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Examining the Lived Experience of Student Veterans Using Photovoice Methodology

Nikhil Tomar

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

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EXAMINING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF STUDENT VETERANS
USING PHOTOVOICE METHODOLOGY

by

Nikhil Tomar

A Thesis Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science
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at

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May 2013

ABSTRACT
EXAMINING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF STUDENT VETERANS USING
PHOTOVOICE METHODOLOGY

by

Nikhil Tomar

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Virginia Stoffel, PhD., OT, BCMH, FAOTA

The primary objective of this study was to understand the lived experience of student veterans using photovoice methodology. After returning from service veterans struggle most with school (Plach & Haertlein Sells, 2013). Student veterans experience difficulty in time management, and transitioning to student life (Radford, 2009). They spend more time working at jobs and caring for dependents than non-veteran students, but spend equivalent time studying. They perceive less engagement with faculty and campus support than their peers (NSSE, 2010). For many veterans, education is a primary occupation but there is dearth of data about their lived experience and factors that help or hinder their pursuit of educational goals. This study employed a qualitative research design using photovoice methodology (Wang & Burris, 1997) to gain such insight.

Student veterans were recruited after obtaining Institutional Review Board approval and informed consent. After being trained in the photovoice methodology, participants were provided with cameras to capture aspects of their life that they wanted to convey regarding the transition process through photography. With their photographs as references, participants engaged in group discussions (audio recorded), and wrote narratives that they consider important to convey to multiple audiences including researchers, health promotion providers, university personnel and

policy makers. These narratives conveyed lived experiences that reflect challenges experienced while attaining an education and factors that helped them to overcome such challenges. Narratives and discussion session transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis and descriptive coding.

Analysis lead to formulation of four themes: 1) reminiscence of past duty and reflections on military life, 2) transition from military to civilian student life, and 3) entry to a new stage of life and 4) university and community environment. Findings from this study can help researchers, health promotion providers, the higher education community, and policy makers to acknowledge the factors that challenge or support student veterans so that programs and services can be offered to assist them in attaining their educational goals.

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CHAPTER – 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of student veterans through the methodology of photovoice. This chapter briefly describes the study and provides the background that forms its foundation. This chapter also introduces the reader to the research question posed and the need for this study.

In the latter section of the chapter, operational definitions for words that frequently appear in this study are provided. The section will provide readers with insight into the essential concepts and language forming the core of this study.

Background

There are approximately 23.8 million living veterans along with 37 million dependents (spouses and dependent children) of living and deceased veterans. They together represent 20% of the US population (Garcia, 2009). As of 2008, approximately 523,000 student veterans have received education benefits from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), 20% of whom were first time recipients. This figure does not include a significant number of student veterans that are ineligible for VA educational benefits or who are entitled but not receiving benefits (Garcia, 2009).

Plach & Haertlein Sells (2013) reported that the areas in which veterans struggle most after returning from service are school (70%) and relationships (76%). They used the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure, a reliable and valid measurement tool (Carswell, McColl, Baptiste, Law, Polatajko, & Pollock, 2004) to identify one's perception regarding occupational performance (www.caot.ca/copm/index.htm). In the occupational performance area of productivity, 93% of participants reported encountering challenges in the occupations of school life and 80% in relationships

(Plach & Haertlein Sells, 2013). These data identify areas in which veterans might struggle after returning from the service. However, factors that contribute to struggles or alleviate stress while living as a student have not been fully explored. Thus, this study attempts to examine their lived experiences during school life.

Student Veterans of America (SVA) (2009) reported that around 54% of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) / Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans are 20-29 years old. According to National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS, 2011) survey conducted between years of 2000-2009 there were approximately 31.9% of veterans with college experience versus 25.4% of non-veterans in the sample recruited. Thus, education can be touted as an important area of living for these young veterans. These numbers also helps to acknowledge the predilection of veterans towards continuing and/or completing an education. Various difficulties faced for reintegration after active duty such as access to healthcare (Sayer, Noorbaloochi, Frazier, Carlson, Gravely, & Murdoch, 2010) along with residual impairment [physical or psychological, acquired during the experience of war (EoW)] can hinder the educational progress of student veterans.

Continuing one's education after an EoW may not be a menial task. College students often experience stress due to academic commitments, financial pressures and lack of time management skills (Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000) but the stress on student veterans can be much more. This stress can be attributed to the health altering consequences of past experiences but can also result through future expectations. Therefore, it is warranted to acquire data, through a phenomenological approach, that can help understand the lived experiences of student veterans and thus assist them in attaining their educational goals.

Photovoice methodology, a phenomenological approach, helps to look at and study the lived experiences of the participants and, in fact, look through their own eyes, see what they see and what sense they make of that. It is a process by which people can identify obstacles for participation in their external physical or social environment, and represent, and/or enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. “As a practice based in the production of knowledge, photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their and their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). This methodology is an appropriate marker for an old adage that is a picture is worth a thousand words.

Photovoice methodology has been used in several studies to advocate for different groups of individuals. Some studies have been conducted using students as focus of interest to assess their lives and health needs. Goodhart, Hsu, Baek, Coleman, Maresca, & Miller (2006) reported that using photovoice provided a well-grounded and concrete approach for students to feel empowered as they participated and conducted a major part of the research while providing recommendations for change. Photovoice enables participants inform policy makers and others what needs to be changed and what is worth remembering (<http://www.photovoice.org>).

The aim of this study is to understand the lived experience of student veterans through photovoice methodology so as to have insights into their experience. This study will not be shaped by speculations made through existing data and literature but by gaining sight into the life of student veterans. These veterans can struggle because of the post war experience and its repercussions, while at the same time try to hold the

ground for achieving educational excellence. This study tries to fill in gaps in information and knowledge representing the life of student veterans by using photovoice methodology.

Need for the Study

Considering the large number of veterans who return from the war and try to attain higher education, it is warranted to learn and generate evidence regarding their lived experience so as to assist them in their pursuits. It is also pertinent to learn about the determinants of their struggles so as to provide these young veterans opportunities to accomplish their educational aims. Existing evidence helps to acknowledge the increasing number of veterans pursuing higher education. Evidence also suggests that student veterans can struggle during school life (Plach & Haertlein Sells, 2013; Sayer, Noorbaloochi, Frazier, Carlson, Gravely, & Murdoch, 2010). However, there is a dearth of information that could give us insight into the background and understanding of their lived experience and to acknowledge the factors that assist or hinder their educational pursuits.

Student veterans, who face transition from being a service member to a student, can experience significant change in their surroundings which could be confusing as well as agitating. This transition may also lead to further advancement of any existing traumatic stress symptoms. This study helps to generate information regarding the experience of student veterans, how they cope, and the challenges and benefits they encounter during their education. These insights can potentially help educational institutions and the community to acknowledge and bring about the required change that could help this unique population.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to study the lived experience of student veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation New Dawn (OND), through the methodology of photovoice. Another purpose is to study the factors that influence the educational experiences of student veterans. This study will help the researchers and the community to acknowledge the factors that can help in attaining educational goals of the veterans and also acknowledge the factors that hinder those educational goals.

Research Question

The research question is what are the factors that influence the lived experiences of student veterans as they pursue higher education?

The questions that will help further in the study to fill the incomplete picture are:

1. What are the factors and support systems for student veterans which positively influence attainment of their educational goals?
2. What are the factors that hinder educational goal attainment for student veterans?

Operational Definitions

Throughout this study a cluster of specific words are used frequently. These words help in representing the core of this study and portray the concepts which define the foundation of this study. This section will provide brief descriptions of these words.

Lived Experience

In this project the term lived experience is used instead of experience to define the events of life lived by the student veterans. Lived experience (a synonym of “phenomenology”) has been defined as study of subjects and objects of a person’s experience (thesaurus.com; <http://thesaurus.com/browse/lived+experience>). Every individual experiences various events during a particular day in one’s life which is different from another and they are also influenced by the past events of one’s life. It is the study of these lived experiences that gives us an insight to what it means to live as that individual.

Researching lived experience introduces an approach to qualitative research methodology in education and related fields which is distinct from classical and established approaches derived from the behavioral or natural sciences. It is an approach rooted in the everyday lived experience of human beings in educational situations. Researching lived experience offers an alternative that taps the unique nature of each human situation instead of relying on abstract and evident generalizations and theories (Manen, 1990). In this study, it is important to understand the lived experience of the veterans who are trying to attain their educational goals while struggling from their physical and/or psychological wounds of the war.

Experience of War (EoW)

“Experience is not only the actual observation of facts and events, but also the knowledge resulting from this. An individual’s experience of war is necessarily limited, but much can be learned from the experience of others” (Athos, 1954, p.74). These lines are ideal to state a brief view of an EoW. The profession of a service member exposes one to an experience that is significantly different from a normal life

pattern. Some of the aspects related to life of a service member include living away from loved ones, surviving in harsh conditions, loss of colleagues/friends and the experience of life threatening events. Exposure to such experiences may lead to psychological turmoil which can lead to prolonged distress if required care is not provided (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). No one except a service member or a veteran can accurately characterize the experience of war. Their struggles may be speculated through various mediums but the true sentiment can only be expressed by war veterans.

Photovoice Workshop

The photovoice workshop involves multiple sessions where the participants are introduced to the methodology and ethics of photovoice. This workshop can span around 4 or more sessions held throughout the study as the participants share their photos, engage in critical discussions, share, draft and refine narratives.

Photovoice Mission

The mission of photovoice methodology is to facilitate the participant's use of a camera to capture aspects of their lived experience and to share that view in and with the community to initiate or continue the desired change. Once the participants complete the introductory training session they are deemed ready for their first photovoice mission. With a camera in hand they pursue images that will help them to tell their story.

To encourage participants to think and portray their experience through photographs, the Photo Mission Log (Appendix - A) can be used. This log consists of questions that encourage a participant to write down their thoughts and ideas about a

chosen photograph and thus convey the importance of the event or place or person or moment that the photograph has captured.

Photovoice Narratives

The photographs generated by the participants are incomplete if the researcher could not accurately convey the story behind the photograph. To help a researcher know that story, photovoice narratives are composed by the participants. These narratives are essentially the written description of the image captured by the participant in a photograph reflecting the meaning and message associated with their lived experiences.

Narratives are written in accordance with the views of the photographer or the participant and through involvement in the discussions with fellow participants and the researchers. Tools like the SHOWED (Appendix - B) handout (Wang & Burris, 1997) and the Photo Mission Log also help in writing these narratives as they encourage the participants to think about various hidden aspects in the photographs. The narratives that are produced by participants help the researcher to understand their lived experience. These narratives form an integral part of the data to be analyzed for various codes and themes pertaining to the research question.

Service Member

This study focuses on the lived experience of student veterans for whom the previous life role was being a service member. This section, thus, defines the term service member to reflect on the understanding of their previous life role as soldiers, marines or other military personnel. The Servicemembers Civil Relief Act defines the term service member as “a member of the uniformed services” (p. 2-1) as defined in section 101(a)(5) of title 10 of the United States Code (Administrative and Civil Law

Department, 2006). The United States Code provides meaning of uniformed services as the armed forces, the commissioned corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the commissioned corps of the Public Health Services (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/10/101>). This study defines service members as individuals who served the United States defense forces by enrolling in military through the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and/or Coast Guard.

Traditional College Students

As this study considers student veterans as non-traditional students it is imperative to define the term traditional students. Some differentiate the two groups on the basis of age. Students are considered non-traditional at or older than 24 (Hermon & Davis, 2004) or 25 years (Spitzer, 2000) of age and traditional students at or younger than 23 years (Spitzer, 2000; Dill & Hanley, 1998). Traditional students have also been characterized as students who had been enrolled continuously since high school graduation and did not take any year away from college (Eppler & Harju, 1997). Dill and Henley (1998) defined the traditional student as one who typically does not have multiple roles (such as parent, employee, etc.).

This study defines traditional college students as students with age 18-23 years who don't have any experience of military life and have not participated as a service member in any of the recent past wars such as OIF, OEF and/or OND.

Summary

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of student veterans through the methodology of photovoice. This chapter provided a brief description of this study. It also introduced the reader to the need and purpose of this

study. The following chapters will provide a review of literature pertaining to the aspects that were briefly described in this chapter.

CHAPTER – 2

Literature Review

Studying lived experience of student veterans through the methodology of photovoice is the primary aim for this study. In the earlier chapter, a brief description regarding various aspects of the study was given. This chapter provides a comprehensive and detailed view into the existing literature relevant to the study. Initially, literature pertaining to the status of student veterans and struggles faced by them is discussed. Later, facts and literature on veterans and their struggles with health altering conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression is presented.

In the later sections, this chapter provides literature review on the practice of occupational therapy. Literature on the methodology of photovoice is also presented. The section named photovoice talks about the theoretical background of photovoice and how this methodology surfaced as an advocacy tool for lesser privileged communities.

Student Veterans

Nearly 2 million U.S. military personnel were engaged in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars (American Council on Education, [ACE], 2008; Radford, 2009) suggesting a high influx of veterans in higher education institutions. As such institutions prepare to serve their needs it is important to note what is known about these veterans in general, as well as veterans and military service members who enroll themselves in higher education (Radford, 2009).

The percentage of Americans with college degrees increased from 4.6% in 1945 to 25% in 1970 and this growth was significantly assisted by introduction of the GI Bill (Garcia, 2009) which gave privileges to veterans who want to pursue education. The Post 9/11 GI bill also helped to increase the number of student veterans in educational institutions in US during 2009 by 20 to 25% (Garcia, 2009). A significant number (43 %) of military undergraduates in 2007–08 attended public two-year institutions and 21 % attended public four-year colleges. Overall, military undergraduates pursued associate (47 %) and bachelor's (42 %) degrees in 2007–08. About one-quarter (23 %) of military undergraduates attended full time educational programs for the full year, while 37 % attended part time for part of the year in 2007–08 (Radford, 2009). As Table 1 suggests, approximately 85% of military students were reported to be of age 24 years and above (Radford, 2009) and approximately 75% were represented by student veterans (Figure 1). Military undergraduates receiving benefits were almost 15 % more likely to enroll full time/full year and 19 % less likely to enroll part time/part year than military undergraduates who were not able to receive benefits (Radford, 2009).

Released in 2010, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), for the first time in the survey's 11-year history, included students who served in the Armed Forces. The results were based on the responses of approximately 362,000 freshmen and seniors at 564 colleges and universities in the United States. More than 11,000 of the students surveyed were veterans, including 4,680 (44% of the student veterans) who had been in combat during their tours of duty. Three-quarters of all the veterans who participated were seniors and the others were freshmen. In this survey, it was also observed that veteran students are more likely to have a disability than non-veteran or

traditional students. One in every five combat veterans attending college had some type of disability, compared to one in 10 non-veterans (Haining, 2010).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Military Students, Non-military Non-traditional Students, and Non-military Traditional Students (2007–08): Radford, 2009, p.7.

Demographic Characteristics	Military students	Non-military non-traditional students	Non-military traditional students
Total	100.00 (%)	100.00 (%)	100.00 (%)
Age:			
18 or younger	0.5	0.9	18.1
19-23	15.0	13.6	81.9
24-29	31.4	37.2	+
30-39	28.2	26.5	+
40-or older	24.9	21.9	+
Gender			
Female	26.9	64.8	52.9
Male	73.1	35.2	47.1
Race Ethnicity			
White	60.1	57.0	65.8
African American	18.3	18.1	10.3
Hispanic	12.8	15.1	13.5
Asian American	3.2	5.6	6.3
Other	5.7	4.3	4.1

+ = Not applicable

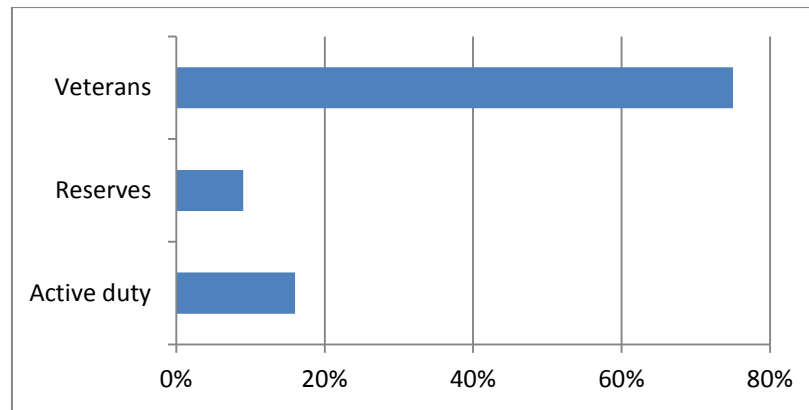


Figure 1. Distribution of military undergraduates by status: 2007-2008, (Radford & Wun, 2009).

Constraints Faced by Student Veterans

For veterans, the transition from war zones to college campuses can be difficult, and most college officials want to learn ways to efficiently educate this conceivably large and relatively more complicated group of students for that reason (Haining, 2010). As more and more veterans enroll in college classes, colleges and universities are urged to serve their needs, many of whom require additional support to successfully navigate through their academic life (Haining, 2010).

Besides the evitable stress, there are other physical and mental strains that a student veteran may experience. “Military undergraduates can find it difficult to finance their education, manage time constraints, transition from military life to student life, and overcome bureaucratic obstacles” (Radford , 2009, p.vi.). Also unlike non-veteran students, veteran or military students have already lost time for education while they dedicated time to their service, thus they might perceive stress to make up for that time. Military undergraduates tend to be younger than veterans in general, but are still older than non-veteran undergraduates. Apart from time constraints, they might also experience other constraints affecting their education.

A report by NSSE (2010) suggested that student veterans attending four-year colleges in the US spend more time working at jobs and caring for dependents than their non-veteran classmates, but spend equivalent time studying. Freshman and senior veterans reported that they feel “less engaged with faculty” and also perceive “less campus support” than non-veteran students. Alexander C. McCormick (NSSE director and associate professor of education at Indiana University) while announcing the results of NSSE report said in a press release that “...findings suggest that colleges and universities need to make special efforts to identify and address the needs of their student veterans, they make up a small share of the undergraduate population, but it is an important group that is likely to grow under the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, or the new GI Bill” (NSSE, 2010, p.1).

The NSSE study findings support that colleges and universities should strive for finding more than existing ways to effectively help former service members to create better supportive environment to promote student veterans pursuit of education (Haining, 2010). “I came back to school and I was like a deer in headlights,” 27-year-old veteran Matt Knorr said this statement to the Wisconsin newspaper Appleton Post Crescent (Haining, 2010).

To provide the insight into the lived experience of student veterans, it is important to first have knowledge of what that experience is and how it can be captured in a close knit nexus of research. It is also acknowledged that an experience of war (EoW) can make an individual vulnerable to health altering conditions such as PTSD, depression or substance abuse. Therefore, evidence should be created regarding the opportunities and resources that can assist student veterans experiencing such health altering conditions.

Wounds of War

In the past 9 years approximately 2 million U.S. military personnel have been deployed for assistance in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) (Peterson, Luethcke, Borah, Borah, & Young-McCaughan, 2011). Development of acute stress disorder (ASD), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other combat and operational stress reactions are acknowledged as some of the significant psychological risks of this exposure (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). An estimated of 300,000 veterans among nearly 1.7 million who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan are struggling from depression or post-traumatic stress disorder. “More than half of these people, according to the study conducted by the Rand Corp., are slipping through the cracks in the bureaucratic system, going without necessary treatment” (Barnes, 2008, p.1).

Hoge and colleagues (2008) reported that U.S. Army Soldiers and Marines returning from deployment in support of OEF/OIF indicated high rates of trauma exposure. The most common types of combat or war exposures were artillery, rocket or mortar fire (87%); gunshot (80%); seeing dead bodies or human remains (65%); being attacked or ambushed (74%); and knowing someone seriously injured or killed (63%) (Peterson et al, 2011). A study by Hoge and colleagues (2004) evaluated U.S. military combat personnel returning from deployments to OIF and OEF for the risk of PTSD. Results from the study suggested that PTSD prevalence and occurrence is strongly and positively correlated with combat experiences, such as being attacked or shot at, firing on or killing the enemy and seeing or handling human remains. Analysis revealed a linear progression with an increase in PTSD corresponding to increased exposure to fire-fights and among service member who were either injured or wounded.

It is suggested that mental health problems reported on the post-deployment assessment were significantly associated with combat experiences among other factors (like health care referral and utilization) (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006). The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) assessed the medical records of more than 206,000 veterans entering the VA health care system (from 2000-07). Findings revealed that one in every three patients was diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder—41 % were diagnosed with either a mental health or a behavioral adjustment disorder and the rate of diagnosis for PTSD was 20 % followed by 14% for depression.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) defines PTSD as “an anxiety disorder that some people get after seeing or living through a dangerous event”. It goes on further to explain that during danger an individual demonstrates a fight-or-flight response which is healthy and natural, but in PTSD this response can either be damaged or altered. Thus, people suffering from PTSD may experience stress or fear even when they are no longer exposed to danger or a dangerous situation (NIMH, 2009).

During World War I (WWI), the term “shell shock” was used to describe veterans who presented with signs of stress and anxiety due to exposure of combat trauma and during WWII a new term emerged called “combat fatigue” (Parrish, 2008). Post-Vietnam Syndrome was used as a term to identify veterans presenting PTSD symptomatology experienced due to exposure from the Vietnam War (<http://www.vvaw.org/veteran/article/?id=319>). The official designation of PTSD appeared in 1980 when third edition of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental

Disorders (DSM) was published (American Psychiatric Association). Initially PTSD was described as a psychological condition experienced by an individual who had witnessed a traumatic event (such as war, torture, rape, or natural disaster) which caused catastrophic stress which is significantly outside the range of usual human experience. This definition helped differentiate between PTSD stressors from the ordinary stressors that were characterized in DSM-III as "Adjustment Disorders", such as divorce, failure, rejection and financial problems (Parrish, 2008). By gazing into the history of PTSD one can speculate that war veterans are more likely to encounter PTSD than other populations due to their exposure to war or other violent situations.

Self-report of PTSD symptoms have tripled among combat-exposed military personnel as compared to those who have not been deployed since 2001 (Smith, Ryan, Wingard, Slymen, Sallis, & Kritz-Sivlerstein, 2008; Amaker, Woods, & Gerardi, 2009). Military personnel returning home are suggested to demonstrate signs and symptoms related to combat-related PTSD, such as nightmares, flashbacks, memory loss, insomnia, depression, avoidance of social interaction, fear, decreased energy, drug and alcohol use, and the inability to concentrate. These manifestations from PTSD could affect these individuals' ability to completely reintegrate into their personal lives and work roles (Penk, Drebing, & Schutt, 2002; Amaker, Woods, & Gerardi, 2009). Although most research targets military combatants, it is also suggested that the risk for combat-related PTSD exists even for those who are not officially identified as combatants (Peterson, Wong, Haynes, Bush, & Schillerstrom, 2010).

However, there is a dearth in the current literature about combat-related PTSD, especially for its intervention among active-duty military and recently discharged OIF/OEF veterans (Peterson et al, 2011). Also, the survival rate among military

service members wounded in action during deployment for assistance in OIF/OEF has increased to approximately 90% (Gawande, 2004). Those who survived often undergo severe and mutilating injuries such as sustained limb amputations, severe facial injuries, or significant burns (Kauvar, Wolf, Wade, Cancio, Renz, & Holcomb, 2006; Lew, Walker, Wenke, Blackbourne, & Hale, 2010; Owens, Kragh, Wemke, Macaitis, Wade, & Holcomb, 2008). Exposure to these and other grotesque and mutilating injuries of war are hypothesized to be one of the most common factors contributing to combat-related PTSD (Peterson, Cigrang, & Isler, 2009; Peterson et al, 2011). In order to escape or cope from the resulting symptoms of PTSD individuals may engage in activities which can put their health at risk (such as alcohol or substance abuse). Thus, PTSD can be suggested as a risk-factor for indulging in substance abuse later in life (Torchalla, Nosen, Rostam, & Allen, 2012).

