et al., 2015). Their results suggested academic support correlates significantly with military veterans' persistence in higher education, and social support was not as significant ($r = .13, p = .25$). Additionally, financial support was not significant ($r = .09, p = .44$). Their results did note "persistence for the military, nonmilitary, and the overall populations was strongly affected by institutional identity" (Mentzer et al., 2015, p. 40). This argument does suggest the need for connectedness (i.e., relatedness).

Alschuler and Yarab (2016) examined military veteran students' retention and persistence at a midwestern public university as well as personal, administrative, or academic issues related to academic success. Results from data on military veteran students ($N = 707$) enrolled from Fall 2009 to Spring 2014 and who earned a bachelor's degree by Summer 2014 indicated a 50% graduation rate, a rate comparable to the national average. The phenomenological phase of Alschuler and Yarab's study consisted of focus groups and interviews with military veteran students ($N = 7$) and indicated the following themes concerning issues related to academic success: transitioning to civilian life; managing multiple identities; attitudes about civilian peers, faculty, and staff; and medical or psychiatric issues interfering with retention or persistence. Alschuler and Yarab concluded from their study that military experience provides veteran students strengths (i.e., structure, perseverance, and meeting deadlines) as well as weaknesses (i.e., running out of government benefits, faculty and students' responses to military veteran students, and civilians ignorant about military culture and service).

The empirical findings on military veterans in higher education vary, and in some instances, contradict one another. These studies suggest social networks (Gregg et al., 2016), financial burdens and cultural differences (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Olsen et al., 2014), and academic support (Mentzer et al., 2015) influence military veterans in higher education in some way. While evidence from studies described above varies, these findings can provide an understanding of the roles autonomy, competence, and relatedness play in motivation resulting in persistence. By focusing on SDT as a framework for these findings, researchers can begin to understand why military veteran students demonstrate certain behaviors, as well as how they are motivated to persist.

Summary

Attrition in DE can be 10% to 20% higher than in traditional education programs (Kennedy et al., 2015; Terrell, 2005) and 50% of doctoral students do not persist to completion (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015). In addition, attrition rates for nontraditional students are 10% to 20% higher than traditional students (Horn, 1996; Olsen et al., 2014). It is difficult to determine where military veteran students fall among the academic outcome data. While there is no research describing military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs, there are studies conducted on persistence in higher education, including doctoral persistence, online doctoral persistence, and military veterans' persistence. These studies provide value for understanding military veterans and motivation to persist, but vary in findings leaving more questions than answers. SDT provides a theoretical framework for understanding how experiences with autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster motivation that results in enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This theoretical framework may bring focus to existing research and provide insight to understand and give a

voice to military veterans' motivational experiences as they persisted to complete DE doctoral programs in the United States.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand and give a voice to military veterans' motivational experiences as they persisted to complete DE doctoral programs in the United States. Currently, there is no research study giving a voice to this particular population persisting in this particular program setting. This chapter provides a description of and rationale for this study's research method. The research method provided structure for this study's design, research questions, setting, participants, and research procedures. My role as the researcher, data collection methods, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are explained in detail allowing for replication of this study.

Design

Research studies examining phenomena must have structure (i.e., research design) for researchers to draw out participants' meanings of their lived experiences (Dukes, 1984). I chose a qualitative research design as this structure allowed me to not only draw out, understand, and describe my participants' lived experiences, but also make this research study useful and transferable to other populations experiencing the same phenomenon as well as those outside the phenomenon (i.e., educators) who can support and encourage those who are experiencing it. Since this study's central phenomenon is motivation to persist, I chose a qualitative research design to understand and describe motivation to persist as it relates to military veterans' doctoral journeys in their DE doctoral programs.

Qualitative Study

A qualitative study is distinguishable by its characteristics for inquiry (Creswell, 2013). Over the years, seminal researchers have developed definitions to this type of inquiry that is

organic by nature. Creswell (2013) described a qualitative study as a process influenced by philosophical assumptions, interpretations, and procedures for analyzing social or human issues. I applied the following qualitative study characteristics to my research study as Creswell (2013) described:

- A collection of multiple forms of data (i.e., demographic questionnaires, timelines, advice letters, and semi-structured interviews).
- The researcher as a data collection instrument of multiple realities.
- The use of a phenomenological approach.
- A focus on a single phenomenon (i.e., motivation to persist).
- A triangulation of multiple data sources.
- Themes derived from multiple data sources.
- A descriptive and persuasive account of lived experiences.
- The researcher's experiences reflected in the study.
- An ethical study at all phases of the research.

Motivation to persist is a complex phenomenon and deserves inquiry and detailed understanding. Hence, a qualitative study design that included the above characteristics allowed me to use naturalistic inquiry to understand my participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013) as they were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs.

Phenomenology

Researchers have a diverse number of research designs to choose from when conducting qualitative studies. For researchers participating in a qualitative study for the first time, Creswell (2013) grouped the following research designs for logic and ease of understanding: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. I selected a phenomenological

research design to draw out the essence of human experiences as it pertains to this study's central phenomenon (i.e., motivation to persist). Husserl (1913), the founder of phenomenology, used the term *eidōs* to refer to the essence of a human experience. I was able to capture my participants' *eidōs* and gain an understanding of multiple perspectives. I described my participants' *eidōs* as it related to their motivation to persist to completion in their DE doctoral programs. Like Husserl (1913), Dukes (1984) argued the main goal for conducting a phenomenological study is for understanding. Dukes' (1984) argument extended to say that empirical research requires explanation; however, explanation cannot take place if understanding is lacking. I not only captured and understood my participants' *eidōs*, but also used my participants' *eidōs* to provide other military veterans as well as those who support this population an explanation of how and why military veterans are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Transcendental Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a process that provides structure researchers need to describe participants' lived experiences. It also affords an opportunity for a researcher to interpret the meaning of those lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) identified two types of phenomenological approaches: hermeneutical and transcendental. Van Manen (1990) defined hermeneutical phenomenology as research that leans on lived experiences as well as interpretations of those experiences and argued a researcher describes as well as interprets participants' lived experiences. Contrasting with van Manen, Moustakas (1994) argued a transcendental phenomenological approach is best as researchers should not lean on their interpretations, but lean on descriptions of participants' lived experiences. I chose a transcendental framework since, like my participants, I am experiencing motivation to persist in

my DE doctoral program; however, I wanted to set aside my experiences as much as possible to give my participants a voice describing their own experiences. Moustakas' (1994) approach aligns with Husserl's (1913) concepts of phenomenology "in which investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). The transcendental approach caused me to focus on descriptions rather than interpretations of my participants' lived experiences. Thus, it provided me a fresh and unexpected perspective of military veterans who were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs.

As the researcher experiencing this study's central phenomenon (i.e., motivation to persist) as a non-military student, I needed to be aware of my own assumptions, biases, and experiences so that I did not distort but enriched the research process. Therefore, I implemented Moustakas' (1994) research approach to mitigate (i.e., bracket out) researcher subjectivity and interpretation by following a specific process. As an individual who is aware of assumptions, biases, and experiences, I wanted to ensure I did not overlook deeper levels of consciousness concerning motivation to persist; therefore, bracketing out subjectivity and interpretation began with the birth of this topic and continued throughout the entire research process. One way to ensure I was aware of and bracketed out my experiences was to write out and analyze my own experiences with motivation to persist in a DE doctoral program. I analyzed and categorized significant statements from my own experience into themes. Next, I wrote a textural description providing the "what" of my experiences, and wrote a structural description providing the "how" of my experiences. Lastly, I synthesized the textural and structural descriptions, and described in a passage or narrative my experience with motivation to persist in my DE doctoral program. This process led to the construction of a description of the overall essence of my own experience,

thereby allowing me to remove subjectivity and interpretation when I analyzed my participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 1913; Moustakas, 1994; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Research Questions

The following questions guided this research study:

Central Question

CQ: What are the motivational experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a distance education doctoral program?

Sub-questions

SQ1: What are the motivational military experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program?

SQ2: What are the motivational DE experiences of military veterans who persist to doctoral completion?

Setting

Participants for a transcendental phenomenological study can come from a single setting or multiple settings so long as they have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The setting for my research study was DE doctoral programs where 80% to 100% of course content was delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Additionally, the DE doctoral programs were in multiple disciplines, located throughout the United States, and were accredited by agencies the U.S. Department of Education recognized.

There were two significant reasons for choosing a DE doctoral program as the setting for this study. First, I chose a DE because the number of students participating in DE is growing each year (Seaman et al., 2018); however, attrition in DE can be 10% to 20% higher than in traditional education programs (Kennedy et al., 2015; Terrell, 2005). Second, I chose a doctoral

program because statistics demonstrate that 50% of doctoral students do not persist to completion (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015). It was important for me to understand the role that DE doctoral programs play when considering existing data on academic outcomes.

Participants

Participants and their experiences with human and social issues are at the heart of a phenomenological research design (Creswell, 2013). However, a phenomenological research design has fewer sampling strategies than other research designs as all participants must have experienced the same phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2013). There were two significant reasons for choosing military veterans who earned a doctoral degree via a DE program as participants for this study. One reason is that military veterans are participating in DE programs at a high rate. For example, a U.S. Department of Education brief (Snyder et al., 2016) reported that 41% of graduate military students took all of their courses online compared to 19% of graduate nonmilitary students (Radford et al., 2016). Another reason is that military veterans are continuing their education beyond their initial postsecondary degrees (Cate, 2014). For example, the Student Veterans of America Million Records Project (MRP) reported 20.8% of military veterans who earned bachelor's degrees furthered their education by earning graduate level to doctoral degrees (Cate, 2014). When considering the existing statistical data on academic outcomes for DE doctoral programs, it was important for me to understand how and where military veterans fall among the data.

Sample Pool

I chose military veterans as the sample pool for this study. Data on the academic outcomes of this student body are scarce, and what is available is speculative (Cate, 2014). For

example, the Student Veterans of America MRP provided an analysis of how national databases track academic outcomes of military veterans (Cate, 2014). The Student Veterans of America MRP reported these national databases' sampling methods are weak as they do not identify and track military veteran students properly (Cate, 2014). In addition to speculative data on their academic outcomes, military veteran students are often described in research as nontraditional students (Olsen et al., 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) describes characteristics of nontraditional students as being over the age of 24, may not follow traditional enrollment patterns (e.g., right after high school, continuous enrollment until completion, etc.), and may have family and financial responsibilities (Horn, 1996). Due to these characteristics, nontraditional students are at a higher risk of not completing their degrees when compared to traditional students (Horn, 1996). While academic institutions and research define military veterans as a subgroup of nontraditional students, studies are unclear on whether military veterans share the same attrition fate as nontraditional students (Cate, 2014).

Sample Size

Creswell (2013) argued that there must be enough participants to collect extensive data. I ensured my sample size was large enough to reach thematic saturation and fully develop textural and structural themes (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas' (1994) approach to reach thematic saturation is no fewer than 10 and no more than 25 participants (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989); however, no new information emerged from the data and interviews when I reached the right number of participants ($N = 9$).

Sampling Procedures

Once I received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix A) to conduct my study, I used snowball sampling to identify participants. I developed a flyer (Appendix B) that

provided details about the study to capture social media attention (i.e., LinkedIn and Facebook). In addition to posting the flyer on social media, I provided the flyer to individuals I knew personally and/or professionally to gain access to military veterans who were motivated to persist to completion in their DE doctoral programs. Included on the flyer was a demographics questionnaire via a Qualtrics® link I developed and piloted for potential participants to click on and complete within 10 minutes. See Table 4 for a listing of highly structured yet open form questions (Gall et al., 2007) on the Qualtrics® link.

Table 4

Demographics Questions

Demographics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your age? • What is your ethnic background? • What is your gender? • Describe your employment status? • What is your current job title if still working?
Military Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What United States military branch did you serve and how long? • Were you drafted or did you volunteer? • Did you experience combat while serving? • What year did you separate/retire from the military? • What was your military rank at time of separation/retirement?
DE Doctoral Program Experience
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you earn a doctoral degree at a DE program where 80 to 100% of the content was delivered online? • What doctoral degree did you earn? • What is the name of the institution at which you earned your doctoral degree? • What year did you graduate from your doctoral program?

The first part of this three-part demographics questionnaire included specific questions (e.g., age, ethnicity, gender, etc.) to draw out descriptive information about the potential participants. This information provided a representation of the study's sample. The second part the demographics

questionnaire focused on the potential participants' military experiences (e.g., military branch of service, combat experiences, military rank, etc.). Additionally, this part provided support for sub-question 1: What are the motivational military experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program? In addition, this second part provided support for the semi-structured interview questions two through 10. The third and final part of the demographics questionnaire focused on the potential participants' DE doctoral program experiences. This part provided support for sub-question 2: What are the motivational DE experiences of military veterans who persist to doctoral completion? In addition, this part provided support for the semi-structured interview questions 11 through 17. The demographics questionnaire provided triangulation of data, assurance that potential participants did in fact participate in an accredited DE doctoral program and that potential participants did complete their DE doctoral program.

The demographics questionnaire was piloted prior to distributing the flyer. The purpose of the pilot was to ensure validity and reliability (Gall et al., 2007). While questions were highly structured and more likely to produce accurate answers, I wanted to ensure the potential participants met the following criteria:

- Served the military for any number of years (i.e., two years to most of adult career);
- Served in any one of the five armed military branches in the United States;
- Military veteran before completing the DE doctoral program;
- Earned a doctoral degree in any field of study at an accredited DE doctoral program located in the United States; and
- 80% to 100% of the DE doctoral program was delivered online.

It was worth considering the number of years participants served in the military. A participant

who served in any one of the five armed military branches for two years may not be as indoctrinated into the military culture as a participant who served 25 years. While it was not necessary for participants to be military veterans upon entering their DE doctoral program, they needed to be a military veteran before they completed it. This criterion was essential for delimiting military students who received government incentives (i.e., military promotions)—a source of extrinsic motivation. An equally important criterion was the DE doctoral programs in which the participants were enrolled. The DE doctoral programs needed to be accredited and delivered 80% to 100% of the content online. I analyzed responses to ensure all the criteria listed above were met before gaining consent from the participants. After analyzing the demographics questionnaire, I emailed consent forms to potential participants who fit the criteria (Appendix C).

Demographic Information

To reduce research study limitations, I did not focus on one branch of service but pooled from all five armed military branches (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and USCG) as much as possible. In addition, I tried to have equivalent representation of men and women. The DoD reports an average of 14.6% (i.e., less than one in five) of active duty military members are female (Cate, 2014). I included participants who were commissioned (i.e., officers) as well as those who were non-commissioned (i.e., enlisted) and from a variety of ranks (e.g., admiral, commander, general, lieutenant, master chief, sergeant, etc.). The military path participants took while serving is significant. For example, military veterans who were commissioned officers are accustomed to being the primary source of authority as they commanded other commissioned officers and enlisted members (Luckwaldt, 2018; Sherman, 2018). These military veterans led enlisted members in completing missions; likewise, military veterans who were enlisted

members are accustomed to following orders from commissioned officers (Luckwaldt, 2018; Sherman, 2018). It was worth considering if the experiences of the commissioned officer versus the enlisted member had an impact on how he or she was motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program. See Table 5 for a summary of participant demographics and below a discussion on the final study sample.

Table 5

Participant Data

Name	Ethnicity	Gender	Age	Military Branch	Rank	Years Served	Degree Earned	Years to Complete Degree
Alpha	White	Female	47	Navy	Lieutenant Commander (commissioned)	23	Doctor of Business Administration (PhD)	4.2
Bravo	Black	Male	58	Navy	Commander (commissioned)	28	Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership (PhD)	7.1
Charlie	White	Male	53	Navy	Senior Chief Petty Officer (enlisted)	24	Doctor of Training and Performance Improvement (PhD)	4.6
Delta	White	Male	65	Navy	Master Chief Petty Officer (enlisted)	23	Doctor of Education (EdD)	3.11
Echo	White	Female	49	Navy	Lieutenant Commander (commissioned)	10	Doctor of Audiology (AuD)	3.3
Foxtrot	White	Male	52	Air Force	Master Sergeant (enlisted)	20	Doctor of Education (EdD)	6
Golf	American Indian	Male	61	Navy	Captain (commissioned)	28	Doctor of Organizational Leadership (PhD)	5
Hotel	White	Male	58	Navy	Chief Petty Officer (enlisted)	21	Doctor of Education (EdD)	14.9
India	White	Female	46	Air Force	Staff Sergeant (enlisted)	9	Doctor of Education (EdD)	4

The final study sample included gender and ethnicity demographics representative of the military organization; however, all but two participants served in the Navy. The study included commissioned officers ($n = 4$) and enlisted members ($n = 5$) and the average number of years served ($n = 20$) demonstrated significant commitment to military service. In a variety of fields, participants earned PhDs ($n = 4$), EdDs ($n = 4$), and one participant earned a Doctor of Audiology (AuD). There was a wide range between participants in the number of years to attain their DE doctoral degrees. While the average was 5.8 years, the least number of years to attain a doctoral degree was 3.3 and the most was 14.9.

Procedures

A transcendental phenomenological study provides researchers structured procedures for conducting research. Some researchers argue this research design is too structured and restrictive for qualitative inquiry; however, to study a phenomenon requires researchers to examine abstract concepts and philosophical ideas (Creswell, 2013) necessitating structure; therefore, I leaned heavily on the structured procedures a transcendental phenomenological study provides.

Prior to soliciting participants and collecting data, researchers must follow an important approval process to ensure participant safety and protection. Gaining IRB approval is the first step for ensuring efficient research procedures and participant safety and protection; therefore, I submitted an application to and received approval from the IRB (see Appendix A). One of many positive outcomes from the IRB approval process was the recommendation to use Qualtrics® software to develop and disseminate the demographics questionnaire. This change in my IRB application made the data collection and analyzation process much more efficient.

Once I received IRB approval, I conducted a pilot study. Pilot studies can refine and

further develop the research process as well as improve interview techniques (Kvale & Brinkmann, 1993). This proved to be true for this research study. I piloted the study with a dissertation committee member who is a retired USCG Commander and who was motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program. He met all of the criteria to participate. Three years after retiring from the military, this committee member earned his PhD in Business Management with a focus on Leadership and Organizational Change. I asked my committee member to participate in the pilot study starting with accessing the demographics questionnaire via the Qualtrics® link, completing the Research Study Package (Appendix D), and participating in the one-hour semi-structured interview. As already stated, this pilot study proved to be beneficial and resulted in a more efficient research process. For example, my committee member recommended I revise three of my interview questions as they were written using technical terms (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) that may be confusing to participants.

The elicitation of participants and data collection process began after finalizing changes from the pilot study. I posted a flyer (Appendix B) on social media (i.e., LinkedIn and Facebook) at least three times per week as well as distributed the flyer to others I knew personally and professionally until I attained the number of participants ($N = 9$) needed to reach thematic saturation. The social media posts gained attention as social media connections reached out with interest via private messaging. I replied within 24 hours to respondents interested in knowing more about the study and directed them to the Qualtrics® link to allow for a concrete determination of their participation.

Once respondents completed and submitted the demographics questionnaire via the Qualtrics® link, I analyzed and determined whether the respondents met all the criteria. I used the contact information (i.e., email address) the respondents provided in the questionnaire to

notify them whether they met the criteria to participate. With the exception of the semi-structured interviews, communication from this point on was conducted via email. Out of all questionnaire respondents ($N = 16$), 14 respondents met the criteria to participate. I emailed a consent form (Appendix C) within 24 hours of making a positive determination to those who met the criteria. Also contained in the email were instructions to return the signed consent form via my email address. Within 24 hours of receiving the signed consent form via email, I emailed the participants the Research Study Package (see Appendix D) that included instructions and a one-week deadline request for completing and forwarding the timeline template and advice letter. Within 24 hours of receiving the participants ($N = 9$) completed Research Study Package, I emailed the participants requesting a date and time to conduct and record the one-hour semi-structured interview via Skype® and MP3 Skype Recorder 4.43. Prior to conducting the one-hour semi-structured interview, I analyzed and made notes on the participants' Research Study Package. This analysis allowed me to gain more detailed information during the interview with each participant as I was able to ask additional interview questions and hone in on their experiences with their motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs.

Once the interview was complete, I discussed detailed next steps with each participant. For example, I explained to each participant that I would transcribe the interview using the Interview Protocol (see Appendix E) and asked each participant if he or she was willing to review his or her own transcript to ensure I captured his or her statements accurately (see Appendix F). Conducting member checks established validity. As co-researchers, participants ($n = 4$) contributed to and participated in the data analysis process by validating their experiences, reviewing transcripts, and adjudicating with me any necessary corrections. This

enhanced the analyses of the transcripts and allowed me to capture detailed and accurate descriptions of the participants' lived experiences.

Throughout the research process and after each interview, I recorded in a journal my experiences with and thoughts about each step (see Appendix G). For example, I recorded impactful statements participants made that provided me new insight into this study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist. Additionally, I described my frustrations with the amount of time it took to attain the right number of participants. Recording experiences and thoughts not only allowed me to express, analyze, and synthesize my experiences with the research process and research findings over time, it also provided an audit trail.

As co-researchers, participants were interested in learning about this study's findings; therefore, at the end of the research process and after analyzing all data, I forwarded the participants my findings (see Appendix H). I reported my findings to the participants at a high level in that I shared main themes that emerged from their lived experiences. In addition, I included a paragraph that answered the central research question: What are the motivational experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program? Participants ($n = 4$) reacted to the findings. For example, Hotel stated, "Thank you for sharing your findings; very insightful indeed. These texts will surely provide inspiration to present and future learners. You have undoubtedly contributed meaningfully to the knowledge base." While participants did not ask for a deeper explanation of the findings, they thanked me for sharing them and expressed interest in continued connection and potential future work on this research topic.

The Researcher's Role

As a doctoral candidate participating in a DE doctoral program, I wanted to be an instrument for analysis and gain understanding of military veterans' motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Dukes (1984) argued, "A phenomenologist's task is to understand, rather than to explain a human phenomenon in terms of causal antecedents or to correlate it with other human or nonhuman phenomena" (p. 198). To be an instrument (Creswell, 2013) in this qualitative inquiry, it was imperative for me to make note of my experiences working with military veterans. I have worked as a contractor for the USCG since 2013. My official job title is Instructional Systems Design (ISD) Analyst. Prior to working for the USCG, I was a middle school and high school language arts teacher at a private Christian school. My professional background and passion have always been in training and education. As an ISD Analyst for the USCG, I work side-by-side with military veterans developing training instructions to support military men and women in the field. I develop training instructions for a variety of missions ranging from how to report missing military assets to how to lower a rescue basket from a helicopter to a vessel. Not only is my job rewarding, it gives me a deep appreciation of how important quality training and detailed instructions are to the military. Military men and women are trained to follow orders to complete a mission. They lean heavily on organizational structure, their chain of command, and clear policies and procedures for serving their country. Having this deep understanding of the importance of providing military men and women quality support systems has made me passionate about military veterans motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Military veterans leave their posts for a variety of reasons, but transitioning from military work to civilian work can pose challenges. I have witnessed commissioned officers and enlisted

members transition from military service to the civilian workforce. On these occasions, the military veterans experience stress and confusion in their new roles for at least the first year as they translate their military experience to the civilian world of work; however, I have seen military veterans flourish once they adjust to civilian work and life. My role as a researcher for this study was to understand military veterans' motivational experiences that led them to flourish in the academic environment, specifically DE doctoral programs.

My Relationship to Participants

While I had no personal or professional relationship with my participants, I had a personal and professional connections through common acquaintances. This is due primarily to the snowball or chain sample type as I used individuals I knew personally and/or professionally to provide access to military veterans who were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs. This distant connection provided a sense of familiarity that brought a level of comfort and trust for participants to open up about their experiences.

My primary role as a researcher for this study was to provide my participants with an opportunity and safe environment to relive their experiences. My participants not only opened up about their motivating experiences while persisting in their DE doctoral programs but also contributed to existing research. I emphasized the significance their contributions will make on the research and academic community.

My desire to learn how military veterans experience DE doctoral programs has grown while on this doctoral journey. My understanding of military veterans' motivation to persist has deepened. This deepened understanding has enabled me to encourage and advise other military veterans considering DE doctoral programs.

My Role in the Setting

The setting for this research study is any accredited DE doctoral program in any field of study in the United States where 80% to 100% of course content is delivered online. While I did not have a direct role in the specific DE doctoral program in which my participants participated, I did participate in the same setting type as a doctoral candidate. I have in common with my participants the setting, but differ in that I have never served in the military. My only experience with the military is a professional one as a contractor. I set aside my experiences in my DE doctoral program during this research study to allow participants to describe their own lived experiences with motivation to persist in the DE doctoral program in which they participated. Dukes (1984) explained that “the researcher must allow the subjects to speak, in their own way and their own time, about those aspects of the experience in question that seem relevant to them” (p. 200); therefore, I bracketed out the role my DE doctoral program had on my motivation to persist as a non-veteran to give my participants time and space to discuss their own experiences.

My Role in Collecting and Analyzing Data

My role in collecting and analyzing data was turning participants’ lived experiences into words. Tufford and Newman (2012) explained, “A researcher’s ability to hear previously silenced voices and shifting centers of oppression relies on the ability to silence, for a time, his or her own voice and give precedence to the voice of the participant” (p. 95). I was able to understand my participants’ experiences by bracketing out my own experiences (Moustakas, 1994) with the study’s central phenomenon—motivation to persist. In addition, I analyzed demographic questionnaires, timelines, and advice letters to prepare for more meaningful and data-rich semi-structured interviews. As a qualitative researcher, I used the central and sub-research questions to frame and develop open-ended interview questions. Data collected from

my interviews were part of a systematic process that moved from narrow to broad analyses (Creswell, 2013). For example, I identified significant statements (i.e., narrow units) from the demographic questionnaires, timelines, advice letters, and interview transcripts and categorized these statements into meaning units (i.e., broad units) to summarize comprehensively in narrative form what my participants experienced and how they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994).

My Assumptions Influencing My Analyses

Qualitative researchers must understand the importance of philosophical assumptions and reflect on their own personal history, perceptions of themselves and others, as well as ethics and politics of research (Creswell, 2013). Once researchers understand themselves as multicultural subjects, they must recognize paradigms they bring to the research. This understanding is important for researchers to gain as it is the drive behind how researchers formulate research questions, accept new ideas, and evaluate studies. My philosophical assumption is the belief that individuals' realities are as they see them from their perspectives; therefore, I described multiple perspectives on one phenomenon and categorized these multiple perspectives into themes. My philosophical assumption is embedded within a social constructivist framework. Social constructivism aligns with my philosophical assumption in the researcher's belief that individuals' realities are as diverse as their meanings. I sought to identify my participants' meanings of their lived experiences as military veterans who were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Under a social constructivism framework, I listened intently to how my participants navigated through their experiences and how those experiences related to participants' personal, cultural, and historical backgrounds (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection

The data collection process included multiple data sources for this study. These multiple data sources provided opportunity for triangulation and assisted in categorizing major themes that emerged from the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). In addition, these data sources provided me background knowledge on each participant prior to the interview, giving me the opportunity to ask specific questions elaborating on those data sources. Each data source described below is presented in the sequence in which they were disseminated, completed, and analyzed.

Demographics Questionnaire

Demographics questionnaires provide researchers characteristics of a sample to a population as well as descriptive information of the phenomenon under study. I used a demographics questionnaire to analyze the participants' characteristics to determine potential similarities and differences within this study's sample while considering whether those characteristics were linked to their experiences of the study's central phenomenon. See Table 4 in the Sampling Procedures section of this chapter for the listing and description of demographics questions.

Timeline

Timelines serve as a memory aid in that they have the potential to unlock experiences that may otherwise be overlooked. In addition, timelines are chronological and descriptive representations of the participants' lived experiences, acting as a guide through the interview process. Kolar, Ahmad, Chan, and Erickson (2017) argued that timelines encourage "rapport building, participants as navigators, and therapeutic moments of positive closure" (p. 13). The participants used the timeline template embedded in a Microsoft Word document (see Appendix

D) to provide a chronological display of their lived experiences with motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs. I included on the timeline template an example to demonstrate the appropriate amount and quality of details the participants should aim to provide. In relatively chronological order, they described significant events during their entire doctoral journey (see Appendix I).

Another benefit of using the timeline was to cause participants to recall events that could potentially enrich their advice letters and enhance and supplement the semi-structured interviews (Kolar et al., 2017). Some lived experiences can be traumatic to describe. It was my goal to relieve undue stress by increasing participants' involvement in the research process through their timelines. The timelines focused the participants' attention on the interview, assisted with switching topics, kept the interview on an appropriate pace, and redirected participants when they seem to be experiencing stress (Kolar et al., 2017).

Advice Letter

Advice letters are a communication tool written from one person to another, providing insight into the writer's experience with a particular act to another who may follow in the writer's footsteps. Researchers use advice letters in qualitative research for multiple reasons. For example, the act of writing the advice letter prompts participants to relive challenges and best practices for overcoming them. Additionally, participants' experiences with a study's phenomenon may have occurred years ago. The activity jogs participants' memories, enriching information participants provide to researchers. For this study, the participants wrote an advice letter to a phantom military veteran considering a doctoral degree through a DE doctoral program (Appendix J). I provided writing prompts that not only assisted participants with their writing,

but also aligned with my research questions. Table 6 provides a listing of some of the writing prompts and demonstrates how they aligned with the research questions.

