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Women Student Veterans' Experiences in a College Setting: A Phenomenological Case Study

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WOMEN STUDENT VETERANS' EXPERIENCES IN A COLLEGE SETTING:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor
of Philosophy
Educational Leadership—Higher Education

by
Rebecca Atkinson
May 2019

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological case study explored lived experiences of women student veterans in a college setting. Through in-depth interviews, women student veterans described their transition from their military experience to enrollment. Further, participants discussed their experiences and perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). The case, bounded in this research design, was a large, public, research-intensive institution in the Southeastern United States. Six participants were recruited to participate in face-to-face interviews.

Eight coded themes were identified in support of the research questions. The primary research question was, what are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting. In support of this main research question, the secondary questions were: (a) How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting? And (b) What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

The first themes were related to the influence of participants' military experience on their college transition. The first themes were: (a) reason to join the military; (b) unique qualities of women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture. The second themes identified women's experiences and perceptions within the campus veteran support services. The findings were organized by components of the model for student veteran support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013). The findings were presented through: (a) services (including student veteran center and educational benefit processing; (b) support (including support staff); (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions.

The findings of this study offered insights to experiences women student veterans had in one college setting. Because of the bounded context of case design, participants' experiences at the research site were unique to the support structures specifically available. This study continued to fill a gap in the literature on women student veterans as well as provided practical implications to support women student veterans in higher education.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my husband Price, you are the most loving and devoted man I know, I am so lucky to be with you. To my sweet Ben and Maddy, your love and endless cheerleading have carried me through this process- the homework is finally done. And to my mother, Susan, thank you for being the strongest and most persevering woman I know—you are not invisible, you are my role model. I love you all times infinity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Since Congress adopted an all-volunteer military force in the late 1970s the number of women serving in the United States (U.S.) military has steadily increased. Currently the U.S. military is comprised of approximately 15% active duty women compared to 2% in 1973. Further, women make up 19% of National Guard or Reserve forces (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). Just as the number of active service women has increased, so has the number of women veterans. The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics estimated in 2015 women veterans represented 9.4% of all veterans (2017). Women veterans are “the fastest growing cohort within the Veteran community” (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017, p. 10).

Women veterans use their veteran educational benefits at a higher rate than men veterans (Holder, 2011; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). These results suggest women veterans use military service as a strategic access point to further their education (Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Patten & Parker, 2011; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). In addition, demographic data highlights women student veterans (WSV) juggle many personal responsibilities (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Despite a growing number of women veterans utilizing their benefits to gain a college degree, we know little about them as students in the college setting.

Background of the Study

Student veterans are a small subset of a nontraditional population enrolled in higher education. Student veterans make up approximately 4% of the undergraduate population (Radford, 2009). Women student veterans, however, are an even smaller population representing about 26% of student veterans enrolled (Radford, 2009). An example to contextualize these percentages in simple numbers would be out of 100 college students, four would be student veterans. Women student veterans would be only one of those four, or one out of 100 undergraduate students. This contrasts with traditional women undergraduate students who typically make up 57% of an undergraduate population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

In the landscape of student veteran literature, women veterans have had very little representation. In the few studies where women veterans were participants, they noted challenges experienced during their transition to higher education (DiRamio, Jarvis, Iverson, Seher, and Anderson, 2015; Heineman, 2007; Heitzman and Somers, 2015, Iverson, Seher, DiRamio, Jarvis and Anderson; 2016; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). Authors continue to call upon the need to empirically investigate the needs of WSV in higher education (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Jones, 2017; Vachi & Berger, 2014).

Statement of Problem

Previous qualitative literature has focused on transition of veterans from military service to the university environment (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jones, 2017; Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). Most quantitative literature

has focused on degree completion and time to degree metrics (Cate, 2014) or other demographics of the student veteran population (e.g. degree fields or enrollment pace or intensity) (Cate, Lyon, Schmeling, & Bogue, 2017). Further, a gap in the literature includes how men and women experience differently their transition to the college setting and civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). However, in these literature sources the sample of women participants was relatively small. Therefore, WSV needs and experiences remain unclear and need to be studied further.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences WSVs had on a college campus and explore the perceptions WSVs had of campus services available to them (e.g. student veteran center and veterans support staff) as they navigated their transition to higher education. Secondary, the purpose was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV.

Conceptual Framework

The previous literature on student veterans has been guided primarily by transitional frameworks such as Schlossberg's Transitional Theory (1984), which includes four components related to transition (situation, self, support, and strategies). These models, however, were analyzed from data collected through veteran men's perspectives. Additionally, the utilization of some feminist identity development models was not appropriate as they are approached from a critical feminist lens (e.g. Downing and Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development for women. Because the research questions were focused on U.S. women veterans' experiences who transitioned

from military to college, I selected two conceptual frameworks that satisfied these factors.

This study situated the research questions within two conceptual frameworks: Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support and Culver's (2013) gender identity development of women in the military. These theoretical frameworks are relatively new as the literature on the veteran population has grown extensively over the past several years. Both Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model and Culver's (2013) model served as conceptual frameworks to help frame the phenomenon of women student veterans' experiences. Vacchi (2011, 2013) identified a student veteran-centered model where success strategies and practices are established from a holistic lens. While Culver (2013) described a four-phase identity development process designed around experiences women veterans had in the military. Culver described a masking and unmasking of warrior identity (military identity) balanced with the feminine identity.