There is a good amount of evidence suggesting the co-occurrence of PTSD and substance use disorder (SUD). A study by Brown, Stout & Mueller (1999) reported histories of traumatic events within 90% of their SUD sample. Individuals who have experienced trauma may abuse substances such as alcohol or drugs to cope with their symptoms. National Comorbidity Study findings revealed that 51.9% of men and 27.9% of women with PTSD had concurrent alcohol use disorder compared with 34.4% of men and 13.5% of women without PTSD (Kessler, Sonnega, Bromet, Hughes, & Nelson, 1995). Considering the association between these two health altering conditions it is important to understand how they might manifest within a population of student veterans.

Substance Abuse

DSM-IV defines substance abuse as “a maladaptive pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress occurring within a 12-month period” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p 181-183). It is hypothesized that the underlying cause for the use and abuse of depressants by veterans involves the hyper-activation of the flight-or-fight response accentuated due to the experience of combat. There is an increasing amount of concern for the substantial rise in substance abuse among younger veterans of war in the Middle East, especially among those who demonstrated signs of PTSD and those with mental illness (Petrakis, Rosenheck, & Desai, 2011).

The majority of US military is comprised of young men and women from the ages of 18 to 25, the age group that is most likely considered to engage in binge drinking and heavy alcohol use (NHSDA, 2001). A study conducted during 1998 which recruited a sample of 4 infantry battalions of Marines reported that those between the ages of 18 to 25 were two times more likely to engage in heavy drinking and binge drinking for 4 or more days in a 30 day period than their civilian counterparts (Schuckit, Kraft, Hurtado, Tschinkel, Minagawa, & Shaffer, 2001). Out of this sample of 1,320 Marines, while more than 70% reported no blacking out or perceived inability to stop drinking, 24% reported blacking out when drinking in the prior 6 months, 21% reported themselves as unable to stop drinking, and 18% reported drinking in the morning (Schuckit, et.al., 2001). It can be noticed that this level of alcohol consumption was reported during the peacetime, and a full 3 years before U.S. troops invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, substance abuse may not only be a dysfunctional method of coping with stress or trauma from war, but may also be a cultural aspect of this warrior society as well (Caffrey, 2009).

Recent studies which provide a more comprehensive understanding of the pre-service psychological makeup of war veterans, suggest that pre-existing conditions such as trauma history, pre-existing personality disorder, the occurrences of sexual abuse or harassment prior to or during service, and familial substance abuse history, may also play a role in the etiology of substance abuse (Caffrey, 2009). Studies also suggest that veterans may use alcohol to self-medicate themselves to alleviate the effects of hyper-arousal, nightmares, intrusive memories when awake, and avoidance of anxiety producing situations (Steindl, Young, Creamer, & Crompton, 2003). Veterans often use alcohol to manage the effects of post-combat stress, which in its most extreme form can manifest as PTSD.

Apart from the demographic factors moderating alcohol use, a “warrior” like cultural status and characterization of hyper-masculinity also seems to add to these factors (Caffrey, 2009). “It is within the cultural dissonance of the idea of the invincible warrior and the reality of the oft times psychologically fragile soldier, that the seeds for the neglect of the substance abuse issues confronting our veterans are often sown” (Caffrey, 2009, p.1). A significant number of veterans, even before their exposure to war, are suggested to be more fragile and less resilient than non-veteran civilians (Caffrey, 2009).

By way of comparison, 50.1% of male veterans in the age group of 18-25 report binge drinking, as compared to 47.1% of non-veterans in the same age group (Caffrey, 2009). According to National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH, 2005), the overall rates for heavy drinking by veterans in 2003 was 7.5% as opposed to 6.5% in the civilian population and marijuana use during the same period was 3.5% by veterans versus 3% by non-veterans (Caffrey, 2009). From the statistics presented

above, it should also be noted that the majority of veterans (more than 90%) do not engage in heavy drinking and marijuana use.

When the data from 2004 through 2006 were combined, an annual average of 7.2% of veterans met the criteria for SUD in the preceding year in the following age categories: 25% in the 18 to 25 group; 11.3% of those ages 26 to 53; and 4.4% of those 55 years or older. (NSDUH, 2007; Caffrey, 2009). The statistical difference reported between men (7.2%) and women (5.8%) was found to be statistically insignificant (NSDUH, 2007).

Alcohol abuse is one of the most prevalent problem among war veterans and one which poses a substantial health risk. Army soldiers deployed to Iraq were screened 3 to 4 months after returning and it was found that 27 % of them met criteria for alcohol abuse and were at increased risk for related harmful behaviors (e.g., drinking and driving, using illicit drugs) [National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), 2011]. Alcohol use concerns are often reported by soldiers, however, few are referred for its treatment. Research findings emphasize the requirement for improvement in screening and access to care for alcohol-related problems among service members returning from combat deployments (NIDA, 2011).

As acknowledged, young veterans are more likely to engage in substance abuse as well as undertake education for future benefits. Therefore, it is essential to create evidence pertaining to factors which can help student veterans in their educational pursuit, thus reducing their stress levels.

Depression and Major Depressive Episode (MDE)

Nearly 30% of veterans were affected because of depression, making it one of the most common chronic conditions treated in the Veterans Health Administration

(VHA) (Cully, Zimmer, Khan, & Petersen, 2008). World Health Organization (WHO) defines depression as “a common mental disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration” (WHO, 2011, p.1). Manifestations from depression can become chronic or recurrent resulting in significant reduction of an individual's ability to take care of oneself; at its worst can lead to suicide (WHO, 2011).

According to NSDUH (2008), an estimated 9.3 % of veterans aged 21 to 39 (approximately 312,000 in number) experienced at least one major depressive episode (MDE) during past year. Among veterans aged 21 to 39 with past year MDE, almost all (99.2%) reported experiencing some level of resulting impairment in one or more of the role domains (home management, work, close relationships with others, and social life). It was also reported that the rate of MDE in 2007 was higher among veterans aged 21 to 25 and those aged 26 to 29 (12.1 and 13.4 %, respectively) than among veterans aged 30 to 34 and those aged 35 to 39 (7.5 and 8.3 %, respectively).

Depression not only hampers the mental health of an individual, it also creates turbulence in the regular pace of life and disturbs the (lived) role of an individual. The age group of 21-29 years resonates with the veterans who upon return from service pursue higher education. Overall, veterans who encountered MDE reported some or other kind of impairment in any domain of role functioning and were unable to carry out normal activities on an average of 57.4 days in the past year and this period was higher (an average of 120 days) in those who reported a very severe impairment in the year of 2007 (NSDUH, 2008). If student veterans are not able to perform their daily living activities then it may further increase stress in their lived experience which may contribute to other health risks such as substance abuse. This in turn can lead to

increase in disturbances faced by student veterans, creating a cycle of mental and/or behavioral health problems.

Suicide Risk

Another sensitive issue revolving around the post war veterans is suicidal tendencies. In recent years, the rate of suicides has substantially increased among service members. Combat exposure, substance abuse, and resilience are correlated with suicidal ideation/self-harming thoughts through the mediation of PTSD and/or depression symptoms (Mansfield, Bender, Hourani & Larson, 2011). Exposure to traumatic events experienced during active duty can increase the likelihood of suicidal ideation but immediate adequate intervention can decrease such risk factors. Adequate follow-up for new-onset depression in the VHA is significantly associated with decrease in the likelihood of mortality (Cully et al., 2008). Also, the relationship between adequate follow-up visits for depression care and decreased mortality was found to be consistent with recent randomized controlled trial that found that care for depression (monitoring medication adherence, side effects, and depressive symptoms) compared with usual care practices reduced mortality for a period of over a five-year (Gallo, Bogner, & Morales, 2007; Culley et al, 2008).

Need for Culturally Competent Care

Veteran culture is informed by a shared experience of veterans which is based on the duties they performed during their past service. Veterans are often not distinguished as a unique cultural group for competent care. Change to this approach is necessary to provide efficient and compassionate care (Hobbs, 2008). Veterans, as a cultural group, present health care providers, including occupational therapists, with unique challenges. These challenges may include health inequalities and health

disparities related to posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and substance abuse and these must be understood to provide better care to this potentially vulnerable population. Targeted interventions use the language and customs of military life. Providing effective care to veterans requires an approach involving knowledge of veteran culture by which healthcare practitioners can contextualize the data gained through various assessment strategies (Hobbs, 2008).

Gains from War

The population of young veterans who enroll themselves as students can be suggested as potentially vulnerable based on their exposure to warfare. However, this experience or the training before entering in the war gives them set of skills which can also be seen as positive attributes. This study is not biased towards the negative aspects of post war effects (like PTSD or substance abuse), but also appreciates the gains earned through the experience of war. “Beyond the gloom and doom of war is a positive attribute to be used in life by veteran students” (Smith, 2010, p. 9). Many student veterans who served in the war zone experienced personal development in areas of self-discipline, time management, and establishing goals (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Smith, 2010). Wartime experience has enabled many veterans to become good college students and educated business leaders. As acknowledged by researchers, having veterans in the classroom endow the institution in fulfilling its agenda to produce global ready graduates for today’s global workforce (Katopes, 2009; Smith, 2010).

Through the combat service, veterans may also learn to ignore negative cultural realities, and experience establishing relationships with people of different cultures (Katopes, 2009; Smith 2010). Veterans may experience living abroad for long periods

of time without resources being available to them which makes them an ideal candidate to be an expatriate. During wartime, combat service may also involve duties for community reintegration or reformation which includes services within the local communities surrounding the war zone. During his 2009 speech, President Obama acknowledged military service as an honorable public service. Community service is a goal for many institutions and veteran students contribute for the achievement of this goal through their willingness and readiness to serve the communities (Katopes, 2009; Smith, 2010). The positive attributes of those with military service, when acknowledged, can aid student veterans who are reintegrating in an educational institution.

These positive attributes along with negative consequences of war can influence the educational pursuits of student veterans in various ways. To scientifically create evidence regarding this lived experience a methodology is required which can help to collect reliable, valid, and trustworthy data.

Emergence of Visual Media for Advocacy and Photovoice

The use of visual media as means of communicating, educating or changing behavior is certainly not a new phenomenon. As early as 1917, a visual culture emerged with public health campaigns that regularly depended on the strong graphical use (such as poster displays) as immediate obvious messages (WHO, 2009; Roberts, 2009). The visual media now play an increasingly essential role for social awareness and intervention, given the competition for maximum exposure and impact on dwindling attention spans. Visual engagement and indulgence of the participants in the research itself becomes a part of social intervention, which helps to bring hidden issues into public view (Pink, 2006; Roberts, 2009).

Earlier, fieldworkers used mixed and multiple media sources to collect ethnographic materials and combined spoken words with photographs, film and sound in the exhibition of their work and public lectures. Ethnographic photography during 1940s and 1950s was used more as an illustration rather than being considered as an analytical or methodological tool (Pink, 2006; Roberts, 2009). James Collier and Malcom Collier (1986) portrayed photography as a research method and employed visual anthropology for applied research. The work by Collier was practical, intended to lead to social intervention, was scientific in its methodology and informed by anthropological theory (Pink, 2006; Roberts, 2009). In that way, it paved the way for the later arrival of interventions such as Photovoice (Roberts, 2009).

Photography gives the user a control to convey what one wants. Additionally, being a photographer documenting one's environment and experience with the purpose to determine change would provide an individual with a sense of agency, power and control over one's reality (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006; Roberts, 2009). Therefore if visual anthropology can be viewed as a means to collaboratively produced knowledge (Pink, 2006), then, as a tool, Photovoice is a perfect methodology to facilitate that collaboration (Roberts, 2009).

Photovoice

Photovoice is acknowledged as a participatory action research (PAR) strategy in which members of a community (participants) are given cameras and asked to photograph events, people or things from their everyday life, with focus on aspects they would like to see improved (Wang, Burris & Xiang, 1996). Participating in a group process of critical reflection empowers people to advocate and communicate desired change, to policy makers, in their communities by using the vigor of their

images and stories (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001: p.560). Photovoice methodology helps to look at and study the “lived experiences” of the participants and in fact look through their own eyes and see what they see and how they see.

This methodology was originally designed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris, and was first used in Yunnan, China for the Ford Foundation- supported Women’s Reproductive Health and Development Program (Wang, Burris & Xiang, 1996). It helps people to acknowledge and understand obstacles for participation in the community, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. As a practice based in the generation of knowledge, photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge regarding important issues through large and small group discussion on photographs collected, and (3) to reach policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997) by creating scientific evidence.

Photovoice is a research based approach that enables people to reach out for themselves and others, including policy makers, for what is worth remembering, what is important and what should be changed (from www.photovoice.com). Various studies have been conducted using this methodology in order to advocate for variety of populations. Few studies have been conducted using students as the population of interest in order to assess their lives and health needs (Goodhart, Hsu, Baek, Coleman, Maresca, & Miller, 2006). In the field of public health, researchers have used photovoice to capture and identify needs of the participant populations, conduct participatory evaluation and reach policy makers to facilitate the changes required to improve community health (Wang & Redwood, 2001). A study reviewing the peer-reviewed literature on photovoice in public health and related disciplines concluded that particularly among various highly participatory projects, photovoice appeared to

contribute an enhanced understanding of community assets and needs of the participants and ways for empowerment (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Theoretical Background

Photovoice, as a methodology, is primarily used as a participatory action research strategy to initiate required changes within a community. It is based on the theoretical work of Paulo Friere, a Brazilian educator who devoted his career to educating and empowering the illiterate with a voice (Roberts, 2009). Photovoice, with the aim of moving participants beyond a sense of helplessness to one of independence, advocacy, control and exploring possibilities, stresses on community engagement through the process of image making. This methodology have been suggested to be particularly useful for public health campaigns where policy makers have good intentions but often have no idea about the realities faced by the populations they may be aiming to help (Roberts, 2009).

Freire suggested that to overcome the situation of oppression, its cause must be critically recognized by people, so that through transforming action, a new situation can be created making possible a better humanity (Roberts, 2009). Participatory research provides community members a tool to reflect their lived experiences and allows them to share those reflections with others. Community development is encouraged when local members commit themselves and their resources towards a desirable aim. This explains why communities are seldom built from top down, or the outside in approach (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Roberts, 2009). To bring about a desired change in a community, an approach should be focused on changes beginning at the grass roots level which makes it likely to succeed (Nichter, 1984; Robert, 2009).

Using photovoice for needs assessment of participants involve three-stage process which provides foundation for this endeavor: selecting photos which accurately reflect the community's needs and assets; telling what the photos mean and represent; and codifying, or identifying the issues, themes and/or theories that emerge (Wang & Burris, 1997). This methodology thus produces knowledge for various issues that hold importance for the participants as well as the community.

Photovoice helps the researcher to learn about the lived experience of the participants by acknowledging an enhanced sense of what life a person lives and what factors affect one's health. It has been used in various studies in order to understand the lived experience of people suffering from various mental or behavioral health illnesses. Researchers have suggested that "a photovoice project offers a useful lens to examine experiences associated with living with mental illness" (Fleming, Mahoney, Carlson, & Engebretson, 2009, p.16). Thompson and colleagues (2008) concluded that participants in the study enjoyed the process of taking photos that help tell their story, and they were also able to capture meaningful images that portrayed their lived experience of living with a mental illness.

Advantages to the Use of Photovoice

Primarily, photovoice uses influential visual imagery as a tool to reflect needs of the participants which makes it an ideal methodology to assess or facilitate changes required for a community and its members. Additionally, it does not require the participants to have ability to read or write and this affirms the ingenuity and viewpoint of society's most vulnerable populations (Wang & Burris, 1997; Roberts 2009), by making it accessible to anyone who can learn to use a camera. Through photographs, participants can portray settings, moments and ideas, which may not be

perceivable by professionals and health researchers, thus empowering people to communicate their needs and assets. By comparison, surveys and other needs assessment methodologies which require people to be counted, interviewed and questioned may inadvertently induce a sense of impotence, inferiority and resentment (Wang & Burris, 1997; Roberts, 2009). Images that are produced, along with its discussion and framed by people can potentially stimulate social action, allowing people to advocate for their own, and their community's well-being (Wang and Burris, 1997; Roberts, 2009).

Photovoice is an accessible way to “turning the tables” approach on participant’s issues, through the building of practical skills, being given a chance to be heard and a responsibility to communicate areas that require improvement. It is primarily through the visual and auditory perception that we acknowledge the humanness around us (Collier & Collier, 1986; Roberts, 2009).

Occupational Therapy and its Constructs

In order to learn the difficulties that student veterans might experience while engaging in educational pursuits or how the environment affect the occupation of school life, it is essential to gain insight into what an occupation means or entails as a construct. Occupation has been defined by Reed and Sanderson as "activities or tasks which engage a person's time and energy; specifically self-care, productivity and leisure"(1983, p. 247). Occupations are attached with aspects such as meaning, context, and goal that form its foundation. The name for this discipline and profession of occupational therapy (OT) was based on the observations that had been made about the relationship between occupation, health and well-being (Atwood, 1907; Barton, 1915; Hall, 1905; Law, Steinwender, & Leclair, 1998). “An occupation is a specific

individual's personally constructed non-repeatable experience: that is, an occupation is a subjective even in a perceived temporal, spatial and socio-cultural conditions that are unique to that one-time occurrence" (Pierce, 2001, p. 139). An occupation takes place in a specific field, has a pace, can either be shared or have a solitary aspect, has a cultural meaning and other infinite number of perceived contextual qualities. An occupation can be observed but interpretation of its meaning or emotional context is necessarily inexact by anyone other than the person experiencing it (Pierce, 2001).

Competence in the performance of tasks and occupations plays a vital role to shape an individual's identity. Realization of an acceptable identity contributes to coherence and well-being (Christiansen, 1999). Within this framework, it is proposed that performance limitations and disfigurement which sometimes result from illness or injury have implications and effects on the conformed identity which is recognized by occupational therapy practitioners. As a part of their profession and by virtue of their expertise in daily living skills, occupational therapy practitioners are well equipped and positioned to help address the identity challenges of those whom they serve. In doing so, substantial contribution to the well-being of an individual is made (Christiansen, 1999).

In occupational therapy practice, it is believed that engagement in occupations holds a major key towards gaining independence in one's life. Engagement in occupations is influenced by many factors such as individual goals, environmental disturbances, and/or internal physical or emotional turmoil. These factors can substantially influence one's performance in an occupation, resulting in hindrance to an individual's living. Occupational therapists aim to make an individual's level of occupational performance match his/her capabilities, sometimes by changing the immediate environment, providing manual assistance, providing inanimate assistance

or changing procedure of an occupation so that a person can achieve it. Occupational therapists provide assistance to people for improvement in their well-being by enabling them to design and engage in daily occupations that are health promoting and meaningful (Jackson, Carlson, Mandel, Zemke, & Clark, 1998; Yerxa, 1993). They provide interventions to the clients by helping them to set goals, develop strategies to accomplish their goals, and help them attain skills that allow them to achieve maximum level of participation and independence in their daily life (Baum, 2008) so as to achieve well-being.

Need of Occupational Therapy for Veterans

Occupational Therapy, as a profession, shares a rich history with World War 1 where early practitioners provided services to veterans. Occupational therapists provided assistance to injured soldiers to facilitate their return to military responsibilities or transition into civilian life (Baum, 2008). They provide critical services to veterans in a variety of medical and community settings by addressing their functional, behavioral and socio-emotional needs. “Occupational therapy practitioners use purposeful activities to help veterans and their families bridge the gap between their ability to process and manage their experiences and their innate strengths and capacities for resilience” (American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. [AOTA], 2008, p.1). Occupational therapy as an intervention has also contributed and benefitted healthcare for people with mental health concerns (Llyod & Williams, 2010).

Occupational therapy plays an exclusive role in helping veterans recover from PTSD (Baum, 2008). They serve as key members of the team. Physicians and psychologists use medications and counseling while an occupational therapist employs the use of performance strategies that support veterans in gaining independence in

their performance in daily activities and their life roles as well (Baum, 2008). The overarching goal of occupational therapy, while creating interventions for veterans struggling with any mental health concern, is to use strategies that could help them recover, compensate, or adapt so they can reengage themselves in their daily life activities (Baum, 2008).

As occupational therapists have knowledge and skills in addressing physical, cognitive, and psychosocial factors associated with combat-related PTSD, with occupational therapy assistants, they bring broad expertise to help military personnel identify barriers that limit their recovery and participation in meaningful activities (AOTA, 2005; Amaker, Wood, & Gerardi, 2009). In addition, occupational therapist's knowledge enables one to view each individual's occupational performance through a psychological-social-emotional lens and this perspective helps them to understand what hold importance and meaning to a veteran as well as how their past life roles, experiences, strengths, and patterns of coping work together to shed light on current challenges (AOTA, 2008).

Occupational therapy intervention for veterans focuses on functional and readiness skills and behaviors, and includes social support from families, friends, fellow veterans and other professionals. Services are directed towards attaining desired outcomes that are established through collaboration with veterans and their support team. The characteristic person, environment and activity focus of occupational therapy provides veterans an opportunity to engage in therapeutic activity that holds a purpose and meaning for them and helps them regain control of their behavior, emotions and lives (AOTA, 2008).

The interventions provided by occupational therapy practitioners are individualized to the needs of a veteran, based on the individual/client centered approach, which makes them effective while addressing one's mental health and broader health issues. Helping the veterans identify both positive and health-threatening coping strategies in order to mindfully change them towards those supporting full engagement in healthy patterns of everyday life reflects core knowledge in occupational therapy. Strategies employed by occupational therapy practitioners include helping veterans learn to manage, organize and control their behavior and emotions, and make constant progress on their way to 'living life to its fullest'. Provided this expertise of occupational therapy practitioners, they can potentially help student veterans during their reintegration in a community by assessing their individual needs and providing them with the needed resources or intervention.

Thread that Binds – Advocacy

The purpose of this study is to acquire knowledge regarding the lived experience of student veterans so as to unearth the factors that communities can employ to provide them with opportunities to succeed in their educational aims. Because this population may struggle with various health concerns, advocating with student veterans for supportive and inclusive environments in higher education may be an important role for health care providers.

Occupational therapy practitioners engage in advocacy for various reasons; some relating to access to the profession, some to the particular occupational needs of clients and/or others relating to both. Their unique understanding for advocating is to facilitate the client's occupational performance (Dhillon, Wilkins, Law, Stewart &

Tremblay, 2010). Advocacy around health, wellbeing and resumption of important life roles are compatible with a focus on student veterans.

Photovoice as a research methodology has been established to advocate for various populations. Newman and colleagues (2009) included individuals with spinal cord injury (SCI) as participants and reported using photographs to educate the public as well as those with political power to make required changes in the community. Photographs provided visual evidence that helped to identify issues pertaining to community participation. Necheles and colleagues (2007) engaged teens in photovoice to promote health through advocacy. They reported that “results were derived from photograph sorting activities, analysis of photograph narratives, and development of advocacy projects” (p. 211-212). Employing photovoice methodology provided health care professionals with a discrete and tangible way for students to feel empowered, as they themselves conducted the project, collected data using photography, analyzed the results qualitatively, and met with policy makers to discuss their photos and offer recommendations for change (Goodhart et al, 2006).

Occupational therapy as a practice has one of its core values as advocating with those in need. Photovoice as a methodology has been established as an influential advocacy tool. Findings of this study can be utilized to advocate for resources and programs that student veterans could benefit from to successfully achieve their educational goals. Thus, principle of advocacy binds together this study to form a clear dimension of its importance.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of existing literature concerned with veterans and student veterans. This literature helps to support the need for this study while

demonstrating the challenges experienced by student veterans as they pursue personal goals in higher education. The research question is thereby sufficiently justified.