Table 6

Advice Letter Writing Prompts

<p>SQ1: What are the motivational military experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to transition from the military culture to the academia culture. • How to use military experiences completing a mission to complete a DE doctoral program. • What military experiences a military veteran can lean on to be motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program.
<p>SQ2: What are the motivational DE experiences of military veterans who persist to doctoral completion?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What to expect regarding the structure of a DE doctoral program (e.g., type of assignments, assignment due dates, navigating technology, etc.). • What to expect regarding interactions with faculty and students of a DE doctoral program. • What DE doctoral program experiences a military veteran can lean on to be motivated to persist to the completion of his or her program.

Semi-Structured Interview

Conducting interviews is a significant data collection step. Kvale (2006) described the interview as giving participants a voice to freely express in their own words their experiences while interacting with the researcher. I chose the interview to be the last data source as all other data sources collected prior to the interview triggered memories for participants to bring to the interview. Additionally, my analysis of the completed demographics questionnaire, timeline, and advice letter provided me background knowledge into my participants' experiences that became prompts for additional interview questions eliciting rich, descriptive data (see Appendix K). I conducted interviews with participants using Skype®. With participants' knowledge and permission, I used MP3 Skype Recorder 4.43 to record the interviews. In the one-hour semi-structured interviews, I asked participants to describe their experiences with the central

phenomenon—motivation to persist. The central research question and sub-questions framed the interview questions. Table 7 provides a listing of all of the interview questions as well as the alignment to the research questions that guided the participants to relive their experiences with this study’s central phenomenon—motivation to persist.

Motivation to persist and how this phenomenon drives military veterans to complete DE doctoral programs is important to examine as currently there is no research providing insight on this topic. Military veterans bring unique character traits, values, and military experiences to higher education as they are “typically above 24, have families, work part-time or full-time, are self-supporting and mature, have a limited involvement with activities on campus, and desire to earn degrees to further their career and life goals” (Bergman & Herd, 2016, p. 86). Question 1 allowed me to gain insight into my participant’s personality, values, and the root of their personality and values. It was essential to know from the onset of the interview the root of why my participants were motivated to persist to help me determine if their motivation was intrinsically or extrinsically rooted.

Table 7

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Opening Question
1. Describe one or two values that provide insight into your personality and from where those values came.
SQ1: Military Experiences
2. Why did you join the military?
3. Describe your positive military experiences while you served.
4. Describe your challenging military experiences while you served and how you overcame those challenges.
5. Describe your relationships (e.g., fellow military member, unit, commanding officer, etc.) while serving in the military.
6. Why did you separate/retire from the military?
7. Describe your experiences transitioning out of the military.
8. Why did you decide to earn your doctorate?
9. Describe military experiences, if any, that motivated you to persist in your DE doctoral program.
10. Describe military experiences, if any, that threatened your motivation to persist in your DE doctoral program and how you overcame those challenges.
SQ2: DE Doctoral Program Experiences
11. Describe how or if the reason to earn your doctorate changed over the course of your DE doctoral program.
12. If not apparent on your timeline, how long did it take you to attain your doctoral degree?
13. Why did you choose a DE format over other degree formats for earning your doctorate?
14. Describe your positive experiences in your DE doctoral program.
15. Describe your challenging experiences in your DE doctoral program and how you overcame those challenges.
16. Describe your relationships (e.g., classmates, advisor, chair, etc.) while earning your doctoral degree in your DE doctoral program.
17. Describe your experiences transitioning from the coursework phase to the dissertation phase of the DE doctoral program.
Closing Questions
18. How has your doctoral degree benefited you professionally?
19. How has your doctoral degree benefited you personally?
20. What else do you think is important for me to know about military veterans' motivational experiences while persisting in DE doctoral programs?

While all of the interview questions were written to answer the central question to this study, Questions 2–10 were written specifically to address SQ1: What are the motivational military experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program? Interview Questions 2–10 guided the participant to focus on how his or her unique military experiences that motivated him or her to persist as well as how or if those experiences were positive or challenging. Question 2 provided insight into the type of motivation (i.e., intrinsic or extrinsic) participants had for joining the military and whether this motivation related to their values stated in Question 1. In addition, I compared participants motivational behaviors described for joining the military to the motivational behaviors described for earning a doctoral degree (see Question 8). These are significant life events that deserved inquiry and insight into what drove the participant to make such life changing decisions. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that challenges can energize one’s behaviors, providing feelings of mastery and effectiveness. Questions 3 and 4 focused on participants’ positive and challenging military experiences. These questions provided more insight into what the participants valued (e.g., security, goals, etc.) as well as obstacles and how they overcame them (e.g., deployment, time away from family, etc.). Ryan and Deci (2017) postulated that relatedness is when one feels he or she is contributing to a cause beyond him or herself and contributing to a social organization. Question 5 not only focused on relationships, but also revealed what the participants valued in relationships, whether they were positive or negative relationships, and how they interacted with and leaned on these relationships while serving. In addition, Question 5 provided insight into the participants’ motivations concerning relatedness. Question 5 is very similar to Question 16, allowing me to compare the relationship experiences in both the military setting and the DE doctoral program setting. Ryan and Deci (2000a) defined motivation as occurring when one is moved to act, is

inspired, and is energized toward an end. Question 6, like the previous questions, provided greater insight into the participants' motivational behaviors. For example, participants retiring because their military career could not go any farther is a different motivation for leaving than from participants retiring early because they were ready to pursue a different career path or pursue higher education.

When this self-motivated population separates or retires from service, they often enter higher education to increase civilian opportunities (Bergman & Herd, 2016). This experience can be a challenging shift in social contexts. Question 7 revealed military veterans' experiences, both positive and negative, during this transition. This question not only revealed how the participants integrated into a new social context (Ryan and Deci, 2017) but also provided insight into how or if military veterans translated their military experiences to the civilian and academic environment.

Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that the more one is intrinsically motivated, the more one persists, performance is of higher quality, and psychological experiences are more positive. Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) posited that each student has his or her unique reason (i.e., motivation) for beginning a doctoral program, and that it is important for students to understand the root of the reason to persist. Therefore, Question 8 led discussions with participants about their specific motivation for earning a doctorate.

Studies suggest military veteran students perceive themselves as having specific skill sets (i.e., work ethic and time management) gained while serving (Olsen et al., 2014) that translate well in the academic domain and can positively influence self-directed learning. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that initial sources of motivation must be considered as these sources affect behavioral outcomes including quality of persistence, performance, and health benefits.

Questions 9 and 10 provided significant insight for understanding participants' positive and negative military experiences that may have contributed to their motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Question 10 in particular led to discussions about overcoming challenges, again providing insight into the military veteran student and how or if he or she used military experiences to persist.

Framing Questions 11–17 was SQ2: What are the motivational DE experiences of military veterans who persist to doctoral completion? These interview questions guided participants to focus on how their DE doctoral program experiences motivated them to persist as well as how these experiences may have brought challenges. Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) argued that doctoral candidates need to understand reasons for not only beginning but also continuing their doctoral journey. Question 11 asked if the “what” (i.e., reason) behind a military veteran earning a doctoral degree changed over the course of his or her doctoral journey. When considering aspirations, life goals, and their consequences, SDT (1985) focuses on the reason for people's behaviors. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that the content of goals is extremely important to consider. If the contents of a goal are extrinsic (e.g., wealth, fame, image, etc.), individuals experience less well-being once that goal is attained (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Question 12 addressed the length of time the participants took to earn their doctoral degrees. While this study focused on military veterans, many of the participants ($n = 6$) began their DE doctoral program as active duty members and separated or retired before finishing. It was worth considering if these participants experienced deployment while persisting in their doctoral program as 18% of military veterans withdraw from school due to military deployment or duty orders and 19% plan to further their education to the doctoral level (U.S. Department of

Defense, 2016). It was worth noting unique experiences such as deployment and if those experiences impacted the participants' motivation to persist.

While Question 12 addressed the “what” of military veterans' motivation to persist, question 13 addressed the “why.” It was important to understand participants' motivations for choosing a DE format for earning their doctoral degrees. Military training involves breaking down individualism so that soldiers, airmen, and sailors act and think as a unit (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Executing a mission as a military unit is a very different experience from executing the doctoral journey, particularly in a DE environment where 80% to 100% of course content is delivered online; however, the literature suggests military students are more likely to choose online learning programs over face-to-face learning (Ford & Vignare, 2015).

Ryan and Deci (2017) explained social environments can be supportive or thwarting, influencing motivation positively or negatively. When individuals experience social environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, individuals flourish as they are motivated to persist (Ryan and Deci, 2017). When social environments are overly controlling or negative, individuals become amotivated (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Questions 14 and 15 are very similar to Questions 3 and 4 with the exception of the social environment (i.e., DE doctoral program). It was important to understand military veterans' positive and challenging experiences while persisting as well as how they overcame challenges for educators to be able to appeal to military veterans in DE doctoral programs. It is equally important for other military veterans considering entering a DE doctoral program to know and understand positive and challenging experiences and strategies for overcoming them.

The military environment is very different from the academic environment, and I wanted to determine if relationship experiences (i.e., relatedness) were different as well. Ryan and Deci

(2017) argued the quality of relationships influences well-being and volition. Similar to Question 5, Question 16 focused on relationships. The distinction between these questions was the setting in which participants developed relationships. I was curious to know if participants used their experiences with relatedness in the military the same way when they were persisting in their DE doctoral program, and if they did, I wanted to know how. Answers to Question 16 may provide educators with a better understanding of how to create opportunities for relatedness for military veteran students.

Rockinson-Szapkiw and Spaulding (2014) argued that the doctoral student experiences several transitions. For example, the student transitions from an autonomous learner to a self-directed learner when he or she finishes the coursework and enters the dissertation stage (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Also, during the dissertation stage, the learner transitions from the student to the researcher (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014) where the researcher learns to think critically, contributes to research, and navigates the research process until he or she reaches doctoral completion. Transition is an experience with which military veterans are familiar. Military members deploy, relocate families, move in rank and responsibilities, and retire or separate from the military to enter their next career. Question 17 focused on the transition from coursework to the dissertation phase. It was worth noting if and how military veterans applied their transitioning experiences while serving to their transitions during their doctoral journey. It was equally important to know how military veterans were able to navigate the various stages, such as moving from being an autonomous learner to a self-directed learner.

Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that work is not just a source of income but also a form of self-realization and personal satisfaction. Work gives individuals a sense of purpose, fulfillment,

and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Questions 18 and 19 addressed the professional and personal benefits a doctoral degree provided the participants. It was worth noting if the reason the participants began this journey paid off in the end, whether professionally, personally, or both. Also, worth noting was the motivation driving their professional and personal gains shedding more light on what the participants valued most.

One-shot questions (Patton, 2015) provide participants an opportunity to offer insight into the study's phenomenon. Question 20 was the one-shot, closing question (Patton, 2015), and closed the interview with the participant as the co-researcher who provided last thoughts. Although I was also pursuing my doctorate in a DE program, I had never served in the military and may have overlooked significant aspects to the participants' experiences. While working with military veterans gives me firsthand account of how unique this population is in that they are trained to think and live a certain way, even after separation or retirement, Question 20 gave my participants an opportunity to shed light on distinctive information.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is unique in that it does not require a step-by-step process but is organic, with process steps happening simultaneously, recursively, and developing as the research progresses (Creswell, 2013); however, for the purposes of this study, I used a customized, step-by-step approach. I prepared and organized data for the analysis process, highlighted significant statements, developed meaning units from statements, clustered meaning units into themes, described findings in a rich narrative, and visually displayed data in tables (Creswell, 2013). I customized this step-by-step process using Moustakas' (1994) approach to fit this study's purpose—to understand and give a voice to military veterans' motivational experiences as they persisted to complete DE doctoral programs in the United States.

Using Moustakas' (1994) modified approach to fit this study, and while waiting to receive the Research Study Packages (Appendix D) from all of my participants, I tested this data analysis process by writing a full description of my own experience with motivation to persist in a DE doctoral program. I highlighted significant statements from my written description. I listed statements that were not repetitive to create meaning units of my experience. Next, I clustered the meaning units into themes and described the textures of the themes while including verbatim examples. I wrote textural (i.e., what) and structural (i.e., how) descriptions of my experience. Lastly, I wrote a textural-structural description (i.e., narrative) giving the essence of my experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Once I tested Moustakas' (1994) data analysis approach on my own experiences and received all of the Research Study Packages (see Appendix D) from the participants, I analyzed each participant's demographics questionnaire, timeline, advice letter, and interview transcript. A single data source cannot capture the meanings and essences of participants' experiences. Multiple data sources facilitated a deeper understanding of military veterans' persistence in DE doctoral programs. Researchers corroborate multiple data sources and validate findings through triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Erlandson, Harris, & Skipper, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). I triangulated data sources by comparing descriptive information from demographic questionnaires, timelines, and advice letters and how that information corresponded to significant statements from the interviews. By triangulating data sources, I looked for consistencies in findings as well as any data that were unique that could provide rich insight into the participants' lived experiences. First, I printed out hard copies of each data source (i.e., demographics questionnaire, timeline, advice letter, and interview transcript). I identified and highlighted significant statements (i.e., narrow units) in each data source. These significant statements

provided distinct information about the participants' experiences with motivation to persist. I made notes in the margins next to each significant statement. Moustakas (1994) referred to this technique as memoing (see Appendices I, J, and K). Next, I populated all significant statements for each participant into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. After analyzing significant statements, I removed redundant statements and categorized the remaining statements into meaning units (i.e., broad units). See Table 8 and Table 9.

Table 8

Participant's Meaning Units and Number of Significant Statements from Each Data Source

Participant	Timeline Meaning Units/ # of Significant Statements	Advice Letter Meaning Units/ # of Significant Statements	Interview Transcript Meaning Units/ # of Significant Statements
Alpha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative DE Experience / 2 • Negative Family Experience / 2 • Amotivation / 2 • Increase Military Opportunities / 1 • DE Flexibility / 1 • Motivation / 1 • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DE Flexibility / 2 • Negative Family Experience / 2 • Translating Military to DE / 1 • Autonomy / 1 • Positive DE Experience / 1 • Positive Family Experience / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 • Motivation / 1 • Relatedness / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 9 • Relatedness / 5 • Positive Military Experience / 3 • Positive DE Experience / 2 • Negative DE Experience / 2 • DE Flexibility / 2 • Continued Passion / 2 • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 1 • Competence / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1

Bravo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative DE Experience / 8 • Positive DE Experience / 3 • Motivation / 2 • Increase Civilian Opportunity / 1 • DE Flexibility / 1 • Negative Family Experience / 1 • Personal Challenges / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 8 • Relatedness / 8 • Translating Military to DE / 7 • Negative DE Experience / 7 • Negative Chair Experience / 3 • Negative Military Experience / 3 • DE Flexibility / 2 • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 2 • Goals / 1 • Continued Passion / 1 • Military Values / 1 • Negative Family Experience / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative DE Experience / 7 • Relatedness / 7 • Motivation / 4 • DE Flexibility / 2 • Negative Chair Experience / 2 • Negative Military Experience / 2 • Continued Passion / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 • Military Values / 1 • Negative Family Experience / 1 • Translating Military to Civilian Pursuits / 1 • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 1
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Charlie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatedness / 4 • Positive DE Experience / 2 • Motivation / 1 • Continued Passion / 1 • Civilian Career Competing with DE Program / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Military Experience / 13 • Positive DE Experience / 8 • Relatedness / 8 • Negative DE Experience / 6 • DE Structure / 2 • Overcoming Obstacles / 2 • Negative Transition Experience / 2 • Motivation / 2 • Translating Military to DE / 2 • Continued Passion / 2 • Personal Challenge / 1 • Positive Career Experience / 1 • Negative Family Experience / 1 • Negative Military Experience / 1 • Positive Transition Experience / 1 • Choosing Doctoral Program / 1 • Differences in Military and DE / 1
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Delta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 5 • Negative DE Experience / 4 • Positive DE Experience / 3 • Positive Military Experience / 2 • Continued Passion / 2 • Relatedness / 1 • Dissertation Interest / 1 • Competence / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Military Experience / 3 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 • Negative DE Experience / 1 • Positive Family Experience / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatedness / 5 • Motivation / 2 • Negative Military Experience / 2 • Overcoming Obstacles / 2 • Positive DE Experience / 2 • Positive Military Experience / 1 • Continued Passion / 1 • Negative DE Experience / 1 • Positive Chair Experience / 1
<hr/>			
Echo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 4 • Overcoming Obstacles / 3 • Negative Family Experience / 2 • Positive Military Experience / 2 • Positive DE Experience / 2 • Negative DE Experience / 2 • Relatedness / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 1 • Amotivation / 1 • Choosing Family over Career / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 6 • Positive DE Experience / 4 • Negative Military Experience / 4 • Relatedness / 3 • Continued Passion / 3 • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 2 • Positive Military Experience / 2 • Negative DE Experience / 2 • Goals / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 • Choosing Family over Career / 1 • Negative Transition Experience / 1 • Competence / 1 • Negative Family Experience / 1

Foxtrot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive DE Experience / 5 • Motivation / 3 • Negative DE Experience / 3 • Overcoming Obstacles / 3 • Amotivation / 3 • Dissertation Interest / 2 • Positive Family Experience / 1 • Relatedness / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translating Military to DE / 3 • Relatedness / 2 • Motivation / 2 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 11 • Relatedness / 10 • Positive Military Experience / 7 • Overcoming Obstacles / 7 • Negative DE Experience / 7 • Positive DE Experience / 6 • Autonomy / 5 • Dissertation Interest / 5 • Translating Military to DE / 4 • Continued Passion / 3 • Amotivation / 1 • Competence / 1 • Negative Transition Experience / 1 • DE Flexibility / 1 • Positive DE Chair Experience / 1 • Positive Family Experience / 1
<hr/>			
Golf	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive DE Experience / 1 • Relatedness / 1 • Motivation / 1 • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 1 • Negative DE Experience / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued Passion / 7 • Motivation / 6 • Relatedness / 6 • Negative DE Experience / 4 • Overcoming Obstacles / 3 • Translating Military to DE / 3 • Positive DE Experience / 1 • Goals / 1 • Positive Military Experience / 1 • Negative Transition Experience / 1 • DE Flexibility / 1

Hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative DE Experience / 3 • Negative Family Experience / 2 • Amotivation / 2 • Health Concerns / 1 • Motivation / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming Obstacles / 3 • Motivation / 2 • DE Flexibility / 1 • Goals / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 • Relatedness / 1 • Dissertation Interest / 1 • Negative Military Experience / 1 • Negative Family Experience / 1 • Health Concerns / 1 • Amotivation / 1 • Positive Military Experience / 1 • Negative DE Experience / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued Passion / 3 • Positive Military Experience / 2 • Motivation / 2 • Relatedness / 2 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 • Health Concerns / 1 • Positive Transition Experience / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 • DE Flexibility / 1 • Negative DE Experience / 1 • Negative Family Experience / 1 • Autonomy / 1 • Competence / 1 • Positive DE Experience / 1
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative Family Experience / 5 • Positive DE Experience / 3 • Autonomy / 2 • Relatedness / 2 • Continued Passion / 1 • Positive Family Experience / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translating Military to DE / 4 • Relatedness / 2 • Motivation / 2 • Negative DE Experience / 2 • Autonomy / 1 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatedness / 9 • Motivation / 6 • Positive Military Experience / 3 • Positive DE Experiences / 3 • Negative Transition Experience / 2 • Overcoming Obstacles / 1 • Translating Military to DE / 1 • Increase Civilian Opportunities / 1 • DE Flexibility / 1 • Negative DE Experiences / 1 • Positive Chair Experience / 1 • Continued Passion / 1 • Choosing Family over Career / 1

Table 9

Meaning Units and Significant Statements Totaled

Meaning Units	# of Significant Statements
Motivation	83
Relatedness	76
Negative DE Experience	65
Positive DE Experience	47
Positive Military Experience	40
Overcoming Obstacles	35
Translating Military to DE	32
Continued Passion	28
Negative Family Experience	20
DE Flexibility	15
Negative Military Experience	13
Increase Civilian Opportunities	11
Amotivation	10
Autonomy	10
Dissertation Interest	9
Negative Transition Experience	7
Negative Chair Experience	5
Competence	5
Positive Family Experience	5
Goals	4
Health Concerns	3
Positive Chair Experience	3
Personal Challenges	3
Choosing Family over Career	3
Military Values	2
DE Structure	2
Positive Transition Experience	2
Increase Military Opportunities	1
Translating Military to Civilian Pursuits	1
Civilian Career Competing with DE Program	1
Positive Career Experience	1
Choosing Doctoral Program	1
Differences in Military and DE	1
Total # of Meaning Units = 33	Total # of Significant Statements = 544

Thorough analysis of meaning units revealed patterns in the data and textural and structural themes emerged from these meaning units (see Appendix L). After repeated engagement with each participant's data and emergent themes, I summarized comprehensively in narrative form what each participant experienced and how he or she experienced it (Moustakas, 1994; see Alpha). Once I developed a textural-structural description of each participant's meanings and essences of their experiences, I developed a composite textural-structural description, bringing together all of the participants' textural-structural descriptions of their experiences into one rich narrative (Moustakas, 1994; see Results).

Trustworthiness

Since the 1980s, qualitative researchers have transformed and improved trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) in qualitative research. Previously, researchers evaluated qualitative research under the same constructs as quantitative researchers who used experimental methodologies and paradigms. However, it is impossible for qualitative researchers to meet the same criteria set forth in quantitative research (e.g., internal and external validity, devising valid and reliable instruments, assigning participants randomly to treatments, etc.) needed to maintain rigor with trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). In response, research evaluators proposed a naturalistic methodology and paradigm to maintain rigor with trustworthiness in qualitative research (i.e., credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability). The following sections provide detailed explanations for how I used the same methodology for maintaining trustworthiness.

Credibility

Qualitative researchers follow specific steps for demonstrating credibility (i.e., findings that are believable). Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed "credibility as an analog to internal

validity” (p. 76). Instead of determining causal relationships like internal validity in quantitative research studies, Lincoln and Guba (1986) recommended the following for determining credibility for qualitative research studies: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, and member checks. This study included a number of strategies to ensure credibility. Researchers corroborate multiple data sources and validate findings through triangulation (Creswell, 2013; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1986); I used four data collection sources to ensure data triangulation. For example, I used demographics questionnaires, timelines, advice letters, and semi-structured interviews. I conducted member checks by having participants review and provide feedback on their interview transcripts and the research study’s findings.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability provide readers the ability to judge the research study’s findings. Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed “dependability as an analog to reliability and confirmability as an analog to objectivity” (p. 76). Where quantitative researchers lean on reliable measurements for objectivity and to remove biases and subjectivity, qualitative researchers use external auditing procedures. Lincoln and Guba (1986) argued qualitative researchers use “an external audit requiring both the establishment of an audit trail and the carrying out of an audit by a competent external, disinterested auditor” (p. 76). I conducted a pilot interview with a content expert and revised interview questions as needed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 1993). In addition, I developed an audit trail containing raw data and research notes.

Transferability

While generalizing findings is not a goal of a qualitative study, providing transferability is (i.e., thick descriptive data; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed

“transferability as an analog to external validity” (p. 76). Instead of testing for external validity, qualitative researchers use thick descriptive data to transfer context. Thick descriptive data consist of narratives other researchers can read and apply to other studies. After analyzing data and developing themes from participants’ significant statements, I provided a narrative of each theme and explicit statements from the interviews. These narratives came from enlisted and commissioned military veterans, from men and women of diverse backgrounds, and from those who earned a doctoral degree at an accredited DE doctoral program. These narratives provide transferability and applicability to other populations for other researchers studying motivation to persist.

Ethical Considerations

My role in collecting data was to ensure that the best ethical conditions were present for collecting, protecting, and storing data. Technology makes data collection methods easier to manage (Creswell, 2013) and secure; however, I took extra precautions and preparation. For example, I ensured my participants were comfortable with and had access to the technology tools I used throughout the study. In addition, I ensured all data were password protected. I used email as the main form of communication with my participants. I used pseudonyms on all documents to distinguish participants’ data and protect their names. I secured printed documents in a locked filing cabinet only accessible to me. Participants knew prior to consenting to the study how I would protect their identity (see Appendix C). My procedures for collecting data were ethical and enabled me to maintain my participants’ trust throughout the study. In case data protection was breached, I prepared a plan to follow IRB procedures to ensure transparency and reduce harm to participants.

Researchers must adhere to IRB requirements and qualitative research protocols to ensure participant confidentiality and comfort, as well as ensure research integrity. I used several precautions to ensure participant confidentiality and comfort. First, I established clear communication with participants concerning the research study and their contributions. I communicated initial details of this study via a flyer posted on social media (see Appendix B). Detailed communications continued via email with the following: an explicit consent form (see Appendix C) that provided more details of this study to potential participants who met this study's criteria to participate; a Research Study Package (see Appendix D) that provided instructions and requested a deadline for completing the next step, which involved completing and returning the timeline template and advice letter; transcription review instructions to participants (see Appendix F); and a report of findings to the participants (see Appendix H). These formal communication tools supported accurate representation of the research and ensured participants understood their level of participation and removed any pressure to participate. In addition to these formal communication tools, I was available for questions via phone and email. This line of informal communication established honest and open interactions with the participants.

I ensured confidentiality and protected participants' identity. I did not disclose participants' names or the names of their DE doctoral programs in the data collection or in the research study. I gave each participant a pseudonym using the International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet. For example, I used the telephony "Alfa" for participant one; "Bravo" for participant two, and so on. I used the same process for all participants and for each setting as necessary. In addition, all documents (i.e., demographics questionnaires, timelines, advice letters, and interview transcripts) were password protected and locked in a cabinet.

Most participants were geographically dispersed; however, for local participants, I provided the option to conduct the interview in person; however, all participants preferred using Skype®. I coordinated with the participants on an appropriate time to conduct the interview to ensure they were able to relax and be fully focused on the interview questions in an environment that was comfortable and quiet.

The demographics questionnaire, timeline, advice letter, and interview questions caused participants to reflect on past experiences. Some of these experiences were painful to discuss as some of my participants ($n = 4$) experienced combat while serving. Therefore, I prepared for the possibility of stressful segments of the interview by analyzing data sources prior to the interview. During the interview, I listened intently and watched body language for participants who showed signs of stress. If I sensed a participant experiencing stress, I was prepared to recommend a United States Department of Veterans Affairs counseling center by providing the phone number to the Vet Center Call Center at 1-877-WAR-VETS or the link <https://www.vetcenter.va.gov>.

Summary

This transcendental phenomenological study was designed to gain an understanding and give a voice to military veterans who were motivated to persist in DE doctoral degrees. The purpose of this study was to share military veterans' experiences described in the demographics questionnaires, timelines, advice letters, and semi-structured interviews with other military veterans considering DE doctoral programs, with other researchers interested in this topic, and with other educators who support military veterans in this setting. In addition, this study supported and extended SDT as it applied to autonomy, competence, and relatedness for this population motivated to persist in this setting. Once I received IRB approval, I used purposeful sampling to identify enough participants ($N = 9$) for this study to reach thematic saturation

(Moustakas, 1994). I secured participants' consent forms, forwarded participants a Research Study Package (see Appendix D) to complete, and conducted one-hour semi-structured interviews with each participant. I collected and analyzed data under an ethical and trustworthy process while following Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach. This process included transcribing, organizing, memoing, and categorizing participants' experiences into major themes with the goal of answering my research questions. Answers to my research questions may provide other military veterans, researchers, and educators a deeper understanding as to how and why military veterans are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand and give a voice to military veterans' motivational experiences as they persisted to complete DE doctoral programs in the United States. Chapter Four presents the participants' experiences and the findings for the research study. My research study focused on military veterans who served the military for any number of years in any one of the five armed military branches in the United States, were military veterans before completing their DE doctoral programs, and earned a doctoral degree in any field of study at an accredited DE doctoral program located in the United States where 80% to 100% of the DE doctoral program was delivered online. The analyses of the participants' demographics questionnaires, timelines, advice letters, and semi-structured interview transcripts make known their stories individually and then collectively in themes. Lastly, the essence of their shared experiences is described and research questions answered.

Participants

This study provides perceptions and experiences of nine military veterans who were motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs. All participants with the exception of two completed their doctoral journey after retiring from the military. While these two participants fit all but one criterion, their experiences were rich with data that were worthy of this study. All participants, with the exception of one, participated in a DE doctoral program where 80% to 100% of the content was delivered online. This participant experienced DE, but prior to accessibility to online education. Rather, this participant experienced first-generation DE via correspondence. This section introduces each participant through descriptions of what and how each military veteran experienced motivation to persist in his or her DE doctoral program. To

ensure confidentiality and as discussed in Chapter Three, all participants' names and settings were replaced with pseudonyms using the International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet.