CHAPTER – 3

Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the design and methodology that is employed to complete this research. Every research project follows a specific design and methodology to gather data and its analysis. The primary aim of this study is to understand the lived experience of student veterans, thus it uses a qualitative study design with phenomenological approach.

This chapter provides a detailed description of the study design and methodology used. Later sections provide rationale for the design and methodology chosen. Finally, this chapter describes the methods that were used to analyze the data.

Research Question

The research question posed by this study is what are the factors that influence the lived experiences of student veterans as they pursue higher education?

The questions that further assisted in the study to fill the incomplete picture are:

1. What are the factors and support systems for student veterans which positively influence attainment of their educational goals?
2. What are the factors that hinder educational goal attainment for student veterans?

Study Design

The selection for a research design begins with the topic and a paradigm under which the study is conducted which is essentially the view, a whole nexus and architecture of beliefs, values and methods, under which a research occurs. It is under this roof of beliefs that researchers work (Joubish, Khurram, Ahmed, Fatima &

Haider., 2011). According to Cresswell (1994) “qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting”(p. 1-2). As this study explores the social and human context of the lived experience of student veterans through their own views, thus qualitative study design is appropriately suited.

Qualitative research emphasizes close exploration and evaluation of participants’ words, actions and/or other records. It explores the patterns of meaning which emerge from the data, often found to be in the form of participants' own words. The duty of a qualitative researcher is to extract the patterns within those words (and other forms of data) and to present those patterns for others to acknowledge and inspect without disturbing the actual depiction presented by the participants (Kakulu, Byrne & Viitanen, 2009). The mission of qualitative research is to discover patterns which appear after extensive review of the data, thorough documentation of the themes explored, and thoughtful analysis of the research topic. Qualitative research does not present sweeping generalization but discovers contextual and thematic observations (Kakulu, Byrne & Viitanen, 2009).

Most models present design as a logical progression of defined stages or tasks, from deriving the research question to the generation of conclusions or theory, that are necessary to plan or perform a research study (Maxwell, 2008). Such models identifies with a step by step flowchart progression with an evident starting point, goal and a specified order for doing the intermediate tasks. Neither of these models can appropriately represent the logic and process that a qualitative research addresses. In a qualitative study, “research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 24). The process of data

collection and analysis, exploring and revising theory, elaborating or refocusing the research questions, and identifying and controlling validity threats are steps that often goes along with each other where each factor influences the direction of others (Maxwell, 2008).

Qualitative study is also prone to obscure twists and turns for which a researcher should be willing to modify and appropriately change the course of the study, with the original core kept preserved. Yin (1994) says, “Every type of empirical research has an implicit, if not explicit, research design” (p. 19). What a qualitative study requires is simply a broader and less restrained framework of design than the traditional ones (Maxwell, 2008).

Rationale for the Design

A qualitative study is preferred on the assumption and background of the nature of research question. The research question often starts with a *how* or *what* in a qualitative study which then forays into the topic to describe what is going on (Creswell, 1994). As the nature of this study, as well the questions asked, focuses on the information generated by the beliefs and views of the participants therefore the study design is chosen as qualitative. Qualitative approach is also preferred in order to study individuals in their natural setting and as this study focuses on the experiences of student veterans in their educational institution (and/or other natural settings), it becomes an appropriate design for this study.

Method

In order to reliably capture the lived experiences of the student veterans and to visualize their experience of college/university life, a methodology that seizes the lived experience, without disturbing the natural flow of life of a participant was

selected. Due to such properties, phenomenology is considered as appropriate for this study.

Phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician who suggested that the objectivism of science precluded a sufficient appreciation of the world (Orleans, n.d.). Husserl's work described various philosophical conceptualizations and techniques designed to capture the essence of reality in the human consciousness. However, Alfred Schutz's work made phenomenology enter the domain of sociology. Later, Schutz described how subjective meanings can give rise to an apparently objective social world (Orleans, n.d.).

The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to highlight the specific. It explores phenomena of an experience by acknowledging the way they are perceived by an individual in a situation. Phenomenological methods are also particularly effective at accentuating the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives (Lester, 1999). Therefore, phenomenology provides a perspective and insight that can challenge structural or normative assumptions. "Adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research, enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action" (Lester, 1999, p.1). The appropriate phenomenological method should be chosen based on the research question.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Photovoice

Participatory Action Research (PAR), also known as Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), is an interdisciplinary research methodology in which researchers and members of a community equally participate in the development,

implementation, and dissemination of research (Figure 2) that is relevant to the community (Israel, 2000). Even though a researcher initially guides the participants, at later stages it is the participant's flow of actions which guides the researcher and the research process.

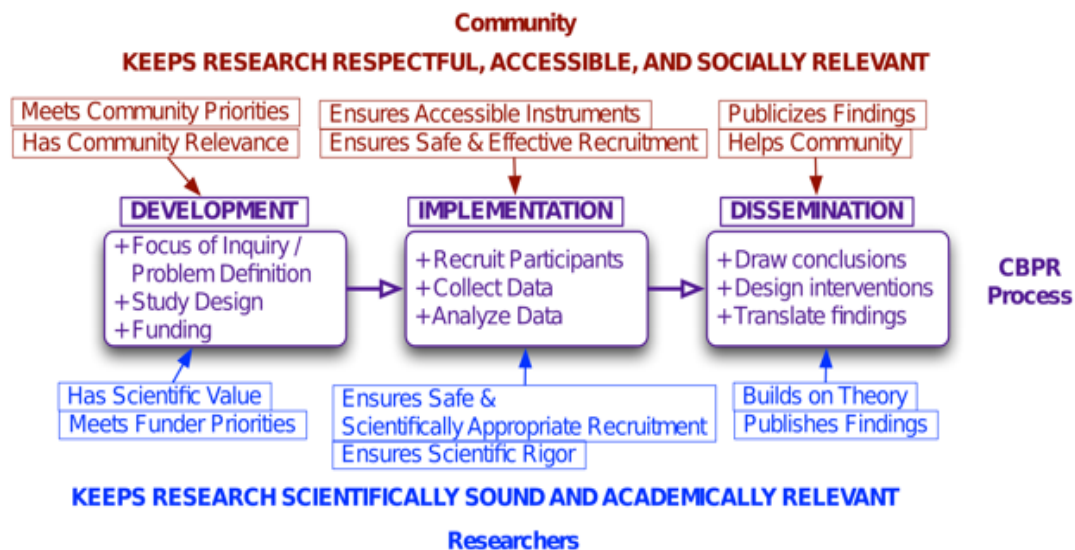


Figure 2. Flow chart describing role of community and researcher in a PAR

(Retrieved From: <http://aaspire.org/?p=about&c=cbpr>)

Participatory action research allows the researcher to study the community not just through the scientific lens but also acknowledges the community through the views of the people who constitute the community. As this study tries to study the “community” of student veterans, it is beneficial to use such an approach.

As acknowledged, Photovoice is a PAR methodology in which members of a community are given cameras and asked to photograph their everyday lives and are suggested to pay particular attention to things and aspects in/of the community they would like to see improved (Roberts, 2009). In a qualitative review performed to explore use of photovoice as a research methodology it was supported that, despite limitations of the studies, photovoice helps facilitate community change

(Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi & Pula, 2009). Catalani & Minkler (2010) suggested that “particularly among highly participatory projects, photovoice appears to contribute to an enhanced understanding of community assets and needs and to empowerment” (p. 424).

Photovoice provides a useful lens for examining experiences relevant to living with mental illness (Fleming et al., 2009). Patients with mental illness in a study conducted using photovoice methodology enjoyed the process of taking photos to help tell their story, and they were able to capture meaningful images that communicated their lived experience of living with a mental illness (Thompson, Hunter, Murray, Ninci, Rolfs, & Pallikkathayil, 2008). In addition, insights as to what can be done to improve the living conditions of under-served individuals by giving them a voice to advocate for themselves and their community makes the approach a useful tool.

Research Funding

The research was partially funded by the College of Health Sciences at University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee through the endowment of Chancellor’s Graduate Student Award to the graduate researcher during Fall semester of 2011.

Institutional Review Board Approval

Prior to recruiting participants, the graduate researcher applied for approval to conduct this study from the University Institutional Review Board so as to maintain the integrity and sincerity of this study. The approval was received on February 2, 2012 (IRB # 12.206).

Participants

Student veterans were recruited (n=3) from a midwestern higher education institution. The inclusion criteria were:

1. Veterans from OIF/OEF/Operation New Dawn.
2. Age within the range of 20-29 years. The inclusion criterion for age was decided by considering the finding suggesting that this age group represents the highest percentage of US veterans (SVA, 2009).
3. An enrolled student status in a higher education institution during the time period of this study.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited through announcements in and around the educational institution campus. Assistance from the on-campus Military Educational Benefit Office (MEBO) was taken to reach out to the student veterans. Electronic flyers were mailed through the help of officials from MEBO. Advertisement of the study was undertaken by the graduate researcher through posting of paper flyers at various student meeting areas on campus.

Various challenges were encountered during participant recruitment. At least 10 student veterans contacted the graduate researcher through phone calls or emails. However, due to significant time commitment required for the study, only three student veterans followed up with the graduate researcher and completed the consent process.

At initial individual interview session they were informed about the nature and course of the study. They completed and signed the informed consent form (Appendix - C). Each participant and the researcher signed two copies of the informed consent

form, one copy was provided to the participant and another is securely stored by the research team in order to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

Sample

There were 3 student veterans who consented to participation. Two of the participants were male and one female. All participants were Caucasians and had diverse educational backgrounds with one being an undergraduate and two as graduate students. Unfortunately, after two sessions of the study participant # 3 withdrew due to time limitations as he was preparing for graduation and getting a job.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Marital status	Time spent on active duty	Back since
Participant 1	28	M	UG	Single	4 years	7 months
Participant 2	28	F	G	Married	9 years	2 years
Participant 3	30	M	G	Single	12 years	2.1 years

Data Collection

After recruitment of the students veterans (n=3) as participants, they completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix - D) during the first interview session. During initial interview, participants were given thorough information regarding the research objectives and procedure. Each participant received a 35mm disposable camera at the end of the initial interview. Participants returned the cameras after a time period of 3-4 weeks, prior to attending the group sessions.

Data collection spanned around a time period of approximately 4 months between months of March and June, 2012 (Table 3). During this time period,

participants and researchers met for one individual interview and a photovoice workshop, spanning around 6 group sessions, which took place at varied time intervals according to the availability of the participants.

Table 3

Photovoice workshop timeline

	Interview	Photovoice Workshop					
	Session#1 Date	Session#2 6/1/2012	Session#3 6/4/2012	Session#4 6/27/2012	Session#5 6/29/2012	Session#6 7/6/2012	Session#7 7/9/2012
Participant 1	3/30/2012	P	A	P	P	P	P
Participant 2	3/31/2012	P	A	P	A	P	P
Participant 3	4/5/2012	A	P	Withdrew			
PI	3/30 & 4/5	P	P	P	P	P	
Graduate Researcher	Present in all	P	P	P	P	P	P

P=Present A=Absent

Each group session took place for a time period of approximately 1.5 to 2 hours and included discussions pertaining to the photographs and time for narrative writing. All group sessions and individual interviews were audio recorded. As a method of triangulation for data collection, the graduate researcher also took field notes during the group sessions. A member check was employed at the end of the data analysis, by presenting findings to the participants, to ensure trustworthiness of the study.

Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic questionnaire (Appendix - D) was adapted from previous research performed with veterans as a focus population conducted by Plach & Haertlein Sells (2013) with their permission. The questionnaire (self-administered)

consists of categories seeking to collect general information about the participant, experience served in the military/army and their relevant educational background.

Photovoice Workshop

The ideology and construct behind the workshop was adapted from the previous research conducted using photovoice methodology by Choi & Stoffel (2010), who used revised photovoice materials from Alexandra Bowers (Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University, 2004). Participants took part in a photovoice workshop consisting of 5 group sessions that familiarized and assisted them to perform photovoice as a PAR methodology. Participants were provided knowledge on how to carry out photovoice and how to gather data such that it could appropriately represent their lived experience.

Each session spanned around a time period of 1.5 to 2 hours and took place on the premises of the educational campus. The schedule was determined by the participants as they were enrolled students, balancing school, job and family responsibilities.

The information (in the form of printed handouts) and equipment to carry out photovoice (including cameras and development of photographs) was provided free of cost to the participants. In all the group sessions of photovoice workshop, participants were asked to share their thoughts, views, opinions, experiences, comments and questions regarding various concerning issues and topics related to their lived experience. The graduate researcher and a trained photovoice researcher (primary advisor) were present during the sessions to assist participants and facilitate the sessions. The two researchers asked probing questions when appropriate. These

questions were not scripted and emerged due to curiosity of researchers to gain deeper understanding of the aspect being discussed.

Session # 1 (Individual Interview)

The first session was an introductory session for each participant. This session was conducted as an individual interview between the researchers and the potential participant. After completing informed consent, each participant was provided information regarding the overview, nature, and goals of the research along with procedure and technique of photovoice methodology. Handouts provided consisted of written syllabus (Appendix - E), goals of photovoice workshop, photo mission log, SHOWED handout, photo consent form and a tentative schedule.

Participants were introduced to the ideology behind the acronym SHOWED (Table 4) where each letter represents a specific question. Researchers provided several sample photographs used to write practice narratives, by the participants, to familiarize them with the photovoice methodology. The graduate researcher and the primary advisor (facilitator) also took part in this exercise so as to generate a variety of responses to a photograph and use of the SHOWED questions. Participants were encouraged to ask questions, discuss, give comments and provide their feedback on sample narratives, photovoice methodology and the research.

They were also provided with photo-mission logs in which they could keep notes regarding the time and place of the photograph as well as write a brief description about each. Participants were informed that it is not mandatory to write up the photo mission log but recommended.

Table 4

Description of Acronym SHOWED (Wang & Burris, 1997)

SHOWED

What do you See here?

What is really Happening here?

How does this relate to Our lives?

Why does this problem or strength exist?

How could this image Educate the community or policy makers?

What can we Do about it?

Researchers assisted participants to identify potential audiences who they would like to inform about their lived experience through photovoice pieces. Examples of previous studies conducted with photovoice methodology and their implications were also shared so as to identify participants with the influence of this methodology as an advocacy tool.

Each participant was informed about the guidelines for carrying out a photovoice mission and was provided with an overview of their role as a data-collector. A photograph may represent the view of a community and a photographer's ideology but it can also consist of unwitting inclusion of incidents misrepresenting the community. Such photography was avoided in this project using strategies such as informing participants about the ethics of photography (Appendix - F). They were also provided with multiple copies of the photography consent form which is used to gain consent from individuals willing to be included in their photographs.

In the end of session 1, each participant received a 35mm disposable camera. The graduate researcher provided a brief description of the camera, its functions and use. Participants were asked to take photographs that could reflect their lived experience as a student veteran and were asked to return it within the time frame of 3-4 weeks. They were instructed on safe use of the camera (instances such as taking photographs near heavy machinery or from an unsecured height should be avoided). They were also informed that they could use smart phones as a tool to take relevant photographs, in case the provided camera was not available. At the closing of session 1, participants were asked for their availability to conduct the following group sessions and a planned schedule was constructed.

Session # 2 (First Group Session)

The second session, held on June 1st, 2012, consisted of group discussions about the initial experience of participants during the photovoice mission. Two participants, primary advisor and the graduate researcher attended this session. One of the participants was not able to attend this session but a make-up session was conducted for him several days later. Prior to this session, graduate researcher collected the cameras (which were placed in his mailbox by the participants) and developed photographs were made available to the participants during this session. Each photograph had two copies, one for the researcher and one for the participant. Negatives of the photographs were handed over to the participants as their property. A compact disc containing digital format of the photographs is stored in the primary advisor's lab.

After distribution of the photographs, participants conveyed the details, importance, and/or relevance of selected photographs and later discussed ideas to be

included in the narratives to be developed after the discussion. Each participant shared the description of their photographs along with its importance to their lived experience as a student veteran. Participants corroborated with each other's experiences and shared their own insight and personal experiences regarding issues which were highlighted through the photographs.

Participants used SHOWED handout (Table 4) to answer various questions pertaining to a selected photograph. Later, participants wrote narratives about the photographs which could help others to understand their stories in the context of the photograph taken. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts with others by reading the narratives out loud and providing feedback within the group. During the session, the graduate researcher and the facilitator offered assistance to the participants, such as scribing or editing of their narrative.

At the end of this session, schedule for the next group meeting was discussed. Participants were encouraged to think about how they would like to structure and share their photographs and experience, through the narratives.

This group session was held with two participants and the researchers. The third participants met later individually with the researchers and that meeting followed a similar pattern as described above. The participant shared his experiences and discussed photographs with the researchers and wrote sample narratives.

Session # 3

This session was held on 4th June, 2012 and was attended by one participant who was not able to attend the last group session. Both graduate researcher and primary advisor were present during this session. Prior to this session graduate researcher had made photographs available to the participant as he wanted to make-up for the last

session, before attending the present one. Negatives were handed over to the participant. A compact disc containing digital format of his photographs is stored in the primary advisor's lab. This session followed a similar pattern as the previous one. The participant and the primary advisor along with graduate researcher discussed the details, context and importance of the photographs. Participant had written brief notes about each of the photographs which were shared during this session.

Some of the photographs were chosen by the participant for detailed discussions. He shared his insight on being a graduate student veteran and discussed about employment concerns for graduate students, as he planned to graduate during that summer semester. He also shared his concerns regarding the importance of financial assistance and appropriate outreach of organizations intended to be resources for the benefit of student veterans.

The participant wrote several narratives using the SHOWED handout, and read them out loud. He further discussed the aspects which were included in his narratives. Due to restricted time availability of the participant, the session took place for one hour. Prior the end of the session, the participant made a commitment to meet for the scheduled next session.

Session # 4

The fourth session took place on June 27th, 2012. One participant along with the primary advisor and graduate researcher attended this session. Two of the participants were not able to attend this session due to changes in their availability. This session took place for approximately 1.5 hours and included discussion pertaining to photographs chosen by the participant and their narratives. The participant first discussed details about the chosen photographs and its relevance to the

lived experience of the student veterans and was later provided with quiet time to write narrative for the chosen photographs.

Narratives were read out loud by him and were later edited. For the purpose of editing, participant sought assistance which was provided by the primary advisor. Primary advisor provided her assistance primarily for grammatical revision of the narratives, as requested by the participant. The participant was encouraged to be sure that any edits did not disturb the context or message of their narrative and it was made sure that the context of the narrative is not disturbed. By the end of the session participant completed writing narratives for 3 photographs and the schedule for the next session was discussed.

Session # 5

Unfortunately, one of the participants withdrew from the study before this session. He was a graduating student and conveyed that he would not be able to commit any additional time required by this study. His sample narratives have been stored along with other data. Photovoice is driven by photographs and written narratives approved by the participants. As no final consent was provided by this participant, thus his photovoice pieces are not included in this thesis. However, the audio taped comments from his discussions with the researchers are used, with the participant's written consent.

This session, held on June 29, 2012, involved editing as well as further write-up of narratives by the participants. Group discussion between the two participants and researchers took place. Participants shared their insights and experiences in context of the photographs, and revealed aspect of their lived experience such as hypervigilance

and access to resources. To gain further insight on participant's lived experience researchers, at many instances, asked probing questions.

Later in the session, participants were given quiet time to write narratives. The written narratives were then read out loud by each participant to encourage further discussion or editing. Both participants shared their concerns in writing effective and appropriate narratives. Thus, primary advisor or the facilitator assisted participants in clarifying and refining their narratives.

During this discussion, one of the participants announced that a new space had been created for veterans on the campus. Researchers and the participant decided to take photographs of that space to share the importance of such developments on campus to assist student veteran's education pursuits. One of the photographs was later chosen by the participant to develop a narrative, which was completed during the following sessions. At the end of this session, participants finished writing various narratives. Schedule for future sessions was discussed and date for the next session was decided.

Session # 6

This session was comprised of editing and write-up of narratives. Held on July 6th, 2012, it followed a similar pattern as the previous one. However, due to prior time commitments the primary advisor was not available during this session. Therefore, graduate researcher facilitated this session. Discussions were staged to provide feedback as well as suggestions on narratives by the participants and the researcher. The graduate researcher provided assistance for writing the narratives and encouraged relevant critical discussions addressing issues concerning educational pursuit of goals by the student veterans.

Participant were given quiet time to write up narratives of selected photographs as well as to edit previously formed narratives. Later, narratives were read out loud to suggest ideas or initiate discussions for further editing. Participants completed narratives and noted that few were left to be edited. Therefore it was decided that the next session would be the last session of the Photovoice Workshop. At the end of this session, the schedule for the final session was confirmed.

Session # 7

This was the last session for the Photovoice Workshop. Two participants along with researchers met on July 9th, 2012 for a time period of 1.5 hours. During this session participants were provided with copies of all their written narratives. All the narratives were read out loud by the participants and were later finalized after final editing. Each participant was later provided with a print version of the final photovoice pieces which s/he created. Participants signed photographic consent forms (Appendix - G) and final photo release forms (Appendix - H) to allow researchers to use and disseminate their narratives and photographs. One participant allowed us to use his legal name while the other opted for an anonymous identity to be used.

Consistent with the recruitment flyers, researchers provided gift cards to the participants as an appreciation for their participation. Participants shared feedback about what it was like to participate in this project. They also provided feedback as to how to attract more students for future Photovoice Workshops by doing such things as taking measures to outreach to student veterans, decreasing the time requirement of the study, and expanding the age limit. Participants also agreed to participate in the process of member checking once preliminary analysis of the data occurred.

After qualitative analysis of the data collected, participants were asked to participate in a post-study follow up session (2 months later). This follow-up session was scheduled as a part of member checking procedure so as to increase the trustworthiness of this study. Both participants agreed to review the preliminary analysis

Triangulation of Data

In a qualitative study, integration of the data depends on variety of methods for its collection and sources of information, a theoretical concept known as triangulation (Denzin, 1970; Maxwell, 2008). By attaining triangulation in the data collection procedure, one reduces the probability that conclusions formed at the end of the study include systematic biases and the inherent limitations of a specific methodology. Triangulation helps to provide a better internal as well as external validity to the study (Maxwell, 2008). Hence, this study included more than one method for data collection. The major form of data were collected in the form of photovoice pieces (photographs and written narratives) created by the participants. The graduate researcher also included his observations made during the photovoice workshop discussions in the form of field notes. Another method to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the study employed was audio-recording of the discussions during the photovoice workshop. Transcripts of audio recordings were used as a reference for data analysis while creating themes.

Triangulation in the data collection reduces the risk of faulty associations due to any one specific method (Maxwell, 2008). Employing more than one method to collect data helped to strengthen the reliability as well as the validity of the results and findings of this study. As the nature of this study is qualitative, therefore to capture the

threads of lived experience of participants, it is warranted that the data collected (and its analysis) by the graduate researcher accurately captures their lived experience.

Data Analysis

The analysis in a qualitative study is based on the analysis of words, photovoice images, and observations, unlike the quantitative studies which use numbers and statistics to interpret the results. In any research study, analyses and interpretation of data collected is essential to bring order and understanding into the research area and this procedure requires creativity, discipline and a systematic approach (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). In a qualitative study, text or narrative data can be presented to the author in any form (based on the methodology of the study selected), one might collect data in the form of responses from open-ended questions on a survey, or a transcript from a focus group meeting, or field notes (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003).

In this study, data were collected in the form of photovoice pieces generated by the participants (which included visual data in the form of photographs and text in the form of narratives), field notes created by the graduate researcher and the audio recordings created during the workshop. The data collected in this study were analyzed on the basis of technique suggested for photovoice analysis by Wang & Burris (1997). Descriptive coding and thematic analysis were employed to convert photographs and written narratives into various themes.

There are three steps to analyze photovoice pieces collected in a photovoice project (Wang & Burris 1997). These steps also represent the methodology that was used by the researchers of this study to analyze the photovoice pieces collected.

- 1.** First step was to select photographs: This process was performed by the participants as they selected photographs that can best represent their lived

experience, identity, strengths and struggles (Wang & Burris, 1997; Palibroda, Krieg, Murdock, & Havelock 2009). These photos were later included in the analytical procedure of the study.

2. **Contextualizing:** Participants contextualized selected photographs by providing details and meaning of the photographs through written narratives. Each participant shared his/her insights and experiences with other participants and acknowledged each other's view and outlook. This process provided a voice to their individual as well as group experiences. "The acronym VOICE, standing for Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience, reminds participants to think not just about their own life conditions, but also about shared life events and conditions" (Palibroda et al 2009: p55). This process involved using SHOWED questions (Table 4), to critically analyze the content of the photographs (Wang & Burris, 1997; Palibroda et al, 2009).
3. **Codifying:** This process involves identifying, sorting and categorization, and building themes by the researcher (Palibroda et al, 2009). Descriptive coding and thematic analysis, of the data, was employed for this purpose.

Qualitative approach in a research is highly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003) and thematic analysis should be preferred as a basic method for its analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is an approach to identify, analyze and report the hidden patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This kind of analyses requires a step by step approach which in the end leads to the formation of a theme that can be generalized within the population studied. Based on the phases/steps provided by Braun & Clarke (2006), the graduate researcher used the prescribed methodology while creating themes during the data

analysis using narratives, field notes and discussion transcripts with input and verification from the primary advisor trained in the Photovoice method.

Step -1: Recognizing the data: In a qualitative study, there is a deluge of data. A researcher should be willing to study every page of the field note or listen to every dialogue of a tape-recorded conversation and by doing this only the researcher could point himself/herself to the things that are repeatedly encountered. It is ideal to read through the entire data set at least once before one begins coding, as ideas and identification of possible patterns would be streamlined as one reads through (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, graduate researcher formed a record of initial list of ideas within the data that pertains a specific meaning to the participant or the study.

Step – 2: Forming preliminary descriptive codes: Codes helps to describe a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appeals to the analyst. They also assist to refer to the most basic part of the raw data or information that can be determined in a meaningful way that pertains to the phenomenon being studied (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding basically means identifying patterns that repeat often in the data collected. Coding can be of two types: data driven (acknowledging every pattern that exists) or theory driven (acknowledging patterns that are relevant to the research questions). For the purposes of this study coding was be performed using data driven approach. While manual coding, the graduate researcher highlighted both implicit and explicit patterns within the data, wrote notes about them and/or mark the pages where they occurred. Even though if information seemed not to have explicit relevance to the research but holds an important pattern in the data, it was acknowledged and further studied (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step – 3: Looking for patterns and theories: This step comprised of identifying and grouping the codes that represent, in the background, a similar and

potential principle or an idea or a thought that could be developed into a theme relevant to the research question. This phase focused on the codes to be identified and later collated into a potential theme. Sub-themes were, inadvertently, encountered that were later clustered to form a theme in case a big picture was not explicit. Formation of sub-themes helped in forming a potential theme rather than searching for a theme, which at most times, is not obvious and clear (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step – 4: Reviewing the themes formed: This step involved two phases. First was when the researchers reviewed the principle codes that formed a particular theme to identify whether the underlying codes form a coherent pattern that can form a particular theme. Second phase involved examining the relevance, reliability and validity of a particular theme to the entire data set, whether a theme brings a meaning and insight to the entire data set and to the research. As Braun & Clark (2006) suggested, each theme should be able to form one or other part of the story that a researcher would want to tell through the data collected.

Step – 5: Defining and naming the theme: In this phase, the researchers performed detailed description and analysis of themes formed. Based on that data researchers identified and correlated the stories within the themes to form a bigger story that imparts insight to the research as a whole. Themes were defined by acknowledging it as a part representing a bigger story and where that theme falls in that story. Based on a theme's role into the story, naming was done (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Step – 6: Preparing the report: The themes were put in order and their write-up was decided in this phase. The write-up must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data, i.e. enough data extracts to demonstrate the presence of the theme. Representation of vivid examples or extracts is presented to capture the essence

of the point which needs to be demonstrated, without unnecessary complexity. Extracts were threaded within an analytic narration that represents the story and makes an apropos argument in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Role of the Researcher

This study was undertaken by a graduate student pursuing a post professional Master of Science in Occupational Therapy in collaboration with his primary advisor, experienced in the photovoice methodology and analysis. In order to maintain the integrity of this study, it is substantial to convey and state to the readers and reviewers of this study about the role of the graduate researcher. As various stages of a study are prone to prejudices and biases of the researcher therefore it is essential that those biases are bracketed throughout the study. This section provides reflections from the graduate researcher in the study and his beliefs and presumptions.

The graduate researcher for this study is an international student pursuing graduate studies in from a United States mid-western educational institution. He has no prior experience relevant to social exposure with student veterans, thus is less likely to hold any assumptions about this population or the sample that was recruited. Also, none of the participants had any prior social connection with the graduate researcher. Thus, discussion and interactions were less likely to be influenced or unreliable based on prior relationships.

The graduate researcher's primary role was to collect data and conduct its analysis, along with the dissemination of subsequent findings. The recruitment of the participants was also undertaken by the graduate researcher, under the guidance of the primary advisor. As stated earlier, photovoice workshop is pivotal to this study and it was undertaken by the graduate researcher and facilitated by the primary advisor. The advisor, being an expert on the methodology of photovoice, has conducted and

mentored several studies in the past as a researcher. The graduate researcher was supervised, guided and assisted by the primary advisor in order to maintain the trustworthiness of this study.

During all sessions of photovoice workshop, field notes were created by the graduate researcher. The graduate researcher was also responsible to contact the participants for scheduling purposes. He was also engaged in the distribution of cameras to the participants and their collection, along with the development of photographs. The organization of the exhibition of photovoice pieces created by the participants was also one of the responsibilities of the graduate researcher.

Summary

This chapter introduced readers to the methodological aspects of this study. It provided a detailed account of the analytical strategies that were used by the researchers to undertake this study as well as to analyze the data collected. This chapter also provided readers with the data collection procedure and a chronicle of the Photovoice Workshop that was conducted as a part of data collection. The following chapter will introduce readers with the research findings.

CHAPTER – 4

Research Results

The primary purpose of this research was to examine the lived experience of student veterans. Secondary research questions aimed to acknowledge factors that help or hinder student veterans in their educational pursuits. A qualitative research design using photovoice methodology was employed as the primary data collection strategy. Data were collected in the form of photovoice pieces (generated by participants), audio recordings, and field notes formed during the photovoice workshop. Descriptive coding and thematic analysis were later used for analyzing data.

One of the fundamental reasons to undertake research is dissemination of its results or findings. Research primarily leads to generation of knowledge which can, consequently, be applied to inform the clinical practice. This chapter provides a detailed account of themes that were uncovered via data analysis of this study. Demographic description of the participants is provided along with the photovoice pieces that each generated. Findings in form of themes and sub-themes are provided later in the chapter.

Participants

Three student veterans from a midwestern university were recruited as participants. Participants engaged in photovoice workshop, spanning around a time period of approximately eight weeks, and provided data in the form of photographs and narratives (photovoice pieces). They also engaged in group discussions along with the researchers to present their views and concerns relevant to the research questions. One of the participants withdrew from the study after first two sessions due to time

commitment issues. Thus photovoice pieces from the remaining two participants are presented.

Participant One: Jon

Jon is a 28 year old male Caucasian student veteran enrolled in an undergraduate program. He is single, lives alone, and does not have any children. He was 22 years old when he enrolled in service and worked in the Navy for 4 years on active duty and served one year as a reserve. It had been seven months since he was back from service and is living in the civilian community, at the time of his recruitment in this study. He works part time for 16 hours/month.

Following are the photovoice pieces that were created by him during the course of this study.

Figure 3: Photovoice Piece 1. Untitled

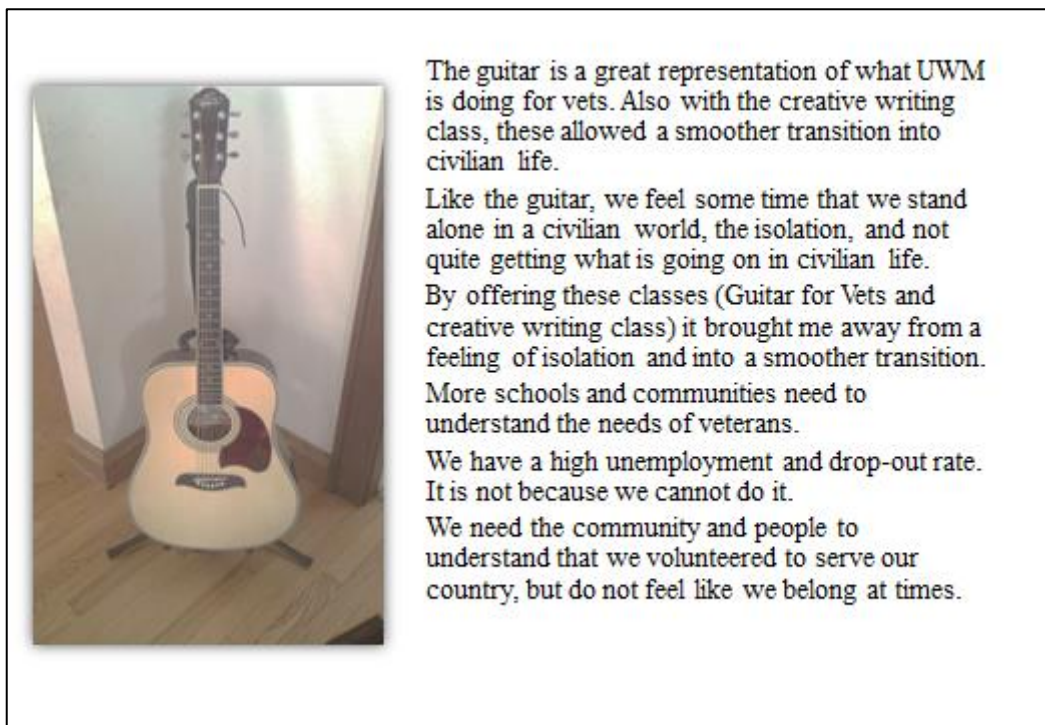


Figure 4: Photovoice Piece 2. Untitled

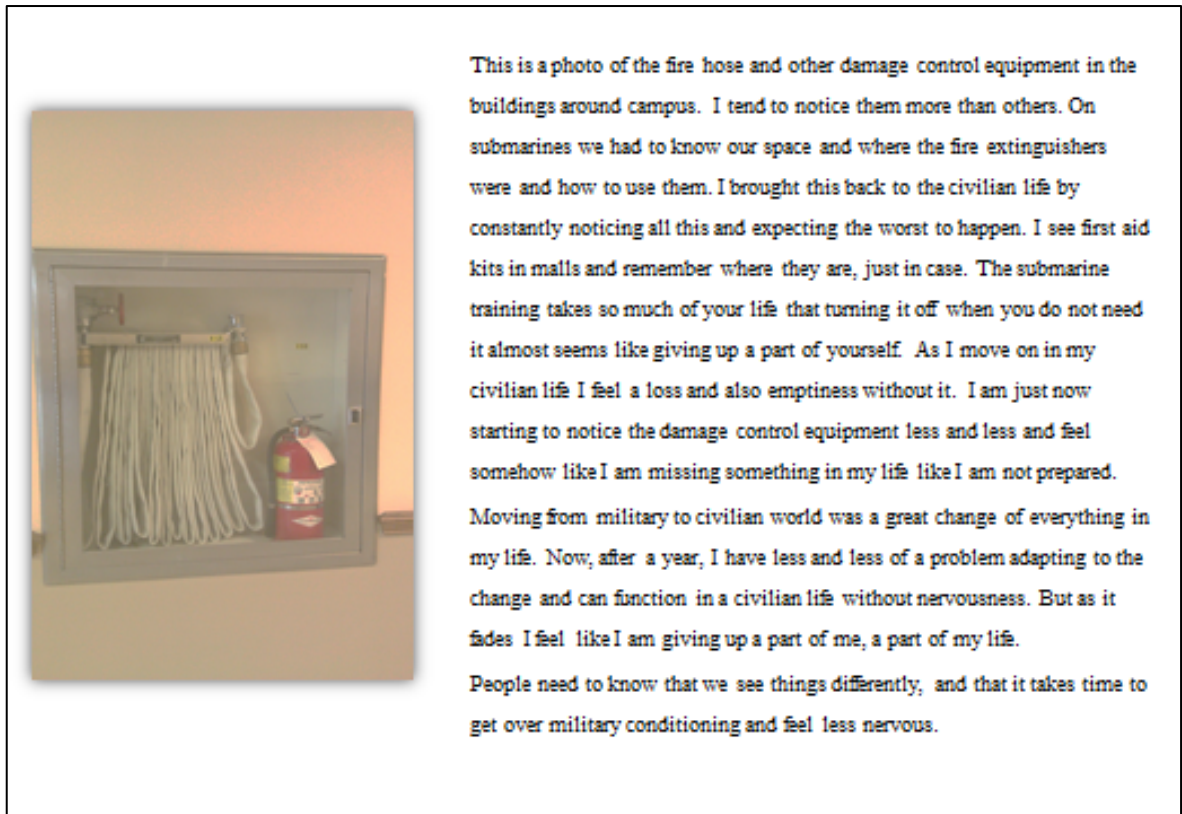


Figure 5: Photovoice Piece 3. Untitled

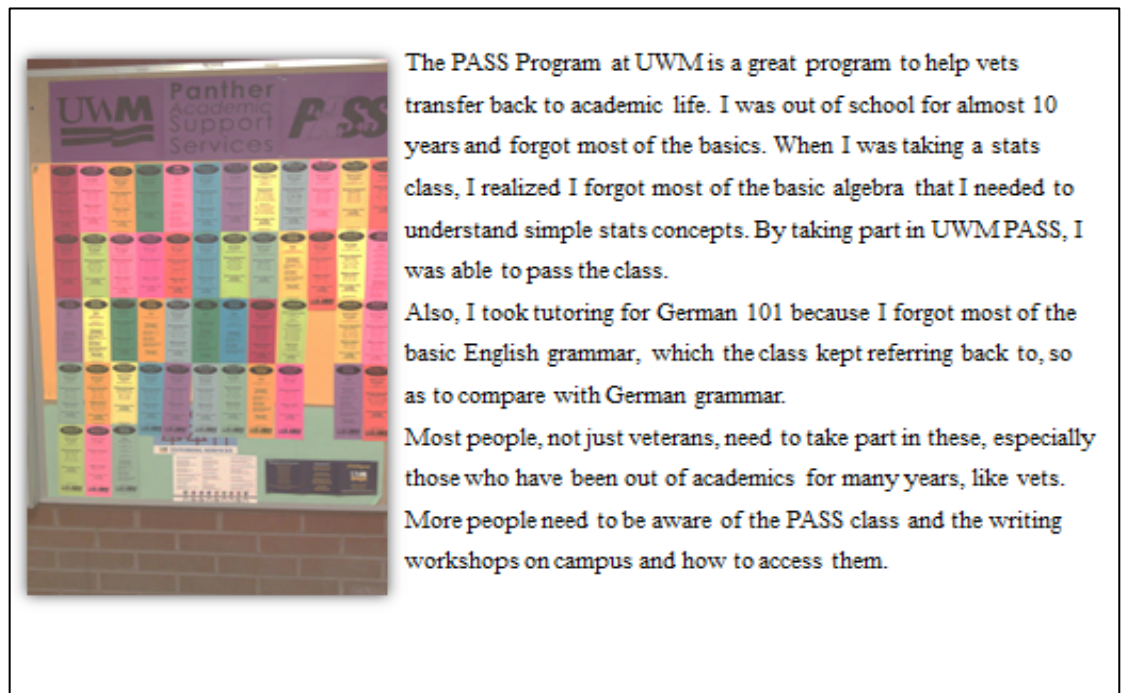


Figure 6: Photovoice Piece 4. Untitled



On submarines, we understand that sometimes someone just needs their space to get away. Coming back to civilian life, dealing with people that dress, talk, and act different, I need a place just to get away as well as a place to take a nap before the next class, or a quiet place to catch up on reading. There seems to be so few places on campus for students just to get away, even for an hour.

With the nervousness of returning to civilian life, and not quite understanding young people, whether it has to do with my age or my military experience, I need a place where I could get away and compose myself between classes.

The Northwest Quadrant was a great place to get away and it had plenty of areas for many students that just need their space.

Figure 7: Photovoice Piece 5. Untitled



This picture is more about what I could not take a picture of. Being on a submarine heightened my other senses. In a sub, the environment is mostly artificial. Coming back to nature, the first thing I noticed was the air. I notice all the smells that most people take for granted.

Also, sounds are very unique. Being on a sub, we had to be aware of sounds of hydraulic or high pressure ruptures. We also had the constant sound of ventilators humming. When the ship was rigged for reduced electrical, the humming stopped and you had an appreciation for silence. People should be more aware of what is around them and less focused on their phones.

On a sub, we were deprived of all social media, TV and cell phones and only given one email address that people could reach us at, which rarely ever worked. This isolation created a life that could be lived without all the unnecessary distractions and only focus on the present task at hand. I see so many students on their phones texting or updating Facebook, and they just can't stop to smell the flowers.

Figure 8: Photovoice Piece 6. Untitled



Being in the military, I moved to different cities constantly and saw different cultures in each as well as different political climates and different levels of military acceptance.

Coming back to Milwaukee, I can see how Wisconsin looks to the rest of the country, having lived outside of Wisconsin for most of the time during the recent recall election. Coming back, I have a different perspective and am more of an observer.

Being able to see other parts of the country allowed me to have a greater understanding of politics and cultural diversity all over the country.

Many student veterans have this experience and can benefit classes that deal with politics and cultural diversity.

Figure 9: Photovoice Piece 7. Untitled



The military requires a person to move all over the country as well as all over the world. We experience many different parts of the world and American culture, while at the same time, work closely with others who represent those cultures.

When we come to college, we have a broader view of the world than many students coming to college. As veterans we can share this knowledge of diversity with others.

Being in the military on active duty, I had to understand many different treaties mostly dealing with the Cold War and disarmament. Then, coming to the Reserve side, I talked with many SeaBees (engineering corps) who worked in the Middle East. Having a firsthand experience of many news events things become less of a black and white issue and more gray.

Talking with the SeaBees, the Navy becomes less of a military occupying force and more of a Peace Corps within the military component of the Navy. Here, they build roads, hospitals and schools to help create infrastructure and provide aid to places like Haiti.

Figure 10: Photovoice Piece 8. Untitled



My first semester at UWM, I had some time to kill between classes. I started to walk around the city and discovered many interesting places.

This was different from my military experiences because whenever I moved to a new city, there were people willing to take you out and show you everything, and people who were already established.

Most of the time I go out by myself.

Having a space at UWM for student veterans and those in the military to drop in and connect would really help.

Figure 11: Photovoice Piece 9. Untitled



At times I still want to go out to sea. When I got off active duty, I felt like I was letting my crew down. I felt like I should have still been there to help them on their next deployment. I see messages on facebook of my former crew getting ready to go underway and feel an obligation that I should be there.

Wanting to reenlist and continue on with my education is a constant conflict. I want to succeed in school but I don't want to feel like I gave up on my crew. Earning my dolphins was an acceptance into the submarine life. This was a connection we had. We looked at someone's chest and saw the qualification pin and knew we were the part of same team and we could save each other's life if we needed to and knew how to work together to combat a casualty.

Not being able to help other submariners and my crew feels like I gave up on what I earned.

Figure 12: Photovoice Piece 10. Untitled



Whenever there were veterans in my class we seem to always ask the same questions like have you gotten your BHA or have your tuition been paid for or have you got your book stipend yet. These are just some of the questions we ask each other.

If we had an area where we could meet and talk to the people we needed to as a whole about the issues that we have, to someone with the power to do something this would help out greatly in the resolving a lot of the problems we are facing. Also, a place where we could get together and help each other out with everyday problems. On active duty if someone's car was broken or if any one needed help we would always be there to help. I hope that the Center for Military and Student Veterans would bring about some of this and we could deal with this issue with one voice. Coming off with active duty with only 2 weeks before school I had no idea of where to go or what to do. A area where returning veterans can ask stupid questions that everyone else seems to know would be great instead of asking students and getting all the look of how can you not know that.

Participant Two: Emily

Emily is a 28 year old Caucasian female student veteran enrolled in a graduate program. She is married and lives with her husband, who is currently serving in the Military (active duty). She has a daughter aged 6 months, at the time of recruitment in this study. She was enlisted at the age of 17 years and served in the Army for 9 years in the National Guard; during this period she was deployed and served in OIF. It has been 2 years since she returned to the civilian community. She was not working during the course of this study.

Following are the photovoice pieces that she created during the course of this study.

Figure 13: Photovoice Piece 11. Distance



This photograph depicts the inside of a car while looking out at a distance mileage sign and lots of empty highway ahead.

I am in my own world completely disconnected from my battle buddies who shared my experiences; the distance between us seems endless, 100 miles might as well be 10,000. We are not only separated by physical distances but emotional as well. Even our phone conversations are brief, lacking common ground and understanding of our new experiences. People who I spent every minute of every day with for a year, who could finish my thoughts, no longer understand my life.

When I returned to the States, we demobilized at Fort McCoy for 4-5 days and were scattered to the wind, left to our own devices to navigate the civilian world. This is just the nature of the military; people come together from all over the country for a common purpose and return once they are finished.

Campuses need to create student veteran's organizations to get student veterans connected with others who feel our losses. Don't judge, connect veterans with other veterans on campus.

Figure 14: Photovoice Piece 12. Safety is key



This picture shows a key in hand, painted toes, jeans and kitchen floor. I see a girl who is feminine (painted toes, blue jeans) yet strong, a civilian yet a soldier. I see someone who wants to be a civilian but can't let go the hyper vigilance instilled by military training. I see someone whose main focus is safety and preserving her life.

This photo is about the hyper vigilance instilled in me. I walk on campus with a key in hand, ready to jab it in the ribs of an attacker.

I took this photo to represent the hyper vigilance and fear we experience upon transitioning to being a civilian. This fear comes about as a result of being weaponless and buddy less, knowing we are in a world where the bystander effect is prevalent and very few would come to our aid. This exists out of a need to protect ourselves and our battle buddies in combat environments.

People should understand that our hyper vigilance does not mean that we will snap one day but is survival mechanism.

Counselors on campus need to realize that every veteran is not struggling with PTSD and be aware of military culture.