Alpha

In 2016, Alpha, a Caucasian female, completed her DE program and earned a PhD in Business Administration at an accredited, for-profit university located in the Midwest region of the United States. Alpha, the oldest of six children, could not afford to pay for college on her own, so she joined the Navy right after graduating from high school at 17 years of age to earn a secure wage and get education benefits. A mother of one daughter and steeped in family values, Alpha always valued education as the path to having a stable income. While serving, Alpha earned her associate degree, master's degree, and began a DE doctoral program. Prior to earning her doctoral degree, Alpha retired in 2012 from the Navy as a Lieutenant Commander after serving 23 years.

The experience of motivation to persist for Alpha was unique from the other participants in that Alpha did not persist on her first attempt in her DE doctoral program. Alpha's first attempt lasted two years and seven months while she experienced some of her most difficult deployments as a lieutenant in the Navy. Her DE doctoral journey was complicated by the communication gap from being deployed, resulting in the lack of guidance and communication with her chair. In addition to the thwarting experiences with her chair, Alpha experienced family challenges as well: "While on deployment, my husband emailed me saying he wanted a divorce and the day I returned he would be moving out." Three months after receiving this devastating email, Alpha experienced amotivation and decided to drop out of her DE doctoral program.

Alpha had another opportunity to re-enter a DE doctoral program five years later. Now looking for civilian work, Alpha felt she needed to increase her job opportunities by pursuing her

doctoral degree. She wanted to set herself apart from the competition, wanted to provide for her family, and wanted to be an example to her daughter. Alpha felt more equipped than previously as she did not have the added pressure of deploying and internalized the motivation needed to attain her goal:

I got back to it after I retired because I looked at it and I said you know what, I can do this. I want to do this. You know it's something I set out to do. But now I'm back. I did it and I was able to do it really well this time.

In addition to renewing her motivation to persist, Alpha learned from her military experiences to lean on requirements and templates to complete military assignments. She translated this experience to completing coursework in her doctoral program.

The DE doctoral program provided Alpha the nutriments such as assignment expectations and clear communication from her chair to be motivated to persist. The asynchronous DE format provided her the flexibility she needed to work in her civilian job and removed the necessity for childcare for her young daughter. She did not want to experience communication gaps with her chair as she did on her first attempt of attaining a doctoral degree, so she and her chair arranged weekly phone calls to address questions she had about her research study. She grew from her previous negative DE doctoral program experiences and relied on her military successes and her family to persist to completion. With the encouragement and support of her family and over the span of 11 years, Alpha successfully completed her DE doctoral program on her second and final attempt within four years and two months.

Bravo

In 2017, Bravo, an African American male, completed his DE program and earned a PhD in Management in Organizational Leadership at an accredited, private, for-profit college located

in the West region of the United States. In 1985, Bravo earned his bachelor's degree prior to joining the Navy. The unemployment rate was high, and Bravo was working odd jobs. Bravo's uncle, who was a military veteran, urged Bravo to enter the Navy. Bravo's uncle explained entering the military with an undergraduate degree would provide Bravo officer status and a stable income. Bravo heeded his uncle's advice. He not only experienced a successful career as a Navy officer, he became a Surface Warfare Officer. Surface Warfare Officers are considered leaders of the Navy's fleet. Prior to earning his doctoral degree, Bravo retired in 2013 from the Navy as a commander and after serving 28 years.

Bravo's experience with this study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist—had many peaks and valleys over the seven years it took him to complete his doctoral journey. He entered his DE doctoral program with the goal of finishing in less than four years. What is so fascinating and inspiring about Bravo's experience is that even though it took seven years to complete his doctoral journey, he never doubted his eventual success. As a commander in the Navy finishing his last tour, Bravo was not traveling as much and thought he could handle the workload; however, he experienced many challenges with the DE doctoral program shortly after he completed his coursework, slowing down his progress significantly. One challenge was his chair's lack of responsiveness and lack of understanding of the DE doctoral program's process. Bravo remained motivated. He leaned on his competence and his abilities to overcome obstacles while serving as a “ship driver” for the Navy to overcoming the following challenges: understanding the dissertation process, his chair's weak understanding the DE doctoral program process, and committee member turnover. Bravo stated,

Every hurdle seemed to take months to overcome. I never considered giving up.

Although I did not complete it [DE doctoral program] when I thought I should have, I

strongly believe that the perseverance I learned during my career helped me to know that I could complete the program no matter the obstacle.

Translating his military experiences as a Surface Warfare Officer in the Navy to the DE doctoral program served Bravo well for understanding the rigors of this particular mission. “At sea, sailor’s lives are replete with completing training, completing professional qualifications, and ensuring those under your care are flourishing.” Regardless of the obstacles, he took full responsibility and blamed no one for the hardships. Even though Bravo’s goal took twice as long to achieve as he had anticipated, he never doubted his eventual achievement. “I don’t think there was a time where I thought I’m never going to get this completed. If you really want to do it, it’s always doable even if it’s difficult.” Bravo’s competence in himself to complete his doctoral journey painted a vivid picture of this study’s central phenomenon—motivation to persist.

Charlie

In 2008, Charlie, a Caucasian male, completed his DE program and earned a PhD in Training and Performance Improvement, an interest that began as an enlisted member in the Navy. Charlie earned his doctoral degree at an accredited, for-profit university located in the Midwest region of the United States. Charlie entered an undergraduate program prior to enlisting but then dropped out as he was “tired of school.” He enlisted and found himself in a shore duty training environment that allowed him to flourish and encouraged him to re-enter an undergraduate program. Charlie remained interested in education and made a career out of military training. Serving 24 years, Charlie retired from the Navy as a senior chief petty officer. This was the same year he completed his doctoral program. Today, Charlie is a Performance Analyst in the private sector and continues to flourish in a training environment.

Charlie described his experiences with motivation to persist in his DE program as having the ability to translate many military experiences to his academic environment. As an enlisted member, Charlie experienced the military as being part of a unit that consisted of other enlisted members like Charlie but each having his or her own specialty. Charlie described this as an efficient way to meet objectives in that each person on a team had a specific task to complete, and together they executed a mission. Charlie used these military experiences in his DE doctoral program as a way to find those in his doctoral program who had skill sets that could help Charlie where he was weak:

If you're the individual who is trying to successfully navigate the waters and come out the other side with a really cool piece of paper that you can hang on the wall to know where those around talents lie and to be able to draw upon those talents to best help you get through those objectives or goals.

In addition to understanding how to leverage skill sets of those around him, Charlie understood from advancing in the military that managing time played an important part in his DE doctoral program:

My experience in the military contributed greatly to successfully completing my online degree. The skills that were beneficial during my time on active duty directly translated to the online classroom. Probably the two most crucial factors in the alignment were time management and teamwork.

Charlie's ability to translate his military experiences of working in teams and understanding individuals' skill sets were embedded in his positive DE doctoral program experiences as well.

"The best part of the program for me was the field of study is so narrow and so specific that there was a lot of commonality in the background of the people that I had the opportunity to deal

with.” In fact, much of Charlie’s positive experiences in his DE doctoral program included experiences with others. During his residency, he enjoyed meeting students and faculty. Not only did Charlie experience autonomy and competence by translating military experiences to his DE doctoral program, he experienced relatedness while leaning on relationships in his program to motivate him to persist.

Delta

In 1992, Delta, a Caucasian male, earned an EdD in Education at an accredited, for-profit, private university located in the West region of the United States. What is so exceptional about Delta’s doctoral journey is that his “distance education” was not an online program but was distant nonetheless as he was deployed and communicated with his doctoral program professors and dissertation committee via correspondence. Online-centric coursework is defined as fifth generation DE (Taylor, 2001). Delta used first generation DE where coursework was delivered via correspondence. Also unique about Delta’s experience from the other participants is that he retired after he earned his doctorate in 2003 from the Navy as a master chief petty officer and after serving 23 years. This study focused on military veterans rather than active duty members earning a doctoral degree to delimit military promotions, a source of extrinsic motivation, as a motivation to persist. Delta was adamant that his motivation was not promotions, but because he “got so engrossed in the data, research, and statistics” and he “fell in love with the topic.” Additionally, this participant was the first active duty enlisted member of the Navy to earn a doctorate!

Delta had three driving forces behind his motivation to persist: escape the war, improve the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), and rely on the network of people to help him succeed. Delta’s ship was under attack during Desert Storm. He led his crew in firing

Tomahawks and fighting off Iraqi gun boats. During times when Delta's crew was safe, he would go into his study area the command designated for him to work on his dissertation. Delta used these moments as a way to escape these hostile situations. "Going to war for the first time was shocking. It's when you see the after effect of what you shot at. My escape was my dissertation and great support network with fellow sailors."

Delta's second driving force was the ASVAB, a multiple-choice test used to qualify men and women who wished to enlist in the military. The multiple-choice questions measure knowledge in science, math, comprehension, electronics, and verbal expression. Delta wanted to use his research to improve the ASVAB. Delta saw discrepancies in the test based on how military members were qualified. For example, military students who wanted to be electronics technicians, and their scores indicated they would be successful at this job, ultimately failed when placed in the electronics technician environment. Delta used his research to provide recommendations for addressing the ASVAB's discrepancies. His research recommendations included psychomotor testing and cognitive testing which were approved and incorporated into the ASVAB.

Delta's DE is unique from the other participants in that he did not have online technology to navigate through his doctoral journey. He relied on this third driving force to motivate him to persist—the coordination of his committed network of family, friends, shipmates, and DE faculty. Delta had approved officers and even a base Admiral proctor his exams. Family, friends, and shipmates sent Delta research material he requested via correspondence. Faculty drove to the closet gun school mailroom so they could expedite correspondence quicker than through regular mail. Delta's ability to find the right support motivated him to persist:

The biggest positive was I could rely on people, my fellow sailors, my family members, my friends and I could make a phone call at port or send a letter and a spider network would help me collect research data. A sailor brought a bunch of research from shore to the ship from all of my sailor friends to help me.

Delta's motivation to persist in his DE doctoral program was very unique from other participants in that he used his DE doctoral program to escape war and the delivery format of his program was first generation DE; however, he shared similar experiences in that he was passionate about his dissertation topic and leaned on a network of support.

Echo

In 2008, Echo, a Caucasian female, completed her DE program and earned an AuD at a private university that specializes in health care programs and is located in the Midwest region of the United States. Echo retired in 2014 from the Navy as a lieutenant commander and after serving 10 years. While serving, Echo was a specialty leader in audiology. On one tour, Echo was the commanding officer for 25 active duty military and civilian members. On another tour while stationed in Okinawa, Echo was the only audiologist on the island and provided health care services to over 65,000 patients! Ultimately, Echo made the decision to leave the military early due to family illnesses. Today, Echo is an adjunct professor of occupational and community audiology for third year doctoral candidates.

Echo entered her DE doctoral program when stationed in Guam as a way to escape the biggest challenge of her life—infertility. Echo and her husband tried for several years to start a family. When Echo's doctor told her she would never have children, she became severely depressed. Echo shared, "There was no place on the island of Guam in which to seek infertility help. My mind was nothing but having a baby. I needed to do something to stay busy. My mind

started thinking about earning my doctorate.” Echo directed her attention away from infertility complications and dove into her studies. Echo flourished in her DE doctoral program. She experienced autonomy as she loved the course content. Echo admitted being hesitant initially about earning her doctoral degree online; however, the program was so well structured and applicable to her field that she became a strong proponent of DE programs. During her doctoral journey, Echo transferred stateside where she received fertility treatments. At 39, Echo delivered twins. Echo experienced another obstacle as she was finishing her doctoral program. Echo described her experiences as a new mother in the military and finishing her doctoral program:

I’m exhausted after having twins and returned back to work a mere six weeks later. I’m the only provider for over 65,000 folks. I can’t catch a break at work. The twins do not sleep through the night and if I had anymore classes after this one, I don’t know how long I could keep this pace up. I mean, something would have to give.

Echo reminded herself of the phrase she and her husband used throughout her doctoral journey, “It won’t always be this way.” Echo, a former basketball player who was raised with values steeped in perseverance and integrity, was motivated to persist in her doctoral program. She stated, “I was earning a doctorate degree and that level of performance is not an exception, it is the expectation that this is what you must do.” Echo demonstrated competence in her ability to overcome a number of obstacles simultaneously (i.e., being a new mom of twins, finishing her doctoral journey, and being a leader in her medical field).

Foxtrot

In 2018, Foxtrot, a Caucasian male, completed his DE program and earned an EdD in curriculum and instruction at an accredited private, non-profit Christian university located in the South Atlantic region of the United States. Prior to earning his doctoral degree, Foxtrot was an

instructor for the Air Force. He taught airmen how to survive in hostile environments, how to evade the enemy, how to resist the enemy, and how to escape and live off land and sea in the roughest terrain. Foxtrot credited this military experience to “surviving his DE doctoral program.” Foxtrot retired in 2006 from the Air Force as a master sergeant after serving 20 years.

Foxtrot’s motivation to persist in his doctoral program provided him an amazing accolade—the Quantitative Dissertation of the Year by his university! While he ended his doctoral journey with this accomplishment, the route to get there was six years long and arduous. Foxtrot defined his doctoral journey in three stages: finding your way, trucking along, and independent researcher. Foxtrot described “finding your way” as the time he spent navigating technology, understanding assignments, and meeting deadlines. He compared this stage to experiencing a new military assignment of identifying a military standard, developing a plan to meet the standard, then meeting the standard. Foxtrot was engaged in his learning (i.e., autonomous) and gained competence his first semester. For example, he quickly learned how to navigate and access online assignments, and coursework seemed easy to Foxtrot. Therefore, he took an extra class his second semester. This proved to be a huge mistake as he had to devote “every waking hour” to coursework when he wasn’t working. He learned to pace his classes to fit his lifestyle and career.

Foxtrot described “trucking along” as time spent completing courses, getting to know fellow students, and gaining understanding of the curriculum. He experienced relatedness as he compared the coursework stage to surrounding himself with smart military members to answer questions, to connect, and to lean on during challenging times. The end of this stage for Foxtrot was when he experienced one of his biggest challenges—writing his research prospectus. He felt the DE doctoral program did not provide him clear guidelines for writing a solid research plan.

Foxtrot was experiencing amotivation. He shared, “I was completely dejected and confused as to my next step and my intensive professor was no help.” Foxtrot contemplated dropping out; however, he connected with a DE professor who was also a military veteran and leaned on this professor for guidance. This connection motivated Foxtrot to persist to the next stage.

Foxtrot described the “independent researcher” stage as when he made his own deadlines, developed a plan for persisting, and defended decisions. He described this stage as nothing like what military members experience while serving. For example, Foxtrot had to get used to defending his ideas—a very different experience from military experiences when a military member is either the one making decisions or is following orders from his or her chain of command.

Foxtrot experienced amotivation for the second time and considered dropping out. He was working long hours and traveling. His topic was broad, and he decided to develop his own instrument for his quantitative study. He internalized his quantitative instrument to motivate him to persist. His instrument became the driving force. “The final product of that instrument really ended up driving me. I really wanted to build something that could be used.” Today, researchers use Foxtrot’s instrument to measure doctoral students’ academic and social integration. He relied heavily on his dissertation committee for continued support and encouragement. In addition, Foxtrot’s employer allowed him two hours each morning at the beginning of his workday to work on his dissertation. These DE doctoral program nutriments provided Foxtrot the right environment to be motivated to persist.

Golf

In 2016, Golf, an American Indian, completed his DE program and earned a PhD in organizational leadership at an accredited private Christian research university located in the

South Atlantic region of the United States. Prior to earning his doctoral degree, Golf retired in 2007 from the Navy as a captain after serving 28 years. Today, Golf is an adjunct professor teaching communication and leadership courses for a DE program for the university at which he graduated. Husband and father of two, Golf is a professed “lifelong learner” who is interested in creativity, innovation, and leadership—interests today that began while serving his country.

Golf has a long history of interest in organizational leadership. His first experience with this topic was at the Naval Academy in 1975. In addition, Golf found many examples of leadership while he served. While exposed to the Navy’s leadership pool, Golf was also exposed to some of the Navy’s best technology. Golf’s interests in learning were present outside the Navy as well. Golf’s friends were civilian teachers who started a university in Tanzania. “I thought that was admirable and really thought the stories of the African people and the sacrifices they made to get an education made me want to be a part of that.” These experiences coupled with Golf’s interests in creativity, innovation, and leadership motivated him to persist through his DE doctoral program.

Golf viewed his love of learning coupled with the many interests as both positive and negative. While he was exposed to and interested in creativity, innovation, and leadership, Golf struggled for a year to narrow his dissertation topic. He wanted to be sure this topic would be meaningful to him. “I was interested in creativity and innovation and leadership of teams. It was hard for me to narrow the focus down into something that was a bite-sized dissertation.” As he struggled to narrow his topic, he used strategies in overcoming obstacles in the military to propel him in his DE doctoral program:

If you’re going to do something, you find a way to do it. If you’re going on a mission, you’re going to do something. You have a goal, and the goal often in the military is

education because you have to complete education to qualify for different levels. You need to get it done.

In addition to using his competence gained while serving to serve him in his DE doctoral program, Golf credited the military for his interest in a topic that eventually became his doctoral concentration—organizational leadership.

Hotel

In 2018, Hotel, a Caucasian male, completed his DE program and earned an EdD in Education Technology at an accredited, for-profit university located in the Midwest region of the United States. Prior to earning his doctoral degree, Hotel retired in 2003 from the Navy as a chief petty officer after serving 21 years. One unique aspect of Hotel’s DE doctoral program experience is that it took him almost 15 years to attain his doctoral degree. Hotel experienced significant life events such as divorce, remarrying, divorce again, and health risks that went without diagnosis for seven years. Nevertheless, Hotel was motivated to persist. He credits the Navy for instilling two values that allowed him to be motivated to persist and believes every doctoral student should possess—persistence and patience.

Today, Hotel is a consultant who builds learning programs for a private research university in the East region of the United States. Hotel explained it was not his upbringing that shaped him into the person he is today, but the Navy. Prior to joining the Navy, Hotel was “a spoiled brat from an upper middle-class family” who never worked and did not understand the value of money. Hotel barely graduated from high school and focused much of his attention on dating and partying. At 21 years of age, his life was going nowhere and he subsequently enlisted. He described a valuable learning experience early in his military career: “My first task was to clean toilets in the bathroom. That was the defining moment. I was used to having

maids. Now I was elbow deep in dirt.” He internalized this challenging experience as character-building that provided him the foundation for discipline. It was this same discipline and overcoming obstacles during combat while in the Persian Gulf that Hotel used while conducting his research. For example, Hotel received 13 rejections from universities asking for data needed to complete his dissertation. It was the 14th try that propelled him forward to be able to complete his doctoral degree. Even though Hotel experienced this obstacle in his DE doctoral program, he never gave up.

India

In 2016, India, a Caucasian female, completed her DE program and earned an EdD in curriculum and instruction at an accredited private, non-profit Christian university located in the South Atlantic region of the United States. Prior to earning her doctoral degree, India separated in 2006 from the Air Force as a staff sergeant after serving nine years (four years active duty and five years national guard). Today, India is a wife and mother of three. She is a research professor at a private research university and teaches educational leadership courses for another university. She is writing a book and continues to conduct and publish her research on education. India shared, “I have always loved research and now I am paid to do what I love.” India stands out from the other participants as she did not serve in a leadership role while in the Air Force. Additionally, she was the only participant who admitted to struggling during the dissertation phase of her DE doctoral program because she wanted someone to tell her what to do. India explained, “I was used to following orders.” However, she was highly motivated to attain higher education.

India valued education from an early age. Raised in a low-income environment and where education was not encouraged, India found encouragement from her teachers, the

classroom setting, and books. India knew as early as elementary school that she would go to college; however, her economic circumstances could not support her financially to achieve this goal. India enlisted in the Air Force at 18 years of age. The Air Force not only provided her the financial means to attain higher education, but also her chain of command was extremely supportive and ensured India's military track provided her the flexibility to take classes at night and on weekends. India's military job repairing aircraft did not require her to be available around the clock. Proving to be highly motivated to satisfy her childhood dream, India earned her bachelor's degree a few months after she completed her 4-year commitment as an active duty member!

India separated from the Air Force to start a family. After having her third child, India decided she wanted to serve again and she wanted to go back to school. Again, the Air Force provided her the means to achieve her goals. She went on to earn her master's degree to satisfy her need for education. This was her first exposure to DE. India described being passionate about serving her country; however, her love of knowledge and exposure to and assisting with her children's school and teachers changed her career interests. India became a teacher. Quickly, India's civilian opportunities increased, and she became an elementary school principal. This career move encouraged India to pursue her doctorate. Leaning on her previous experiences with DE to earn her master's degree, India decided to attend the same university and participate in DE again to earn an EdD. India had many positive DE doctoral program experiences with faculty and students. She enjoyed the comradery and took as many residency classes as allowed as a way to build relationships. India stated, "I felt like they [faculty and students] helped me connect and I could ask the questions I wanted to ask in person." For example, at one of her residencies, the professor told the class of 10 doctoral candidates that only

two out of the 10 would successfully defend their dissertations. India's class decided that night to form a cohort through social media and maintain constant contact until the end of their program. All 10 doctoral candidates earned their DE doctoral degrees! In addition to experiencing relatedness in her DE doctoral program by connecting with others, India used her military experiences of overcoming obstacles to remain motivated to persist through difficult times in her DE doctoral program. India explained,

When my doctoral journey took me to uncomfortable situations where I didn't feel I could stretch my mind anymore, I remembered memorizing the history of the Air Force and learning all the electrical and environmental systems on three different tactical jets, and I would remind myself I had done hard things before. I could do this too.

India's experience with her DE doctoral program was very positive. Her motivation to persist came from her love of learning; the support of family, friends, DE connections, and military connections; and the opportunity to model to her children setting goals and achieving academic success.

Findings

Thorough and repeated analyses of the participants' experiences provided an understanding of the "what" and the "how" of military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. I followed Moustakas' (1994) research approach to gain this understanding. First, I bracketed out my own experiences with motivation to persist in a DE doctoral program by journaling my experiences (see Appendix G). While analyzing participants' data, I referred to my journal to ensure that I suspended my perspective to allow the participants' perspectives to emerge. Next, I highlighted participants' significant statements in each data source and developed meaning units from these statements (see Table 9). Lastly, I clustered meaning units

into textural and structural themes. Five textural themes emerged, demonstrating what the participants experienced: (a) a support system, (b) obstacles, (c) goal accomplishment, (d) a new culture, and (e) flexibility and autonomy of the DE structure and program type. Six structural themes emerged demonstrating how the participants experienced this study's central phenomenon: (a) engaging a support system, (b) overcoming obstacles, (c) goal setting and accomplishment, (d) navigating the DE dissertation process, (e) using military experiences to determine the dissertation topic, and (f) discovering and pursuing passion. The following sections provide the composite textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences and an explanation of each theme and its application to this study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist.

“What”: The Doctoral Journey Experienced through the Lenses of Military Training and Experiences

To understand military veterans' lived experiences with motivation to persist in a DE doctoral program, it is important to know and understand what they experienced. The composite textural themes below shed light on what the participants experienced during their doctoral journeys as they leaned on their military training and experiences. Those five textural themes are: (a) a support system, (b) obstacles, (c) goal accomplishment, (d) a new culture, and (e) flexibility and autonomy of the DE structure and program type.

A support system. Research studies, including this research study, indicate that having a support system (e.g., family, friends, coworkers, fellow students, faculty, etc.) on which to rely throughout the doctoral journey is essential for academic achievement (Berry, 2017; Gregg et al., 2016; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). Likewise, this research study indicated that lack of support can thwart academic achievement. For example, participants ($n = 2$) described

experiences of amotivation when they did not have a support system. Alpha dropped out of her DE doctoral program after experiencing divorce. She eventually re-entered, remarried, established a support system through her DE doctoral program and through her family, and successfully completed her DE doctoral program. Hotel took almost 15 years to complete his DE doctoral program. Over a 7-year span, divorced, remarried, and divorced again, experiencing very little to no family support. During this time, he also experienced very little to no motivation to persist and considered dropping out. Instead of dropping out, Hotel leaned on his supervisor who was a military veteran and who encouraged Hotel to finish his doctoral program. In addition, Hotel's supervisor allowed him to use his workspace during off hours to write his dissertation. While these participants ($n = 2$) experienced amotivation temporarily, they regained their momentum by developing a support system, enabling them to attain academic achievement.

All participants described experiences with motivation when they had a support system. Delta shared, "The biggest positive experience in my DE doctoral program was I could rely on people, my fellow sailors, my family members, and my friends." Delta described a network of support on which he leaned to move his doctoral program forward while underway as faculty corresponded quickly with graded assignments. Just as Delta was conducting research, he was deployed six months early to the Middle East. Realizing getting research material would take longer via correspondence, he relied on a network of family, friends, and shipmates to send him research material. Four months later, Delta was relieved in the Persian Gulf and he submitted his dissertation for final approval.

While some participants relied on support systems outside their DE doctoral programs, other participants relied on support systems within their DE doctoral programs to motivate them to persist. For example, when asked to describe their positive experiences in their DE doctoral

programs, all but one participant described their relationships with faculty ($n = 2$) and students ($n = 6$). Foxtrot described a particularly difficult moment when he was experiencing self-doubt. It was during his Professional Writing and Research course when Foxtrot faced his first major obstacle. He felt the DE doctoral program did not prepare him sufficiently for developing a research plan. He considered not returning to finish his one-week residency when he was introduced to a research professor who talked him through his difficulty until midnight. Foxtrot attributed his persistence to this faculty member and her ability to work with him and get him back on track. Foxtrot found, in general, the professors' feedback provided him positive reinforcement.

Alpha compared her relationships in her doctoral program to relationships in a traditional setting when she earned her undergraduate degree. She described having a cohort that remains a tightknit group today. "I really liked when we got together. I'm still friends with a lot of them. It's a lot different than what I had when I graduated from University of Mike with my bachelor's. I don't remember anybody from that [program]." Alpha described her DE relationships as having a deeper connection and being more meaningful to her than the relationships she had while as an undergraduate in a traditional setting.

Charlie explained his relationships in his DE doctoral program were the "best part of the program." He was encouraged by the lengthy discussions he had with folks who were equally interested in the content of a very narrow field. He felt that even though these relationships were geographically dispersed, there was "common understanding and common background." Charlie described his one-week on-site colloquiums as helpful for him to complete the program. Because of his positive experience with relationships, Charlie recommended that military

veterans do not enroll in a DE doctoral program that does not include one-week on-site colloquiums or residencies.

Bravo admitted he did not tell his military co-workers he was pursuing his doctoral degree for fear of ridicule; however, Bravo gained connections with students through his residencies that provided him motivation to persist. “Everybody was new to the program. They were really not just excited about the journey but excited about your journey. So, they interacted with me. They said that ‘hey you can do this.’” While Bravo believed DE is ideal for active military members to attain academic achievement due to being geographically dispersed and underway at times, he admitted that leaning heavily on his DE relationships developed during the residencies provided the support and encouragement needed to succeed.

Golf and Hotel cultivated DE relationships as well. Golf enjoyed working with others in group projects. Golf recalled working on several projects with a fellow classmate with whom he found a deep connection. This classmate was from Tanzania. Golf explained the Tanzanian government forced this classmate to leave his village of Maasai. Golf’s compassion for his classmate encouraged him to research Maasai women leaders. Hotel developed a support system with his fellow classmates by providing them encouragement and support. Hotel explained, “Fellow students would tell me you really helped me get through this course. That was inspiring me to be a college professor.”

While participants enjoyed the flexibility of DE where 80% to 100% of the content was delivered online and where they were able to schedule coursework around their careers and families, they appreciated, developed, and facilitated authentic relationships with other students, faculty, and committee members within their DE doctoral programs. Additionally, they leaned

on family and friends. These support systems, whether through their DE relationships or through family and friends, provided participants the motivation needed to persist.

Obstacles. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that challenges (i.e., obstacles) can energize one's behavior, providing feelings of mastery and effectiveness; likewise, challenges an individual perceives as too difficult to overcome can be amotivating to that individual. This study's findings demonstrated the types of obstacles the participants experienced. Interestingly, the participants' obstacles during their doctoral journeys were similar to that of non-military doctoral students. For example, Foxtrot struggled with developing his research plan, explaining he did not have guidance needed from a faculty member to develop a solid research plan. Hotel struggled to obtain research data. It took 14 attempts to gain access to the data he needed to conduct an analysis. Charlie struggled with writing his research findings. His momentum waned after conducting his research. Golf struggled with his dissertation topic because he had so many interests; it took a year to narrow his dissertation topic. With the exception of Delta and Echo, each participant struggled with transitioning from an autonomous learner during the coursework stage to a self-directed learner during the dissertation stage. For example, India wanted someone to tell her what to do at every step of the dissertation process. These obstacles are obstacles any DE doctoral candidate can experience. What may be unique among this study's participants compared with other DE doctoral candidates, however, is how these participants overcame their obstacles.