Figure 15: Photovoice Piece 13. Uniforms

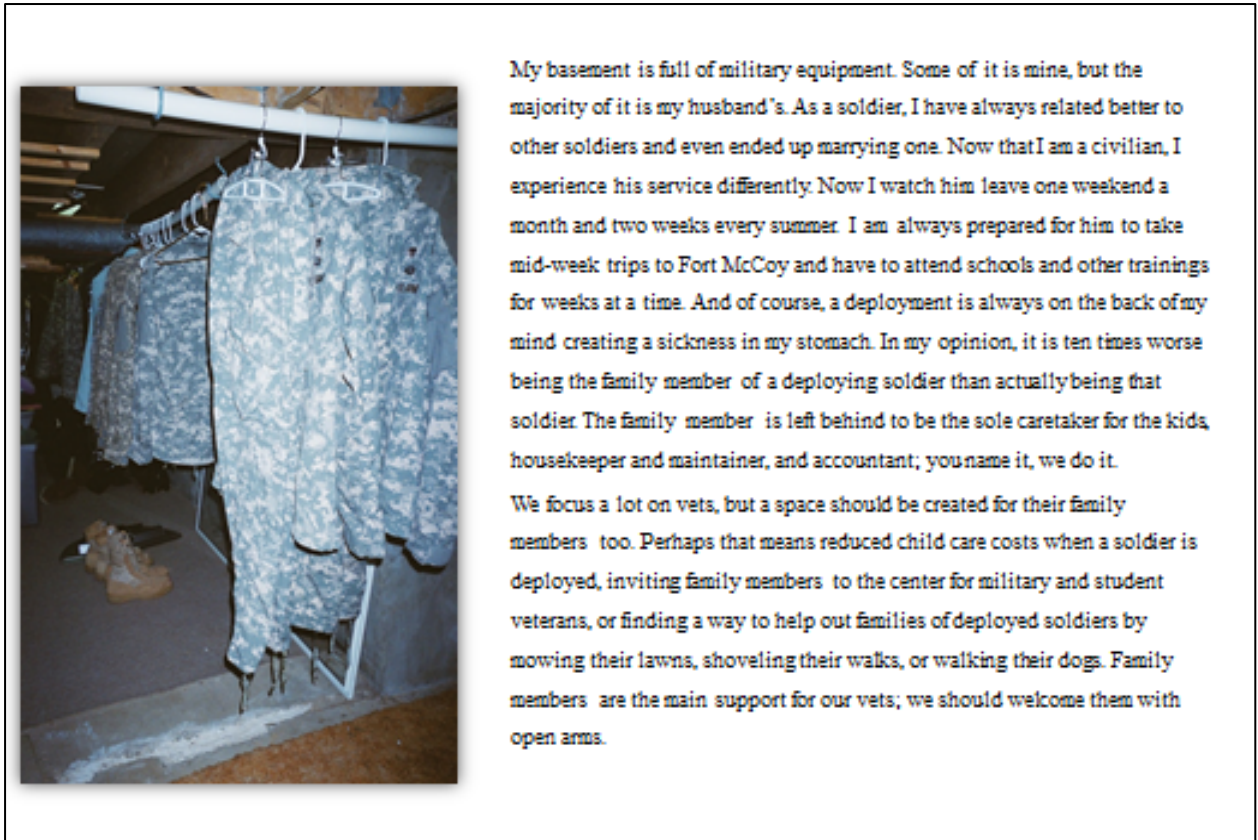



Figure 16: Photovoice Piece 14. Family is paramount



Figure 17: Photovoice Piece 15. Outreach



This is a photo of the tiny corner into which the Veteran's Education Office is shoved. It is difficult to find even with the room number.


This tiny space is representative of the space vets are given on the campus. There are huge resource centers for countless other groups in the Union, yet here is our space, hidden in a dark corner. This lack of visibility also represents the lack of outreach on this campus for veteran's resources.

I paid \$20,000 for graduate school before realizing I was eligible for additional benefits. Thankfully, when I snapped this photo Jim took the time to chat with me and told me about these benefits.

If the vet center was more visible, other vets may pop in and get help they didn't know was available. Similarly, I had no idea there was a student veteran's group on campus, guitar lessons, or writing classes for vets. These are excellent resources, but we can't use them if we don't know.

I recommend reaching out to veterans at orientation, through email, by posting fliers, and most importantly by giving the veterans education center a bigger, more visible space.

Figure 18: Photovoice Piece 16. Escape



This is a photo of the lake with the city of Milwaukee in the distance. This is my attempt to escape the chaos of the city. There is always so much going on in Milwaukee – festivals, construction, violence; sometimes I need to get away. There are times when I am on campus and feel this need. There are young people everywhere, riding skateboards, bikes and listening to headphones, not paying attention to or caring about who they are running over. Don't get me wrong, I love that they are able to be young and carefree. However, sometimes I need an escape. Heading out to the lake gives me the space I need to decompress.

Figure 19: Photovoice Piece 17. House with flags



This is a neighborhood near my house. Every house on this block has an American flag out front. Seeing this block makes my heart swell with pride and reminds me that there are still people out there who support me. I feel safe and at peace when I walk or jog in this neighborhood. I know there is always a lot of debate about the flag and the pledge. Many institutions don't honor the flag anymore because they don't want to offend anyone. I understand this perspective but what about us? Every time someone talks through the national anthem I feel they might as well be spitting in my face. A place that doesn't make space to honor my culture, but goes to extremes to honor all others, is not a place I want to be. On the other hand, a place that proudly honors the American Flag, is a place I feel safe, comfortable, and a sense of belonging.

Figure 20: Photovoice Piece 18. Education



This is a poster depicting the education benefits available to veterans. Veterans are worth a lot of money and that money is guaranteed to the educational institution they choose. Most importantly, veterans want an education.

When I was deployed, I counseled several soldiers on how to apply for school, how to select classes, etc. There were so many soldiers, young and old, that were interested in going to school upon returning to the States.

Veterans have already proven that they have the fortitude to withstand adversity. It's not the challenges associated with school that turn them away. I believe they don't feel like they belong. Often they are much older than their peers, have life experiences others cannot relate to, or are confronted with anti-war protests on their own campuses. Not only are they already uncomfortable, but then there are people literally telling them they don't belong here.

Creating an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging will surely entice veterans to UWM campus. Creating a community will encourage them to stay and with that comes a lot of guaranteed funding for UWM.

Participant Three: Mark

Participant three is a 30 year old Caucasian male student veteran who was attending his last semester of graduate studies. At the time of data collection, he was single and had no children. He was living with his roommates and was working full time (40hours/week). He was in the Army and served in OEF for 12 years. He entered in the Army at the age of 17 and served in the National Guard. It has been 26 months since he returned to civilian life.

Unfortunately, due to time commitment issues, Mark withdrew from the study before completion of the data collection. Researchers were not provided with the final photo release form from this participant thus his photovoice pieces are not reported. However, data recorded during the discussions which were held as a part of photovoice workshop are included in the study results.

Findings

This section of the chapter presents findings from the data analysis. Data for this study included photovoice pieces (generated by the participant), audio transcripts and field notes (created by the graduate researcher). The data collected were analyzed using descriptive coding and thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged from the data analysis: reminiscence of past duty and reflections on military life, the transition from military to civilian student life, entry to a new stage of life, and University and community environments. These themes are more deeply described using sub-themes which are elaborated later in this section.

Each theme was identified from particular fragments of the data which helped bind together a specific idea or belief conveyed by the participants. The following

section will provide detailed description regarding each theme and requisite sub-themes that emerged through data analysis.

Theme 1: Reminiscence of Past Duty and Reflections on Military Life

During the initial phase of return from the service or active duty, student veterans reminisce about their past duty and aspects related to it. This reminiscence leads to a comparison between two worlds (active duty and the civilian life) resulting in feeling of being less connected or disconnected from non-veteran students. Looking back at military life resulted in longing for an environment similar to that experienced during the service. In addition, a feeling of unfulfilled responsibility towards their duty as a service member was expressed. The realities of military life were shared. These aspects were later constructed as sub-themes and are presented below.

Fellow veterans (as battle buddies): Connected and disconnected.

Student veterans longed for the past camaraderie upon their return to the civilian world. During a discussion session, a participant mentioned:

... you also notice that its different in civilian world cuz there's no one here who's gonna help. Its kinda like when I am in military, I am in the submarine... or even on military base, I got a feeling, a sense of community, as if everyone's gonna help you. Like once in Washington I got my car in a ditch and 3 marines helped me out and I don't even have to ask or anything like that. And here you don't feel like that same....

This feeling of camaraderie may also cultivate into a relatively concrete social relationship (or friendship). One of the Emily's photovoice pieces, named Distance (Figure 13), helped gain insight regarding this aspect of reminiscence. This aspect of

connection with fellow service members was also evident through various dialogues between participants. As one participant mentioned:

Friendship means more to you after being in a military. It's like closest that you can rely on other people is a major thing.

A statement from another participant, made during a discussion session, also helped reinforce this aspect:

...the only reason I survived is because of people around me... It makes you feel like yeah these luxuries are nice but people are the only thing that matter.

This was corroborated with another participant's experience who shared the following, during a discussion session, when asked about initial experiences on campus:

Very similar. Its kinda like that you know on submarines you are constantly working with the same people over and over for a long time and you are just working, eating, sleeping with all the same people you know. And it's just when you get out of there, you don't have that same camaraderie anymore. You just feel alone lot of time.

Re-entering the civilian world and perceiving the absence of previously experienced camaraderie and friendship can lead to feeling of disconnection with non-veteran students. This feeling of disconnection can be one of the reasons for valuing the past duty. Such emotions were ascertained through various fragments of photovoice pieces created by Jon, such as: "Like the guitar, I feel some times that I stand alone in a civilian world, the isolation, and not quite getting what is going on in civilian life" (Figure 3). These aspects were also encountered during various discussion sessions:

I think I feel disconnected with others... Especially when you are active duty when you come back from deployment... we had like 4 or 5 days at Fort McCoy and we were just like disbanded and so all of a sudden your best friends like people you train with them, sleep with them... you work out with them. In one year they become closer to you than anyone and then you come back and you are thrown back into your life. I was a teacher and I jumbled back into the role and nobody understood what I have gone through... the people that I have come so close to, they seem to me like they don't care about me either but they were also throw back into their life where they were trying to figure everything out too and like... So you keep your head up the waters and try to re-figure things out again”.

Another perspective on feeling disconnected shared, during a discussion session, was:

...it's just really sad. When I first came back to school here it's just felt like so isolated. Like going from base to base there's a group of people to help you out... people are willing to help you and show you where to go...

Longing for past environments: Losses and unfulfilled responsibilities.

Feeling disconnected from others (non-veteran students, classmates and officials on campus) can result in longing for past environments, including the places and people whose lives one shared during experience of military services, especially when no new relationships have yet been established. Another aspect to this longing is the feeling that one still has responsibilities toward fellow service members and service. A photovoice piece (Figure 11) created by a participant is a strong reflection of such aspect. In addition it was shared:

Like I still desire to go at the sea all the time. I want to be out there with them. It's kinda like a conflict, I want to continue my schooling but at the same time I wanna go back to the military.

Another participant expressed:

...everyone expects you to be overjoyed when you are back like you get off the plane and everybody there is like so happy to see you and you are just like put me back into the plane and send me back. I still have those times when I wish I was in Iraq.

These aspects reflect the predilection of student veterans towards the military culture. Thus, their lived experience can constitute of reminiscence of both past duties and fellow veterans.

Realities of military life.

While remembering past service experiences, participants also shared the realities of military life. These realities of military life, such as limited luxuries, exposure to different geographical locations, cultures, and politics, helps to acknowledge significant differences that can exist between military and civilian life.

“During my military training and my deployment to Iraq, I was removed from common luxuries. I had no car, no cell phone, didn't shop or, do my make-up... I had to carry my stuff to shower that was like half a mile...”

As a participant shared through these photovoice pieces (Figure 8).

Being in the military, I moved to different cities constantly and saw different cultures in each as well as different political climates and different levels of military acceptance. Coming back to Milwaukee, I can see how Wisconsin looks to the rest of the country, having lived outside of Wisconsin for most of the time

during the recent recall election. Coming back, I have a different perspective and am more of an observer. Being able to see other parts of the country allowed me to have a greater understanding of politics and cultural diversity all over the country.

A participant also shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 9):

Being in the military on active duty, I had to understand many different treaties mostly dealing with the Cold War and disarmament. Then, coming to the Reserve side, I talked with many SeaBees (engineering corps) who worked in the Middle East. Having a firsthand experience of many news events things become less of a black and white issue and more gray. Talking with the SeaBees, the Navy becomes less of a military occupying force and more of a Peace Corps within the military component of the Navy. Here, they build roads, hospitals and schools to help create infrastructure and provide aid to places like Haiti.

As a part of the realities of military life, Emily also shared her view as a wife of an active duty service member and reflected on this by relating her past service experience. She expressed through a photovoice piece (Figure 15) “in my opinion, it is ten times worse being the family member of a deploying soldier than actually being that soldier. The family member is left behind to be the sole caretaker for the kids, housekeeper and maintainer, and accountant; you name it, we do it”. It was suggested that such realities should be acknowledged by individuals who don’t share similar experience to avoid prejudiced or ill-informed assumptions.

Summary of theme 1.

Discussion quotes, excerpts and photovoice pieces that formed this theme primarily consisted of words such as “I came to school and...” or “I still wanna go

back...” These words highlight the initial phase of reintegration and the predilection of student veterans towards military culture. During this phase, student veterans reminisce about past duties and environment, and fellow veterans. However, with passage of time they learn to acknowledge the new environment so as to successfully reintegrate into the student life.

Theme 2: The Transition from Military to Civilian Student Life

After entering civilian life, student veterans experience a transition from being a service member to a student. This stressful transition can be attributed to sudden changes in the immediate environment and perceived anxiety about challenges related to returning to a student role. Another aspect that can be acknowledged during this phase is the change of identity. A person who was once identified as a service member is now expected to take the role of a student which, by characterization, is significantly different from being a service member.

Awareness of new environments: Escape and reintegrate.

As mentioned earlier, upon transition student veterans experience significant changes in their immediate environment. They reminisce about their past environment and simultaneously try to reintegrate into civilian life. They pay close attention to new environment so as to re-integrate successfully. As one participant expressed:

Most times you come back and become a student in a community that you are not familiar with. People finish their military service, get out and move to a city they have been out for a long time or never been to before and attend a school. So there is a component issue of reintegration and initial integration into this community and school.

During the initial phase of reintegration, student veterans may find the “new” environment and various aspects of transition stressful. Sometimes a small aspect of architecture, such as height of the ceiling, can also distract an individual, as shared:

I am not used to high ceiling. It’s weird. Like I am not used to go to huge lecture halls. It’s kinda bothersome. The major thing is that you just wanna get away after a certain point and you can’t really find a place.

A photovoice piece (Figure 18) highlights the struggle of student veterans due to change in social as well as the physical environment:

This is a photo of the lake with the city of Milwaukee in the distance. This is my attempt to escape the chaos of the city. There is always so much going on in Milwaukee – festivals, construction, violence; sometimes I need to get away. There are times when I am on campus and feel this need. There are young people everywhere, riding skateboards, bikes and listening to headphones, not paying attention to or caring about who they are running over. Don’t get me wrong, I love that they are able to be young and carefree. However, sometimes I need an escape...

Another photovoice piece (Figure 6) helps to acknowledge this aspect:

On submarines, we understand that sometimes someone just needs their space to get away. Coming back to civilian life, dealing with people that dress, talk, and act different, I need a place just to get away...

A participant further added to this aspect, during a discussion session:

...all the nervousness and stress you have from coming back from active duty to civilian life you kinda want to get away... You just wanna go there where no one's to bother you and it's just like sending yourself away from the sun.

These views were corroborated by another participant:

Besides being disconnected, part of this is also getting away from city; from all the people... feeling just like trapped in here...things like too much goin' around in here. You just need to clear your mind away

Student veterans can perceive stress due to sudden transitions. For them, civilian or student life is not what they experienced during their recent past. This change can be overwhelming and potentially hinder their education pursuits. Also, as a student veteran being responsible for self is a part of reintegration. However, it is noted that student veterans attempt to understand the mechanics of civilian life so as to successfully reintegrate within the community and acknowledge their new role as a student. A participant said:

Oh yeah, there's another thing, cuz I was a class officer and you are coming from position of authority to here, so its kinda like... I am coming from mentality where professors are kinda like chiefs... or something like that. So kinda like thinking like I can do this and this.... So trying to understand what your level is in whole thing.

During the initial phase of transition, these student veterans struggled due to overwhelming changes in their immediate environment. They encountered difficulty in adjusting to the crowd and making social connections. Student veterans may avoid such changes by escaping to their preferred spaces like a quiet room. However, as the

transition continues, they learn to adjust with the new environment and utilize some of their previously learned skills for successful reintegration.

Straddling two worlds: Being an outsider or an insider.

As acknowledged earlier, these student veterans initially struggled with integrating in their new environment. Similarly, aspects of social relationships are also suggested as one of the concerns by student veterans. A participant commented when asked regarding the kind of photographs one planned to take:

Probably the student union. Never quite feel as different from normal student population as when you are walking through the union, so it's little noticeable.

Non-veteran students have limited access to information pertaining to military experiences, except through news, films, books or blogs. Incoming student veterans may lack knowledge about what living in the community and returning to school might be like. These gaps can hinder communication between the two groups and can lead student veterans to feel as outsiders within the university community. As one participant shared:

...yeah they don't have the context and so like for the first semester I like share all my sea stories to just like put out there. But like after that I am not talking to anyone in class at all unless someone asks me specifically, I am hiding the military side now.

Another participant added to this aspect through a photovoice piece (Figure 20):

It's not the challenges associated with school that turn them away. I believe they don't feel like they belong.

Participants shared that student veterans are less likely to share their experience with non-veteran students and prefer to keep their status a secret:

...we want to keep it a secret. We like to reveal certain things at certain times...

We don't want everyone to know about it so it's kinda like keeping it quiet and don't discuss and just go on with your life.

Keeping one's veteran status a secret, along with lack of knowledge among non-veteran student, widens the communication gap and can heighten the feeling of being an outsider.

Completely informing an individual about the experience of being a veteran can be challenging within the microcosm of fleeting conversations and biased assumptions. As one participant said:

It takes way too much explanation to get into and also people think if you went to Iraq you must have killed somebody or like done those horrible things. But you are so far away from like what the war is about or what actually happens I don't wanna get into it because that's not the experience of majority of people that deploy.

Participants expressed that student veterans are more inclined towards developing social relationships with fellow veterans as they have knowledge and insight to relate with each other's military experience. A participant shared:

Yeah like in my German class there are some veterans from navy... We talk a lot in class about veteran experiences. It's kinda like a weird thing like you can pick out veterans I don't know how to explain but you just have a different walk a different look... So there were like wide range of veterans there and it was kinda nice to talk to them.

These thoughts help to acknowledge that student veterans may prefer to establish or advance social relationships with students having similar experiences. They may choose to keep their military secret from students who have no military experience and feel more comfortable with others like them. While non-veteran students are viewed as being ill-informed around veteran culture, and can place assumptions or judgments on the past experience of student veterans, this can inhibit dialogue between the two groups.

Understanding anxiety.

Anxiety is a common feeling shared by student veterans. Anxiety can be associated, as a symptom, with many mental health disorders. Student veterans, however, view it as normal while reintegrating. As a participant reflected:

I had a civilian job briefly at Pick'n'Save and I didn't understand that my whole anxiety about going into a grocery store or having all these people around me was sort of related to military at all... and it's a similar share of experience but you didn't realize that its connected to military.

A participant further added to this:

I never really notice like lot of problems that I was having, was associated with military. But when I was listening to NPR and they were talking about these military... vets coming back from war and like going back to school or civilian life. I am starting to relate to these guys and I didn't associate any of these problems I was having with military life.

Knowing that prolonged or increasing anxiety can be due to a mental health disorder, for which one can seek assistance is helpful for student veterans. As a participant shared:

Even working with clients (*reflecting on her experience as a Social Work graduate student*), they don't understand that their symptoms are trauma symptoms and once they realize it takes a whole weight out of their shoulders... so knowing like I am not going crazy. This is common for people (*student veterans*) transitioning like that...

Anxiety is a phenomenon that student veterans may experience during their transition into the civilian life. Acknowledging it as a shared experience and providing resources to help them can assist in their transition and reduce their stress.

Giving up a part of self.

Vocational identity is a significant fragment of one's psyche. Veterans learn various skills during their military training which later becomes a part of their identity. However, these skills are not necessarily used or practiced during the civilian life. Thus, they may experience a loss of identity. As one participant shared, through a photovoice piece (Figure 4):

The submarine training takes so much of your life that turning it off when you do not need it almost seems like giving up a part of yourself. As I move on in my civilian life I feel a loss and also emptiness without it. I am just now starting to notice the damage control equipment less and less and feel somehow like I am missing something in my life like I am not prepared.

Loss of identity is a major aspect of reintegration for student veterans, which can be stressful too. It is essential for community members to understand this aspect so as to provide suffice assistance to student veterans. School officials can utilize their skills on campus to make their transition less stressful. This aspect is elaborated later in this chapter under the theme of recommendations.

Hypervigilance.

Hypervigilance was a major concern for student veterans. Having learned how to assess environment for immediate threats or safety equipment can hinder such students in their educational pursuits. As shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 14)

..I see someone who wants to be a civilian but can't let go the hyper vigilance instilled by military training. I see someone whose main focus is safety and preserving her life. This photo is about the hyper vigilance instilled in me. I walk on campus with a key in hand, ready to jab it in the ribs of an attacker... I took this photo to represent the hyper vigilance and fear we experience upon transitioning to being a civilian...

Another participant also shared, through his photovoice piece (Figure 4):

On submarines we had to know our space and where the fire extinguishers were and how to use them. I brought this back to the civilian life by constantly noticing all this and expecting the worst to happen. I see first aid kits in malls and remember where they are, just in case.

Another participant shared during a discussion:

The thing that I keep thinking of like the hypervigilance and like generally being terrified to be back here. Like is weird as it sounds I was more scared being back in Milwaukee then I was in Iraq cuz the safety measure were in place there. You know there its kinda like you know what to expect and you have your gear and your buddy and all but when you are here you are all alone so here you like see all the email about robberies and stuff and I was like still terrified to even walk around this campus you now so. I am definitely like way more vigilant...

The ability to address numerous stimuli in a short span of time is a positive skill to have while protecting self or others. However, this skill can also jeopardize ability to focus on a stimulus for a longer period of time, a skill required of a student. Student veterans, upon initial reintegration, can be hypervigilant of their surroundings which can interrupt them to attend to the common academic stimuli (such as lecture slides and a teacher's spoken word) hindering them in their educational pursuits.

Summary of theme 2.

This theme was marked by views highlighting awareness of new environment and acknowledgement of changes that student veterans make to reintegrate successfully into their student role. This theme also highlighted the communication gap between student veterans and non-veteran students. It was noted that hypervigilance can influence lived experience of student veterans. While student veterans attempt to reintegrate into community life they also perceive a loss of identity which can make their transition further stressful. However, with passage of time, they gain experience and knowledge to assist them in their reintegration and acknowledge their new phase of life as a student.

Theme 3: Entry to a New Stage of Life

During the later phase of transition, student veterans learn to accommodate themselves to successfully reintegrate into the civilian life and take on the role of a student. Student veterans struggle with changes in the environment and their identity during early transition. However, they also learn to recognize the new environment better, along with the mechanics of social relationships. This gained insight assists them in transition. They might have to give up some of their past military skills but

they also learn to integrate other skills in their new role as a student to succeed in their education pursuits.

New identity.

Being a service member is a part of identity for veterans. As they enter higher education institutions, it is advantageous to adapt to the role of a student to successfully achieve goals in higher education. Being a student becomes a new identity for returning veterans who engage in education and learning the logistics and responsibilities of this role becomes a primary aim. As shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 4):

Moving from military to civilian world was a great change of everything in my life. Now, after a year, I have less and less of a problem adapting to the change and can function in a civilian life without nervousness.

During a discussion session, a participant further shared:

Participant (P): It's not like you get distracted it's more like it's a part of you

Facilitator (F): So it's doesn't get in your way...

P: ...You know how to incorporate that (*vigilance*) into your life.

Military experience includes aspects such as disciplined living and competent decision-making, which veterans can incorporate in their student life. Participants shared that such skills help them to experience less stress than non-veteran students.