Goal accomplishment. SDT (1985) focuses on the content of goal-oriented behavior. Specifically, SDT (1985) is concerned with how individuals organize their lives around goals and aspirations and distinguishes goals as intrinsic (e.g., relationships, personal growth, etc.) or extrinsic (e.g., financial gain, physical appearance, etc.). For example, the majority of the

participants described increasing civilian opportunities as their primary motivation for earning a doctoral degree, and each participant retired from military service at ages appropriate to begin a new career. Echo's goal was to use her doctoral degree to become a specialty leader in her field. Alpha felt having a doctoral degree would set her apart from the competition. Bravo and Hotel desired civilian employment that required a doctorate. Bravo shared, "I wanted to teach a class at a command that officers take to get joint-ness. It's taught at a senior level perspective on doctrine and tactics from a joint perspective. It's taught by doctorates." Other participants felt a doctorate would sharpen their skill sets and interests that began while serving the military. The participants' personal goals of increasing civilian opportunities, and whether intrinsic or extrinsic, motivated them to persist to completion in their DE doctoral programs and provided them a sense of goal accomplishment.

A new culture. SDT (1985) is concerned with how individuals orient themselves toward or away from social environments. Military members are exposed to diverse environments, cultures, and communities while serving. These experiences provide military members opportunities to learn from and impact others around them. The participants' positive military experiences included a career of exposure to diverse environments and people. For example, the participants served an average of 23 years in the military. The maximum number of years served was 28 years. Participants traveled the world, developed and used the latest technology, and worked with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. Charlie said, "I got to meet people, I got to see places, and I got to do things that I would never have had the opportunity to do in any other 20-year history." Golf said, "I had so many educational opportunities." India's Air Force unit gave her the nickname "Oh My God Girl" because it was a phrase she would constantly say while experiencing things for the first time. All participants described having exposure to and

strong bonds with fellow military members. Some participants described relationships with mentors who they remain in contact with today. Delta shared,

My first mentor was my commanding officer of my first ship—the first African American 4-star admiral in the Navy. I was a young petty officer. He called me in his state room and asked why I wasn't an officer. He watched out for me throughout my entire career.

Exposure to diverse environments, cultures, and communities provided opportunities for participants to experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness while serving; however, some of these opportunities did not come without a cost. For example, participants experienced difficult leaders in their command, were deployed and separated from their families, and experienced combat ($n = 4$). Ready to serve post 9/11, India was reluctant to leave her three small children. Charlie expressed still feeling guilt 17 years later as he was not present to see his first child born due to deployment. Regardless of the negative impacts of exposure to diverse environments, cultures, and communities, all participants described their military careers as rewarding and their sacrifices as worth it.

Military training and experiences expose military members to unfamiliar environments, cultures, and communities that can be both rewarding and thwarting. These military experiences provided the participants with the ability to seek out familiarity in an unfamiliar environment (i.e., a new culture) when they entered their DE doctoral programs. For example, Alpha “looked for guidance and directives for the program and followed them to the letter.” Much like a military member leaning on his or her unit to execute a mission, Bravo leaned on his cohort for encouragement and support. Bravo shared, “We stayed in touch constantly. We were conspiring with each other at every stage.” Foxtrot connected with a professor at his university with whom

he served for three years. This professor provided Foxtrot motivation to persist by staying in touch with him throughout his dissertation stage and introduced Foxtrot to his chair. Due to their abilities to succeed within diverse environments and communities while serving, these participants had the self-determination to acclimate to a new culture, specifically, their DE doctoral program environment.

Flexibility and autonomy of the DE structure and program type. Military veteran students are participating in DE. Results from a Student Veterans of America (2016) census survey reported that 66% of respondents (i.e., military veteran students) had taken online classes at some point in their academic journey and 8% took all classes online. From that same census survey, 5% of military veteran students were working toward a doctorate (Student Veterans of America, 2016). To understand what and how military veterans are experiencing DE doctoral programs, this study focused on DE where 80% to 100% of course content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Participants ($n = 6$) explained their primary reason for choosing a DE doctoral program was the flexibility. Flexibility for these participants meant setting their own hours for studying, designating family time around deadlines, and having the ability to travel for their civilian jobs. Alpha stated, “I chose a DE program because of the flexibility of being in a job and traveling and being able to work from home or other locations without having to be on campus.” In addition, Alpha scheduled coursework around her career and family time. Alpha shared, “I did a lot of my school work at work before everyone got in and then after working hours and then on the weekends.” Foxtrot explained he did not need the structure of a classroom to motivate him to persist: “I’m much more of a self-learner. I don’t need to sit in the class.” He took his undergraduate courses while serving in Alaska at a satellite campus on base where he met with

classmates and instructors one night a week. The remainder of content was delivered online. This experience helped Foxtrot decide to choose a DE structure to complete his doctoral degree. Like Alpha, Hotel chose DE to pursue his doctorate to “exercise considerable control over my work schedule.” Hotel explained that military veterans considering a doctoral program should base their decision on the conduciveness of a doctoral program to his or her occupation and operational commitments to the military. Hotel felt he would be more successful at completing his doctorate as a civil servant as he would not deploy or travel as often. India chose DE to have flexibility around time with her family. Prior experiences with a DE program provided India the confidence to choose the same structure to earn her doctorate.

Participants ($n = 3$) described their experiences with the course load under the DE structure. For example, Echo had such a positive experience her first semester that she decided to take two courses her second semester. She realized this was a mistake. Echo recalled one course had a reasonable pace; however, her Ethics course was extremely difficult with a heavy workload. Echo shared, “Between work and classes, I was depleted when all was said and done. I learned a very valuable lesson.” She decided to take one class at a time no matter how long it would take her to finish the DE doctoral program. Like Echo, Foxtrot found his first course to be a “breeze.” He had the perception that the DE doctoral program would be a “cakewalk,” so he registered for two courses the following semester: Theory and Research in Educational Psychology and Theory of Historical and Society Foundations of Education. Like Echo, Foxtrot realized he made a detrimental mistake. Foxtrot explained, “I found nearly every waking hour I was not at my job was devoted to passing these classes. I realized two classes simultaneously was too much.” Like Echo, Foxtrot took one course at a time until he completed his coursework phase. Hotel experienced the same struggle as Echo and Foxtrot. Earning a 4.0 GPA, Hotel

decided to take two courses at once. Working fulltime and traveling proved to be too much for Hotel to maintain a 4.0 GPA. His GPA dropped to 3.8 and he was never able to bring it back up. Hotel decided from that experience he would complete his DE doctoral program at a slower pace—one course at a time. These participants' experiences with the DE structure determined their pacing for the remainder of their doctoral journey until successful completion.

Participants ($n = 3$) chose a DE doctoral program for reasons other than flexibility as they were interested in the program type. For example, Golf researched several DE doctoral programs before making a decision. He researched universities that staffed military veteran advisors. He researched universities that promoted the Yellow Ribbon Program, a program that allows approved academic institutions to partially or fully fund tuition and fee expenses that exceed established thresholds under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. In addition, Golf was interested in organizational leadership. This interest and Golf's research on military affiliations narrowed his search down to two universities, one in which he decided to enroll.

When deciding to pursue her doctorate, Echo was against online learning; however, fate would have it that the only option while stationed in Guam was DE to attain her doctorate in audiology. Echo found the structure of the DE doctoral program easy to navigate with its online discussions, weekly meetings, and assignments. She felt the DE doctoral program provided a realistic timeline to complete reading and writing assignments. The DE doctoral program allowed Echo to choose the order in which she would complete her courses. In addition, Echo found her battle rhythm with the structure of her degree completion plan. "Each class was six weeks. You push yourself for six weeks and enjoy the two-week break."

Charlie was more interested in the DE doctoral program and its relevance to his career pursuits than the structure in which he would attain his degree. He focused on finding a

traditional doctoral program, but after researching programs, he found DE doctoral programs to be most relevant to his career pursuits. Both Echo and Charlie forewent their initial plans of participating in traditional doctoral programs for a DE path. Both participants explained it was the right choice. Echo shared, “I was skeptical that I could learn as well at a DE program compared to the classroom. I was wrong on that. It was amazing. I got to know the students and professors. It was well worth it.” Charlie expressed the same sentiment: “They [professors] were actually practitioners inside of the field that I wanted to work within. It really was very, very good.”

Ryan and Deci (2017) postulated an individual is autonomous when he or she is wholeheartedly engaged in an activity. The DE structure and program type not only provided flexibility, but also opportunities for autonomy enabling the participants to pursue dissertation topics and research in which they were passionate. Each participant chose a field of doctoral study that related to his or her military focus while serving. In addition, each participant worked on an independently-selected research topic that contributed to his or her professional practice. Echo shared, “The curriculum was relevant and meaningful to me.” Hotel stated, “You have to have a passion and curiosity for your subject.” In addition, some participants chose a dissertation topic that related to an issue that would benefit them beyond the military. Golf stated, “My topic had to be something I was interested in. It had to be something that possibly had a work angle to it for me, and then it had to be something that nobody else was publishing.” Charlie provided the following advice to other military veterans: “Make sure you are interested in your research area. If you are interested, you will be motivated and excited as your research comes together in the next stage.” These participants experienced flexibility and autonomy in their DE structure and doctoral programs.

“How”: Applying Lessons Learned in Military Training and Experiences to the DE Doctoral Program

Equally important for understanding what the participants experienced is to understand how they experienced this study’s central phenomenon—motivation to persist. This study’s findings revealed how the participants applied the lessons they learned while serving to their DE doctoral journey. The composite structural themes below shed light on how the participants experienced motivation to persist by using strategies learned from their military training and experiences. Those six structural themes are (a) engaging a support system, (b) overcoming obstacles, (c) goal setting and accomplishment, (d) navigating the DE dissertation process, (e) using military experiences to determine the dissertation topic, and (f) discovering and pursuing passion.

Engaging a support system. While the importance of having a support system to be motivated to persist may be essential for all doctoral students, what is unique to the military veteran student body is that they are trained while serving to rely on and contribute to a support system to succeed (i.e., execute a mission). The participants of this study described their experiences with engaging a support system. Golf’s training to think and act as a unit was so ingrained that he used the word “we” continuously during the semi-structured interview when describing his military and doctoral experiences. When I asked him about his use of this pronoun, he chuckled and admitted that his military training was the reason. Golf stated, “I don’t think there ever was just me doing something. There was always a team and I was always part of something bigger.” Charlie described being part of and engaging with a support system from an enlisted member’s perspective:

Specific functions are performed by specific individuals who are best equipped to perform them. How to manage a team is best undertaken by understanding what people's strong suits are and using those to the advantage of accomplishing whatever the larger goal is. . . . [K]now where those around talents lie and draw upon those talents to best help you get through those objectives or goals along the way.

Charlie explained he used the same military experience to develop a support system in his DE doctoral program. Hotel described engaging a support system as helping others while serving: "My last tour in San Diego, I was teaching independent duty corpsmen on preventative medicine and public health. Students asked me to teach their other classes. That made my day, my year, my life. I knew then I'd have a career in education." Hotel's experience with cultivating a support system continued while in his DE doctoral program: "I remember my first year I had a lot of satisfying experiences with fellow students. They would tell me I really helped them get through a course. That was inspiring for me to be a college professor." Foxtrot engaged with a DE professor and credited this DE professor with getting him through one of his toughest moments during his doctoral journey, "I had serious thoughts of walking away. My professor stayed after class and chatted with me until almost midnight. She helped me think through my research idea and frame it into something that might work." Foxtrot fostered this relationship throughout the remainder of his doctoral journey. India's support system was her chair. Today, India remains in contact with her chair as he continues to help her conduct and publish research as well as assist her with career opportunities in education. Alpha described how she now uses her doctoral degree as a way to engage with and contribute to her community as well as encourage others to earn their doctoral degrees. Alpha shared, "I speak at conferences and so I get to meet people outside of what I do. I do a lot of networking and things often." On

encouraging others, Alpha explained how she gives back: “I’ve been able to help them find what helps motivate others with their research. . . tell them ‘if I can do this you can do this’ and ‘let me know how you’re doing.’” Several participants spoke about family members who encouraged them when they were not motivated. Foxtrot shared, “My wife provided unconditional support and positive reinforcement that I could do it, but also would support me if I decided to discontinue.”

The participants experienced the military within a unit—a tightknit group where each member was integral for completing specific tasks, but together completed a mission. The connection to others and having a sense of belonging to society seemed deeply rooted in all of the participants. Golf shared,

I’ve been out of the military now for 11 years. And one of the biggest things I miss is the team. I miss the other guys that I worked with. I miss them and I miss having a big mission responsibility. You don’t get the opportunity to do that again.

These participants benefited from experiencing a support system while serving and were able to apply what they learned from these military experiences to engage support systems within their DE doctoral programs that fostered their motivation to persist.

Overcoming obstacles. While all participants had definite moments of self-doubt and Alpha dropped out temporarily, all participants expressed that in spite of obstacles and self-doubt they knew they would complete their doctoral mission. Statements such as “I can do this. I want to do this” were common among all participants. This confidence led them to overcome obstacles and be competent—when an individual feels effective and capable with respect to a goal and is energized (Ryan & Deci, 2017). They explained that their experience overcoming

obstacles while serving provided them with the confidence needed to overcome obstacles while in their DE doctoral programs.

Several participants' strategies for overcoming obstacles could be strategies any doctoral student may use in DE. For example, Foxtrot explained his strategy for overcoming obstacles was to continue to remember the reason he started the doctoral program. Hotel echoed this same strategy explaining that "knowing up front that there would be challenges that are coming, it is important to verify my motivation was going to be sound enough to get me through the process." What is so unique and fascinating about the military veteran are the values instilled from serving that provides him or her the motivation to overcome obstacles. Hotel explained, "I strongly believe that the perseverance I learned during my [military] career helped me to know that I could complete the program, no matter the obstacle." Foxtrot shared, "My military profession instilled in me a never give up attitude, so quitting was just not an option." Bravo reflected on the time it took to complete his doctoral journey, "Every hurdle [of the DE doctoral program] seemed to take months to overcome. I never considered giving up." The phrase "never give up" was a part of all the participants' language when describing overcoming obstacles. While Golf credited his father for this value, other participants credited their military training. Golf stated,

So, if you say you're going to do something, you find a way to do it. I think that's probably a military value. Understanding the mission and the war was important, so as military officers we have a set of values. We have a mission and purpose...I saw what I was doing as important, and so it was worth the sacrifice.

Participants explained they were always faced with obstacles, however, their military training prepared to them to accept obstacles as part of the process. As Echo stated, "Serving in the military, representing your country, working and living in other countries, those of us that

have served and continue to serve understand this better than anyone.” These participants demonstrated a unique ability to overcome obstacles during their DE doctoral journey by leaning on their military experiences.

Goal setting and accomplishment. Participants joined the military to accomplish a goal, and they believed the military would provide opportunities for them to reach their goals. What differed among these participants were their goals. In addition, some goals were intrinsically driven, some extrinsically driven. For example, Bravo desired employment. He believed serving the military would provide him economic security; therefore, he was extrinsically driven. Hotel and Charlie felt they needed maturity. Hotel was making unproductive life choices, and Charlie did not know what he wanted to do with his life. Each joined the military hoping to learn more about themselves and their capabilities; they were intrinsically motivated. Alpha, Golf, and India desired an education and felt the military would provide the means for them to reach this goal. Extrinsically motivated, Alpha wanted an education to be able to provide for her family. Intrinsically motivated, Golf and India wanted an education because they loved learning. Another intrinsically motivated participant, Delta, had a burning desire that started at the age of 12 while sailing on the Great Lakes to be a sailor for the Navy. Lastly, Echo wanted to focus her attention on healthy and productive goals.

Some participants entered the military having not completed any postsecondary education. It was through ongoing opportunities the military provided that encouraged these participants to further their education. Hotel explained that while he never had to study in high school to make high grades, his desire to continue his education after high school waned. He explained, “I had no study habits. I had no desire.” Hotel joined the military. The military provided Hotel an opportunity to become an instructor, but with the requirement of earning an

associate degree. Hotel enjoyed teaching and was therefore motivated to fulfill the military's requirement. He shared, "I was an instructor for war with the Air Force. I did that my whole career and I really enjoyed that and I enjoyed learning." Charlie entered an undergraduate program on a Navy Reserves Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) scholarship before joining the military. Disheartened by his undergraduate program experience, he dropped out his junior year and enlisted. Charlie shared,

I never wanted to go back to school again. I left school and I enlisted and I went on active duty and then I guess four or five years after I had the opportunity to go back to shore duty and for the next 20 years every opportunity that I had when I was on shore duty I found myself in school and 20 some years later, this is where I sit.

Charlie earned his doctoral degree in training and performance improvement and today is a performance analyst for a consulting firm.

Participants credited their military training and experiences with instilling core values, which helped them develop skills to reach their academic goals. They described executing a mission as a requirement that was part of their military training from the first day of service. Delta explained,

It starts in boot camp. We are given so many things that have to be accomplished in a short period of time and they have to be done properly. If you don't do it properly, someone can get hurt. If you're not serious about what you are doing, there is that safety application to it. Get it done in a proper manner. Don't falsify information. Don't take short cuts. It's an everyday skill that you're mentored from day one.

Hotel shared, "The Navy core values of honor, courage, and commitment hold true to seeing your journey to the end." These early military experiences of setting and accomplishing goals

continued throughout their military careers and carried over into their civilian work and DE doctoral journeys. For example, Charlie translated his military training to his DE doctoral program as one who sets a long-term goal, divides the work into incremental stages, and finds the resources to accomplish each stage. He described accomplishing goals as knowing what the end state looks like and knowing the steps to get there. Bravo explained that his military training provided him many opportunities to learn how to set long-term and short-term goals. Over the course of his 28-year military career, Bravo experienced 13 to 14 tours. Each tour presented new challenges to overcome. The goal was to not only complete a tour or mission, but to improve that particular environment—“to make your mark, make the change you need.” Bravo applied this strategy to his DE doctoral program. Delta explained, “As military members, we have time management skills, we are good at multi-tasking, and we are very serious about finishing what we undertake.” Delta reflected on a Navy phrase he applied to his doctoral journey: “Steady as she goes. Stay focused.” Hotel shared, “Don’t focus on speed or pace; focus on the end goal.”

Common among all participants was a deep regard for finishing a task, completing a mission, or accomplishing a goal. Whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, the military provided the participants opportunities to accomplish their goals. As a result, these participants experienced rich careers while serving and as civilians. The ultimate goal for any student motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program is to finish. With attrition rates for doctoral students hovering consistently high at 50% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015) and attrition rates in DE 10% to 20% higher than in traditional education programs (Kennedy et al., 2015; Terrell, 2005), accomplishing this goal is no easy task; however, these participants from a population classically defined as nontraditional demonstrated that their experiences with

accomplishing goals while serving in the military developed skill sets needed to accomplish goals while persisting in their DE doctoral programs.

Navigating the DE dissertation process. The dissertation phase is the most difficult phase in the doctoral journey (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014) and is when motivation to persist is tested. It is the phase that requires the doctoral student to become self-directed (Ponton, 2014) and to work independently on a research topic that will contribute to his or her research field. Bravo described this phase as “the most daunting” as he did not fully understand the dissertation process. He explained further, “I also noticed that many of my cohorts from our first residency dropped out. There were only four of us remaining from our class of 22.” Bravo found his last residency and chair to be an integral part of providing support and guidance needed to refine his research during the dissertation phase. In addition, Bravo learned that choosing a chair who is interested in the dissertation topic and understands DE doctoral program policies and processes allows for a much smoother dissertation phase. India described her frustrations with the DE dissertation process: “At times I wanted someone to tell me what to do. I was used to following orders.” India leaned on her military-instilled characteristic (i.e., discipline) to help her remain motivated to persist during the dissertation process. India advised other military veterans on how to navigate the DE dissertation process:

We must be self-starters and willing to defend the decisions we make along our path of research. We must be teachable, and yet able to firmly state our thoughts when asked to explain or expand on our statements or claims. We can pull on our trainings on respect, but we must also tap into or strengthen some new skills.

Using military experiences to determine the dissertation topic. When describing the history of intrinsic motivation, Ryan and Deci (2017) noted John Dewey’s view on interest and

explained interest is “spawned by novelty and challenge in relation to that which is already familiar or known” (p. 104) and provides the energy needed in strong environmental forces. Research recommends that doctoral students lean toward research topics they find inherently interesting (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). While this study’s data collection did not include questions about participants’ dissertation topics specifically, during the semi-structured interview almost all of the participants described that their experiences selecting their dissertation topics were based on military experiences they found novel or interesting. For example, Delta described using his dissertation as a platform to solve a problem he became aware of while first entering the military. His initial motivation for attaining a doctoral degree was to be the first active duty enlisted member with a doctorate; however, his motivation changed once he determined his dissertation topic. Delta explained while taking the military entrance exam (i.e., ASVAB), he was shocked when he qualified for nuclear engineering as he admitted using elementary mathematic strategies to answer test questions. At that moment he realized the ASVAB needed improvement. Twenty-three years in the military and almost four years persisting in his doctoral program, Delta not only used his dissertation as a platform for addressing issues with the ASVAB but also contributed to improving it. Today, the ASVAB includes a cognitive test section from the efforts of this participant’s dissertation research.

Like Delta, Charlie discovered an issue in the military he wanted to explore through his dissertation. While serving, Charlie earned an undergraduate degree in workforce education and training, a master’s in human resources, and was an instructor at a training command. Charlie enrolled in a DE doctoral program that focused on training and performance because this area was his focused interest while he served. As he began his doctoral research, Charlie was struck by an article he read on the military’s enormous training budget and its primary use for solving

problems. Connecting with this problem from his military experience and narrowing his dissertation topic, Charlie's research study focused on talent in the military organization by looking at the relationship between leadership practices and successful mentoring relationships among women in the Navy. Today, Charlie's civilian work has allowed him to extend his research to men and women.

Foxtrot explained his dissertation topic really interested him and motivated him to persist. His advice to other military veterans was to "make sure you are interested in your research area. If you are interested, you will be motivated and excited as your research comes together in the next stage." Foxtrot, once a young student with no motivation or good study habits turned Air Force instructor, developed and validated an instrument to measure students' opinions of DE persistence as part of his dissertation work and earned the Quantitative Dissertation of the Year award at his institution.

Discovering and pursuing passion. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that the term *meaning* is an important concept within SDT and has two definitions. One is when people reflect on life experiences and the degree to which they feel a sense of satisfaction. The second definition is concerned with whether people see themselves as having a purpose. Ryan and Deci (2017) assert that individuals experience meaning only to the extent that they experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Intrinsic motivation guides individuals toward interesting experiences that promote growth and provide meaning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). All but one participant (i.e., Echo) found their passions while serving; Echo knew her passion prior to entering. What is so fascinating about this study's participants is that they entered the military to satisfy a specific need, whether it be economic security, gaining maturity, or earning an education. Through their military experiences, these participants gained more than what they

were seeking originally. Tour by tour, mission by mission, they pursued education opportunities, led teams, developed curricula, and encountered diverse cultures and settings. They took advantage of all the military had to offer. They discovered their niche, pursued educational opportunities to help them flourish, and used their dissertations as a platform for addressing military issues about which they were passionate. DeCharms' (1968) argued exploration and curiosity are the ingredients for self-determination. Hotel echoed that argument by explaining,

What will keep you motivated will be your curiosity over your topic of study, how it unfolds through your scholarly review, what it reveals through your data analysis, how persuasively and impartially you report on your findings, and most importantly, what contribution your work will make to society.

Today, all participants are involved in civilian work reflecting their military careers and their doctoral journeys. Hotel, who entered the military because he had no other life direction, explained the importance of not taking his military and doctoral experiences for granted: "The biggest caveat. Don't misuse it. Don't waste it. Put it to good use for others. It's not about you. It's about contributing." Hotel was an instructor for the military, earned an EdD, and is now building learning programs at a university. Alpha, who entered the military initially to provide for her family, explained, "Think about life after the military and life of the military. . . look at that as you continue to grow. It's just such a great opportunity." These participants found meaning while serving that translated to their DE doctoral journey and is a part of what they do in their civilian work today.

Currently, all participants are participating in civilian opportunities and interests that were the result of or encouraged and supported by their military and DE doctoral experiences. Charlie shared, "The first time that I really thought I knew what I wanted to do when I grew up I

was working at a training command standing in front of the classroom building curricula.” Golf said,

I’ve always been interested in leadership. My first leadership classes were at the Naval Academy in 1977. My military career kept me interested in organizational leadership. I would definitely have come from the seeds of leadership from the military and in the courses I took at the undergraduate level.

Foxtrot was an instructor while serving. He wanted to continue teaching after retirement. He had applied for several educational technology teaching jobs when he realized he needed a doctorate. He shared, “That was one of the reasons why I got my doctorate.” Foxtrot earned an EdD and is now providing instructional system design services to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Alpha, experienced in strategic operations, was the team leader for rebuilding the Navy’s communication center. She explained how she used her skill sets to rebuild the center while being the only female and in charge of military personnel with higher ranks: “So I dealt with these guys and they weren’t used to women. I let them choose which things they did instead of assigning them.” As a result of Alpha’s work leading her team to complete this mission, she was selected as an officer. Later, Alpha entered the School of Business Administration where she now holds a doctorate and is a performance analyst for a consulting firm, speaks at conferences on operational excellence, and is writing a book on women in leadership. Charlie stated, “The connections I made along the way, both through school and the military played a significant role in finding what has turned out to be my current job for the past 10 years.” Prior military experiences led to decisions to enter and complete DE doctoral programs in areas of interest that carried on after retirement. All participants were able

to hone their passions while serving and while persisting in their doctoral journeys; these passions became their lifelong pursuits.

Central Question

What are the motivational experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program?

The central research question was designed to describe military veterans' motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Three theoretical concepts informed this study: (a) autonomy, (b) competence, and (c) relatedness. For example, autonomy was present in that participants' interests while serving translated to participants' interests in their field of study in their DE doctoral programs. Competence was present in that the participants' abilities to accomplish goals were strengthened while serving, and participants leaned on their abilities to accomplish goals in their DE doctoral programs. Lastly, relatedness was present in that the participants experienced working within a military unit, and these experiences translated to participants' working with cohorts and dissertation committees to be motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness were present throughout the participants' military careers and academic journeys—experiences that supported self-determination. The participants demonstrated self-determination by entering into a military environment which prepared them for entering and succeeding in the academic environment.

Sub-question One

What are the motivational military experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program?

Sub-Question 1 was designed to describe military experiences that motivated military veterans to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that need

satisfaction experienced over time predicts well-being, high performance, and human flourishing. All participants flourished in their military careers. While serving, the participants advanced their military careers, led others, developed strategies for executing a mission, and participated in education. They leaned on their skill sets (i.e., time management, leadership, and discipline) to set and accomplish academic goals. Overcoming obstacles is part of any mission. Participants learned through these military experiences and with their units not only to overcome obstacles but also to set goals along the way. The participants described a deeply ingrained value of never giving up no matter how difficult the mission. The military organization provided the participants opportunities to experience support systems through their unit and chain of command. These experiences fostered self-determination for the participants, who leaned on these motivating military experiences to be motivated in their DE doctoral programs.

Sub-question Two

What are the motivational DE experiences of military veterans who persist to doctoral completion? Sub-Question 2 was designed to describe DE experiences that motivated military veterans to persist in their doctoral programs. The participants entered their DE doctoral programs equipped with their unique military training and experiences. Participants experienced autonomy in their DE doctoral programs. For example, participants found the course phase of the DE doctoral program the least difficult phase. They self-regulated their time by balancing assignment deadlines with family responsibilities. In addition, the participants expressed the importance of being truly engaged in the dissertation topic as interest in and value of their work helped pushed them through times when they were struggling with motivation. Having an interest in the dissertation topic is applicable to all doctoral students and has been cited as a factor for motivation in research studies focused on persistence (Madhlangobe et al., 2014).

What was unique is the spark from which the participants' dissertation topics originated. This study's participants gained an appreciation for and interest in their dissertation topic while serving. Several participants saw a need from which the military could benefit, and these participants decided to use their dissertations as the platform for addressing that need.

Competence is an individual's need to feel effective and capable with respect to a goal (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Common among all participants was their goal-driven approach to attaining a doctoral degree. All participants credited service in the military as both instilling and encouraging competence. Foxtrot shared in his advice to other military veterans, "Realize that becoming an independent researcher is a huge part of earning your doctorate. Seek advice and input and be open to critiques. This is nothing that you haven't experienced in the military." Each participant described competence when they leaned on their "never give up" attitudes during challenging moments. Hotel credits the Navy for shaping his persistence while in his DE doctoral program: "The one thing that helped me is that I am persistent. When I say I'm going to do something, I do it." All participants overcame obstacles while serving and translated those experiences to be able to overcome obstacles in their doctoral journeys. India shared, "When learning seemed hard, I reminded myself that leaving home at 18 and entering into a work that was alien was hard too and yet it got through it and I even enjoyed the journey."

An individual experiences relatedness when he or she is contributing to a cause and integral to social organizations (Ryan & Deci, 2017). All participants described experiencing relatedness while serving as well as while persisting in their DE doctoral programs. What was unique among each participant was the way in which he or she experienced relatedness. For example, Foxtrot experienced relatedness by connecting with another military veteran to discuss ways of overcoming obstacles in his DE doctoral program. Golf experienced relatedness by

mentoring fellow students in his cohort. Alpha described experiencing relatedness by using her expertise gained while serving and through her doctoral program to speak to organizations. While residencies took participants away from their families, they found this DE requirement very beneficial as it not only provided connections with faculty and students but allowed the participants flexibility to manage their time to be able to dive deep into their courses without interruptions. Yet, each participant believed family support was essential to their motivation and ultimate success.

Summary

Thorough and repeated analyses of data prior to the interviews and using those analyses along with the interview protocol provided rich data that captured the essence of the participants' experiences with motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Five textural themes emerged from the participants' experiences: (a) a support system, (b) obstacles, (c) goal accomplishment, (d) a new culture, and (e) flexibility and autonomy of the DE structure and program type. Six structural themes emerged demonstrating how the participants experienced this study's central phenomenon: (a) engaging a support system, (b) overcoming obstacles, (c) goal setting and accomplishment, (d) navigating the DE dissertation process, (e) using military experiences to determine the dissertation topic, and (f) discovering and pursuing passion. The participants experienced the military within a unit—a tightknit group where each member was integral for completing specific tasks, but together completed a mission. Trained to rely on and contribute to a support system to succeed (i.e., execute a mission) while serving benefited participants as they understood the importance of relying on a support system in their DE doctoral programs to be motivated to persist. The connection to others and having a sense of belonging to society seemed deeply rooted in all of the participants. While each participant had

definite moments of self-doubt, participants expressed that in spite of obstacles and self-doubt, they knew they would complete their doctoral mission. Participants described military training and experiences that prepared them to accept and overcome obstacles as part of the DE doctoral process. Participants demonstrated that their experience with accomplishing goals while serving in the military contributed to skill sets needed to accomplish goals while persisting in their DE doctoral programs. They held a deep regard for finishing a task, completing a mission, or accomplishing a goal. Tour by tour, mission by mission, they pursued education opportunities, led teams, developed curricula, and encountered diverse cultures and settings. They took advantage of all the military had to offer. The participants' exposure to unfamiliar environments and cultures while serving their country gave them the skill sets needed to navigate unfamiliar territory in the DE doctoral environment. Lastly, all participants pursued civilian opportunities and interests that were the result of or encouraged and supported by their military and DE doctoral experiences. They found their niche and used their dissertations as a platform for addressing military issues about which they felt passionate. Today, all participants are involved in civilian work that is a reflection of their military careers and their doctoral journeys.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand and give a voice to military veterans' motivational experiences as they persisted to complete DE doctoral programs in the United States. My research study focused on participants' motivational experiences while serving in the US military as well as the motivational experiences in their DE programs that resulted in their persistence and ultimate attainment of their doctoral degrees. Data from the demographics questionnaires, timelines, advice letters, and semi-structured interviews answered this study's research questions by unveiling participants' lived experiences and their perceptions. Chapter Five provides a summary of findings, a discussion of those findings, implications of the study, delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The participants experienced autonomy, competence, and relatedness during their military service, providing them the motivation needed to persist in their DE doctoral programs. Autonomy was fostered by interests discovered while serving, which translated to interests in their field of study. Competence needed to accomplish goals while executing a mission translated to accomplishing goals in participants' DE doctoral programs. Experiencing relatedness with a military unit provided participants the skill sets needed to engage with support systems within their DE doctoral programs. What they experienced while serving (i.e., a support system, obstacles, goal accomplishment) provided participants with strategies (i.e., engaging a support system, overcoming obstacles, setting and accomplishing goals) for how to be motivated to persist in their DE doctoral programs.

Discussion

This section discusses the study findings in relationship to the empirical and theoretical literature. The section on empirical literature explains how this study extends existing research on military veterans and higher education. The section on theoretical literature demonstrates this study's support for SDT (1985) and its constructs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—in a military and DE doctoral program environment. The section on empirical implications provides researchers with considerations when conducting research on military veteran students and their academic achievements. Lastly, the section on practical implications provides DE administrators, DE dissertation committee members, and military veteran students recommendations and strategies concerning motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Empirical Literature

Researchers have investigated military veteran students in higher education (Alschuler & Yarab; 2016; Ford & Vignare, 2015; Gregg et al., 2016; Mentzer et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2014; Richardson et al., 2015); however, there is very little to no research describing military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. While existing research provides a foundation from which to build for understanding this population, this study extends existing research. Current research on the military veteran student combined with studies discussed in previous chapters is worth noting to gain insight into this population and determine ways to encourage their motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs.

Current literature suggests military learners draw upon deeply engrained military experiences such as self-discipline, mission-first focus, and reliance on fellow military learners (Ford & Vignare, 2015). For example, Gregg et al. (2016) conducted a phenomenological study to describe military veterans' ($N = 13$) experiences transitioning from the military and into

postsecondary education. The participants described translating their skill sets gained while serving to the academic setting. Some of those skill sets included discipline and accountability (Gregg et al., 2016). In addition, the participants in Gregg et al.'s (2016) study shared that the discipline they learned while serving was essential to establishing routines and structure in their coursework schedule. This theme in Gregg et al.'s (2016) study echoes this study's theme with accomplishing goals. For example, participants in this study described having self-discipline and relating their coursework and dissertation phases as a two-year military duty with setting goals and timelines in which to accomplish those goals. Unlike the participants for this study, Gregg et al.'s (2016) participants described the relief of not having military stressors such as putting their subordinates' needs above their own. The participants for this study differed from Gregg et al.'s (2016) in that participants had positive experiences being accountable to others while serving. For example, Charlie, Foxtrot, and Hotel enjoyed being instructors while serving. Hotel enjoyed mentoring his students especially.

Another theme that emerged from Gregg et al.'s (2016) study, but differed from this study, was military veteran students seeking other military veteran students for social support. Unlike Gregg et al.'s participants, Bravo did not tell his fellow military members of his goal of attaining a doctoral degree; however, he leaned heavily on his relationships with non-military students cultivated during his residences. Charlie and Golf sought encouragement and support from others who had similar interests in their fields, regardless of affiliations. While Golf found it important that his chosen academic institution have military veterans on staff, he explained that one of his most meaningful relationships was with a non-military student with whom he collaborated on several projects. Delta leaned on military members, family, and friends for motivation to persist as he attained his doctoral degree via correspondence. He named this

support group a “spider network.” Foxtrot was the only participant who purposefully sought out a fellow military veteran for support. Foxtrot demonstrated the need to connect with another military veteran, and his description of the relationship’s importance was clear and instrumental in his motivation to persist. A contributing factor for the differences between Gregg et al.’s study and this study may be that the participants for Gregg et al.’s study were undergraduates in a traditional setting and this study included only DE doctoral students.

Also significant to understanding military veterans’ experiences in higher education is Olsen et al.’s (2014) mixed methods study conducted on active and reserve military members ($N = 10$). Like Gregg et al.’s (2016) study, Olsen et al.’s study found that military veterans perceive self-discipline learned while serving to be a strength in the academic domain. Olsen et al.’s participants, both undergraduate ($n = 8$) and graduate students ($n = 2$), perceived leadership and teamwork skill sets and having new perspectives and valuable experiences as strengths as well. Olsen et al.’s findings aligned with this study’s themes, specifically overcoming obstacles, goal setting and accomplishment, and a new culture. Olsen et al.’s study differs from this study in that Olsen et al. found their participants’ perceived challenges to be social interaction with other students, financial stress, and experiencing culture and/or role differences. The participants for this study did not share the same perceptions as Olsen et al.’s participants. For example, the participants for this study (i.e., Alpha and Bravo) fostered deep connections with their peers that lasted after doctoral completion. While financial stability was a factor for some participants (i.e., Alpha and Bravo) to join the military, none of the participants described financial stress as a challenge while participating in their DE doctoral programs. Lastly, this study’s participants did not note culture or role differences as challenges in their DE doctoral programs. Instead, each

participant described translating military experiences to their doctoral experiences, allowing them to internalize, connect with, and succeed in their DE doctoral programs.

Mentzer et al.'s (2015) study provided insight into understanding the correlation between financial, social, and academic supports to military veterans' ($N = 294$) persistence in their master's (80%) and doctoral programs (20%). Their findings indicated that of the three supports, academic support provided a significant contribution to military veterans' persistence. Mentzer et al.'s findings align with this study's findings in that my participants described being motivated to persist when they communicated and connected with faculty and students for academic support. For example, India described being part of a cohort that encouraged each cohort member to attain his or her doctoral degree. Foxtrot attributed his motivation to persist in his DE doctoral program to his dissertation chair, research consultant, and a faculty member who was a military veteran. Some participants ($n = 2$) described amotivation when academic support was lacking. For example, Alpha withdrew from her DE doctoral program on her first attempt due to communication gaps between her and her dissertation chair. Foxtrot had thoughts of dropping out of his DE doctoral program when he struggled to understand the dissertation process. While Mentzer et al. purported that financial, social, and academic support are all integral in student persistence, academic support is most significant. From a qualitative approach focused on motivation to persist, this research study's findings support Mentzer et al.'s findings in that academic support is significant to a student's academic success.

Another study that included the transferability of military experiences to academic experiences is that of Alschuler and Yarab (2016), who concluded from their phenomenological study of military veteran student graduates ($N = 7$) that military experience provides veteran students with strengths (i.e., structure, perseverance, and meeting deadlines) as well as

weaknesses (i.e., running out of government benefits, faculty and students' responses to military veteran students, and civilians ignorant about military culture and service). Alschuler and Yarab's study is similar to studies described previously in this section as well as this study in that military veteran students transfer military skill sets to the academic setting. Also, participants in Alschuler and Yarab's study indicated struggling without structure in their academic programs like the hierarchical structure they experienced while serving. India, a participant for this study, echoed Alschuler and Yarab's participants as she described often wanting someone to tell her what to do during the dissertation phase. A significant difference between Alschuler and Yarab's study and this study is that their participants were undergraduates. This study's participants experienced many years persisting in academic environments to achieve post-secondary degrees. In addition, while this study's participants experienced self-doubt at times, they overcame obstacles, increasing their self-efficacy and self-esteem by leaning on their deeply ingrained military values and mission-focused mindsets.

Theoretical Literature

Ryan and Deci's (2017) SDT provided a theoretical framework for this transcendental phenomenological study on military veterans' motivation to persist to doctoral completion. Ryan and Deci (2017) posited that motivational sources which support autonomy, competence, and relatedness result in well-being, performance, and persistence. Motivational sources can be completely intrinsic, rooted in personal values that drive personal satisfaction. Likewise, motivational sources can be extrinsic. There are varying degrees of extrinsic motivation that can positively impact autonomy, competence, and relatedness; however, a high degree of extrinsic motivation can be considered controlling to individuals and can negatively impact autonomy, competence, and relatedness. An extensive body of research indicates intrinsically motivated

students are more likely to persist in higher education than students who are extrinsically motivated (Goldman et al., 2017; Guiffrida et al., 2013; Williams & LeMire, 2011). The following sections demonstrate how this study aligns with and extends SDT (1985).

Military experiences and SDT. While Ryan and Deci's (2017) body of knowledge did not include military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs, this study demonstrates how the military environment is applicable to this theoretical framework. For example, Ryan and Deci (2017) argued that when an individual is autonomously motivated, his or her actions are self-regulated and that individual has opportunities for self-direction. Basic training, often called boot camp, prepares recruits physically, mentally, and emotionally to perform while they serve. It is considered an intense process that lasts eight to 12 weeks starting with a haircut and uniform issuance. Delta described boot camp as follows: "We are given so many things that have to be accomplished in a short period of time and they have to be done properly. If you don't do it properly, someone can get hurt." One may question whether a military environment such as basic training promotes autonomous motivation; however, one must consider why an individual is motivated to enter into the military knowing basic training will be his or her first experience. The military organization's goal during basic training is to strengthen individuals with tools necessary to execute a mission. Ryan and Deci (2000b) posited that specific goals give rise to specific actions. For example, Delta was intrinsically motivated to join the Navy. He dreamed of being a sailor. He believed his service in the military had a purpose and was important. Ryan and Deci (2000b) believed an individual can demonstrate high performance and a willingness to act if he or she internally accepts and values the task. Increased internalization of a goal or task increases persistence and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Foxtrot enlisted in the Air Force feeling no desire or motivation. He described his most

challenging military experience at the end of his basic training when he was assigned to a new para rescue program. Recalling during the semi-structured interview a series of extremely difficult mental and physical tests Foxtrot experienced while serving caused Foxtrot to display emotion that surprised him and demonstrated an impact on his life today. Out of 1,000 military members who started this intense program, Foxtrot was one of 28 who finished. This experience, while difficult, revealed Foxtrot's strength and persistence. Foxtrot's remaining military career was spent teaching this para rescue program to other airmen. He described this experience as something that not only changed his life but was God given. Delta and Foxtrot's experiences extend SDT (1985) in that their behaviors facilitated internalization that supported their autonomy, leading ultimately to self-determination in their military environment.

An individual experiences competence when he or she feels effective and capable with respect to a goal. Ryan and Deci (2000a) argued that optimal challenges provide support for competence. The military organization provided participants optimal challenges and satisfied their need for competence; this study's participants described experiences with optimal challenges and competence while serving. For example, Alpha noticed a distinct shift in her motivation when she became an officer. Prior to becoming an officer, Alpha described her military experiences as "going through the motions of doing the work." When she became an officer, Alpha realized she was in leadership positions where military members relied on her. She described these positive experiences that encouraged competence. Today, Alpha is contemplating writing a book on confidence and empowerment. Bravo recalled optimal challenges while serving the Navy: "I spent my career in the Navy as a Surface Warfare Officer—a life that was spent traveling, deploying, and long hours even when at shore organizations." He credits these challenging experiences with teaching him how to manage time,

complete training, and help others to be successful. Participants' experiences extend SDT (1985) in that military men and women benefit from optimal challenges the military provides, thereby increasing their competence.

An individual experiences relatedness when he or she feels a sense of belonging and significance to others, a group, or a culture. All participants described experiences with relatedness while serving. Delta recalled having many mentors who encouraged his success in the military by attending each of his promotions and remaining in contact with him. Likewise, Delta recalled being a mentor for other sailors: "I watched some of the young officers and sailors that I was able to mentor along the way. They are now Master Chiefs and Admirals. I've had the pleasure of pinning young officers who became Admirals." In her darkest hour battling depression, Echo described a military member participating in a doctoral program who encouraged her to enroll as a way to focus not only on improving her life but also on attaining an AuD. Echo described their frequent meetings: "We discussed best practices in diagnostic procedures and current treatment recommendations. He always saw me in academia and not a career naval officer." Participants described relationships they experienced while serving that were motivating and encouraging—nutriments that foster self-determination.

DE doctoral program experiences and SDT. SDT (1985) is a broad theory that examines many social contexts that encourage or thwart basic psychological needs. In addition, SDT (1985) is applicable to a variety of domains such as education, organizations, physical exercise, technology, and many more. This study explored and this section explains specific DE doctoral program experiences that extend SDT (1985).

As previously discussed, the autonomous nature of a DE doctoral program provides students with the opportunity to choose a dissertation topic in which they are interested. Each

participant described finding dissertation topics about which they were passionate. These topics arose from their military experiences and contributed to their field of knowledge. However, choosing a dissertation topic was a struggle for some participants ($n = 3$). For example, Bravo and Foxtrot chose broad topics they needed to narrow, and Golf considered many topics in which he was interested. Elements of the DE doctoral program supported these participants to refine their topics. For example, Bravo shared his experiences with his chair: “He really helped me focus my work in a specific area and warned me of obstacles.” Foxtrot felt he was “spinning his wheels for six months,” trying to understand the dissertation process and narrow his topic. While in his residency, Foxtrot connected with a professor who helped him with his research plan. In addition, Foxtrot connected with a military veteran professor, and they met periodically to discuss his progress on his dissertation. These connections guided Foxtrot to the right chair, whom Foxtrot credits for motivating him to persist. Golf took a year to decide on his dissertation topic; he understood he needed to have deeply rooted interest in his dissertation topic to succeed and did not mind taking the extra time to refine it. While the ability to choose one’s dissertation topic is an autonomy-supporting aspect of DE doctoral programs, these participants struggled somewhat; however, specific elements of their DE doctoral programs such as faculty support provided personal connections and strategies for overcoming their challenges.

The participants’ DE doctoral programs provided opportunities for optimal challenges and experiences with effectiveness, all leading to their motivations to persist. India described feeling less competent with her statistics knowledge to develop a sound quantitative study; however, she wanted to challenge herself, had access to large amounts of data, and decided to conduct a multiple linear regression study. She dug into the data and enjoyed the research process. The DE doctoral program elements provided India competence support to conduct

sound research. For example, her residencies allowed her to ask questions in person, increase her comfort level with technology, and form lasting relationships with faculty and students. For Charlie, it was his narrow field in his DE doctoral program that provided him competence support. Because his field was so narrow (i.e., training and performance improvement), he was able to connect with a small group of faculty and students who were like-minded and with whom he could have rich debates. These experiences provided optimal challenges for him to grow and learn.

The participants described many experiences with relatedness in their DE doctoral programs that encouraged them to be motivated to persist. Outside of encouragement from family, friends, and co-workers throughout their doctoral journeys, participants formed connections with faculty and students. Echo described experiences with other students while she was participating in her DE doctoral program and while stationed in Guam. Echo shared, “Amazing how folks were attending these courses from all over the world!” She described private online chats with students to maintain comradery and motivation. Delta experienced DE through correspondence as online programs were not developed at the time. Delta shared, “My interaction with faculty and staff were letters or phone call when pulling into port. The hardest thing was not collaborating with other students.” Delta overcame the absence of relatedness with faculty and students by reaching out to his fellow sailors. “Instead of collaborating with other students and I had questions, I went to other officers who had degrees. I would talk to them and banter with them.” Delta’s inability to connect with faculty and students and the ways he overcame these obstacles demonstrate the importance of providing military veteran students this opportunity in DE doctoral programs. Connection with others, especially faculty and students, is significant for military veterans to be motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs.

This study supports and extends SDT (1985) as it revealed many motivational sources that supported participants' experiences with autonomy, competence, and relatedness as they persisted in their DE doctoral programs. For example, Ryan and Deci's (2017) work in self-determination provides an understanding of how social and cultural dynamics influence individual's decisions and goals as they pertain to well-being, performance, and persistence. The participants described leaning on their military experiences to stay the course, overcome obstacles, and complete their doctoral journeys. The DE environment provided autonomy, competence, and relatedness support as well.

Implications

This study extends SDT (1985), specifically concerning goals and relationship concepts of SDT. In addition, it challenges current research that categorizes military veteran students as nontraditional and therefore suggests this student population is succeeding at a lower rate than their peers. This section provides recommendations for DE administrators to rethink the "veteran friendly" rhetoric of their institutions by realizing the significance military veteran students bring to their DE doctoral programs. It provides DE dissertation committees with recommendations and specific strategies to support this student population. Lastly, this section provides military veterans who are considering DE doctoral programs with strategies for academic success by leaning on their military backgrounds as a way of experiencing autonomy, competence, and relatedness in their doctoral pursuits.

Theoretical Implications

Research studies conducted on academic persistence and attrition are prevalent and are increasing (Metz, 2004; O'Neill & Thomson, 2013; Taylor et al., 2014). Tinto's (1987) theory of student integration is seminal in the study of persistence and attrition, suggesting that the

degree of academic integration and social integration predicted student persistence. Tinto (1993) focused on two academic outcomes: persistence and departure (Ford & Vignare, 2015). Ryan and Deci's (2017) decades of work on self-determination focuses on motivational behavior that drives persistence. Existing persistence and motivation theories are helpful for providing a foundational framework for studying academic persistence and motivation, yet there is still a lack of shared understanding and knowledge of how and why military veterans are motivated to persist. Getting at the heart of how and why military veteran students are motivated was essential for this study to understand their persistence.

SDT (1985) includes six sub-theories that apply to autonomy, competence, and relatedness; types of motivation (i.e., intrinsic and extrinsic); social contexts; and the roles specific behaviors play. Extending SDT, this research study's findings revealed that each of the six sub-theories applies to military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. The discussion on the six SDT sub-theories in Chapter 2 provides a description of each; however, goal contents theory (GCT) and relationships motivation theory (RMT) are described below as they apply specifically to this research study's findings.

One of the themes that emerged from the findings was goal accomplishment. GCT is concerned with how individuals organize their lives around goals and distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Ryan and Deci (2017) argue that intrinsic goals such as personal development positively impact performance and well-being whereas extrinsic goals such as recognition and wealth negatively impact performance and well-being. While Ryan and Deci (2017) validated that GCT is applicable to multiple domains such as health, physical activity, and academia, no studies to date have used GCT to analyze military veterans motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs. This study did not focus on GCT; however, participants described

accomplishing goals as motivation. Accomplishing goals was a significant part of participants' military training as they were tasked to execute a mission. Participants translated these experiences with accomplishing goals to accomplishing goals in their DE doctoral programs. Participants described the primary goal (i.e., mission) for entering their DE doctoral programs was to increase their civilian opportunities. The participants' primary goal of increasing civilian opportunities can be considered intrinsic and aligns with Ryan and Deci's (2017) argument that intrinsically motivated goals are more likely to be met. This study corroborates O'Neill and Thomson's (2013) literature review on GCT that indicated students who have clearly defined academic goals are more likely to reach their goals.

Another theme identified from the findings was engaging a support system. RMT is concerned with how relationships and interactions influence performance and well-being as well as the need to belong a group or contribute to an outside cause (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Through various research studies, Ryan and Deci (2017) argued RMT is applicable to a variety of social contexts such as virtual environments, close relationships, and academia; however, currently no research has been conducted on military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs using RMT. While this study did not focus on RMT, findings revealed participants leaned on various relationships and groups for motivation. Not only did this study reveal the importance of maintaining relationships to be motivated to persist, it also revealed amotivation when a support system did not exist. For example, Alpha withdrew from her DE doctoral program on her initial attempt during a time when she was experiencing her toughest deployment, was not able to communicate with her chair, and was experiencing a divorce. Of all the participants, Hotel took the most amount of time to complete his DE doctoral program—15 years. Hotel explained the reason for the time it took was that seven of those years were his most difficult as he experienced

significant family and health crises that led to depression. To a degree, this study's findings support Berry's (2017) qualitative case study on first and second-year doctoral students ($N = 20$) to explore how online doctoral students create learning communities. Berry's findings indicated students of online doctoral programs are not as impacted as their counterparts by social integration with faculty, but formed the following four social groups to create a sense of community: cohort, class groups, small peer groups, and study groups. This study revealed that participants relied not only on social groups but also connections with faculty. Closely aligning with this study is the study Madhlangobe et al. (2014) conducted on open distance learning (ODL) students' ($N = 11$) persistence, perseverance, and success in master's and doctoral programs. These participants' motivational factors included family relationships and backgrounds, supportive study groups that created a sense of belonging, regular contact with and support from academic tutors, and the ability to self-regulate to meet goals (Madhlangobe et al., 2014). As participants in this study demonstrated, Ryan and Deci (2017) explained that when individuals experience satisfaction in their relationships, they are more secure, authentic, and emotionally reliant, resulting in vitality and wellness.

Empirical Implications

Academic institutions characterize military veteran students as nontraditional (Cate, 2014). Horn (1996) argued that if a student had at least one of the following characteristics, he or she was considered a nontraditional student and was less likely to earn a degree compared to traditional students: delayed enrollment, part-time enrollment, financial independence, full-time employment, having dependents, being a single parent, and lacking a standard high school diploma. Horn's (1996) nontraditional characteristics apply to today's military veteran student as they are older than traditional students, support their families, and work; however, there are

significant characteristics missing from Horn's (1996) definition concerning military veterans. First, it does not address students with physical or cognitive disabilities. The U.S. Department of Defense (2016) reported a significant number of military veterans with minor to severe service-related disabilities. Also not included in Horn's (1996) nontraditional characteristics are certain life experiences that military veteran students possess and traditional students do not when they enter higher education (i.e., world and cultural experiences due to serving in the military and deploying overseas; Cate, 2014).

While military veteran students share many characteristics with nontraditional students, historically, military veterans demonstrate high performance in higher education (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Cate, 2014). For example, Alschuler and Yarab's (2016) archival study on undergraduate military veteran students ($N = 826$) attending a Midwestern public university between Fall of 2009 and Spring of 2014 revealed 50% of the military veteran students successfully graduated—a rate comparable to the national average and well above the average of nonveteran students at this university (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016). Jared Lyon, CEO of Student Veterans of America, argued, "Over half of all service members enter higher education within seven months of leaving the military, where they outperform their classmates who have never served" (as quoted in College Board, 2018). In 2016, 69% of military students (i.e., active duty and veterans) reported as either married, engaged, separated, divorced, or widowed; 43% had children; and 16% reported as a single parent (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). In addition, 86% reported being full-time students and 71% reported having cumulative GPAs between 3.00 and 3.99. As for education, 61% of respondents reported currently working to complete a 4-year degree, 17% a graduate degree, and 1.5% a doctorate. These respondents reported their primary motivations for taking college classes were the following: 24% change of career; 22% earn a

degree; 18% be more competitive in the job market. Interestingly, 18% of respondents reported having to withdraw from school due to military deployment or duty orders and 19% reported planning to further their education to the doctoral level (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). These statistics do not demonstrate a student less likely to earn a degree.

Researchers must rethink how to account for this population. Should military veteran students be categorized as nontraditional? Should this population be generalized or included in nontraditional literature and research? This research study demonstrates that military veteran students are different from nontraditional students in that they experienced successful military careers, traveled the world, experienced diverse cultures, experienced combat, and gained values instilled from serving. The participants went beyond earning a doctoral degree. For example, Foxtrot developed an instrument researchers can use to measure doctoral students' academic and social integration and won Quantitative Dissertation of the Year at his university. Delta's dissertation work contributed to improving the ASVAB—a multiple-choice test used to qualify men and women who wish to enlist into the military.

Like the participants in this study, military veteran students may begin their DE doctoral journey while they are still on active duty. Thus, their paths to degree attainment may differ from their peers. For example, these students may experience temporary withdrawal due to deployment, extending their degree pursuit pace and giving the appearance that they are not persisting. Table 5 demonstrates the time participants took to complete their DE doctoral degrees ranged from three to almost 15 years! There is little to no data tracking academic outcomes of military members who are deployed mid-semester, withdraw temporary, and then re-enroll. National databases are failing in the efforts to identify and track military veteran students and their academic outcomes. This limited knowledge hinders theorists, researchers,

policymakers, stakeholders, and academic institutions in the ability to understand and support this population. While characteristics of nontraditional students may historically impede progress (e.g., employed, married, having dependents, etc.), this study illustrates that the military experiences of this subpopulation of nontraditional students may actually foster motivation to persist in higher education, and this finding has implications for DE doctoral students and program administrators who seek to support this population.

Practical Implications

When asked during the interviews if there was anything else I should know about military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs, several participants expressed the call for DE stakeholders (i.e., administrators, chairs, committee members, and academic advisors) to recognize military veterans as a unique student population. Military veteran students navigate through their DE doctoral journeys using deeply ingrained military values to be academically successful. For example, military veteran students are trained while serving to assemble a unit to execute a mission. DE stakeholders must be aware how this training translates to the academic setting. Military veteran students may assemble a cohort or bring together their dissertation committees for regular scheduled meetings. Additionally, military veteran students are trained to expect obstacles while executing a mission as well as how to overcome them. They lean on military members within their unit who have distinct skill sets to be successful. DE stakeholders can support this population by providing them with similar support.

Recommendations for DE administrators. A 2015 Gallup study on active duty and military veteran college graduates reported that only 30% of military veteran students feel their college or university understands their unique needs (Marken, 2015). DE administrators cannot address the needs of a military veteran student if they do not understand what this student

represents. The misunderstanding may be due partly to the lack of or inconsistency in the data reporting on the academic outcomes of this student population. There are very little data on today's military veteran student's academic outcomes (Institute for Veterans and Military Families [IVMF] & Student Veterans of America, 2017). Existing data include the academic outcomes of WWII, Korean War, and Vietnam veterans; however, today's military is very different from previous eras in that it is an all-volunteer military which influences how or if military veteran students use GI Bills. While national surveys provide insight on academic outcomes for military veteran students, they have weaknesses. For example, some national surveys rely on a single question to measure academic completion, which can be interpreted in many ways, while other surveys provide predetermined lists of potential answers that are confusing to the respondent (IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017). The DoD tracks military students only if the student uses tuition assistance. Many NCES databases do not properly identify and track military veteran students (IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017). Inconsistent or lacking data result in a misunderstood student population.

To resolve the data gap, the National Veteran Education Success Tracker (NVEST) partnered with Student Veterans of America, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the National Student Clearinghouse to review the academic outcomes of military veteran students using the Post-9/11 GI Bill (Cate et al., 2017). This study's purpose was to not only track academic outcomes of military veteran students, but also change the "veteran friendly" rhetoric often used in higher education to an "academic institution actualization" that military veteran students are a valuable asset to academic institutions. All administrators must be challenged to change the "veteran friendly" rhetoric by first realizing the following attributes military veteran students bring to their academic institutions: GI Bills cover 100% of their tuition and fees, they

earn higher GPAs than non-military students, and their experience and military-trained skill sets promote diversity (IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017). As of May 2017, the Post-9/11 GI Bill paid \$75 billion for military veteran students' tuition (IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017). This financial information demonstrates the economic value military veteran students can bring to DE doctoral programs.