As one participant shared:

...here it's like everyone's freaking about finals but it's from my point of view it's not that stressful as I am used to. There's like less stress in here as there was

in military cuz qualifying for submarines is like lot harder than studying for the school here. So it's kinda like it's still stressful but not as stressful.

Some student veterans also take role of a family member such as a wife, a mother, a son, or a brother. This role can, initially, be challenging for some, however, they learn to adapt the role. One of the participants, reflecting on her role as a wife, shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 15)

My basement is full of military equipment. Some of it is mine, but the majority of it is my husband's. As a soldier, I have always related better to other soldiers and even ended up marrying one. Now that I am a civilian, I experience his service differently. Now I watch him leave one weekend a month and two weeks every summer. I am always prepared for him to take mid-week trips to Fort McCoy and have to attend schools and other trainings for weeks at a time. And of course, a deployment is always on the back of my mind creating a sickness in my stomach.

New appreciation of the immediate environment: Positive aspect of vigilance.

It is known that military personnel can spend significant amount of time living in geography characteristically different from a traditional community. A war zone can be characterized by turbulent, disquiet and life threatening environment, unlike traditional community living. Therefore, upon return, student veterans appreciate community environment more than non-veteran students. As one participant shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 7):

This picture is more about what I could not take a picture of. Being on a submarine heightened my other senses. In a sub, the environment is mostly

artificial. Coming back to nature, the first thing I noticed was the air. I notice all the smells that most people take for granted.

The participant further added:

Also, sounds are very unique. Being on a sub, we had to be aware of sounds of hydraulic or high pressure ruptures. We also had the constant sound of ventilators humming. When the ship was rigged for reduced electrical, the humming stopped and you had an appreciation for silence. People should be more aware of what is around them and less focused on their phones.

Military living is also characterized by limited exposure to social media. Such experiences further assists in recognizing the importance of such limited exposure. As a participant shared (Figure 7):

...we were deprived of all social media, TV and cell phones and only given one email address that people could reach us at, which rarely ever worked. This isolation created a life that could be lived without all the unnecessary distractions and only focus on the present task at hand.

One of the major aspects of military living constitutes close investigation of the immediate environment. This training can lead to heightened senses and upon return, such senses, assist student veterans to better appreciate their surroundings. A participant shared:

...Your other senses are kinda heightened... its kinda like appreciation for the environment and everything around you... From military aspect you learn how to deal with all your other senses. Self-aware of surroundings, it's kinda like a Zen like feeling... It's kinda like you can be around and enjoy every day smells and everyday experiences.

Due to their military training, student veterans can be more observant than non-veteran population. This skill, along with the fact of having lived away from community, provides them an ability and desire to appreciate community environment.

Renewed relationships.

Being away from family and friends for a significant time can influence relationships. Student veterans shared varying views on renewed relationships. For one participant, military experience helped to realize the importance of the family members and other close ones, as shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 16)

The people near me were what mattered. People were what kept me going each day. This has definitely found its way into my civilian life. People, specifically my family, are my number one priority. Being at class is important, participating in student organizations and research is important but family is paramount. I would drop everything else without question for my family (the civilian version of battle buddies)

Another participant shared that family and friends can influence one's lived experience in both positive and negative ways. Understanding military experiences can be difficult for non-veteran populations. Thus, family members may or may not help in facilitating the transition process, as a participant shared:

Facilitator: Do you think family and friends can help you easing up the process?

Participant: I mean yes and no. Friends and family they can help you or they can hurt ya, unintentionally most of the times. Friends and families are like double edged sword. You are coming back but you are not the same person that they remember...

Summary of theme 3.

This theme highlights the later stage of transition of student veterans from military culture to student life. It is acknowledged that during early transition student veterans experience anxiety due to sudden change in the environment and future expectations. However, during this phase, they learn to incorporate certain past (military) skills in their student role. As the stress or anxiety wears down, they learn to appreciate the community environment. Student veterans also take on their family roles upon their return, which can be challenging initially but are renewed or restored at later stages.

Theme 4: Influence of University and Community Environment.

Lived experiences are influenced by variety of environmental factors and lived experience of student veterans is no anomaly to this premise. During discussions and data provided by the participants emphasized the influence of environmental factors on more than few occasions. This influence was present at all phases of community reintegration and each phase was, in one way or another, shaped by these influences.

After grouping similar factors sub-themes were developed to illustrate their effects on the lived experience of student veterans. Various factors were discussed by participants such as peer to peer interaction, influence of family or child care, outreach, etc. Recommendations were also provided to strengthen existing resources and development of resources which are not yet available on campus and in community.

Social attitudes and relationships.

Students.

Participants emphasized on the influence of attitudes of non-veteran individuals (including student and teaching staff). It was suggested that it is an important aspect influencing educational experience of student veterans. As acknowledged, during initial phases of transition, student veterans may feel disconnected from the non-veteran students as they may place stereotypical judgments on this population or ask uncomfortable questions. This is partly because of lack of knowledge pertaining to military experience on campus and peer to peer interaction between the two populations. One participant shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 20):

Often they (*student veterans*) are much older than their peers, have life experiences others cannot relate to, or are confronted with anti-war protests on their own campuses. Not only are they already uncomfortable, but then there are people literally telling them they don't belong here.

Another participant also added through a photovoice piece (Figure 3):

More schools and communities need to understand the needs of veterans. We have a high unemployment and drop-out rate. It is not because we cannot do it. We need the community and people to understand that we volunteered to serve our country, but do not feel like we belong at times.

A participant further added to this by sharing the following during a discussion session:

I remember all the armories had all the different posters with all the money and it like added up to like \$58,000 a year towards school... This is the money we

want to spend here (*school*). We want to use the services but you need to give us a home.

Non-veteran students are likely to be unaware or ill-informed of military culture. Lack of context regarding military experience along with misconceptions and prejudiced opinions may lead to abridgement of social relationships with student veterans. However, participants also shared that individuals can be welcoming and sensitive to their experience which potentially initiates a dialogue. As a participant shared:

Also, I think the way people in classrooms talk about the military is kinda off putting some times. Like I had somebody in one of my classes talk about how they are lowering the scores for people to get into the military and he's like "now our military is gonna be stupider than they are" and I was like "I am a masters student in the same program as you. Don't call our military stupid". So like the ignorance of people has been part of my experience. But also on the flip side people, you know, admire my service and people ask for my perspective so you know there are people who are sensitive and some not so sensitive.

Faculty & Teaching Staff.

The influence of teaching staff was also emphasized by the participants and they wanted them to be an audience for the photovoice pieces they created. In addition, academic advisors are significant sources for guidance within the university as one participant said:

I have been talking to other people and they hate their advisors because they don't do anything. But the advisor that I had is like, apparently, one of the better one... She'll just list the whole bunch of classes I need to take that semester...

other people don't have that, like the advisor I had when I first got here. She was really helpful for that and constantly, as always, emailing job opportunities and everything like that... Like when I came after active duty and she was like "okay we don't have that classes available right now but here's what we can do for you and here's what you can do".

Every individual may not have similar positive experiences. Some student veterans can experience struggles in this aspect. A participant shared an experience where she received lesser grade for missing one lecture despite having a valid reason for her absence (Figure 16).

I missed one lecture when I gave birth to my son and had a professor tell me, 'Remember I gave you a break when you had your son.' This attitude is completely unacceptable.

Participants emphasized on the importance of well-informed individuals on campus which can potentially facilitate their transition, as shared:

People like professors and teachers need to become more understanding... there is this need for a community or an understanding out there.

A higher education institution is primarily represented by its students and teaching staff. Student veterans share a lesser percentage of student population. Therefore, it is essential to inform student and teachers, of any higher education institution, regarding the military culture and its influence on student veterans. By taking such measures both university and community officials can assist in their smoother transition.

Available resources.

Campus resources such as access to student veteran organizations, recreational classes, military education benefits office (MEBO) and educational assistance classes can be highly useful to student veterans for community reintegration and navigating the campus. These resources facilitate transition for student veterans by providing assistance in variety of aspects such as education, financial assistance and social relationships. As a participant shared about the academic support services:

Well in my first semester I didn't knew about the tutoring session or the writing center existed. Knew a little bit but not that much about it. But in my second semester, I actually thought about it and it was a great asset for students likes us who are 10 years out of school and didn't know anything. So it's kinda like help move through that...

This participant also emphasized on positive influence of such services through a photovoice piece (Figure 5)

The PASS Program at UWM is a great program to help vets transfer back to academic life. I was out of school for almost 10 years and forgot most of the basics. When I was taking a stats class, I realized I forgot most of the basic algebra that I needed to understand simple stats concepts. By taking part in UWM PASS, I was able to pass the class. Also, I took tutoring for German 101 because I forgot most of the basic English grammar, which the class kept referring back to, so as to compare with German grammar. Most people, not just veterans, need to take part in these, especially those who have been out of academics for many years, like vets.

A participant also shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 3)

The guitar is a great representation of what UWM is doing for vets. Also with the creative writing class, these classes allowed a smoother transition into civilian life.

Along with such resources, participants also shared need of student veteran organizations. Such organizations assist student veterans to connect with fellow veterans and assist each other in their educational pursuits and building social relationships. A participant highlighted:

...I think student veterans organization is severely needed in every campus because I mean it's not gonna be the same in that vets that you meet they are not gonna be replaced but they will understand your loss.

A participant further shared:

It is good to know that there's a group to, you know. If it is the first time that just going from day to day and not knowing anyone that has your experience, is hard.

Financial assistance or military education benefits offices (MEBO) are also valuable to student veterans as they assist them understanding policies concerning the financial assistance for their education. Student veterans can receive financial funding from various state or federal resources to support their education. Offices such as MEBO help student veterans to discern such policies so as to secure maximum benefits to support the desired education. As one participant shared:

I went there (*MEBO*) to take this picture... I actually found out that I am eligible for a ton more credits that I am not using... I paid \$20,000 for last year of grad school that they could have paid for me.

During the data collection phase of this study, a new space for student veterans was created within the university campus. Participants acknowledged the space as a place where student veterans can ask each other for assistance. As one participant shared (Figure 12):

...a place where we could get together and help each other out with everyday problems. On active duty if someone's car was broken or if any one needed help we would always be there to help. I hope that the Center for Military and Student Veterans would bring about some of this and we could deal with this issue with one voice. Coming off with active duty with only 2 weeks before school I had no idea of where to go or what to do. An area where returning veterans can ask stupid questions that everyone else seems to know would be great instead of asking students and getting all the look of how can you not know that.

Recommendations to strengthen existing resources.

Resources such as student veteran's organizations, writing classes, recreational classes and financial assistance offices can facilitate transition of veterans from military to student life. Participants, many at times, shared their appreciation for available resources on campus. However, they also shared their concerns regarding importance of accessibility, advertisement or outreach of such resources within a higher educational institution campus. A participant said "Coming off with active duty with only 2 weeks before school I had no idea of where to go or what to do". Participant further expressed that "...in my first semester I didn't know about the tutoring session or the writing center existed".

Resources are valued if they are accessible to the individuals requiring assistance. Also, outreach or advertisement of available resources makes them more accessible for people to acknowledge. However, it is not always that every support center is advertised appropriately to reach the targeted audience. Participants shared that officials and community members should place emphasis on the outreach of such organization enabling student veterans to reach out to them. As a participant shared:

...I think reaching out to the veterans and making sure that the services are known. I am very active in finding services but I don't think lot of veterans knows the things that are out there to help them or assist them in the school.

Another participant shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 17)

It is difficult to find, even with the room number. This tiny space is representative of the space vets are given on the campus. There are huge resource centers for countless other groups in the Union, yet here is our space, hidden in a dark corner. This lack of visibility also represents the lack of outreach on this campus for veteran's resources.

Participants also recommended that student veterans can use their skills on campus to strengthen the existing resources. Student veterans have certain skills, such as knowledge of various cultures, which are gained through the military experience and can be utilized on campus to benefit student veterans as well as non-veterans students.

...they (*non-veteran students*) are getting these degrees like political science and other cultural diversity classes. (*But*) they never really experienced this cultural diversity... Like I worked really close to Muslims and Jews like all day

long and it's just like you can understand where they are coming from lot of times.

Participant further shared through a photovoice piece:

Many student veterans have this experience and can benefit classes that deal with politics and cultural diversity. When we come to college, we have a broader view of the world than many students coming to college. As veterans we can share this knowledge of diversity with others

Such logistical steps can also help build communication between student veterans and non-veterans students. As another participant added:

While you were talking I am thinking like you bring some great assets with yourself and no one even knows about it. Like the fact that you would respond and would be there to save them help them... in case something happens cuz you are aware of these things... cuz nobody knows enough about your experience so no one know what you bring to the table... So educating people that we are not just killers, that's like 1% of our training, we have so much educational experience that could be used.

Student veterans also emphasized on the importance of building a community to assist them in their educational pursuits. Veterans realize the importance of camaraderie and, as acknowledged earlier, yearn for it. Thus, building a sense of community can assist in their transition.

Resources not yet available.

Student veterans also recommended establishment of resources which are not yet existent but can assist in transition of student veterans. One of the recommended

aspects was establishment of resources or services that could assist family members of student veterans. As one participant shared through a photovoice piece (Figure 15)

We focus a lot on vets, but a space should be created for their family members too. Perhaps that means reduced child care costs when a soldier is deployed, inviting family members to the center for military and student veterans, or finding a way to help out families of deployed soldiers by mowing their lawns, shoveling their walks, or walking their dogs. Family members are the main support for our vets; we should welcome them with open arms.

The participant further added on this aspect by sharing her experience as a wife of an active duty soldier, she stated:

My husband still on active duty, so that kinda also presents like another unique side of it. Like I am very understanding of his situation as I have been there but having him leave for like for weeks... I am kinda trying to figure out childcare and get to school and like... I guess actually I am looking into there's a military stipend for families that have active duty soldier and I am looking into that for like childcare but that actually pays like \$100...

Apart from establishing family support systems, resources should also be set up which can help incoming student veterans in the initial integration such as locating a residence, geographical navigation of the campus and getting them acquainted with student veterans organization on campus. A participant shared:

But then I came to school it was crazy cuz I came after 2 weeks out from military and I needed a car and a place to live and all other stuff and trying to figure stuff out... and there was no one helping me out and I didn't know any of

buildings on campus where they are and in the first semester I was stumbling through everything

A participant further added through a photovoice piece (Figure 12)

Whenever there were veterans in my class we seem to always ask the same questions like have you gotten your BHA or have your tuition been paid for or have you got your book stipend yet. These are just some of the questions we ask each other.

Therefore a place where student veterans can seek initial integration guidance could reduce their stress by assisting them in finding a home or navigating on campus.

Seeking jobs after graduation is also an essential task, which can be stressful for many individuals. Participants shared their concern in this aspect and suggested that a resource which can assist them in seeking appropriate jobs can assist them in achieving their educational goals. As a participant shared:

There's nobody at the university, it boggles my mind that matches students looking for employment with employers. All they do is give you a list of websites "oh yeah here's something important resources for you". Anyone can freaking Google that. Is that what I paid freaking \$30,000 for?

Challenges of creating targeted, specialized services for a group that doesn't want to be identified as "needy".

As acknowledged, student veterans can benefit from various services and resources which may not yet exist. It is also noted that university officials are taking steps to assist transition or reintegration of student veterans. However, officials are

facing challenges to create such services. It was discerned that student veterans, as a group, don't want to be identified as "needy". A participant shared:

...we (*student veterans*) don't wanna be recognized but at the same time you need a little help but you don't wanna like stand out.

Another participant added:

...and also with veterans too they are not gonna ask for help

Another participant further added

Most veterans try to be normal students so... Because we are veterans we don't need to be selected out as a different group in this population... Lot of the veterans' programs don't get a turnout as they like because more they try to target student veterans the more you are picking student veterans out as a different class than normal students when all they are trying to do is to integrate back into the normal life. So it's counterproductive that way.

Student veterans struggle during their transition from military to student life.

Participants suggested that university and community officials can implement various strategies to alleviate these struggles. However, student veterans are reluctant to be recognized as a distinct group. They also prefer to keep their identity, as a veteran, a secret. Thus, it becomes challenging for officials to recognize and create service and resources which are specific to their needs.

Summary of theme 4.

This theme highlighted the influence of university and community resources on education pursuits of student veterans. It was noted that existing resources can potentially help student veterans but they should be well advertised and make

attempts to reach out to this population. However, many resource required by student veterans may not be present on every educational campus. Therefore, university officials should take measures approach student veterans as a group and identify their characteristic needs. It was acknowledged that it can be challenging for the officials and policy makers to reach out to this population as they like to maintain their status of student veteran a secret and are also less likely to be identified as needy.

The Transitional model

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of student veterans. Analysis revealed that the educational experience of student veterans is a process involving patterns of experiences which begin upon re-entry into the civilian life. This lived experience is influenced by university and community environmental factors, such as attitudes of non-veteran population and access to resources, during all the phases of transition.

Data analysis suggested a transitional view of lived experience of student veterans, which is influenced by various environmental factors. A model emerged (Figure 21), through the findings, which represented the transitional nature of lived experience of student veterans. This model was developed after member checking to ensure that the findings resonate with the data presented by the participants. The three transitional phases identified were developed into following themes, as previously acknowledged:

- 1) Reminiscence of past duty and reflections on military life.
- 2) Transition from military to civilian student life.
- 3) Entry to a new stage of life.

Along with these three themes, a fourth theme was developed representing the influence of various university and community factors which was termed as

4) University and community environment.

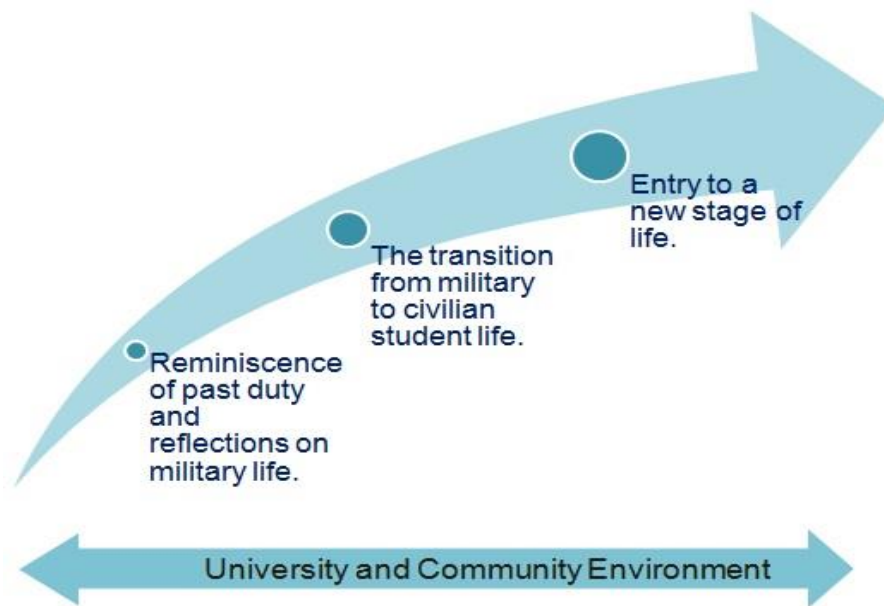


Figure 21. Transitional Model representing perception of lived experience of student veterans.

This model presents first three themes placed over a single head arrow representing continuum of time. This depiction resonates with the lived experience of student veterans and their transition to student life as each theme or phase transition into another along time. The measure of time is, however, not similar for every student veteran as each will have their own pace of reintegration. This model also places university and community environmental factors on an axis running through each theme suggesting that lived experience of student veterans is influenced by such factors throughout their reintegration into the student life.

This model was developed through the data collected from the participants of this study and helps to acknowledge lived experience of student veterans in a manner occurring over time where one phase seems to precede another. However, it is noted that lived experience of student veterans can be a dynamic process where the above mentioned phases co-exist. As an example: a student veteran can reminisce about his/her fellow service members even during the later phases of transition. For some student veterans, the aspect of reminiscence may not be exclusively experienced during initial phases of transition only. It is suggested that although this model places each phase within an exclusive dimension of time these phases can also co-exist in some cases.

Another way to look at the Transitional Model (Figure 21) is to think about the phases as representing key perceptions held by the participants as they moved through the transition process. That is, in early transition, even though they were attending classes, studying and navigating the campus environment, they spent time reminiscing about their past service and fellow service members while carrying out their student role. As they moved into transition, this reflected a conscious process of choosing strategies and relationships that allowed them to move towards civilian life as a student.

Summary of findings

Student veterans experience various phases while transitioning back into community life. Their initial phase of return is marked by the reminiscence of their past duty and fellow veterans. They yearn for similar camaraderie during student life and also feel an extended responsibility towards their past duty. However, with passage of time, they start to find new aspects of the civilian environment closely for

successful reintegration. They also acknowledge anxiety as a shared experience and may seek assistance either from university resources or other student veterans.

Lack of insight regarding military culture within the non-veteran population can lead to biased assumptions. Student veterans can, thus, feel as an outsider within the community. On the other hand, they feel as an insider with people who share or have insight in military experience. While transitioning into student life, student veterans let go some of their military skills but they learn to integrate others into their new identity as a student to successfully reintegrate into their new role. Skills such as hypervigilance can negatively influence their education but they learn to integrate it in their student role so as to become vigilant of their environment.

Student veterans lived in a military environment for a significant time. Therefore, upon their return they seem to attend to and appreciate the community environment more than the non-veteran population. Resumption of their role as a family member upon their return which can initially be challenging but later may become strengthened or renewed.

University and community resources can influence the transition of student veterans in various ways. Available resources should be advertised effectively for better outreach. Student veteran organizations can assist in building social connections through which student veterans help each other. Establishment of resources to assist family members of student veterans can also positively influence their educational pursuits resulting in better educational outcomes. Student veterans like to keep their veteran status as a secret and are less likely to identify themselves as needy thus creating challenges for university and community officials and policy makers to identify their needs and establish required resources.

This study explored factors which assisted or hindered student veterans in pursuit of their educational goals. Data analysis revealed the following factors influencing educational experiences.

Factors Assisting the Educational Pursuit of Student Veterans

- Access to educational resources such as tutoring, writing center and military educational financial benefits.
- Cultural competence of faculty, staff, and peers around the military culture.
- Recreational classes such as guitar lessons.
- Employment assistance resources and services.
- Increased social connection and interaction among and between student veterans.
- Assistance during early transition for needs such as housing, and community/university navigation.
- Overall increased awareness of military culture on campus.
- Family care services available on campus.

Factors Hindering the Educational Pursuit of Student Veterans

- Negative attitude and ill-informed judgments.
- Lack of outreach by existing university and community resources.
- Perceived lack of connection and interaction with non-veteran population.

Summary

This chapter provided findings revealed through data analysis. Findings led to the formulation of a model highlighting the transition of student veterans from military to student life. The model was developed and verified by member checking to

highlight the progression of phases of transition over the (continuous) influence of the environment. Phases of transition were represented as themes and sub-themes by grouping fragments of data which highlighted similar ideas or views or aspects associated with lived experience of student veterans and their educational pursuits. Three phases/themes were identified: 1) reminiscence of past duty and reflections on military life, 2) transition from military to civilian student life, and 3) entry to a new stage of life. Along with these three themes, a fourth theme (university and community environment) also emerged which represented influence of various environmental factors on the lived experience of student veterans.

CHAPTER – 5

Discussion

This chapter illustrates importance of the findings and their implications to facilitate community reintegration of student veterans. This chapter begins with a review of the findings and later discusses the implications of research findings for alleviating struggles faced by student veterans while reintegrating in the university and community. This chapter also focuses on the recommendations provided by the participants highlighting ways to strengthen existing resources and importance of building additional needed resources or centers.