While economic value is an important feature for DE administrators to consider, the economic value this student population offers should not be the driving factor. DE administrators need to implore military veteran students to attend their doctoral programs because of these students' work ethic, discipline, and their potential to make significant contributions to the field through their dissertation research. Work ethic and discipline are the top strengths that military service instills in their members (87%), followed by teamwork (86%) and leadership (82%; IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017). Motivated by career opportunities (86%) and personal growth (71%), military veteran students attaining bachelor's degrees have an average GPA of 3.34 compared to that of traditional students at 2.94 (IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017). Military veteran students' completion rate for a bachelor's degree is 53.6%, whereas the national completion rate is 52.9% (IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017). In addition to their strong work ethic and discipline, these high performing students bring diversity to higher education in that they are likely to be older, married, have children, have a disability, and work (IVMF & Student Veterans of America, 2017) as well as possess a strong organizational commitment and responsibility. When DE administrators begin to understand the profile of a military veteran student and realize the value this population brings to their doctoral programs, the "veteran friendly" rhetoric changes to an academic culture that engenders a greater commitment to this population's educational advancement.

After developing a deeper understanding of the military veteran student population, DE administrators need to analyze how they are meeting these students' needs. For example, DE administrators must analyze their online presence. How many clicks does it take for a military veteran researching DE doctoral programs to get to veteran-related information? DE administrators must ensure their doctoral programs have dedicated military veteran representatives who can help these students navigate the admission process. DE administrators must ensure that their institutions not only accept military credits but also understand how to evaluate military transcripts. For example, the American Council on Education (ACE) evaluates military training and experience in terms of academic credits. Over 2,300 colleges and universities use Joint Services Transcripts (JSTs) as official records of military training and experiences that ACE recommends for college credits; however, the academic institutions vary in transfer policies and make the final determination if military training and experience directly align with specific subject matter to courses (American Council on Education, 2018). The DE program should have a dedicated, centralized department that provides military veteran students a network of academic, program, and community connections that can assist from the beginning of the DE doctoral program to the dissertation defense. Ultimately, it will be the military veteran student who decides, through experiencing the DE doctoral program process, if the administrator has indeed actualized educational advancement of military veteran students.

Recommendations for DE doctoral program structure. DE program structures can include synchronous learning where learning occurs in real-time (i.e., videoconferencing, teleconferencing, live chatting, and live-streaming), asynchronous learning where learning is self-paced (i.e., self-guided lessons, streaming video content, virtual libraries, posted lecture notes, discussion boards exchanges), or a blend of both. An asynchronous course design is a key

feature that DE doctoral programs should offer military students as they serve, live, and work in different time zones. For example, a 2016 demographics report released by the U.S. Department of Defense on the military community of 1,021,370 personnel reported nearly half (47.6%) of active duty members are located in California, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, and the majority of military veterans reside in California, Florida, and Texas. An asynchronous learning environment provides military students the ability to schedule their doctoral work around their professional schedules as well as greater accessibility to DE programs. As previous discussed, all but two participants explained their primary reason for choosing DE was the flexibility as they set their own hours for studying, designated family time around deadlines, and traveled for their civilian jobs.

Although they were not the focus of this study, some research institutions assign large research projects to teams of graduate students (Gall et al., 2007). While advantages of having a team conduct a research study include gaining financial support from a grant and experiencing collaborative team work, a disadvantage may be conflicting research goals between team members (Gall et al., 2007). Based on the findings from this study, DE doctoral programs, even those that lean towards group research, should provide autonomy support in that all students have the opportunity to choose a dissertation topic in which they are interested. Choosing a dissertation topic is an important aspect of being a self-directed, adult learner who is motivated to persist to doctoral completion. This study's participants described taking time to determine and narrow their dissertation topics. In addition, participants described the importance of being curious about the topic and finding one that contributed to their practice. While some participants ($n = 3$) struggled to narrow their dissertation topics, each participant described finding dissertation topics in which they were passionate.

Recommendations for DE dissertation committees. DE dissertation committees can implement strategies that encourage military veterans to lean on or translate their military experiences of overcoming obstacles and accomplishing work in their DE doctoral programs. For example, this research study along with a myriad of other research studies (Kelley & Salisbury-Glennon, 2016; Locke & Boyle, 2016; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012) demonstrates how doctoral students struggle the most during the dissertation phase, partly due to the self-directed nature of this phase where the student regulates his or her learning (Ponton, 2014). This is a stark contrast to the approach the military organization uses concerning military members advancing in their careers and education. For example, the military organization monitors, measures, and guides military members throughout their entire military career, ensuring performance improvement and career advancement. Military veteran students who have spent years serving in a very structured environment with a focus on tracking their career and education progress can benefit from a more structured approach to the dissertation phase. While this phase should be student-driven, DE dissertation committees can encourage military veteran students to develop strategic plans for attaining their doctoral degrees much like developing a strategic plan for executing a military mission.

Lieutenant Colonel Stacey Lee (2014) described a strategic plan as “a communication tool that captures the commander’s vision for the organization in a clear and consolidated form that is available to every member of the organization” (p. 20) with the purpose of responding to uncertainty. Lee explained that strategic plans must communicate direction, contain a decision-making framework, include detailed measures for accountability, and stimulate and drive change. Such a plan provides progress assessment that guides the entire organization. In the case of a military veteran student attaining a doctoral degree in a DE program, the student would develop

the strategic plan under his or her dissertation committee's guidance. The strategic plan would play an important role in aligning expectations, establishing pacing, and providing shared understanding between all involved in the success of the student. In addition, this strategic plan would provide all involved a feedback loop that establishes an accountability battle rhythm on which military veteran students can learn to communicate with their dissertation committees.

Recommendations for military veteran students. President George W. Bush addressed military veteran students when he presented NVEST by stating,

Even after your time in uniform, America still needs your leadership, your drive, and your talent. We know that student veterans like you outperform your peers. You're more likely to graduate, to attend a respected accredited institution, and to earn degrees in emerging fields. I couldn't be prouder of you all for taking full advantage of your education. (Student Veterans of America, 2017)

The Student Veterans of America MRP (Cate, 2014) and NVEST (Cate et al., 2017) show that military veteran students not only persist to degree attainment, but do so at a rate higher than their peers. This student population is motivated; however, military veteran students must maintain intrinsic motivation through social and cultural settings (i.e., DE doctoral programs) that supports autonomy, competence, and relatedness. First, military veteran students must investigate the DE doctoral program to ensure it offers a field of study that will positively impact learner motivation. To do so, military veteran students should lean on their military experiences, skill sets gained while serving, and driving passions realized during their time in the military to determine the best field of study to pursue. If the military veteran student values the field of study and finds it inherently interesting, he or she will experience autonomy. Second, military veteran students must understand the scope and magnitude of a DE doctoral program. A DE

doctoral program can take anywhere from two years to 10 years and 60 to 120 credits hours or 20 to 40 college courses to complete. While this is no easy goal to accomplish, military veteran students can compartmentalize the coursework and dissertation phase much like compartmentalizing deployment or a military tour where it takes two to four years to complete a mission. Military veteran students are more likely to experience competence if they focus on completing their doctoral programs one course or one stage at a time. Lastly, students may perceive DE doctoral programs as education experienced in isolation. This perceived notion is nothing like executing a mission under a chain of command and with a unit; however, military veteran students do not have to experience DE doctoral programs in complete isolation. Military veteran students must seek out DE doctoral programs that encourage cohorts, foster communities of learners, and provide complete access to faculty. Relatedness plays a vital role in military members' motivation to complete a mission; it has a role in DE, and military veteran students must ensure they are provided opportunities to experience relatedness in their DE doctoral programs.

Delimitations and Limitations

This study included three delimitations: (a) participants attained their doctoral degrees, (b) participants used DE to attain their degrees, and (c) participants were military veterans prior to completing their DE doctoral programs. I chose a doctoral level program for two reasons. First, military veterans are continuing their education beyond their initial postsecondary degrees (Cate, 2014). For example, the Student Veterans of America MRP reported 20.8% of military veterans who earned bachelor's degrees furthered their education by earning graduate level to doctoral degrees (Cate, 2014). The second reason for delimiting this study to doctoral level programs is because attrition for doctoral students hovers consistently high at 50% (Bowen &

Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015). I wanted to understand how and why military veterans are attaining doctoral degrees.

I chose to delimit this study to DE for two reasons. First, military veterans are participating in DE. For example, a U.S. Department of Education brief (Snyder et al., 2016) reported that 41% of graduate military students took all of their courses online compared to 19% of graduate nonmilitary students (Radford et al., 2016). The second reason for delimiting this study to DE is because attrition in DE can be 10% to 20% higher than in traditional education programs (Kennedy et al., 2015; Terrell, 2005). Again, I wanted to understand how and why military veterans are succeeding in this program setting. The last delimitation was to exclude active duty members from the study. The rationale for this delimitation was to remove extrinsic motivation (e.g., military promotions) as a factor for attaining a doctoral degree as Ryan and Deci (2017) argue that individuals extrinsically motivated are not as self-determined.

Some limitations were present in the research study. For example, this study's sample ($N = 9$) is small for a transcendental phenomenological study. While no new information was presented after the last participant was analyzed, Moustakas' (1994) approach to reach thematic saturation is no fewer than 10 and no more than 25 participants (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989). In addition to this study's small sample size was the lack of equal representation of military branches. Seven participants served in the Navy and two participants served in the Air Force. There are five armed branches of service: Navy, Air Force, Army, Marines, and Coast Guard; therefore, three out of the five armed branches of service were not represented in this study. Not having Army, Marines, or Coast Guard representation in the sample limits perspectives and the potential transferability of these lived experiences with motivation to persist to the unrepresented military branches.

Another limitation related to the number of participants ($N = 9$) in this study is the number of potential participants, for reasons unknown, who could have but chose not to participate in the study. Fourteen potential participants completed the demographics questionnaire and met all criteria; however, after four months of requesting completion of the timeline, advice letter, and participation in the semi-structured interview, potential participants ($n = 5$) did not complete these remaining data sources. All of these potential participants responded via email they were interested in participating. Several attempts were made to follow up with their progress on the data sources. After many attempts with no response, I ceased communication. While intentions to participate were positive, I speculate the amount of time needed to participate was a deterrent for these potential participants. Possible changes to mitigate this problem and gain more participants may be to use either a timeline or advice letter, but not both. To ensure triangulation, a replacement for one of these data sources may be one of the following scales: Intrinsic Motivation to Learn Scale (IMLS), Need for Relatedness at College Questionnaire (NRC-Q), or Student Psychological Needs Scale (SPNS). See the Related Literature section in Chapter 2 for a detailed description of research studies conducted using these data sources.

Recommendations for Future Research

Currently, there is little to no research describing military veterans' motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs. This study aimed to fill this gap; however, more research studies must be conducted. For example, more studies on military women and minorities are needed. Women represent 16% of the military population and minorities represent 31% (i.e., black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska native, native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, multi-racial, or other/unknown; U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). This study included women

($n = 3$) and minorities ($n = 2$). This study revealed each female participant experienced motivation to persist differently from that of the male participants ($n = 6$). All female participants described feeling guilt and concern for their families while pursuing their doctoral degrees. For example, Echo described being exhausted from being a new mom and balancing work and school. She doubted her ability to keep up the pace over a long period of time. Fortunately, she was at the end of her doctoral journey. Male participants described feeling guilt and concern for their families during deployment, but did not describe this experience during their doctoral journey. In addition to the uniqueness of the female participants' experiences during their doctoral journey was the African American male participant's DE doctoral program experience. For example, Bravo explained he did not tell his military co-workers and friends he was pursuing his doctoral degree for fear of being ridiculed. These experiences were new and different from the other participants. Other studies like this one need to be conducted to give female and minority military veterans a voice describing their motivation to persist in DE doctoral programs.

While there are studies conducted on active duty and reserve military members participating in higher education (Fall et al., 2011; Williams & LeMire, 2011; Wilson et al., 2013), more must be conducted to understand the percentage rate of military members who attain degrees above a bachelor's degree. The total number of active and reserve military members is over 2.4 million (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016). Of this population, 76% of active duty members hold a high school diploma, 13% hold a bachelor's degree, and 8% hold a degree higher than a bachelor's degree (i.e., master's and doctorate). These percentages for active duty members mirror that of reserve members as well as the national average of persons ages 18 to 24 (NCES, 2017). There is a wide percentage gap (68%) between military members having only a

high school diploma and military members having degrees higher than a bachelor's degree. Conducting studies to determine factors related to or causing this gap would be beneficial to researchers, educators, and military students.

Each military branch has its own core values that are taught to new recruits the moment they enter. For example, the Army values are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The Navy and Marine Corps values are honor, courage, and commitment. The Air Force values are integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all they do. The Coast Guard values are honor, respect, and devotion to duty. All participants described and leaned on their military-instilled values to attain their doctoral degrees. In addition to core values, each military branch contains its own culture and even its own language. For example, participants in this study used military phrases such as “stay the course,” “steady as she goes,” and others to describe their motivation to persist in their DE doctoral programs. While this study pooled from all five armed military branches, only two (i.e., Navy and Air Force) were represented, which limited perspectives, experiences, and cultural differences that may exist among the five branches. How one participant who retired from the Navy experiences motivation to persist may be different from one who retired from the Marines Corps or the Army; therefore, more studies on this topic need to be conducted to compare all five military branches.

Summary

This study answered the following central research question: What are the motivational experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a distance education doctoral program? The theory guiding the research was SDT (1985), a theory of human motivation, development, and wellness that frames how motivation influences behavior, in this case,

persistence. Using SDT to guide the research, analysis of the data revealed five textural themes demonstrating what the participants experienced concerning this study's central phenomenon—motivation to persist: (a) a support system, (b) obstacles, (c) goal accomplishment, (d) a new culture, and (e) flexibility and autonomy of the DE structure and program type. Six structural themes emerged demonstrating how the participants experienced this study's central phenomenon: (a) engaging a support system, (b) overcoming obstacles, (c) goal setting and accomplishment, (d) navigating the DE dissertation process, (e) using military experiences to determine the dissertation topic, and (f) discovering and pursuing passion. This study's findings provide a deep understanding of how military veterans are motivated to persist in DE doctoral programs. This understanding provides a range of useful and tangible recommendations to DE administrators, DE dissertation committee members, and military veterans as well as recommendations to extend this research study that can assist with this population's academic success.

The results of this study provided two significant takeaways. First, military veteran students are a self-determined student population. They enter DE doctoral programs classically defined as nontraditional and, therefore, less likely to succeed (Horn, 1996; Olsen et al., 2014); however, they are equipped with military experiences that strengthen their motivations to persist in an academic environment. Like most doctoral students, this student population experiences obstacles along the DE doctoral journey. Their values of accomplishing goals are internalized prior to entering their DE doctoral programs. Unlike non-military doctoral students, they lean on military training such as time management, leadership, overcoming obstacles, and completing a mission to reach their academic goals. The second significant takeaway is the ease at which the participants indoctrinated themselves into their DE doctoral programs. While studies indicate

military veteran students struggle identifying with student peers and academic culture (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Gregg et al., 2016; Olsen et al., 2014), the participants in this study fostered deep connections with faculty and students during their doctoral journey in a DE program.

Additionally, participants described these relationships lasting past doctoral degree attainment.

This population has served their country and their service continues as they succeed in education and contribute to the economy as civilians. In turn, policy makers, academic institutions, and researchers must serve this student population.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 1, 2018

Paula Ross

IRB Approval 3228.050118: Military Veterans and Their Motivation to Persist in Distance Education Doctoral Programs

Dear Paula Ross,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FLYER

Research Participants Needed

Military Veterans and Their Motivation to Persist in Distance Education Doctoral Programs

- Are you a military veteran and 18 years of age or older?
 - Did you earn your doctorate online?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to describe motivational experiences of military veterans who persisted to completion in their distance education doctoral programs. Participants will be asked to complete a demographics questionnaire (10 minutes), develop a timeline of lived experiences while persisting in a distance education doctoral program (15-30 minutes), write a letter of advice to military veterans considering earning a doctorate (15-30 minutes), and participate in a 60-minute interview conducted via Skype. Benefits include providing other military veterans strategies for how to not only enter distance education doctoral programs, but also strategies for successfully completing the program and earning a doctoral degree.

Please click on the following link to provide contact information and answer questions to help the researcher determine if you meet the study's criteria to participate:

https://liberty.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2rtyXS64FMiBXeJ

Contact Paula Ross at [REDACTED] for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
5/1/2018 to 4/30/2019
Protocol # 3228.050118

CONSENT FORM

Military Veterans and Their Motivation to Persist in Distance Education Doctoral Programs
Paula Ross
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on motivational experiences of military veterans who persisted to completion at their distance education doctoral programs. You were selected as a possible participant because you meet the following criteria to participate: over 18 years of age; served at one of the five armed military branches in the United States for any number of years; separated or retired from the military prior to completing your distance education doctoral program; and earned a doctoral degree at an accredited distance education doctoral program in the United States in any field of study. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Paula Ross, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the motivational experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in distance education doctoral programs.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete a demographics questionnaire (10 minutes).
2. Develop a timeline of your lived experiences while persisting in a distance education doctoral program (15-30 minutes). A template will be provided.
3. Write a letter of advice to military veterans considering earning a doctorate (15-30 minutes). Writing prompts will be provided.
4. Participate in a semi-structured interview (60 minutes). The semi-structured interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed.
5. Optional: Review transcription of the interview (15-30 minutes).

Risks: If you experienced combat while serving, reliving significant experiences may cause some stress. Otherwise, the risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, data from this study's research may provide benefits to society such as providing military support services personnel best practices to incorporate in programs to better assist this population and contribute to increasing the likelihood of military veterans' motivation to persist in distance education doctoral programs. Additionally, military veterans considering pursuing

distance education doctoral programs may benefit from the practical implications this study could provide as well. Academic programs like distance education doctoral programs do not provide military students, or any student, the same level of direction they experienced while serving. Military veterans may benefit from the results of this study to better understand how to transition into the self-directed nature required of students in distance education doctoral programs, and educators of distance education doctoral programs need to know the nutrients to provide in the academic environment to influence this population's well-being and motivation.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data. Specifically:

- To protect participants' privacy, participants and names of the institutions from which they earned their doctoral degrees will be assigned pseudonyms. I will conduct the interviews via Skype in a private location or in person in a semi-private public location such as a public library conference room where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- This research study's data will be stored on a password locked computer, and electronic communications and documents will be password protected. Data may be used in future presentations; however, protection of participants' privacy will remain. After three years, all electronic and paper records will be deleted and destroyed.
- Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Paula Ross. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, at [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 1887, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH STUDY PACKAGE

Dear Participant,

I am so appreciative and excited that you have agreed to participate in this transcendental phenomenological study. Your participation will provide other researchers, educators, and military veterans an understanding of military veterans' motivation to persist in a DE doctoral program as you have experienced it! The pages contained in this package will assist in that understanding; therefore, your willingness to complete each page is greatly appreciated. Please print and fill out each page per the instructions provided in the following order as presented in this package:

1. Timeline
2. Letter of Advice to a Military Veteran Considering Earning a Doctorate

After you have filled out each page, please email to my email address [REDACTED] no later than DAY MONTH YEAR. Once I have received your completed package, I will email you within 24 hours to set up a date and time to conduct the one-hour interview and explain the next steps of the research study. If you have any questions or need assistance forwarding the completed package, please do not hesitate to email or call me [REDACTED]. Again, thank you for your time and effort in this study.

Very respectfully,

Paula Ross, EdS, Researcher

Letter of Advice to a Military Veteran Considering Earning a Doctorate

Now that you had a chance to relive your doctoral experience through the Timeline exercise, it would be helpful to researchers, faculty in DE doctoral programs, and military veterans considering earning a doctorate to read a letter of advice as written from a direct source (i.e., you) on what that experience is like and how you were motivated to persist. The primary purpose of this letter is to give a military veteran advice considering earning a doctorate. Some advice to consider incorporating in your letter may be:

- How to transition from the military culture to the academia culture;
- How to use military experiences completing a mission to complete a DE doctoral program;
- What military experiences a military veteran can lean on to be motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program;
- What to expect regarding the structure of a DE doctoral program (e.g., type of assignments, assignment due dates, navigating technology, etc.);
- What to expect regarding interactions with faculty and students of a DE doctoral program;
- What DE doctoral program experiences a military veteran can lean on to be motivated to persist to the completion of his or her program.
- How to include family as part of the doctoral journey;
- How to manage time with family, work, and school; and
- How to stay motivated during difficult times.

You may develop your letter of advice in one of the following three formats of your choosing:

- Type in a Word document;

- Type inside an email addressed to the researcher ([REDACTED]); or
- Narrate the letter in an audio-recorded software program and I will transcribe your letter.

These options are to provide you with the most convenient and efficient way for you to submit a well-developed letter of advice. Whatever format you choose, please submit your letter of advice in an email along with the completed timeline.

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Project: Military Veterans and Their Motivation to Persist in Distance Education Doctoral Programs

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer: _____

Interviewee: _____

Questions:

1. Describe one or two values that provide insight into your personality and from where those values came.
2. Why did you join the military?
3. Describe your positive military experiences while you served.
4. Describe your challenging military experiences while you served and how you overcame those challenges.
5. Describe your relationships (e.g., fellow military member, unit, commanding officer, etc.) while serving in the military.
6. Why did you separate/retire from the military?
7. Describe your experiences transitioning out of the military.
8. Why did you decide to earn your doctorate?
9. Describe military experiences, if any, that motivated you to persist in your DE doctoral program.
10. Describe military experiences, if any, that threatened your motivation to persist in your DE doctoral program and how you overcame those challenges.
11. Describe how or if the reason to earn your doctorate changed over the course of your DE doctoral program.

12. If not apparent on your timeline, how long did it take you to attain your doctoral degree?
13. Why did you choose a DE format over other degree formats for earning your doctorate?
14. Describe your positive experiences in your DE doctoral program.
15. Describe your challenging experiences in your DE doctoral program and how you overcame those challenges.
16. Describe your relationships (e.g., classmates, advisor, chair, etc.) while earning your doctoral degree in your DE doctoral program.
17. Describe your experiences transitioning from the coursework phase to the dissertation phase of the DE doctoral program.
18. How has your doctoral degree benefited you professionally?
19. How has your doctoral degree benefited you personally?
20. What else do you think is important for me to know about military veterans' motivational experiences while persisting in DE doctoral programs?

APPENDIX F: TRANSCRIPTION REVIEW INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS

Date _____

Dear _____,

Thank you for meeting with me and sharing your experience as a military veteran motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program. I appreciate your willingness to share your unique and personal thoughts, feelings, and events.

I have attached the transcript of your interview. Would you please review the entire transcript? If you are willing to do so, ask yourself the following questions during your review:

- Did this interview fully capture my motivational experiences as a military veteran persisting in a DE doctoral program?
- Are there any misrepresentations present in the transcript? (NOTE: You do not need to provide comments on grammar, as I have captured language used in the interview exactly as it was spoken).
- Are there important experiences that I did not think of until after the interview that should be included?

Please feel free to provide comments using Adobe® commenting tools to further elaborate your experiences, or if you prefer, we can arrange to discuss your additions or corrections. Please return the transcript with feedback to my email address

(██████████) no later than MONTH DAY YEAR.

I greatly appreciate your willingness to share your experiences. After I have analyzed all of my research data, I will forward you my findings. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to call (██████████) or email me if you have any questions.

Very respectfully,

Paula Ross, EdS, Researcher

APPENDIX G: EXCERPTS FROM REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

My experience abandoning my initial research topic and becoming familiar with my new research topic:

April 2017

Dr. Sierra and I agree today that my original dissertation topic, implementation fidelity, is too broad as I would need a research team and grant to conduct it. I am disappointed as I've spent at least six months researching this topic and pre-planned the research proposal. I have been reading up on quantitative research and have almost completed my Quantitative Research intensive. I began thinking about implementation fidelity as a tool I could use to brand myself within the Coast Guard. I know I will not completely abandon this topic, but realize with Dr. Sierra's help that the timing and resources need to be right to do this topic justice.

April 2017

Dr. Sierra suggested I begin researching military veterans persisting in limited residence doctoral programs using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Her experience is that she has to provide more guidance with military veterans than with other student types. She advised that this is a research gap and I should look into it begin that I work in a military environment and may have some insight. Persistence is a topic I love to read about. While I am still mourning over the end of my previous topic, I think this one will be equally as beneficial and challenging. One challenge is switching my thoughts about research methods from quantitative to qualitative. Being that I'm quantitative minded, this is a welcoming switch, but will still take some time to look at research with a new lens.

April 2017

I am thinking through lessons learned about how I collected literature from my original topic. I was good about saving articles and naming them efficiently for easy access. However, my summaries were scattered. I've decided to write and keep summaries on one document organized according to topic. For example, I have one word document saved under Persistence. This contains all the summaries for all the articles I've researched on persistence. The other Word documents are: Military and Persistence; Transcendental Phenomenology; Self-Determination Theory; and Military and Limited Residence Doctoral Programs.

April 2017

Researching and getting smart on qualitative research and persistence. I decided to start researching broadly and narrow my research from there. I love reading about persistence. Today, I began reading about Tinto's persistence theory, as his theory focuses on nontraditional students in higher education and student retention and learning communities; however, his theory leans more toward academic and social integration. He theorizes that students who socially integrate into campus life are more likely to graduate. While this seems like a solid theory, my research topic focuses on limited residence programs where participants have chosen to not be physically present with the community from which they learn. I found two theories I feel are more appropriate for my topic: grit and self-determination theory. Both examine intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. I've order *Grit* by Angela Duckworth.

My experience with the pilot study:

May 2018

I emailed demographics questionnaire link to my committee member, Dr. Hotel. Dr. Hotel completed the questionnaire and I analyzed his answers to ensure he met the criteria to participate as well as determine if the questionnaire provided me enough data to ensure potential participants met all criteria to participate. Dr. Hotel's feedback:

- Remove "Definitely" out of the choices for answers.

May 2018

Forwarded the stamped consent form via email to Dr. Hotel for his signature to participate in the research study. Dr. Hotel provided good feedback on the consent form that caused me to wonder if I should change it. I don't know how much this will involve since IRB has already stamped the consent form; therefore, I've reached out to my chair for advice.

May 2018

Forwarded the Participant Package to Dr. Hotel to complete with a deadline. It's a tight deadline, but Dr. Hotel felt it was reasonable and lets participants know there is a quick turnaround on the package.

May 2018

Dr. Hotel completed and forwarded the Participant Package. I highlighted and analyzed significant statements, then connected those statements to motivation types as identified within SDT. I was surprised and excited to learn almost all of Dr. Hotel's motivation was extrinsic. Sometimes his motivation was completely external (i.e., introjected regulation) as he wanted rewards or was avoiding punishment. Other times he experienced integrated regulation, the closest he got to internal motivation as he related his motivation to something bigger than himself; furthermore, he followed the relatedness concept under SDT. He found great motivation in his relationships with people who were going through the same experience or others in his program. I have scheduled an interview with him tomorrow. Having the feeling for the first time that I want to call up my mom and tell her all of the exciting things I am learning. I miss her.

May 2018

I conducted a pilot interview with Dr. Hotel today. It was a great experience and I learned a number of things. It took me an hour and 15 minutes to ask Dr. Hotel questions about his timeline and advice letter as well as interview questions. I felt like some of my questions were repeated. Also, while listening to Dr. Hotel's answers to my questions, I wanted to drill down more to get him to discuss experiences that would be unique to military veterans but I wasn't sure if I should do that. I will conference with my chair on whether I should. At one point in the interview, Dr. Hotel mentioned marital issues. Since he brought it up a couple of times, I asked him to be more specific. He seemed visibly uncomfortable, so I did not probe for specifics and moved on to the next question.

My experience with conducting interviews with Bravo and Charlie:

June 2018

What a data rich interview! Bravo was so insightful! The most interesting point he made was that military members are used to doing two and four year tours/projects. They know they have this window of time to make their mark at this one particular station and he translated that to the doctoral program. He looked at the timeframe to complete the doctoral program in the same way and knew he could do it. Also interesting is that he said did not have motivational experiences in the military that helped him persist in his doctoral program. This is the same answer as Alpha and I wonder if there is a correlation with both of them not using the degree to position themselves professionally or if my interview question and terms in it were unclear.

Bravo was humble and polite. I could tell he was a Christian and strong family man. He finds relationships both in the military, doctoral program, and familial to be very important. He admitted that the dissertation phase took longer than necessary mostly because he could not adhere to his self-imposed deadlines as easily. Coursework was much easier because of the structure. He needed that structure and felt if he understood the dissertation process better he would have finished sooner. I have experienced the same. Deadlines are beneficial to anyone needing to complete a task. In my experience with facilitating group projects, I've found most individuals will take all of the time you give them whether it is one week or two months to complete a task. My distance education doctoral program requires students to submit goals every four to five weeks. This has helped me stay on task and to know when I've fallen behind and why. I wonder if other distance education doctoral programs do this. I wonder if this would have helped Bravo. I thoroughly enjoyed this interview.