The purpose of the study was to examine the lived experience of student veterans through the methodology of photovoice. Three student veterans were recruited as participants who took photographs and wrote their narratives while engaging in discussions about their experiences. Data obtained in the form of narrative, discussion transcripts and field notes were analyzed using descriptive coding and thematic analysis. Findings emerged in form of four themes which were later used to construct a model (Figure 21) depicting transition of student veterans from military to student life.

Review of Findings

Transition is defined as an occurrence resulting in changes in daily role, routines, assumptions and relationships (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). Needs of student veterans, who transition from military to student life, are different from non-veteran students and they can face unique challenges while pursuing higher education (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Church, 2009; Herrman, Hopkins, Wilson, & Allen, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Findings from this study suggest that student

veterans struggle during initial phase of transition but with passage of time learn to integrate their past skills with newly gained insight on community living for successful reintegration. They can be anxious and uncertain about their transition at the beginning but later develop confidence for community reintegration (Brito, Callahan, & Marks, 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

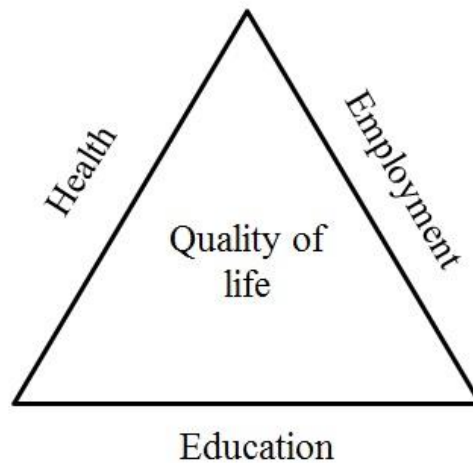


Figure 22. Factors affecting Quality of Life of returning veterans. (Sutherland, 2013)

Education is one of the primary aspects affecting quality of life for returning veterans (Figure 22) (Sutherland, 2013). Student veterans may experience emotional turmoil while transitioning into student life requiring significant time to adjust this complex process. They report feeling isolated and lost during the early phases of transition (Normandin, 2010) and the struggle to locate useful resources can further increase their plight.

The inaccessibility of resources can hinder educational pursuits of student veterans. Student veterans seek assistance related to financial aid, mental health and navigating the campus. However, lack of outreach by such resources and their inaccessibility makes it difficult for student veterans to utilize the available financial and healthcare resources. Inaccessibility of campus support resources including

financial aid services, general campus navigation and other campus support services did challenged their pursuit of educational aims, a finding similar to existing literature (Derby & Smith, 2004; Matus-Grossman, Gooden, Wavelet, Diaz, & Seupersad., 2002).

Participants of this study reported difficulty in locating resources on campus. One of the participants reported paying tuition fees despite being eligible for financial aid due to misinformation she received during her demobilization. While taking pictures at one of the campus resource centers she learned that she was eligible for financial aid and can use it to fund her graduate studies. Student veterans attribute financial support and university counseling as significant factors assisting in their educational success (Hayes, 1949; DiRamio, Ackerman, Garza-Mitchell, 2008) and such aid, along with other resources, can significantly help to reduce their stress. However, participants also suggested that some student veterans may not seek assistance deliberately while keeping their veteran status a secret.

One of the challenging tasks for returning veterans is to accept that it is all right to seek help. Due to high expectations and culture of war hero and hypermuscularity they may resist themselves to seeking required assistance (Caffrey, 2009; Vacchi, 2012). Thus, teaching staff and other university officials should learn to approach student veterans as they can mask their needs which they perceive as insignificant (Vacchi, 2012). Strategies such as early identification of student veterans in a class, approaching them to offer educational and instructional support, and informing them of campus resources can be employed by teaching staff to assist student veterans during their initial phase of transition. Such strategies can be employed to engage both traditional and non-traditional students in effective learning.

As a response to modify existing higher education institutions to include students with disabilities, Silver, Bourke, & Strehorn (1998) suggested a Universal Instructional Design (UID). This concept suggested embedding instructional accommodations and approaches required by student with disabilities within an existing instructional design so that such students don't have to request and wait for accommodations assisting them in higher education. Following this intuition, it is suggested that teaching staff should employ strategies such as outreach and integration with available campus resources to assist student veterans as well as other traditional and non-traditional students to offer them required resources immediately upon their enrollment.

Teaching staff (such as professors and teaching assistants) can be a significant support system for student veterans. Participants highlighted assistance of advisors and teaching staff in facilitating transition of student veterans. External agents are essential to demonstrate support to non-traditional students and assist them in educational and personal development (Rendon, 1994). With respect to student retention, Rendon (1994) defined validation as active involvement of college faculty and staff for student's academic and personal development. Non-traditional students, such as student veterans, recognize validation when officials approach them to offer their valued assistance (Bravo, 2010). Active faculty involvement, through mentoring, peer support and academic advising, can assist reintegration of student veterans with disability (Branker, 2009). Also, student's personal views pertaining to faculty assistance can influence one's academic pursuit (Astin, 1984; Derby & Smith, 2004; Matus-Grossman, Gooden, Wavelet, Diaz, & Seupersad, 2002; McArthur, 2005).

Unfortunately, this assistance is not experienced by every student veteran. About 1 in 8 female veterans report disrespect from their professors while 1 in 20 male

veterans report the same (Pattillo, 2011). In this study, a female student veteran reported a negative experience with one of her professors. It is recommended that teaching staff should be sensitive and sympathetic of their experience (Washton, 1945; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Higher education institutions should inform teaching staff about the experience of military life and its consequences leading to an understanding of their individual needs which may pertain to healthcare, or education. Along with teaching staff, attitude of non-veterans student can also impact transition and lived experience of student veterans.

About 38% of non-veterans students report not knowing a student veteran on campus (Pattillo, 2011). Student veterans report challenges in connecting with non-veteran students which can arise due to their own anxiety or negative assumptions that are placed by non-veteran students. This disconnection can be, primarily, due to misunderstanding of military culture and life by non-veteran student and stereotypical dispositions (Normandin, 2010). A participant shared an experience where a non-veteran student stereotyped veterans as being “stupid”. It is due to such instances that student veterans feel disconnected and, sometimes, offended by non-veteran students.

Student veterans share concerns pertaining to fitting in (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009) and feeling behind in college progress as compared to non-veteran students (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Evidence suggests that student veterans can significantly outperform non veteran students in academic achievements (Akerle, 2011). University officials should take steps to inform non-veterans population about the military culture and reduce stereotypical dispositions. Social and cultural events can be organized to reduce communication gap between the two groups. Such strategies can make student veterans feel welcomed on campus and assist them in their initial phases of transition.

Student veterans reminisce about their past experiences and camaraderie during their initial phase of reintegration. Due to their past military experience, student veterans value family connections and camaraderie. Veterans often return to civilian life with no concrete support systems as they separate from their fellow veterans upon their arrival into the civilian world (Normandin, 2010). Family connections can be perceived as overwhelming by some student veterans upon their initial phases of arrival. However, as they transition, they learn to renew their relationships with family members and close friends and acknowledge them as their support systems (Normandin, 2010) or “battle buddies” as one participant suggested. Close social relationships can assist student veterans in their transition but it should be noted that they are more likely to seek support from their family members and friends who approach them (Rumann & Hamrick, 2001).

Student veterans also reported loss of identity during their transition. Military and student lives can be perceived as disconnected by student veterans. They feel that they will have to give up their military identity in order to succeed in their educational endeavors (Ackerman et al, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). University officials can take measures to assist student veterans in this regard by utilizing their past military skills.

Veterans bring unique perspective and skills on campus which can serve as a beneficial tool not just for their own transition (Normandin, 2010) but can also assist university and its students in various ways. They learn various skills during their military training; however, they struggle to employ previously learned skills during their education (Johnson, 2009) which can make it difficult for them to negotiate with their transition. Such experience can lead to a perceived loss of identity. University officials can utilize some of their skills, such as resilience, teamwork and self-

discipline (Church, 2009), on campus. Student veterans can be employed to educate non-veterans population (including students and teaching staff) about the military experience, as institution security advisors, or teaching assistants for various global studies and politics related classes. Such measures can also assist to build a communication bridge between veteran and non-veterans population.

Discipline, structure, and focused goals along with ability to adapt are some of the positive characteristics learned from military life that can facilitate transition of student veterans (Normandin, 2010). However, collaboration between university and community officials in effective reintegration of student veterans is crucial (Burnett & Segoria, 2009). University officials can partner with local military and veteran organizations to better serve student veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). As acknowledged, student veterans may not seek assistance always and are likely to keep their status a secret. Thus, it is important for university officials to develop strategies, such as creating official links between university and community resources, including family members to facilitate transition and connecting students with campus resources upon their immediate return, to approach and support this population.

Recommendations and Implications for Higher Education Institutions

Providing professional development to faculty/staff, establishing a student veterans and family care center, and counseling staff to assist students with PTSD have been reported as strategic plans by higher education institutions to develop veteran-friendly campuses (Bravo, 2010). This research assisted to unearth the lived experience of student veterans and acknowledge factors that assist or hinder their educational pursuits. The data were collected not on the basis of assumptions by the researchers but through the subjective narratives of student veterans which included

issues of shared concerns. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, participants were able to convey their struggles and strategies which can be employed by higher education institutions to alleviate their struggles. The following are recommendations to higher education institutions based on this study:

- *Increased awareness of military experience* should be a primary step for developing effective support services for student veterans (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Through professional development and training of teaching and counseling staff higher education institutions and communities can efficiently cater to the characteristic needs of student veterans. Educational institutions should also develop strategies to increase understanding of military culture and reduce misconceptions among non-veteran students. Such measures can reduce the communication bridge between veteran and non-veteran populations.
- Efforts should be made for *better outreach and advertisement of available resources*. Student veterans have reported struggle locating useful resources which can be frustrating while struggling with the complex procedure of their transition. (Normandin, 2010). Therefore helpful resources should be advertised widely and frequently around the campus especially when students are new to campus. Helpful resources can also be connected with student veteran organizations on campuses for their better outreach. Social events can be organized to approach student veterans and gain feedbacks to strengthen and develop required resources.
- Higher education institutions should *develop resources to assist families of student veterans*. Family care is a major concern for student veterans. University and community officials can assist this population by developing

resources aiding their family members in aspects such as child care, medical care and education. Student veterans regard family members as their support systems (Normandin, 2010). Thus, assisting families of student veterans will strengthen their support system and help reduce their stress and facilitate educational pursuits.

- *Utilization of military skills on campus*: Student veterans learn variety of military skills which they fail to employ upon their return into the civilian life which can lead to perceived loss of identity (Johnson, 2009). University officials can employ student veterans to utilize their unique skills for various purposes. Skills such as leadership, resilience, and teamwork (Church, 2009) along with their knowledge of political and cultural issues can be used to educate non-veteran students assisting in reducing their communication gap. Taking such measure will help student veterans to utilize their skills on campus and not experience an identity loss while reintegrating in the community.
- *Development of resources assisting in employment opportunities* for student veterans can also assist them in their long term educational goals. Along with education and healthcare, employment is also a primary concern for veterans pursuing higher education (Sutherland, 2013). Participants shared their concerns regarding the importance of employment assistance. Some of the student veterans plan to join the military after their education while others may opt for employment outside the military regime. However, both groups should be assisted in matching employment opportunities with their educational background providing them long term assistance.
- Transition of student veterans from military to student life is also marked by their transition into the civilian life. *Collaboration between university and*

community officials in effective reintegration of student veterans is crucial (Burnett & Segoria, 2009). Student veterans can seek assistance from resources outside an education institution for concerns such as mental health, financial aid, and other general transitioning needs such as housing and community navigation. A collaboration between university and community official can help facilitate transition of student veterans and address their needs for overall adjustment into the civilian life aiding their education pursuits.

- *Immediate assistance upon entry into the community:* Veterans report most struggles upon their entry into the civilian life. They report being isolated and lost during the early phases of their transition (Normandin, 2010). Participants of this study reported struggles in finding living accommodations and navigating the community upon their return. University and community officials can create resources to assist student veterans upon their arrival into the community. University resources can assist them in aspects such as navigating the campus, enrolling in required classes and connecting with student veteran's organization. While, community resources can assist them in aspects such as finding housing opportunities, community navigation and locating useful resources. These measures can assist student veterans in reducing challenges pertaining to initial integration and facilitate in smoother transition.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice and Research

Throughout a lifetime, one is constantly renegotiating his/her life role by attributing meaning to occupation and the surrounding environment (Law, Polatajko, Baptiste & Townsend, 1997). Engagement in meaningful occupations provides an identity to an individual. Christiansen (1999) argued that make-up of identity is

closely related to what an individual does and is central to meaning and well-being in one's continuity of life (Unruh, 2004). Student veterans struggle within occupational performance areas of school, relationships and physical health (Plach & Haertlein Sells, 2013).

Transition of student veterans involves not just changes in everyday occupations but also a shift in one's identity. The findings from this study helped to reinforce this observation by analyzing the written narratives provided by the participants. Literature has suggested that this transition can be struggling for many student veterans (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Church, 2009; Herrman, Hopkins, Wilson, & Allen, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). However, there is little literature on what are the aspects or factors that support or hinder their occupation of education while they experience a shift from their role as a service member to that of a student. Therefore, this study employed the ideology of advocacy to acknowledge the needs of student veterans while pursuing higher education.

Historically occupational therapy practitioners have advocated for the humanistic philosophy which notes the importance of individual choice and engagement in meaningful occupations along with right to self-fulfillment and equal opportunity for every individual (Bruce & Christiansen, 1988). Advocating for a client is an acknowledged role of occupational therapy practitioners (Sachs & Linn, 1997; Smith, 2005; Swedlove & Brown, 1997). The process of becoming client advocate has been described as a natural development of their practice by occupational therapy practitioners (Sachs & Linn, 1997) as they take on the role of advocates by contributing to public education and participating in the political arena (Bruce & Christiansen, 1988b).

In the context of occupational therapy practice, Dhillon and colleagues (2010) defined advocacy as:

a client-centred strategy involving a variety of actions taken by the client and therapist, directed to the client's environment to enact change for the client such that engagement in occupation is enhanced through meeting basic human rights or improving quality of life. (p.246)

Occupational therapy practitioners protect client's rights and represent their needs to other health care practitioners and community officials (Sachs & Linn, 1997).

Philosophies supported by the Centennial Vision of the American Occupational Therapy Association acknowledges supporting occupational needs of the society and assisting individuals to overcome obstacles to participation in their valued activities as significant roles of this evolving profession (Board of Directors, AOTA, 2006).

Pursuit of higher education is a significant occupation for this population, defining their identity and life role as a student veteran. This study provides an insight into the lived experience of student veterans, a potentially vulnerable population, while advocating for the factors supporting their higher education.

Photovoice, as a methodology, was employed to advocate for the needs of student veterans and also acknowledge their transition and lived experience in higher education institutions. Photovoice has been noted as an influential research methodology for the topics relevant to occupational therapy (Lal, Jarus, & Suto, 2012). This methodology can help occupational therapy practitioners and researchers to identify facilitators and barriers of participation, acknowledge lived experiences and understand one's perspective of the life roles. It can also help to identify strategies to maintain well-being while empowering individuals to advocate for themselves and

inform policy makers about their plight (Lal et al, 2012). However, there are limited scientific papers based on this methodology in the occupational therapy literature (Lal et al, 2012).

Photovoice was employed as a methodological strategy to identify the lived experience and need of student veterans. After the analysis of data, including written narratives of photographs and discussion transcripts, various themes were identified which reflected the transition of student veterans and factors that influence their education pursuits. A model was developed to demonstrate the themes as phases of transition over a continuum of time, and the model was verified by the participants. This data was utilized to convey and advocate for the needs of student veterans at campus forums, community veteran events and occupational therapy professional meetings.

Photovoice proved to be a beneficial approach assisting in growth of scientific evidence to advocate for student veterans. Findings were presented at a meeting consisting of members of Student Veterans Advisory Council (Table 5). After showcasing the photovoice pieces and presenting the findings to the council a dialogue was initiated to utilize findings of this study to better serve the needs of student veterans. Members of the committee reflected on the importance of these finding based on the common concerns shared by student veterans around the campus. Discussions were later held to identify measures for advertisement and outreach of resources available on campus and to better assist student veterans in family care.

Findings were also presented during a campus wide event held to honor the returning veterans on campus. Comments from the student veteran panel resonated with the findings of this study as they discussed about the communication gap between

veteran and non-veteran students along with the access to quality care and required resources. Findings were shared with the university and community officials present at this event and discussions were initiated for better care of student veterans.

Table 5

Description of events where findings were presented

Date	Event	Audience
10/10/2012	Student Veterans Advisory Council Meeting	Faculty and staff
11/1/2012	Bringing It home - Veterans Day	Faculty, staff & students
11/3/2012	Wisconsin Occupational Therapy Association	Faculty, staff & students
12/7/2012	College of Health Sciences Fall Research Symposium	Faculty, staff & students
3/21/2013	Milwaukee Warrior Summit	Community policy makers, faculty, staff, & students

This study helped unearth the factors influencing the educational goals of student veterans and acknowledge the shift in their identity experienced due to change in their primary occupation and environment. University and community officials may not be able to make their environment reflective of their military life, however, strategies can be employed to facilitate their transition such as providing them resources related to connecting with other student veterans, finding adequate housing, and navigating in the community. Student veterans can be employed within university systems to utilize their past (military) skills to facilitate their identity shift through engagement in meaningful occupations, thus benefiting both veteran and non-veterans students.

A major implication of this study is the use of photovoice as an advocacy tool, by occupational therapy practitioners, to acknowledge needs of under-served populations. Kielhofner and colleagues (2002b) demonstrated the use of narratives to acknowledge the influence of competence, adaptation and continuity in shaping occupational identity (Unruh, 2004). Occupational therapy practitioners can use photography driven narratives developed by participants through engagement in photovoice as an influential advocacy tool. This methodology can help to initiate dialogue between policy makers to acknowledge the voice of under-served community members and alleviate their struggles by implementing suggested changes.

Strengths of the Study

Various strategies were employed by the researchers to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study. One of the measures involved was triangulation of data collection methods. Primary data were collected in the form of written narratives and photographs provided by the participants. Along with narratives, researchers also audio recorded the discussion sessions and took field notes. These strategies assisted to collect data in more than one form to ensure that inherent faults of any one data collection strategy are reduced through use of another.

Another method employed was member checking. After the analysis of data, meetings were held between the researchers and the participants to discuss findings of the data analysis. Given the exploratory nature of this research, it was warranted to confirm that findings are supported by the data provided by the participants. Individual meetings were held between each participant and researchers and findings were presented to them. Participants were asked if they have any concerns or comments about the findings in an hour long meeting. The participants confirmed that the themes

and sub-themes appropriately represented lived experience of student veterans and the factors influencing it.

A feature of sampling in a qualitative study is heterogeneity of the sample. The aim of such an aspect is to include participants which vary in more than one category or aspects. Such strategy assist the researcher to identify themes which are valid for variety of cases or people (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam; 2005). In this study, participants did not vary significantly on the basis of age but all had distinct characteristics such as level of education being pursued, gender and marital status (Table 2). Such distinct characteristics helped this study to acknowledge their lived experiences which were different in various aspects but simultaneously represented lived experience of student veterans as a group.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the best efforts of investigator(s) a research endeavor is likely to have limitations. In this study, a major limitation was small sample size. The graduate researcher employed more than one technique for participant recruitment. Flyers were posted around the university campus and through assistance from MEBO electronic flyers were also mailed to the student veterans. Along with such efforts, the graduate researcher also advertised information regarding the current study at various events which were primarily attended by student veterans. Despite such efforts, a small number of three participants were recruited as a sample. Unfortunately, after first two sessions, one of the participants withdrew from the study making the sample size of two student veterans. Use of the photovoice method was found to be useful in helping to uncover meaningful stories about the transition process. The time involved in discussing, writing and finalizing each photovoice piece may have served as a barrier

to involve more participants. However, it is noted that data provided by the participants was rich in context and details validly conveying aspects of living of student veterans.

Generalizability is not the primary aim for every research endeavor (Marshall, 1996). This study was exploratory in nature and yielded useful findings even though the sample size was small. An inverse relationship is suggested between amount of functional data from each participant and number of participants while pursuing a qualitative study (Morse, 2000). It can be suggested that valid results can be produced using smaller samples if each participant provide rich and contextual data pertaining to a phenomenon. Therefore, if the data collected from a small sample adequately answers the research question then it can be deemed appropriate for a qualitative study (Marshall, 1996).

All participants were not present at all the discussion sessions which may have limited sharing of ideas among the participants. Two sessions were marked by presence of only one participant where we were unable to hold a peer to peer discussion. However, the primary and graduate researchers made sure to ask questions and provide general feedback to gain deeper understanding of the aspect being discussed by a participant.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research helped to acknowledge the lived experience of student veterans and factors influencing their education. However, due to various limitations, it is recommended to gain more knowledge on this transition of student veterans by developing further research. Continuing to collect more stories generated by student veterans to assure that the transition process is fully uncovered is one of the strategies

that can be employed for future research. Such strategy will help further to gain more understanding into lived experience of student veterans and also help to validate the findings of this research. Employing a larger sample size can also assist in acknowledging varied aspects of lived experience or factors influencing higher education of student veterans which may not have been reported or discussed by present participants.

Another recommendation can be use of surveys to assess the validity of findings on a larger basis. Survey questionnaires based on the findings of present research can be distributed among student veterans to validate the findings. Questions such as accessibility of campus resources, attitudes of non-veterans population on campus and their impact on education of student veterans, measured using Likert scale, can help to build a survey and help generalize and validate the results of this study. Using survey strategy will take lesser time for participants and can potentially lead to collection of larger data set that can be analyzed using quantitative methods. Such research design can help to generalize the findings of this research on a larger basis.

Performing a similar research on a sample consisting of participants from varied age ranges is also one of the possibilities to generate knowledge regarding this phenomenon. Age range of participants for this research was 28-30years. Therefore, this research can be expanded by recruiting participants of varied age ranges. Also, recruiting a more diverse participant pool based on demographics such as gender, race, ethnicity, marital and family status as well as conducting the study at variety of university campuses (technical schools, private and public 4-year colleges, etc.) can help to acknowledge community transition of student veterans having varied backgrounds or demographics.

This research provided disposable cameras to participants to assist them in photography. However, one can also employ this research design using smart phones which are more readily available to participants as a personal tool. This strategy can reduce research related cost and provide participants ability to take photographs at any time and place without carrying any extra device.

Conclusion

As of December 2011 when the Iraq war ended more than 50,000 veterans returned to the United States (ABC News, 2011). As more and more returning veterans engage in pursuing educational goals it is necessary for higher education institutions to learn and implement efforts to serve them better. This study employed qualitative research design through the use of photovoice methodology to learn the live experience of student veterans and acknowledge the factors that influence their education.

Three student veterans were recruited as participants who took photographs representing their lived experience and factors that influenced their education. They wrote narratives of photographs taken and engaged in group discussion to share their insights and concerns regarding engagement in higher education. Unfortunately, one participant withdrew from the study. However, contextually rich and informative data were provided through group discussions by remaining participants. Data provided in the form of written narratives, discussion transcripts and field notes were analyzed using descriptive coding and thematic analysis.

Data analysis revealed four themes; namely: 1) reminiscence of past duty and reflections on military life, 2) transition from military to civilian student life, 3) entry to a new stage of life, and 4) university and community environment. After member

checking, these themes were developed into a model representing lived experience of student veterans over a continuum of time and the influence of environmental factors on their lived experience and educational pursuits. Recommendations were provided by participants to strengthen or develop campuses and community resources.

This study led to scientific discernment of lived experience of student veterans and factors influencing their educational pursuits. Findings were presented at campus, community, and professional forums to present struggles of student veterans and suggest ways to alleviate their struggles. Findings from this study can be utilized by higher education institutions to acknowledge lived experience of student veterans and implement strategies to assist them while they engage in higher education. Occupational therapy programs, faculty, staff and students can serve their campus communities by actively leading campus efforts to better meet the transitional needs of the student veteran population.

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APPENDIX – A**PHOTO MISSION LOG**

Use these logs to record thoughts/information about pictures you take during your Photo Mission

1. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

2. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

3. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

4. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

5. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

6. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

7. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

8. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

9. Description of photo: _____ Thoughts, feelings, ideas you had when you took photo:

APPENDIX – B

SHOWED HANDOUT

What do you **SEE** here?

What is really **HAPPENING** here?

How does this relate to **OUR** lives?

WHY does this problem or strength exist?

How could this image **EDUCATE** the community or policy makers?

What can we **DO** about it?

APPENDIX – C**INFORMED CONSENT****CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPATION CONSENT**

**THIS CONSENT FORM HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE IRB FOR A ONE YEAR
PERIOD]**

1. General Information**Study title:**

Examining the lived experience of student veterans using photovoice methodology

Person in Charge of Study (Principal Investigator):

My name is Virginia Stoffel. I am a professor in the Department of Occupational Science and Technology at UWM. I am working with Nikhil Tomar, Graduate Student.

2. Study Description

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to.

Study description:

The purpose of this study is to learn about the lived experience of veteran students returning from OIF/OEF/OND. Another purpose is to acknowledge the factors which help or hinder attainment of their educational goals.

This study is being conducted to gain insight into the lived experience of student veterans. When veterans return from the war and attend a university the experience gained through war may challenge their student life. Data suggests that many veterans struggle with school experiences after returning from the war. Veterans are also at risk for developing Post-Traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD), Major Depression (MD) and Substance Abuse (SA) and these conditions may further hinder a veteran to attain education. Data that clearly highlights factors which hinder or bolster their aims for educational goals is limited. This project aims to gain insight in the experiences of student veterans so that changes could be suggested to better suit university and community programs supporting student veterans.

This study will be conducted at a Midwestern university. Approximately 10 student veterans will participate in the project. Your participation in the project will take approximately 10-15 hours total during the 2012 Spring and Summer semester.

3. Study Procedures

What will I be asked to do if I participate in the study?

If you agree to participate, you will make an appointment with the project member (Nikhil) to meet individually or you can also opt for a group meeting. You will be asked to provide demographic information so that we can contact you regarding upcoming sessions. You will be asked to join other participants of the project in a series of sessions to learn about the methodology of photovoice which involves using a camera to collect photographs that reflect the ideas that you would like to convey to your university and community. Approximately 4-7 sessions will take place within a time period of 3 months and each session will last up to one and a half or two hours. You will be given the camera for a time frame of two-three weeks during which you will be asked to take photographs that reflect the ideas and issues that you would like to convey to the university or community. With those photographs as reference and group discussion you will be asked to write narratives describing the photographs. Your participation will help to generate knowledge about the struggles faced by student veterans in attaining educational goals and what factors help and hinder them in this experience.

With your permission, we will record your voice during the group sessions with a tape recorder. The recording will be done to make sure that we accurately record and interpret your views. If you do not wish your voice to be recorded, please let the researcher know and we will write down your responses on paper instead.

4. Risks and Minimizing Risks

What risks will I face by participating in this study?

The potential risks for participating in this project are minimal – no greater than what you would experience from indulging in conversations with a fellow student.

Psychological: There is a small possibility that you may feel uncomfortable talking about the challenges you encounter in your daily life. You do not have to answer any questions that may make you uncomfortable. You will be provided with a list of resources (Norris Health Center, VA Medical Center in Milwaukee, WI etc.) should you want to discuss any issues related to your psychological or well-being.

5. Benefits

Will I receive any benefit from my participation in this study?

There are no direct benefits to you other than to further the research.

Are subjects paid or given anything for being in the study?

As a token of our appreciation for your participation in this project, you will receive a gift card **which will be provided to you at the last session**. If you choose not to receive the gift card, you may still participate in the study.

6. Study Costs

Will I be charged anything for participating in this study?

You will not be responsible for any cost of taking part in this study. Costs related to camera and developing the film will be covered by the researchers.

7. Confidentiality

All information collected about you during the course of this project will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. We plan to present what we find to the research community, or publish our results in scientific journals or present them at scientific conferences. Only the advisor and graduate student (project assistant) will have access to the information. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review your records.

You will be identified on tape with a made-up name. Your name will not appear anywhere on the surveys or interview form, no one will know about your answers except the research team. Data storage and analysis will be held within the premises of University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee. Electronic files that hold data will be password protected and available only to the principal investigator and co-investigator. Printer data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in Dr. Stoffel's lab in room 982 in Enderis Hall at UWM.

Data will be maintained by Dr. Stoffel and the graduate researcher, Nikhil Tomar after the end of the study. The data can be potentially used for future research in this area.

8. Alternatives

Are there alternatives to participating in the study?

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this project.

9. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

What happens if I decide not to be in this study?

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this project, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the project. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

If you decide to withdraw or if you are withdrawn from the project before it ends, we will use the information we collected up to that point.

10. Questions

Who do I contact for questions about this study?

For more information about the project or the project procedures or treatments, or to withdraw from the project, contact:

Virginia Stoffel
 Department of Occupational Science and Technology
 University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
 P.O. Box 413
 Milwaukee, WI 53201
 (414) 229-5583
 stoffelv@uwm.edu

Or

Nikhil Tomar
 Department of Occupational Science and Technology
 Graduate Student
 University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
 P.O. Box 413
 Milwaukee, WI 53201
 (414) 364-5659

Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject?

The Institutional Review Board may ask your name, but all complaints are kept in confidence.

Institutional Review Board
 Human Research Protection Program
 Department of University Safety and Assurances
 University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
 P.O. Box 413
 Milwaukee, WI 53201
 (414) 229-3173

11. Signatures

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered, and that you are 18 years of age or older.

Printed Name of Subject/ Legally Authorized Representative

Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

Date

Research Subject's Consent to Audio/Video/Photo Recording:

It is okay to audiotape me and use my audiotaped data in the research.

Please initial: ____ Yes ____ No

Principal Investigator (or Designee)

I have given this research subject information on the study that is accurate and sufficient for the subject to fully understand the nature, risks and benefits of the study.

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Study Role

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX – D**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

1. Your birth date is: _____
2. Gender:
 - a) Male
 - b) Female
3. Race/Ethnicity:
 - a) Hispanic or Latina
 - b) African-American
 - c) Asian American
 - d) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e) Caucasian/White
 - f) American Indian/Alaska Native
 - g) Other _____
4. Marital status:
 - a) Single
 - b) Married
 - c) Separated
 - d) Divorced
 - e) Widowed
5. Living status:
 - a) Alone
 - b) With roommate
 - c) With parents
 - d) With spouse/significant other
6. Do have any children?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
7. If question 6 was answered yes ask, how many children do you have?

8. If question 6 was answered yes, ask what ages are your children?

9. You are classified as a:
 - a) Freshman
 - b) Sophomore
 - c) Junior

- d) Senior
 - e) Masters student
 - f) Doctoral student
10. Are you working:
- a) Yes, full time
 - b) Yes, part time
 - c) No
11. How many hours do you work in a week?
_____ hours/week
12. What Branch of the Military were you in?
- a) Army
 - b) Navy
 - c) Air Force
 - d) Marine
 - e) Coast Guard
13. Which of the following were you?
- a) Active Service
 - b) National Guard
 - c) Reserves
14. Where did you serve? (Mark all that apply)
- a) OEF
 - b) OIF
 - c) OND
15. How long have you served?

16. What age were you when you entered?

17. How long have you been back from a war zone and into your civilian world?

APPENDIX – E

PHOTOVOICE WORKSHOP SYLLABUS

Time: 1.5 - 2 hours (each session)

Location:

University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee

Room: Enderis Hall 940

Instructors:

Dr. Ginny Stoffel (stoffelv@uwm.edu) and OT graduate student: Nikhil Tomar (ntomar@uwm.edu)

Purpose of the Workshop:

1. To introduce participants to the technique of photovoice.
2. To enable participants to record and reflect on their lived experience as a student veteran.
3. To promote group discussion to identify common themes, concerns, or issues that may help in influencing program, organization, or community change.
4. To use the information from this workshop to inform future programs offered in support of student veterans.

Workshop Materials:

All materials required for workshop will be provided to participants **free of charge**. The materials include folders, disposable cameras, and photo developing (prints).

General Workshop Requirements and Ground Rules:

1. Participants of the project titled “Examining the lived experience of student veterans using photovoice methodology” are expected to attend all workshops. If you are unable to attend, please inform Dr. Ginny Stoffel, or Nikhil in advance. Make-up sessions can also be scheduled.
2. An important part of the Photovoice workshop is to share and discuss the pictures and stories that you would like to convey. Each participant will have the opportunity to contribute to group discussions. We will work together to allow space and time for all to participate. It is important that everyone has a chance to be heard, so please speak one at a time and be respectful when others are speaking.
3. Confidentiality of information expressed in the workshop is important for respect of others. You will decide which photographs you want to make public and what message you want others to hear.
4. Treat your fellows and instructors with respect.
5. Feel free to step out quietly if you feel that it is necessary.
6. When giving feedback to other fellows about their pictures/stories, be respectful and compassionate.

Tentative Schedule of Workshop Topics

Date	Main topic	Exercise/activities
Session 1 (2 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete informed consent. • Introduction and Overview: What is photovoice? • Stages and Process of Photovoice • Ethics of Photovoice: Who and what can I take pictures of? • Ideas and Problems about living as a student veteran • Who is our audience? • Practice writing a sample using SHOWED • Review of Guidelines for Photo Mission; Consent Forms • Photo Taking Tips; Brainstorm ideas for possible pictures • Photo mission #1. What does living as a student veteran mean to you? What does it look like? How can we ‘picture’ it? What do we see? 	Fill out consent/assent form. Review Syllabus Learn about Photovoice Learn about Photovoice and Ethics Brainstorming ideas Practicing writing Sharing feedback Practice getting consent Learn how to use a camera Get camera! Go out and take pictures! Turn in cameras within 3-4weeks
Session 2 1.5-2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did picture taking go? • Review photo images; Discussion • Writing • Storytelling • Writing 	Distribute and review pictures Group discussion Give and receive feedback Start writing
Session 3 1.5-2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and give time for any of the above steps • Writing, Sharing, & Writing 	Catch up Writing
Session 4 1.5-2 hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing and Storytelling • Final Editing • Plan for final session • Main messages; PowerPoint Slides or posters? 	Group discussion Finishing writing

Session 5 2hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sharing about the collective work accomplished; Future possibilities• Schedule follow-up session	Group discussion Finalizing permissions for Photovoice slides Gift cards Celebrate!
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APPENDIX – F

**ETHICS OF TAKING PICTURES
BECOMING A VISUAL RESEARCHER**

1. What are *ethics*?
2. Why is it important to consider *ethics* when taking pictures?
3. What would you **NOT** want to be doing while being photographed?
4. What are some risks of taking pictures?
 To you?

 To the subject (person you are taking a picture of?)
5. Imagine you want to take a picture of a stranger. How would you approach him/her? What would you say?
6. What are some rules we can agree to follow for our project?
7. What are some good things we can get from sharing our pictures with people in the community?

Remember a picture is not worth taking if it will cause danger or harm to you or anybody else!

APPENDIX – G**PHOTOGRAPHY CONSENT FORM****Examining the lived experience of student veterans using photovoice methodology.**

I, (print name) _____ agree to have my photograph taken as a part of a photography project to explore the lived experiences of student veterans. I understand that the photographer is participating in a workshop where they will take pictures and will tell stories about those pictures to express their perspectives on important issues in their communities and lives as student veterans. I understand that this photo will become the personal property of the photographer and will not be used for any financial gain. I understand that the photographer may share the photo in the workshop as a part of the class discussion.

I understand that the photo and narrative may be included in a student thesis and subsequent research reports and subsequent professional publications, and other exhibits at local, state, national or international mental health, public or professional conferences to disseminate the findings from this study. I understand my name will not be used under any circumstances if the photo is included. I understand I can withdraw my consent for this photo to be included in the thesis report or any subsequent professional publications prior to their being printed or exhibited.

This consent form and any information on it will be kept confidentially in a locked cabinet at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee by Dr. Virginia Stoffel. If I have any concerns or questions about this project, I can contact Nikhil Tomar, graduate student, at ntomar@uwm.edu or his advisor, Dr. Virginia Stoffel at 414 229-5583 or via email at stoffelv@uwm.edu.

I understand I am being given a copy of this consent form to keep for my own records.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of person being photographed	Print name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Signature of photographer	Print name	Date

APPENDIX – H**PHOTO RELEASE FORM****Examining the lived experience of student veterans using photovoice methodology.**

I give permission for public dissemination of my photograph and narrative titled:

I took this photo and wrote this narrative as a participant in the photovoice workshop at University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee to convey my perspective on the experiences of being a student veteran which is part of a study being carried out by Dr. Virginia Stoffel and Nikhil Tomar. I understand that the photo and narrative may be included in a research report and subsequent professional publications, and other exhibits at local, state, national or international health, public or professional conferences to disseminate the findings from this study. I understand that I may choose to have my name listed as the photographer of this photo and the writer of this narrative, may choose to have the photo and narrative displayed anonymously or I may choose to have a pseudonym (a different name) used.

_____ Include this photo and narrative in the research report and subsequent professional publications with my name listed as the photographer/narrator.

_____ Include this photo and narrative in the research report and subsequent professional publications as taken by an anonymous photographer/narrator.

_____ Include this photo and narrative in the research report and subsequent professional publications as taken by a photographer/narrator with a pseudonym (a different name).

_____ Include this photo and narrative in any exhibit/presentation with my name listed as the photographer/narrator.

_____ Include this photo and narrative in any exhibit/presentation as taken by an anonymous photographer/narrator.

_____ Include this photo and narrative in any exhibit/presentation as taken by a photographer/narrator with a pseudonym (a different name).

I understand at any time prior to the printing of the research report I may choose to withdraw my consent for this photo and narrative to be included. I understand that I may also decide to change the way I am identified as the photographer/narrator at any time prior to the printing of the report or subsequent professional publications. Once the report or subsequent professional publication is published, I may choose to withdraw my release of this photo/narrative for possible future publications.

I understand I may withdraw my permission for this photo to be included in a health, public or professional exhibit at any time prior to the opening of such exhibit. I understand I may decide to change the way I am identified as the photographer/narrator at any time prior to the opening of such exhibit.

I understand that I am being given a copy of this consent form for my own records.

Photographer/narrator signature

Date

APPENDIX – I

FULL TEXT DESCRIPTION

Figure 3: Photovoice Piece 1: Untitled (p.64)

Brief description: Photograph of a guitar.

Essential description: Photograph of a brown colored string guitar kept erect in the corner of a room.

Detailed description: The guitar is kept erect on a stand in the corner of a room. The room has white colored walls and a brown wooden floor. The guitar is light brown in color with a dark brown patter on its body.

Figure 4: Photovoice Piece 2: Untitled (p.65)

Brief description: Photograph of a fire extinguisher and a fire hose.

Essential description: Photograph of a red colored fire extinguisher alongside a fire hose, both kept in an enclosed space.

Detailed description: A fire hose (winded), attached to a red valve, is kept alongside a small red colored fire extinguisher. Both these equipments are kept in enclosed space which is colored grey on its boundaries at the bottom of a wall.

Figure 5: Photovoice Piece 3: Untitled (p.65)

Brief description: Photograph of various colored advertisement pamphlets.

Essential description: Photograph of a multi colored UWM Panther Academic Support Services (PASS) program advertisement pamphlets over a big board on a brick wall.

Detailed description: Small rectangular multi colored (pink, yellow, purple, red, green, blue and orange) advertisement pamphlets advertising UWM PASS program over a board with background color of mustard yellow and light military green. On the top of the board there is a purple colored paper with UWM and PASS logo.

Figure 6: Photovoice Piece 4: Untitled (p.66)

Brief description: Photograph of a big hall room.

Essential description: Photograph of a big hall room with two pillars and two windows. Room has few chairs and tables and floor is made up of white marble.

Detailed description: Photographs shows a big room with two pillars, one almost near its end and one in the middle. Light coming out of the two big windows is reflected by the white marble floor. Room has a chandelier and few wooden chairs with blue cushions.

Figure 7: Photovoice Piece 5: Untitled (p.66)

Brief description: Photograph of pink flowers.

Essential description: Photograph of a bush with pink flowers.

Detailed description: Photographs shows a big bush with green leaves and pink flowers. There is bright sunlight on top right corner of the photograph.

Figure 8: Photovoice Piece 6: Untitled (p.67)

Brief description: Photograph of Lake Michigan.

Essential description: Photograph of Lake Michigan with Milwaukee city buildings in the background.

Detailed description: Photographs shows Lake Michigan during a cloudy day, with Milwaukee city buildings in the background. The tallest building is white colored. The photograph is, for the major part, constitutes Lake Michigan water and dark clouds.

Figure 9: Photovoice Piece 7: Untitled (p.67)

Brief description: Photograph of a parking lot.

Essential description: Photograph of a parking lot with three cars taken during day time.

Detailed description: Photographs shows a parking lot with three cars, one colored red and other two of grey color. Photograph was taken during day time and shows water coagulated in various parts of the parking lot. On one side of parking lot is a building with brick walls and on the other side there is an open field with tree. Photograph also shows other side of parking lot with parked cars.

Figure 10: Photovoice Piece 8: Untitled (p.68)

Brief description: A dark photograph of a room with an art structure placed near a window.

Essential description: Photograph, taken from a dark room, of a room with an art structure placed near one of the four windows.

Detailed description: Photographs shows an art structure placed near one of the four windows of a room facing Lake Michigan. Photograph is taken from inside of another dark room. It seems that photograph was taken during evening time allowing some natural light to come through the windows. Some parts of another art structure, placed near the one in focus, can also be seen.

Figure 11: Photovoice Piece 9: Untitled (p.68)

Brief description: Photograph of a beach.

Essential description: Photograph of a beach taken from uphill during a cloudy afternoon or evening.

Detailed description: Photograph of a beach taken from uphill. The beach has two wooden piers (one at right end of the photograph and one at left end). Photograph also shows green grass along the sidewalk from which the photograph seems to be taken.

Figure 12: Photovoice Piece 10: Untitled (p.69)

Brief description: Photograph of Center for Military & Student Veterans.

Essential description: A daytime photograph of working space for Center for Military & Student Veterans taken from outside of their glass walls.

Detailed description: Photographs shows working space of Center for Military & Student Veterans. Photograph was taken during day time and shows the sign of the center taped on one of the glass walls of the center. A computer desktop and a white board, placed on carpeted flooring, are visible from one of the glass walls.

Figure 13: Photovoice Piece 11: Distance (p.70)

Brief description: Daytime photograph of a highway along with inside of a car.

Essential description: Photograph of the highway taken from inside of a car through lower right corner of the windshield.

Detailed description: Photographs shows a highway with trees on the sides and a distant green colored sign. Photograph is taken from inside of the car through the windshield and shows grey colored interior of the car. Photograph is taken during a daytime and shows clear blue skies. One can also see a water body behind the trees.

Figure 14: Photovoice Piece 12: Safety is key (p.70)

Brief description: Photograph of a hand holding a key.

Essential description: Photographs shows a hand holding a key. One can also see legs of a person wearing blue jean and painted toe nails

Detailed description: Photographs of a person holding a key with black top in his hand which is illuminated due to flash from the camera. One hand and lower legs with painted toe nails are visible in the photograph. Person is wearing a blue jean and standing over a tiled floor.

Figure 15: Photovoice Piece 13: Uniforms (p.71)

Brief description: Photograph of Army uniforms hanging on white pipelines.

Essential description: Photograph shows numerous army uniforms hanging in a basement along with boots kept on the floor.

Detailed description: Photograph of numerous army uniforms and boots stored in a basement with light purple colored carpet floor. Army uniforms are hanged on white pipelines while brown colored boots are placed on the floor along with some black bags. One can also see wood planks on the roof of the basement.

Figure 16: Photovoice Piece 14: Family is paramount (p.71)

Brief description: Photograph of a woman pushing a stroller.

Essential description: Photograph shows a woman pushing a stroller, during daytime, along a sidewalk with grass along both edges.

Detailed description: Photograph shows a woman pushing a stroller on a sidewalk with grass along the edges. There is a tree with no leaves on one side of the sidewalk. At distant one can see numerous trees along side a water body, which is likely to be Lake Michigan. There is a child in the stroller. One can also see another sidewalk downhill to the one on which the woman is walking. She is smiling while posing at the camera.

Figure 17: Photovoice Piece 15: Outreach (p.72)

Brief description: Photograph of working space of Military Educations Benefit Office (MEBO).

Essential description: Photographs shows working space of MEBO with a grey colored shelf and two desks and two black chairs.

Detailed description: Photograph of MEBO taken from outside of a window. Working space has a grey colored shelf with black file holders on top of it. A poster is placed on the top of a wall showing face of an army man and words “Honor is never off duty”. There is a brown colored door besides one side of the shelf and a window (with blinds open) on other side. Office also has two desks with light brown wood colored tops, one on right side and one on the left with black chairs besides them.

Figure 18: Photovoice Piece 16: Escape (p.72)

Brief description: Photograph of Lake Michigan.

Essential description: Photograph of Lake Michigan taken during daytime with clear blue skies.

Detailed description: Photograph shows Lake Michigan during a day with clear blue skies. Photograph also shows green colored grass with yellow flowers along the sidewalk from where the photograph was taken.

Figure 19: Photovoice Piece 17: House with flags (p.73)

Brief description: Photograph of a block of houses along a sidewalk.

Essential description: Photograph shows a block of houses along a sidewalk. One house has a United States flag above its front door.

Detailed description: A block of houses can be seen in the photograph which is taken during day time with clear blue skies. Every house has lush green grass in its front lawn and also besides the sidewalk. One house has a United States flag above its front door. There are also many trees on far right end of the photograph and also near a distant house. The sidewalk is clean and one can see cars parked opposite to some of the distant houses.

Figure 20: Photovoice Piece 18: Education (p.73)

Brief description: Photograph of a Wisconsin National Guard poster.

Essential description: Photograph of a poster with blue colored background with a caption "Wisconsin National Guard" and a standing army man. Poster also has information written in bullet points.

Detailed description: Photograph of a poster, placed on a marble, with blue colored background with a caption “Wisconsin National Guard” and a standing army man.

Poster also has following information written in capitals.

Bullet point one: 100% tuition assistance

Bullet point two: Up to \$533 a month to go to school full time

Bullet point three: 30or 6 year commitments

Bullet point four: Weekend drill pay is \$200 a month

Bullet point five: Up to \$50,000 student loan repayments

Poster also has contact information of the Wisconsin National Guards.

**Figure 21: Transitional Model representing lived experience of student veterans.
(p.106)**

Brief description: Model depicting transition of student using text placed on blue arrows.

Essential description: Model depicting transition of student veterans using themes/phases placed on a big blue arrow along with a double sided arrow placed beneath it.

Detailed description: Model depicting transition of student veterans using blue arrows. One of the arrows is one ended with text written over it at three points. Lowest dot has text “Reminiscence of past duty and reflection on military life” written besides it. Middle dot has text “the transition from military to civilian student life” written besides it. Top dot has text “entry to new stage of life” written besides it.

A double ended arrow, with words “University and Community environment”, is horizontally placed beneath the main arrow

Figure 22: Factors affecting Quality of Life of returning veterans. (Sutherland, 2013) (p.112)

Brief description: Figure of a triangle with text written inside and on its side.

Detailed description: Figure of a triangle with “Quality of Life” written inside. One of the three following words is written on each side of the triangle: Health, Education and Employment.