July 2018

I thoroughly enjoyed interviewing Charlie. He's so interesting in that he was an enlisted member. That experience came through in that he had decisions made for him that he felt were not always the best decisions. Decisions were authoritative rather than collaborative, which is not uncommon when you have officers directing enlisted members. Also interesting about Charlie being an enlisted member was the specialization experiences with teamwork in that teams in the military were created based on specialties to accomplish a mission, different from teams or groups created in the academic environment where folks are not as highly specialized but have more commonalities and work together more rather than divide and concur. He used his enlisted military experience of working with specialized folks in the academic environment by being able to hone in on others who showed specialties that he knew he needed to persist and succeed in his program. I am curious to see if other participants translated similar experiences to their doctoral programs. Fascinating!

APPENDIX H: REPORT OF FINDINGS TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

I have analyzed all of my research data and would like to share with you major themes that emerged from your research study package and interview, and a brief explanation of each theme:

Theme:

Accomplishing Goals: The ultimate goal for any student motivated to persist in a DE doctoral program is to finish. With attrition rates for doctoral students hovering consistently high at 50% (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Kennedy et al., 2015), accomplishing this goal is no easy task; however, these participants demonstrated their experiences with accomplishing goals while serving in the military contributed to skill sets needed to accomplish goals while persisting in their DE doctoral programs.

Theme:

Overcoming Obstacles: Common among all participants was a deep regard for finishing a task, completing a mission, or accomplishing a goal. They explained they were always faced with obstacles; however, their military training prepared them to accept obstacles as part of the process.

Theme:

Developing and Relying on a Support System: While the importance of having a support system to be motivated to persist can be true of all doctoral students, what is unique to the military veteran student body is that they are trained while serving to rely on and contribute to a support system to succeed (i.e., execute a mission). These participants benefited from experiencing a support system while serving and were able to apply what they learned from these experiences to their DE doctoral programs.

Theme:

Exposure to Diverse Environments and People: Exposure to unfamiliar environments, cultures, and communities is not a new challenge for military veterans to overcome. To overcome this challenge and to be motivated to persist, this study's participants sought out familiarity in an unfamiliar environment when they entered their DE doctoral programs.

Theme:

Discovering Passion: Currently, all participants are participating in civilian opportunities and interests that were the result of or encouraged and supported by their military and doctoral experiences.

In addition to the above themes, I was able to answer the central question to my research study—**What are the motivational experiences of military veterans who persist to completion in a DE doctoral program?**

Answer:

These participants experienced autonomy in their DE doctoral programs and while serving in the military. All participants were striving to complete their DE doctoral programs. While all participants had definite moments of self-doubt, all participants expressed that in spite of obstacles and self-doubt they knew they would complete their doctoral mission. The participants experienced the military within a unit—a tightknit group where each member was integral for completing specific tasks, but together completed a mission. All participants remained connected to a certain group after retirement whether it be family, friends, faculty, or fellow students. The connection to others and having a sense of belonging to society seemed deeply rooted in all of the participants. Tour by tour, mission by mission, they pursued education opportunities, led teams, developed curricula, encountered diverse cultures and settings. They took advantage of all the military had to offer. They found their niche, used their dissertations as a platform for addressing military issues they felt passionate about. Today, all participants are involved in civilian work that is a reflection of their military careers and their doctoral journeys.

I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research study. Your participation will greatly benefit other military veterans, researchers, and educators interested in this topic. If you have any questions about my findings, please do not hesitate to call ([REDACTED]). Thanks again for all of your help!

Very respectfully,
Paula Ross, EdS, Researcher

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE TIMELINE WITH IDENTIFIED SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

Date of Event	Description of Event	
July 2009	I was nearing the end of my naval career. I had recently completed my MS in Management and <u><i>I had discovered that the post 9-11 GI Bill had recently passed and was available for me and my family.</i></u> My children had almost completed their college programs, so it made sense for me or my wife to continue our education. <u><i>My wife and I decided that we (I) should pursue a doctoral degree to enhance my portfolio once I retired from active duty.</i></u> The Master's program at Sierra Romeo consisted of classes both online and in-person. We decided that distance learning was best suited because <u><i>I knew that I was due to move at least one more time while on active duty,</i></u> so I began applying to Universities that provided quality distance learning.	<p>Post 9-11 GI Bill passed - Motivation</p> <p>Enhance my portfolio - Increase Civilian Opportunities</p>
November 2009	I was accepted into the doctoral program in Management in Organizational Leadership at the University of Papa. <u><i>The program was designed so that one could complete all the classes in the 3rd year and complete the entire process (dissertation and oral defense) before the 4th year.</i></u> It sounded promising and meant I could probably finish about the same time as retirement.	<p>Father passed – Negative Family Experience</p>
December 2009	Began my initial orientation course and <u><i>sadly my father passed as I was working to complete this course.</i></u>	
February 2010	Completed my first residency. Although the program was distance learning, the residencies were in person collaborative training with cohorts. <u><i>This program is vital to ensuring one remains connected personally and helps build friendships that will last the duration of the program.</i></u>	<p>Positive DE Experience</p>
March 2011	Completed Year 2 Residency and began <u><i>researching topics for dissertation. This process was daunting as I did not fully understand the task in front of me (I don't believe any of us really did).</i></u> I also noticed that many of my cohorts from our first residency and dropped out. There were only four of us remaining from our first residency class of 22. I also began the task of finding a Chair/Mentor.	<p>I did not understand the task - Negative DE Experience</p>
October 2011	After a long search and many interviews and discussions, I found my Committee Chair and began the process of fine-tuning my research. <u><i>Finding a mentor was difficult but as I found out later, one of the most critical tasks (if not the most) of this journey.</i></u>	<p>Finding mentor was difficult - Negative DE Experience</p>
February 2012	Attended what I thought was to be my final residency. Only two of my cohorts from my first residency is still in the program.	<p>Negative DE Experience</p>

	This residency was critical in helping me in defining (or refining) my research for topic approval.	
Dec, 2012	I worked on completing my classes while developing my topic and writing the first 3 chapters of my research. <u><i>My mentor was not as available as I would have liked and the process slowed considerably due to schedules and other work related constraints.</i></u> I also learned the importance of the Literature review and how it shapes the research.	Mentor not as available - Challenging Chair Experience
May 2013	Retired from active duty in the Navy and later this month completed my final course in the curriculum. It was all research from this point forward. The hours of my days were now more focused on a post-retirement job and moving to what may have be our permanent place of residence.	
August 2013	Found a job that required more time than being on active duty. I was still searching for a committee and my Chair requested that I find an editor for our 3 Chapters of research while I continue to search for 2 committee members.	
Dec 2013	Found an editor and also filled the positions for my committee. I also found out that editors are not cheap. Upon completion of editing, I was able to schedule the class required to submit to the committee for approval and then submit to QRM (Quality Review Methods) before submission to IRB	Delay submitting my research - Negative DE Experience
Feb 2014	<u><i>Lost job.</i></u> Disappointing but not devastating. <u><i>Also discovered that I needed a 4th residency because of the delay in submitting my research to ORM.</i></u>	Lost job - Personal Challenges
April 2014	Attended residency and submitted to QRM.	
May 2014	Received additional edits from QRM. <u><i>My Chair was more disgusted than I considering the changes that needed to be made.</i></u> My committee was helpful and we worked diligently to “fix” the paper (1 st 3 chapters) for resubmission.	Chair was disgusted - Negative DE Experience
July 2014	Resubmitted to QRM	
August 2014	Received details that required additional changes to the research.	
September 2014	Re-submitted (again), this time receiving approval to submit to the IRB.	
October 2014	IRB approved paper. Commenced searching for participants	
October	Informed by 2 friends they completed the journey and <u><i>began to worry why my process seemed so much more difficult to complete. Every hurdle seemed to take months to overcome never considered giving up, just tired of the process.</i></u>	My process seemed so much more difficult - Negative DE Experience
December	QRM returned again with recommended changes	Never give up - Motivation
February	Completed changes, resubmitted once committee approved.	
June 2014	Finally received QRM approval. Submitted to IRB for approval to collect data.	

December 2015	Conducted first 2 interviews. <u><i>I was excited that I could get the interviews completed in a timely fashion and complete my journey within a year.</i></u>
July	Completed all interviews (which I found to be another difficult part of the process). <u><i>If I had been able to conduct interviews while still active duty, this part would have been easier to schedule.</i></u> I am appreciative of those that chose to participate; they were cordial and interested in my research topic. Commenced data analysis and the writing for my final 2 chapters.
October 2016	While finalizing my paper, two of my committee members decided they did not desire to remain a committee member. <u><i>I had to redirect my efforts to find 2 members that were willing to join the team in the late stages.</i></u> I remember being concerned that this might require a full rewrite if the new members were not pleased with my direction or I worse, it would take as long to find 2 new members as it did initially.
January 2017	I found 2 members for the committee and scheduled my final class for March to submit my research for approval.
March 2017	Began the 8-week course to get approval from the committee and submit the research.
June 2017	The 8-week course was not enough time for my new committee members to become familiar with my research and since the requirement of the University was to submit during the class, I thought I would have to pay for an additional course.
July 2017	Received approval from the university to submit post final course to allow my committee time to thoroughly read and approve research.
August 2017	Submitted research for Final Approval. Received approval within 10 days and scheduled oral defense.
September 2017	Passed Oral Defense!!! Journey complete

Exited I could complete interviews - Positive DE Experience

Redirect efforts - Negative DE Experience

While still active duty, this part would have been easier - Negative DE Experience

APPENDIX J: SAMPLE ADVICE LETTER WITH IDENTIFIED SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

To Whom it May Concern,

How does a military member, especially one on active duty begin and complete a doctoral program? I will start off with this piece of advice first, if you are not serious or you are not a motivated person to begin with, a doctoral program may not be the right thing for you.

For those who are motivated, the transition to academia from a military culture is not that hard. ***As military members, we have time management skills, we are good at multi-tasking and we are very serious about finishing what we undertake.***

**Time
management
skills, multi-
tasking,
finish tasks -
Positive
Military
Experience**

How did the military teach you this? It started in boot camp. We are given so many things that have to be accomplished in a short period of time and they have to be done properly. If you don't do it properly, someone can get hurt. If you're not serious about what you are doing there is that safety application to it. ***Get it done in a proper manner. Don't falsify information. Don't take short cuts. It's an everyday skill that you're mentored with from day one.***

**Get it done,
don't falsify,
no short cuts
- Positive
Military
Experience**

Sometimes your motivation will wane. You will feel the weight of the world on your shoulders at school, work or family. Take a step back, breathe, do something you enjoy, take a couple days leave, go for a hike, a ride, go bowling or to a ballgame. Just get away from it all for a period of time. You will be surprised at how much that can help. Of course, if you are injured, you have to rely on your shipmates or battle buddies to help you out.

My experiences may have been a bit different as I had to rely on the US Postal Service to be expedient in their deliveries to both the university and me. Now, with email it is much easier to complete and submit courses, tests and papers in a timely manner. My interaction with faculty and staff were letters or phone calls when pulling into port. I had no other students to collaborate with.

**Officers who
had degrees –
Overcoming
Obstacles**

The hardest thing was not collaborating with students. I always had collaboration with other students for my bachelors and masters program. I got used to it. Instead of collaborating with students and I had questions, ***I went to other officers who had degrees.*** I would talk to them and banter with them. Phone calls to the faculty was checking on receiving paperwork and verifying they received everything and they were okay with timeline.

**Not
collaborating
- Negative
DE
Experience**

Today, with online courses, you have nearly immediate interaction with faculty, staff and other students. No matter how distance learning is employed, it is different than being in a classroom. Being patient with snail mail or being patient and understanding with technology glitches.

Just don't let yourself become frustrated. I will also say with regards to the university you select, do your research. Find out their expectations with regards to assignments, tests, timelines, etc. As an active duty service member, our missions and day-to-day operations change on a moment's notice. Will they work with that, or are you at their mercy? You need to find the university that understands you are a military student, and that our lifestyles are different than a corporate student or any other student they may have attending.

With regards to your family, please make sure they understand you are doing this for your betterment, and in the long run, their betterment.

**Keep my
wife involved
– Positive
Family
Experience**

ent in what way?

ication is who you are. Money was not a motivator. You've got to be able to live. I had them sending my daughter to college. I paid for her bachelors degree. I wanted to make sure I had the right jobs that would be comfortable for our family. We could live in a good neighborhood.

I found ways to keep my wife involved in the experience. She would help me with the research that I needed to complete for papers and my dissertation. This way she felt that she was part of the success when my degree was conferred.

All in all, have faith in yourself. You have gotten to where you are via a solid work ethic and optimistic view on life in general.

Military gives you a work ethic. And it improves your work ethic. An optimistic view...you will be able to make it in the doctoral program if you don't have that optimistic view.

**Work ethic –
Positive
Military
Experience**

you can do this. Your only barrier to completion is you. I wish you all the best and look forward to calling you Doctor and welcoming you into the fold.

It is a journey that you will near and dear for the rest of life.

Cheers,

Delta, EdD
CNOCM, USN(Ret)

APPENDIX K: SAMPLE INTERVIEW WITH IDENTIFIED SIGNIFICANT STATEMENTS

Researcher: You are currently being recorded. I wanted to make sure that you remember that and you were okay with that before we get started. Do you have any questions about what you know, the tools that you filled out so far, or the study itself?

Participant: Everything was pretty easy and pretty straightforward.

Researcher: Okay great. Well I thoroughly enjoyed reading what you sent me and I'm excited about this interview. It is very helpful what you're doing to help me do this and to really find out how military veterans are motivated to persist to completion in their doctoral programs especially the online doctoral program. So, I thank you very much for your time. I have a couple questions about your timeline and your advice letter and then we'll jump into the interview questions. There are about 20 interview questions.

Participant: Okay. All right.

Researcher: So, you retired from the Navy after 24 years. And right now, you are a performance analyst. But before we get into that, what I find so fascinating about you that's different so far is that you retired as an O8. So, to me it seems highly unusual to have enlisted member go through a doctoral program. Am I overstating that or I think it's less common probably?

Participant: I wouldn't say odd. I wouldn't say rare. But I think less common. It's typically a longer road to get to that point.

Researcher: Yes sir. So, can you tell me a little bit about that... your decision? When you enlisted in the military somewhere along the lines you decided you were ready to go ahead and get your education. Is there anything you want to share with me about that?

Participant: Actually, it's kind of a I was almost more normal then what is probably a little bit more odd path. When I graduated from high school I went straight to college after that and I was actually on a Navy ROTC scholarship. *I did my first three years and at the end of my junior year. I was pretty much done with school. I never wanted to go back to school again. I left school and I enlisted and I went on active duty and then I guess four or five years after that I had the opportunity to go back to shore duty and for the next 20 years every opportunity that I had when I was on shore duty I found myself in school and 20 some years later, this is where I sit.*

I found myself in school – Positive Military Experience

Researcher: Oh that's wonderful. And did you finish your doctoral program while you were still active duty?

Participant: No. I had finished most of my coursework. I think I was in my last quarter of coursework when I retired. And then all of my comprehensive process in the writing of the dissertation were after.

Researcher: Now while you were in the military, did you know of any other enlisted folks who were pursuing education like you?

Participant: I did. I don't recall anybody being in a doctoral program at the time. But absolutely there certainly were people there that were in school. And I would I would say it was probably a larger percentage of people who were using an online program rather than a traditional.

Researcher: Okay so you're familiar with folks who were actually using the distance education program while they were in the military while they were active duty. Did you do any conversations about their experiences? If there were any conversations you had that were persuaded you to do the online or was that something you decided on your own?

Not concerned with format, concerned with field – Positive DE Experience

Participant: It was pretty much something that I had decided on my own. I went to a master's program and it was a little bit more traditional than pure online. It was a one week night during the week. You would actually be in a classroom. It was predominantly weekend work. So you would go get locked away on a Saturday and Sunday for most of the day. *And when I started looking in to my doctoral program I was more concerned with not so much the university or the format. I was very particular in what I wanted to do. So that narrowed the field down significantly and it geographically made that decision for me. And there just wasn't anything around in the area that I really wanted to focus on.*

Researcher: And that was training in performance improvement?

Participant: It was.

Researcher: OK. So that's how you were able to narrow down. You know you're more focused on the field, this is the format of the program, and then it just so happened that you found a good training performance improvement program that was also distance education that was a secondary?

Participant: That's correct.

Researcher: Okay very good. All right. Let me get to your timeline.

Participant: I finished my Masters in 99 I think. And I think it was 2004 when I actually started my doctoral program.

Researcher: Okay great. And you completed your course work in 06 and a lot of what you saw here in your timeline. You say during this time I had attended three separate one-week onsite colloquiums.

Onsite colloquiums to help during phases of program – Positive DE Experience

Participant: *These were basically designed to help during various stages of the program to help with what exactly I think they were sort of freeform but it was highly suggested that you complete them during particular phases of your program.* The first one that I remember specifically was focused on library and research and how to read how to write it how to tear apart a research article that sort of thing. The second one is escaped me at this point and the last one

**Relatedness –
Positive DE
Program
Experience**

which more focused on the comprehensive exam process. The dissertation process pot holes the I.R.B. road. Those sorts of things that were more appropriate for the later pieces of the and you went somewhere and they [colloquiums] were all around the country. You kind and choose what was kind of close to what was kind of convenient or where you wanted to go at that particular time of the year. **But you had the opportunity to actually put a face to the name on the you know the online blackboard people who you've been dealing with for you know at that point you known for years. And that was kind of a cool part of the program and all of that all of the online faculty that were available were there.** But I think the important ones were the first one getting the research background and certainly getting through the writing of the process and interestingly I had gone through and it just wasn't convenient for me to get that third colloquium at the time that they had recommended. It was on the other side of the country; it was West Coast. **There was other life and work things that had gotten in the way so I had pushed that one down the road a little bit to my own detriment** because I had not realized at that time I had done my own research was within population inside of the Navy and when you go to Big Navy proper and you say I want to do research, there's not so much of a distinction with them as to whether or not you wanted to pose a simple survey or you want to inject them with drugs or you what that distinction is not made. **So in order to administer the survey to my target population inside of the Navy I had gone through their Bureau of Medicine in an institution review board process and that was you know days in rooms with lawyers and things I wish I had known ahead of time and that's sort of the WHO the short version of the explanation of the long period of time between the completion of writing my comprehensive exams and finally getting through to the proposal stage and the kind of thing.** So they had a purpose of trying to circumvent to my own detriment I suppose is best way to describe that.

**Work got in
the way –
Personal
Challenge/
DE
Challenge**

**Getting
through
proposal
stage -
Negative DE
Experience**

Researcher: How did you get through that?

Participant: One of the people that I think that we had in common is Juliet. I'm not sure if you work with Golf or if you work with Golf. I had spent some time with Golf at the November Lima and one of the civilian staff there sort of it was someone that I had worked with for three and a half years that I was there and he had sort of helped me target that population. **So from the inside he actually you know did as good a job as anybody could do to grease the skids and he'd say you know he had pointed me in the direction of you got to see this person and you got to talk to that person and you have to go meet with this lawyer and you have to go. And they were helpful. I had some help. I had some sponsorship along the way and people pointing me in the right direction.**

**I had help –
Positive DE
Experience**

Researcher: But these people were outside of Charlie University right?

Participant: That's correct.

Researcher: What was your dissertation topic?

Participant: It was a relational study between mentoring and leadership development among women in the Navy. It focused on whether the mentoring relationship was formal or informal, whether it was across gender lines or within gender roles. It was based loosely on the work of Kilo India as they had done a leadership practices study and have done many over the period of

time. So it was a *self-reported leadership and the historic and current mentorship relationships that these people had had along their military career.*

Dissertation topic

Researcher: Okay. You sent out surveys to the Navy and that's how you collected most of your data?

Participant: We delivered them in the classroom actually as they [female military members] would go through there. There is a requirement that at certain stages throughout your career you get thrown through this Navy leadership training course. *So that the audience was captive I guess I had some agreement and some high-level sponsorship that helped administer that survey inside of the courtroom.* And it was here take this survey and give it back to me when you're done kind of thing.

Military support on dissertation

Researcher: Excellent. And are you still working on that topic professionally now?

Continued career in training post military

Participant: I'm still in the leadership arena. I still have my hands inside of mentoring projects. I don't necessarily have the focus that I had from a gender perspective. I work for a training company. We do probably about 60 percent of our work for the Federal Government not necessarily Navy. And we'll do about 40 percent of our work commercially. *The big work that we do is in the training and development arena. But I'm more of a human factors if that means anything. I probably lean more in that general area of training but I do a lot of analysis and a lot of evaluation and why do you push the wrong button in that sort of thing.*

Researcher: So going back to your timeline. You mention that from June to December you mention your comprehensive exam and the time that it took to do that. And you said that during your writing you recalled a number of conversations between yourself and people you had met along the way or someone was talking to someone else down from freaking out. Can you expound on that?

DE structure

Participant: *The comprehensive process is part of the coursework but what it really is you finish all of your coursework and then they give you a certificate that says I completed all my coursework yay.* Before you're allowed to start writing your dissertation you go in to this two quarter or six-month process. The first part of that process is you're working with the person that you've decided on to become your mentor. He becomes the chair when you enroll into your decision in your dissertation itself. But it's just the one on one. It's not all the other bodies that show up along the way it's just you and that one person and you spend the first part of that time developing questions related to the degree in general but more specifically the topic that you're eventually going to pursue. *One of one of those questions is directly related to the seminal works in the in the field. One of those questions is directly related to the particular research methodology that you intend to pursue. One of them is more focused generally on the one-word topic mentorship and how that historically has applied to your population. And then you get to pick a fourth question and you make it up. You know it's something that's appropriate that's going to help you down the road.* But it's not necessarily one of those three other things and you get the approval and then you finally get a thumbs up and then at that point in time the quarters over and then you go away the beginning of the next quarter and you start writing. And I don't know a period of time later I want to say it's six weeks. It's been a little while. But I want to

DE structure

say it's six weeks. You turn in 60 pages of writing on those four topics and then your committee is assembled and they read those. **The problem for the learner from that perspective is you can fail one of those questions one time and they will send you away and you'll do a rewrite and you'll adjust accordingly. But any more fails along the way and they say thank you very much we appreciate all your time and energy but we're not going to let you move on to the dissertation process.**

You can fail -
Dissertation
Challenge

Researcher: So does that happen?

Participant: There's stories and wives tales and it certainly adds to the pressure of surviving that stage of the game. Do I personally know anyone who did not make it through those? No. Did I hear of anyone who that I could say by name that did not make it through those? No. But that really doesn't matter at that time.

Share
concerns -
Overcoming
Obstacles

Researcher: So how did you overcome that?

Participant: **I think just talking to people and sharing the concerns and letting everybody say you know what, don't worry about it you're doing fine.** You're still on track. That kind of thing. I think it was just moral support more than anything out there.

Students
providing
moral
support -
Relatedness

Researcher: Excellent. And these people... were they family? Was it your mentor or faculty coach?

Participant: **It was more students that were involved in that particular stage of the program because at this point in time you're in a specialization.** There's seven or eight courses that are core. You're going to see the same names pop up. You realize having gone to a colloquium or two that they're at the same stage of the game as you are in need especially the last one is you get to roll in to writing the comprehensive questions you kind of know where everybody is that you've had classes with these people and you've seen them once or twice before you know it their week long. So yeah I think I think from the family perspective it was more of a would you please just go away and get this done kind of that and I'm sure you have some sense of that.

Researcher: Yes. The latter piece that you wrote on your timeline April 2008 as I was beginning my writing process I was transitioning out of the military and began my job search for a new career. The connections that I made along the way both through school and the military played a significant role in finding what has turned out to be my current job. For the past 10 years. So what can you tell me about those connections that you made along the way that played a significant role?

Relating to
military
veteran
students -
Relatedness

Participant: There were a few people that I was working with in the military who were transitioning out at that period of time not part of my same school not part of you know by **people that were in school at the same time that I was and were going through some of the same things that I was into racing for the finish line.** So that could be an important part of making the transition or in my particular case **how am I going to continue to be able to do this school when I would I have to go learn a whole new job all over again.** The technical stuff I was never really concerned with. But **the new culture and the new beginning** to close

Challenges
Transitioning

yourself and all that kind of thing. And it just so happens that 10 or 12 years prior to that I had worked with someone along the way and we had lost touch and somehow through you know a friend of a friend and somebody that I had met new and seven degrees of separation I guess is probably the best way to describe it. I ended up meeting with a guy that I had worked with 10 years before who happened to own his company. And it's where I it's where I am right now was actually on the upswing. It was a situation where he was looking to grow a particular area of the business. I mean he really didn't have any work for me to do. **He didn't have anything to do he had no business hiring me. But it was just that I was probably a really good fit for the area that he was trying to grow the business into. And we probably hadn't seen or talked to each other in seven or eight years. I mean we kept in touch a little bit after we had worked together. But after that I had lost touch and hadn't seen each other in forever and got back in touch. And I think that it worked out for the benefit of both of us. So it's pretty interesting. And I'm still there.**

**I was a really good fit -
Transitioning
and
Relatedness**

Researcher: Okay. And I love hearing these stories. You say on your timeline in April 2018 you definitely would not have successfully navigated all the changes without the support of family and friends. Changes meaning starting the new job while you're in?

**Really crazy
year -
Negative Family
Experience**

Participant: All of that accurate that they are absolutely that was that was a significant part of everything else that was going on. **It just so happens that my wife is retired military. She retired in June of 08. So that was a really crazy year and there is a lot of stuff going on and the changes while you're trying to get your doctorate.**

Researcher: How did you overcome that?

**I was going
to let the data
sit -
Dissertation
Challenge**

Participant: We actually had the conversation where I was still sitting on the fence and at that point I was I was well into writing. **But what I had decided that I wanted to do was I was just going to kick the can down the road a little bit and put school on hold, put the writing on hold. I was going to continue to let the surveys do what the surveys were going to do and end up with some huge pile of data that I really wasn't even going to look at. I was going to let it sit. I was going to get back to it whenever the time was right.** And quite frankly my wife told me that time is never going to be right. You need to just deal and get through. **So she was she was really the one pushing you know to go ahead and not stop not take a break. Finish up.** And that is not an aspect of her personality to push through and to get it done. I think probably she'd be willing to have me do that or have our kids do that then she would. I feel like we probably both need to do that to each other because left to our own devices we would probably take the easy way.

**Finish -
Family
Support/
Motivation**

Researcher: OK. Very good. I like that. I've loved reading your advice letter. Very beautifully written very clear very concise and focused on two very important pieces of information that military veterans lean on. You first attribute your experience in the military to being successful in completing your degree and the two skills that really brings you up to do this training in the military to do this for your doctoral degree with time management and teamwork. You said that you can apply these skills in the workplace and in the classroom. Can you give me some examples of where you learned that you know of time management in the military?

Manage time -
Positive
Military Exp

Participant: Oh wow. Well I think early on in my career. My definition of if you were to have asked me how people in the military manage time. I think my initial response would have been well it's very simple. Everything has to be done yesterday. That was the perspective that I had going in. And that's based mostly on what now I can look back and say is a very limited view of what the big picture was and what the whole understanding of what needs to happen. And I think as I moved it on I grew older I grew more mature. And I had advanced you know through the military. I had a larger understanding. It was the larger piece of the pie was shared with me and I understood that there are a lot of things that happened and some things have to happen first and some things can happen until the very end. And I think to make a big broad statement that anyone at any level of that particular organization that has achieved any success at all has done so through some learning and applying the ability to manage both their time and the time of others around them. You would not have been successful in getting to any level of advancement within that organization.

Manage time -
Positive
Military Exp

Researcher: Was it your chain of command that helped you come to your own?

Participant: And that I would say that the easiest answer for me to give you for that is yes probably all of the above. Some things are trial and error some things are trial by fire you know the necessity exists and then you become successful or you don't. And some. Some things are simply dictated. This is what it is. And you know figure out the how tos in order to get to the end of the road.

Figure it out -
Positive
Military Exp

Researcher: Very good. The other aspect I mentioned earlier was teamwork. Your distinction of teamwork in the military versus teamwork in academia. You talk about teamwork in the military as everyone has a goal and you sort of conquer and divide to meet the objectives and that goal. Is that accurate?

Participant: I think that's very accurate. Sure.

Researcher: And in the academic realm it's there is a goal but everyone is pushing you along to achieve that goal in their own way. Is that true?

Participant: I think that is true. And I think that being a part of a nontraditional academic environment. You also have that responsibility to do that same for others that are around you that you know I would go back to the writing of the Comprehensive exam as you know you've got that responsibility to help push them along when you know when they need it or to reach out and lend a hand kind of thing. So it's that teamwork is defined differently in the military than what you experienced in your doctoral program.

Lend a hand -
Relatedness

Researcher: Is there anything that you were able to translate for the military as far as teamwork and to your experience in the doctoral program?

Participant: I think I would say probably yes. It's a little bit ill-defined in the military. There is a very large degree of specialization. Specific functions are performed by specific individuals who are best equipped to perform them. And to say there is a general list in a technical military environment would probably be a completely untrue statement. They're very specialized in the

areas. And that's probably how the management of that team is best undertaken by understanding what people's strong suits are and using those to the advantage of accomplishing whatever the larger goal is. And that would probably be the best parallel that could draw to any other level or any other degree of teamwork specifically in the academic environment is if you're the individual me for instance if you're the individual who is trying to accomplish an objective or to trying to accomplish a goal to successfully navigate the waters and come out the other side with a really cool piece of paper that you can hang on the wall to know where those around use talents lie and to be able to draw upon those talents to best help you get through those objectives are goals along the way is probably the best parallel that I could draw is in the ability to manage that group of people or manage that teamwork and I that that is. It sounds borderline manipulative though I think I guess the best parallel that you draw probably

Manage teams -
Translating
Military to DE

Manage teams -
Translating
Military to DE

Researcher: That's excellent. I see that I can I can see this this is actually very very good information and good insight for me. Excellent. Okay thank you. So in the last bit you talk about relationships that you develop with fellow learners and faculty will be different. That way your experience as a young adult learner you say faculty will treat you as an adult. They have expectations of you. That you are going to do your best that you're going to contribute to your own learning. The influence of the faculty and their expectations. Is there anything that you used from your military experiences that made you state this?

Participant: I'm trying to make the correlation from military experiences you know treating like this is your job. These are the expectations. Do it. Were there any similarities from the military in that aspect with the faculty that you dealt with? I think so not. Not from what I say is a stringent understanding of you know here's the rules follow the rules kind of that I would say that that particular aspect and I'm struggling on how to say it was I was unclear. Not as clear I think. I think with the military these are the rules and this is how you do things and this is what I expect of you. I don't think that's really what I was trying to get out when I was when I was trying to say that they treat you like an adult. And what the expectations are but my experience has been that that if I were truly trying to give somebody advice on how to be successful in that environment and maybe I took this a bit too far. But my experience has been that here's... I'm going to stop and say this and maybe it fits. My advice to people who were active duty with me when it came to pursuing their education was simply this if I were to offer pay for half of a brand-new car any brand-new car on the lot would you own one and the simple answer to that question is absolutely. Of course, they would. And the reason I would ask is because while they're on active duty their rich Uncle Sam was paying for half of their education. And the concern was why. Why don't you own one. So, the biggest downside to any of that I think is they had some bad learning experience along the way. They hated high school. They hated their freshman year of college and much like me they had said look I am done not going to school anymore. And I think really the only point that I was trying to relay is this is not your mother's college experience when you work through as an adult. When do you work through some sort of online scenario, you're not a butt in a seat in a 19-year-old freshman classroom. This is not that same thing. It's something different. And really that's all that I was trying to get across.

Rules and
expectations -
Military Exp

Uncle Sam
paying -
Motivation

Not your
mother's
college
experience

Researcher: Excellent. Perfect. Great thank you.

1. Describe one or two values that provide insight into your personality and from where those values came.

Researcher: So two values one or two values that you have if you could tell me about that provide me insight into your personality.

Value being helpful - Relatedness

Participant: One or two values I think probably the most important thing to know about D am I am very oriented towards family. And I say that in the loosest sense of the term. To me that means the people that are around me I'm going to do whatever I feel is the right thing to do in order to be helpful and allowing them to be successful and achieve what it is that they're looking to achieve in a much more strict sense of the word family I'm probably a little bit more. Let's pick a good word influential in forces in the people that are my immediate family in some a boot to the high end and turn it to be more forceful in that. But it's important for me to be able to help people succeed in areas where they truly are looking and are willing to do the things it need that it takes to be successful. And I think along those lines probably another area that's very important to me and almost related is persistence. You do the things that you feel like are important and the things that you feel like you need to do in order to get to whatever it is that you're trying to achieve for as long as it's important. I think I would stop short of saying I try to push forward never quit because sometimes things change sometimes things happen sometimes. Beating your head against a wall over something that is either something you're no longer interested in pursuing or be something that is no longer important. I think that becomes something different than persistence at that point.

Value persistence – Overcoming Obstacles

Researcher: Okay. So where do these values come from? Where are the seeds of these views that you just described?

Participant: I don't mean I don't know that I know of a point in time in my life where those things didn't exist. So I guess sometime early on along the way.

2. Why did you join the military?

Researcher: Well that's great. Thank you for that. I'm going to move in to the next question. Why did you join the military?

Participant: Why did I join the military at that point in time in my life? A very very long time ago I had decided that one of the most important things for me was to go to school and get education. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to have my rich Uncle Sam piggy bank bill for a couple of years. And at that point in time I had to take a step back and decide to take a break. I needed to sidestep. I was done with school and wanted anything to do with it. And quite frankly I was at the point in time of a program where I really didn't have an option. They had paid for that much education. I owe them a little bit at time. At that point in time I was going to give them the two years that I owed them and I was going to go back to school. And 20 some odd years later I had continued to give them time and I had continued to go through school and I think it worked out.

Military provided education – Positive Military Experience

3. Describe your positive military experiences while you served.

Researcher: Good very good. Describe to me your positive military experiences while you in. You can come up with something conceptually or if one or two experiences come up.

Participant: I think in general that the best thing that I could say *was I got to meet people, I got to see places, and I got to do things that I would never have had the opportunity to do in any other 20 year history.*

Meet people
see places –
Positive
Military Exp

4. Describe your challenging military experiences while you served and how you overcame those challenges.

Researcher: Well the flipside of that. Can you describe to me how challenging the military experiences when you served?

Participant: Excuse me. This 16-year-old just interrupted me. He was born in November. And when he was born I was on the phone with my wife while they brought him in. I was going through the Suez Canal. Two months after 9/11.

Researcher: How did you overcome that?

Participant: *I carried that resentment for a really long time. Now you know when you're when you're in that line of work it's just what it is;* it's part of the job; it's just what it is.

Resentment during
deployment –
Negative Military
Exp

Researcher: Thank you for your service.

Participant: Absolutely.

5. Describe your relationships (e.g., fellow military member, unit, commanding officer) while serving in the military.

Researcher: Describe your relationships while serving in the military and that can be a member, with your unit, commanding officer. Anything that comes to mind.

Participant: Some good some bad. If you meet a lot of people you meet a whole lot of people. *If you're lucky and I consider myself to be lucky you meet some really good people along the way and you get to add them to your list of friends and I guess the other side of that coin is sometimes you have to work with people that you don't really care for and that's really no different than any other job I suppose.* So you do things that you need to do. You know you and make sure that you're as professional as you possibly can be and you know it's a really structured environment and these rules have places and they have purpose.

Some good
people some you
don't care for -
Relatedness

Researcher: Did you like this structured environment and the rules?

Participant: That again. I think that's probably another two-sided coin. You come to an understanding especially as you get older and you become more mature you get to an understanding of the purpose and the meaning and that sort of thing. *I would say probably did not like the fact that decisions seemed to being made authoritatively. It seemed like even when it was not my best decision that some of the best decisions came from other voices in the room. It did. The environment was not as collaborative. Yeah but that's I mean on the other side of that you know I understand the fact that that sort of thing takes time and you know sometimes times not a luxury they can afford. You know I understand I agree to stand your ground but yet nobody likes all the rules in Washington.*

6. Why did you separate/retire from the military?

Continued school
while serving –
Positive Military
Exp

okay. Well why did you retire from the military?

Well as I mentioned before I had intended on doing two years and getting out and school and traveling down other roads and 20 some odd years later. I had said at along the career that that I was looking for a job when I found this one every opportunity that I had along the way to travel down other venues or to pursue other interests. And it ended up being my choice to stay in and individually defining those decisions. *I don't know that at one point in time it was time for me to go back to shore duty and I had the opportunity to continue going to school at one point in time. There was you know though the planets had not aligned to where I wanted to you know. And before you know it 20 some years later and you know and I don't regret a minute of it.*

Enlisted
member's
experience
while serving

Researcher: So we've talked about when you transitioned out of the military you were actually in a very heavy phase of your doctoral program... your comprehensive exams.

Participant: That's correct. I was finishing up my comprehensives and just getting ready and go into the writing.

7. Describe your experiences transitioning out of the military.

Researcher: Describe your experiences transitioning out of the military. You mentioned you you know instead of putting on your uniform putting on civilian clothes that you expand on that?.

I got to say what I
wanted to do –
Positive
Transition Exp

lucky first of all to start with that I was I was really lucky. I left and I went to a it was a very adult environment it was described for me the things that you the are going to get done. And describe for me you know what you're shooting for as far as a target down the road. *You know and I kind of made up my own thing. I kind of got to say what I wanted to do what I wanted to go after you know who I wanted to talk to who I wanted to meet with. What I thought was you know the direction that you know my particular little piece got to go. And I had the freedom to be able to do that.* And luckily or fortunately or magically it worked out to where I had the ability to be able to manage my time in and cram a hundred and something hours' worth of stuff in it to 68-hour weekend and it just worked out okay.

**Learning curve –
Negative
Transition Exp**

job when you found this opportunity and you were transitioning out the
ing as you had created room to choose your own path in your new job.
described for me earlier. The challenging side of the military where others
u. So it's very different. Were you comfortable with having that creative
rt of make your own path in this new business?

**Difficult
managing time –
Negative DE Exp**

Participant: *There is a little bit of a learning curve.* I was very comfortable with the
I'm not sure that my self-assessment of my ability to be completely successful to the
had envisioned that was a little skewed. It didn't. Everything didn't work out quite ex
way that I had hoped for. Thankfully it worked out at least as well as my boss had thought
would or should or could. And I had that like I said I had that I had the freedom I had the luxury
of being able and allowed to grow in to this. I think it and I *and it was difficult to be able to
manage that time wise with what I needed to be doing with school.* I think it probably would
have worked out easier had I had I gone into a situation where I showed up at 9:00 in the
morning and I left at 5:00 in the afternoon and I think maybe that would have been easier to be
able to keep all of the balls in the air at the same time. But I think that if I had walked in to that
situation ten years ago I don't I don't feel like I'd be there now. So I have the benefit of being able
to look back in. It is tough for me to go back and put myself in that situation.

Researcher: But you had two big situations that really you came from one very structured
environment two environments that were really not structured where you were in charge of your
time and your path and what you got accomplished was just based on you and only you know
that I can imagine that being overwhelming probably.

Participant: Yeah. I mean if you're forcing me back there I can remember some difficult. Yeah
there's probably some hair pulling out in there. But again I don't think I don't think I would be
there had it had I just had to show up and that's right. That's right. So you persist.

Researcher: And here you are. And it's a beautiful thing.

Participant: And it was luck in magic and what it is. Maybe a little persistence but mildly more
luck than anything else. So yeah.

8. Why did you decide to earn your doctorate?

Researcher: So why did you ultimately decide to earn your doctorate?

Participant: Well when I was 17 and I wanted to go to school. And I think I left out the part
Good probably the most important part is *that I did not have the wherewithal to just go to
school and live in a frat house and pay for school out of my pay I did not have that
wherewithal. So the military was a good option for me at the time in order to begin my
education and I wanted to go to school.* And I don't think that you know aside from life getting
in the way on occasion as it does the ebb and flow of that desire to learn and to continue through
school and to always be a student of something. I don't think I've not ever had that. I think that's
just part of. You know that's part of what Delta is.

**Good option to
begin education –
Positive Military
Exp**

Researcher: Do you know where that comes from? A lifelong learner?

Lifelong learner

Participant: I don't know. I really don't know. I mean I've never not liked school. I mean sure along the way there's a significant number of teachers or instructors or professors that I could have lived without. Just like anybody else. But I always enjoyed it. I always enjoyed learning especially as an adult learner because I have the opportunity and I have the ability and I'm not a 19-year-old kid in the back of the classroom where I had the ability to say look you just know just plain no. I mean some of the things other that are coming forth from you are not just iffy but they're just wrong there. You know and whether that whether that be for the sole purpose of saying that someone is inaccurate and or if it were you know just to start a fight in a classroom and to have a discussion and to be able to have that discourse at it's always it's always been a part of what I want to do and what I want to be told.

First time I knew what I wanted to do – Positive Military Exp

Participant: *...ilitary experiences, if any, that motivated you to persist in your distance education doctoral program.*

Researcher: *...ilitary experiences. Could you describe those military experiences if any persist in your doctoral program?*

Participant: I think that just the first time through my educational career the first time that I really thought I knew what I wanted to do when I grew up I was working at a training command standing in front of the classroom building curricula. You put some slides together on PowerPoint 1.0 kind of thing. And it just so happened there was a degree program when I was in that had directly aligned with that sort of thing. So I had gotten my undergraduate degree and workforce education and training. And I finished that degree I finished that tour at the training command and I went back and I did Navy for a few more years. They had the opportunity to go to leadership school and had the great fortune of being surrounded by a bunch of really smart people. And I decided at that point I said you know what I'm here I'm not going anywhere for a few more years. Let me go down here. Figure out what kind of you know master's degree that I can do and that I would like to do. And I ended up for some strange reason. With a masters in human resources. I say that under my breath because it was the closest thing that had anything to do with training it really was. And there was this other world that I really had no interest in. No experience with it and quite frankly it was all completely new learning outside of a military environment. We have our personnel laws. We

Earned degrees/finding niche – Positive Military Exp

Narrow field of focus – Positive DE Exp

...sation. It's on a piece of paper you can see it. Don't argue don't come ask me for a raise. Kind of thing so far and it was out of bounds. And then went away going for some more years and then finally came back to another place where I had to continue going to school if that's what I decided to do. I knew that this was very close to the end of the road. If I wanted to leave and go do something different when I grew up. I did not want it to be making PowerPoint slides and building training. And I certainly didn't want it to be human resources. So I really started getting into the weeds and. what I have learned along the way was that by the time you finish a doctoral degree the broadening that I had to go through in order to get my Masters was exactly the opposite of what I should be doing if I were to pursue a doctoral degree. It was going to be a very narrow field of focus. And I can really sharpen the pencil and figure out what it was that I wanted to do. And I took that opportunity and I said look you know this whole training thing is really

**Finding niche –
Positive Military
Exp**

important. I like it but it's not exactly right. At some point in time I was exposed and then undated and then drowned in the pool of Delta the quality guy. So I had I had meander down the pathway of process management and process improvement. And you hear words thrown around like Motorola Six Sigma or Lean manufacturing in it its quality basically and that had interested me. And in all of the things that came out of his mouth made perfect sense to me and I just didn't really get why people just didn't really get it made. So now I'm into so now I'm focused in the world of training and I'm focused in the world of quality. And I had read an article at some point in time that said if the Navy took their training budget and quit sending people to schools they could send every person on active duty to earn a bachelors and a masters degree at Hotel University. That's the quantity of money that we had spent on training and then the purpose of that article is you may very well know from a Coast Guard perspective is training is the most expensive thing that solves the smallest percent of performance problems. And along the way even back to the late 90s as ISPI had been blossoming and blooming and growing in two you know the people who were smarter than programmed instruction kind of people. And all of those people all of those people in one shape or form were embedded with the University of Charlie Foxtrot, Charlie University, and University of Mike. And those are the people who ended up being the people that I would see as instructors as I went through my program and that was from that point on. There was no decision involved.

**Now I'm focused
in training –
Continued passion**

**Discovered
problem while
serving to address
in current career**

10. *Describe military experiences, if any, that threatened your motivation to persist in your distance education doctoral program and how you overcame those challenges.*

Researcher: Well what about military experience. Any that threatened your motivation?

Participant: In your heart I think really the only thing was once I got my foot in the door and I decided that this was what I was going to do at each of those junctures. I knew that once I had started I had I'm the analysis guy so I had done all of the work ahead of time. I knew that this was really something that I wanted to pursue and once I did the gears were in motion and I finally got my foot in the door. You know with the exception of life trying to happen at the end of my doctoral program made I don't think that I don't think so.

11. *Describe how or if the reason to earn your doctorate changed over the course of your distance education doctoral program.*

Researcher: You've answered this question that you may want to expand on it. Is there reason to earn your doctor changed over the course of your program?

Participant: No don't think so I don't think.

12. *If not apparent on your timeline, how long did it take you to attain your doctoral degree?*

Researcher: Very very good. And on your timeline I believe we have discussed this but how long did it take you to get your doctoral degree?

Participant: I think I started classes in the fall of 04. And my piece of paper says December 30 first of 2010 it had just over four years. Amazing. It's over four years.

13. *Why did you choose a distance education format over other degree formats for earning your doctorate?*

Researcher: And so you mentioned earlier that the reason why you chose a dissertation format was really secondary. You were really focusing on the field and it just so happened that the distance education format offered at Charlie University was that field. Is that accurate?

Participant: That's absolutely correct.

Researcher: So you weren't really looking for distance education you were focusing on the field is that right?

Participant: Yeah. If all of the planets had aligned and this had been at Oscar Delta Uni probably would have had my butt in a chair.

Researcher: And why is that?

Participant: *The faculty was important; area of study was important. I did not pick Charlie University. I picked the people that I knew were part of the faculty whether they were adjunct or not. The experience and the fact that they were actually practitioners inside of the field that I wanted to work with within and in and it was truly a new degree program.* It really was very very good.

Faculty were practitioners – Choosing Doctoral Program

14. *Describe your positive experiences in your distance education doctoral p*

Researcher: Well we're starting to get to some questions about your program. So can you describe your positive experiences of your doctoral program?

Participant: I think in general the best part of the program for me was *the field of study is so narrow and so specific that there was a lot of commonality in the background of the people that I had the opportunity to deal with.* And it was not strange. Or it was not abnormal to have at length offline conversations about things that you either agreed with or disagreed with or everybody had come in from the same sort of place. So there's a lot of common understanding and common background.

There was a lot of commonality – Positive DE Exp

Researcher: OK. Did you experience that in the military when you were collaborating with folks?

Participant: I think as time went on and you become more senior and you know a lot of things built and developed that common background and everybody kind of understand and everybody else is talking about. I think early on in my career and I would probably think this is most true that and now it's kind of a melting pot. *You're just kind of thrown in a room and you kinda sorta yeah you have to. You have to be you're at the very very early stages of*

Team development – Differences in Military and DE

team development I guess as opposed to what I felt like I was dealing with inside of the academic environment.

15. Describe your challenging experiences in your distance education doctoral program and how you overcame those challenges.

Coursework was not high level – DE Experience

Researcher: Right. How about challenging experiences in your doctoral program?

Participant: Now every step of the way I didn't I did not necessarily think that the coursework was at a significantly higher level than what I felt like I endured in my Master's program to be perfectly honest with you. The textbooks probably could have been reused. The approach of the instructors and the way you went about analyzing the material and the focus of the discussions were probably a little bit higher level of learning. And there's a learning curve associated with that. I mean I remember specifically as you as you go through and you start write your dissertation one of the things that they beat you profusely about the head and shoulders is to make sure that you retain every single piece of paper that you've ever touched along the way that sort of thing. And in going through and trying to decipher and consolidate synthesize thoughts and ideas from something that you thought you knew before in the past a specific example would be the ability to follow the simplest directions when writing a paper in X format APA and in my particular case because I thought I knew it in the beginning and I thought I knew it in the end it just so happens that those two things are very different in appearance. So yeah I think you start with whatever baseline it is and you and you work towards whatever you know to be the smartest person in the universe for that one second that you finish the defense of your dissertation because you've read it all and you've seen it all and you've written the latest and greatest kind of thing.

Analyzing material was a learning curve – DE Experience

16. Describe your relationships (e.g., classmates, advisor, chair, etc.) while earning your doctoral degree in your distance education doctoral program.

Researcher: I asked before about the military's but your relationships while you were earning your doctoral degree in your program. If there are any you want to describe whether it's your classmates, adviser, your mentor, or are there anything you wanted described to me?

Build a common understanding – DE Chair Relationship

Participant: From the academic side of the house... Yeah I think that's kind of what we talk about up until now I mean it's important in any you get to the point where you finally you finally pick a chair and you've you know and you get to work with that person. A significant amount of time when you're going through a comprehensive process and any build that relationship and to this day you know any in and you get the benefit of not just that person but whoever that person's mentor was and whoever that person's mentor was and in you sort of it builds a common background and it builds a common understanding in those relationships develop as long as you don't do anything along the way I guess to you know time and distance problems where they just fall away. But yeah those are. You go through some pretty significant events with that group of people.

Researcher: Do you maintain contact with any of them today?

Participant: Absolutely. *There's probably six or seven learners that I'm still in contact with my chair.* I'm still in contact with. I don't. I have I have occasionally reached out to a number another member who was on the committee. But that's more professional question here and kind of thing. Yeah absolutely. The people in the program and certainly my mentor.

Still in contact with students and chair - Relatedness

Researcher: And as far as the military... you still maintain some relationships from your r career?

Participant: I do well in and some by choice and some maybe not so much. First of all I live in Hotal Romeo. Much like half of half of the population there is some sort of relationship to the military. And I and I and I do a significant part of the work that I that I do has some relationship to the Department of Defense whatsoever. You know so yeah some by choice and some are just people that I've known along the way and an acquaintance I guess.

17. *Describe your experiences transitioning from the coursework phase to the dissertation phase of the distance education doctoral program.*

Researcher: Now transitioning from your coursework phase to your dissertation phase. We've talked about this already how that was at the same time that you were retired military and entering into a new career. So we talked significantly about it. Was there anything else you wanted to add about transitioning from the coursework dissertation?

Faculty did a good job of preparing you for the dissertation – Positive DE Exp

Participant: As a learner that was anything about that. I think the only thing that think is because of the way that all of the coursework was structured it was very oriented it was cite your sources documentation blah blah blah. Keep your referen blah. *The university and at least the faculty did a really good job of preparing you to make that transition. Go sit in your office for the next six months and do the things you need to do I think. I wouldn't say it was difficult. No I think they did a really good job. It was you know it seemed sort of seamless.* So yeah I think that's part of that. Yes absolutely.

18. *How has your doctoral degree benefited you professionally?*

Researcher: You've already answered this question that you can certainly expand on it if you want to. How has your doctoral degree benefited you professionally? You've talked about you know the career that you're in now that you've been in for 10 years. You're finally it sounds like you are doing what you want to do and you focused in on a career training and improvement helping people. There anything you want to expand on?

Participant: Don't know if there's anything else you'd like to add. Yeah um I'm not really sure. I think there I think there's probably some face validity that's associated with having the title to be quite honest with you. If I'm not sitting in a room and I'm not in a meeting and I don't necessarily anticipate it much like most of your e-mails it's still a little weird it's uncomfortable. I'm still just the guy that sits in the second row. I'm still just Delta. But again it does carry a certain amount of face validity in it. It does give me the wherewithal that unrelated to my military background where I would just do this anyway but it gives me some sort of credibility when I when I stand up in the room and I say Eh I just don't think so. And here's some of my thinking behind telling

you that you know there's probably 10 different better ways outside of that I think. **I mean it and it carries that validity. The flip side of that coin is it is the onus falls on me and soon you to not be wrong when you when you make those sorts of statements and claims in air to not be in the glass house right.** Yeah. Is there is there a benefit to that. I mean I perceive it from the other perspective. Sure I do. I think it carries some sort of face validity and you give it some al validity.

The degree carries validity

19. *How has your doctoral degree benefited you personally?*

Researcher: How about personally now?

Sense of accomplishment/ achievement

Participant: I mean it's **there's a sense of accomplishment there's a you know there's a sense of achievement** of course the things on the wall somewhere. But yeah I am proud of it.

20. *What else do you think is important for me to know about military veterans' motivational experiences while persisting in distance education doctoral programs?*

Researcher: And this is our last question. Is there anything else you think is important for me to know about military veterans' motivational experiences while persisting in doctoral and distance education doctoral programs?

Participant: I can't think of anything that I'd like to have a rain check if that's okay.

Researcher: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. Your contribution is so valuable to this study.

**APPENDIX L: TEXTURAL AND STRUCTURAL THEMES EMERGED FROM
CLUSTERED MEANING UNITS**

Textural Themes (What)	Clustered Meaning Units
Support System	Relatedness <i>(faculty, peers, family)</i> Positive DE Experiences <i>(residencies and dissertation committee)</i> Translating Military to DE <i>(enlist support from faculty and peers)</i>
Obstacles	Negative DE Experience <i>(communication, chair, dissertation process)</i> Negative Family Experience <i>(divorce, infertility, death, illness)</i> Negative Military Experience <i>(deployment and connectivity issues)</i> Amotivation <i>(temporary drop out and considering dropping out)</i> Negative Transition Experience <i>(from coursework to dissertation phase)</i> Civilian Career Competing with DE Program <i>(travel for work)</i>
Goal Accomplishment	Positive DE Experience <i>(coursework, research, final defense)</i> Positive Military Experience <i>(execute mission)</i> Translating Military to DE <i>(complete mission to complete program)</i> Increased Civilian Opportunities <i>(access to civilian jobs requiring doctorate)</i> Competence <i>(persist at difficult tasks)</i> Goals <i>(attain doctoral degree and civilian opportunities)</i> Military Values <i>(finish what you start, never give up)</i> Increase Military Opportunities <i>(instructor, leader, promotions)</i> Translating Military to Civilian Pursuits <i>(instructor, organizational leadership, training)</i> Positive Career Experience <i>(speaking engagements and further research)</i>

A New Culture	Positive DE Experience <i>(curriculum, cohorts, faculty)</i> Positive Military Experience <i>(exposure to diverse cultures)</i> Translating Military to DE <i>(deployment to other countries and integrating with doctoral community)</i>
Flexibility and Autonomy of the DE Structure and Program Type	<hr/> Positive DE Experience <i>(curriculum)</i> DE Flexibility <i>(program structure, family/career balance)</i> Autonomy <i>(dissertation topic choice and interest in field of study)</i> Differences in Military and DE <i>(regimented under chain of command to self-directed pace)</i> <hr/>

Structural Themes (How)	Clustered Meaning Units
Engaging a Support System	<p>Relatedness <i>(family, peers, committee)</i></p> <p>Positive DE Experience <i>(cohort and facilitate committee)</i></p> <p>Translating Military to DE <i>(enlist military members for executing a mission to enlist peers for academic support)</i></p> <p>Positive Family Experience <i>(family support)</i></p> <p>Positive Chair Experience <i>(chair support and guidance)</i></p> <p>Military Values <i>(tightknit unit and chain of command)</i></p>
Overcoming Obstacles	<p>Positive DE Experience <i>(obtain research data, develop instrument, write dissertation)</i></p> <p>Positive Military Experience <i>(complete mission)</i></p> <p>Translating Military to DE <i>(never give up)</i></p> <p>Competence <i>(complete challenging tasks)</i></p> <p>Military Values <i>(persistence)</i></p>
Goal Setting and Accomplishment	<p>Positive DE Experience <i>(coursework, research, final defense)</i></p> <p>Positive Military Experience <i>(tours and promotions)</i></p> <p>Translating Military to DE <i>(complete tour to complete course phase)</i></p> <p>Increased Civilian Opportunities <i>(speaker, researcher, professor)</i></p> <p>Competence <i>(sense of effectiveness)</i></p> <p>Goals <i>(attain doctoral degree and civilian opportunities)</i></p> <p>Military Values <i>(finish what you start, never give up)</i></p> <p>Increase Military Opportunities <i>(instructor, leader, promotions)</i></p> <p>Translating Military to Civilian Pursuits <i>(instructor, organizational leadership, training)</i></p> <p>Positive Career Experience <i>(speaking engagements and further research)</i></p>

Navigating the DE Dissertation Process	Positive DE Experience <i>(structured guidance from chair and committee)</i> Overcoming Obstacles <i>(obtain research data and develop research plan)</i> Autonomy <i>(determine dissertation topic)</i>
Using Military Experiences to Determine the Dissertation Topic	Positive DE Experience <i>(dissertation interest)</i> Positive Military Experience <i>(ASVAB, organizational leadership, training)</i> Translating Military to DE <i>(military experiences spark dissertation interest)</i> Autonomy <i>(choice in dissertation topic)</i>
Discovering and Pursuing Passion	Continued Passion <i>(military experience and DE experience support interest)</i> Military Values <i>(remember why you started)</i> Translating Military to Civilian Pursuits <i>(instructor, curriculum design, leadership)</i>

APPENDIX M: PERMISSION TO USE FIGURE 1

Getting the most out of motivation blog - Microsoft Edge

Microsoft Corporation [US] outlook.office.com/owa/?viewmodel=ReadMessageItem&ItemID=AAMkAGYxMDY1NTE4LWUwYWQlNDZlZC05NmI4LWQyN2U1MmRjMT11MQBGA...2E75hZBTr%2BYspmMZyHbWChVbD3ZN%2BCTow%2FefwqZjgAAAAz3

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Getting the most out of motivation blog

LM Lorraine Madden <lorraine@semannslattery.com>
Tue, 8/15, 3:09 AM
Ross, Paula

Inbox

Flag for follow up. Start by Tuesday, December 05, 2017. Due by Tuesday, December 05, 2017.

PastedGraphic-10.tiff 10 KB
PastedGraphic-9.tiff 12 KB

2 attachments (23 KB) Download all Save all to OneDrive - Liberty University



Action Items

Hi Paula,

Thanks for your inquiry. We are happy for you to use the figure included in the blog. This figure was adapted from the work of Ryan and Deci (2000) as per the reference list included in the blog and should be referenced accordingly. Please feel free to contact me via email or phone for further clarification. Many thanks!

Kind regards,

Lorraine Madden
Senior Associate, Consultancy & Research
Semann & Slattery

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