Despite the military's notion of having no gender emphasis (Schading, 2007), military culture and socialization is structured around masculinity (Herbert, 1998; Snyder, 2003). It is through intersectionality that this study addresses the understanding the participants' experiences both through the lens of their veteran identity and their gender identity.

Research Questions

This study explored the experiences WSV had on a college campus. Through WSV's descriptions, this study sought to explore how their military experience influenced their transition to higher education. Further, this study explored perceptions of

campus veteran resources available to them once enrolled (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). The purpose of this study was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV. Thus, this study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

Through this investigation, more women's voices were added to the conversation on student veterans in higher education. This study also identified specific needs of women engaging in the student veteran center, which are aimed to support them.

Methodological Approach Overview

To address the research questions, this study employed a phenomenological case study design. This qualitative method allowed for women student veteran participants to share their experiences so higher education professionals can begin to construct an understanding of what WSV need. The use of phenomenology which explore lived experiences (Patton, 1990) along with a case study design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994), allowed for WSV's lived experiences to be highlighted within the context of one research site. This study was completed through semi-structured interviews using a phenomenological approach. This approach allowed a detailed description of the phenomenon to emerge (Merriam, 1998). By using a case study design, the experiences

of the WSV were bounded by the campus on which they were enrolled (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994).

Significance of Study

College campuses have invested many human and financial resources to create supportive programs and environments for student veterans. While best practices are outlined for student veteran success (Brown & Gross, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Kirchner, 2015; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010), women student veterans' experiences and perceptions within these best practices remain unspecified.

The results of this study confirmed WSV use their military experience to gain access to VA educational benefits afforded because of their military service. An added layer of WSV strategic use of the military service was how they used their military role to affirm and/or advance their professional career interests. Additionally, the findings demonstrated despite a military culture which looks down upon weakness, WSV are keen enough to ask for help to complete their tasks. Finally, the results of this study revealed that WSV military experience was a valued part of their personal stories. WSV found camaraderie and pride in their military service.

Above all, this study outlined practical strategies to support WSV based on the thematic findings of their experiences within a support model (Vacchi, 2011, 2013). Further, this study offered insights to current experiences WSV had on college campuses. The lack of women student veteran participants in the overall academic literature,

provided an opportunity for the findings of this study to fill a gap and provide practical implications to support WSV.

Assumptions

When constructing the research questions and research design, I approached the study with several assumptions. First, my assumption was women in the military. they have inherently different needs than men. Secondly, as my background education was in college student development, I recognize the early adult years (18-24 years old) are formative to a person's identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). My assumption was because many service members join the military after high school graduation, there was a period of identity development which occurred. Instead of the college environment shaping that identity development, the military environment provided the structures and setting in which identity development occurred.

Additionally, WSV have different needs than men oftentimes based on the prevalence of sexual harassment or sexual assault (Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). I intentionally did not assume sexual harassment or assault had or had not been experienced but was prepared to offer support had the topics it arisen during the interview.

Finally, I assumed when I met with participants, they shared their truths and were willing to share their full life story with me. I assumed they relayed accurate information about the circumstances they experienced.

Overview Positionality Statement

I have been connected to the military since my childhood. My father was a military officer and I grew up around military bases from grade school through high school. After college, I worked at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland with women student athletes.

My previous campus role was in orientation and transition at a large, research-intensive university. Several years ago, a group of student veterans desired to participate in the orientation process. I supported them, but chose to go beyond the orientation. I created a task force on campus that identified their needs and outlined institutional changes needed to support these needs. Two changes implemented were the establishment of a formal student veteran center and a full-time support staff position. The task force continues to identify institutional policy and practice to enhance the student veteran experience thus making this campus more veteran-friendly.

As I worked across campus to build support programs for student veterans, I quickly recognized I was often the only woman in meetings about the population. Working with the military population gave me flashbacks to the time I worked at the U.S. Naval Academy and with women student athletes. My experience with military-connected students has not only been with the student veterans at the institution with which I am employed, it was a part of my life growing up as a military dependent, and my part of my previous employment at a U.S. service academy.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this study:

Student veterans: A college-enrolled student who has served in the U.S. military active duty or reservist status (Vacchi & Berger, 2014).

Women student veterans: A student veteran who identifies as a woman.

Military-Connected: In higher education a military-connected student is a recognized category referring to U.S. veterans, active-duty, reservist, National Guard members, dependents of U.S. service members or Reserved Officer Training Corps (ROTC) (Molina & Morse, 2015). For the purposes of this study, I chose to not use the term military-connected as my participants were U.S service members who identified as veterans, active-duty, reservists or National Guard status. I did not interview students who were dependents or enrolled in the research site's ROTC programs.

Campus Resource Officer: A campus staff member who is in place to support student veterans. Typically, these staff do not have an officer rank, nor any official military rank (other than their rank if they were once in the military). Oftentimes because student veterans are used to military structure, they assume some military language including the term officer. Student veterans may draw upon their military experience and call the support staff on campus an officer. Throughout this study, I will refer to this staff person as the resource officer.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Certifying Official: A university appointed official required to verify enrollment and processes federal payments of any beneficiary

who utilizes the VA educational benefits. Throughout this study, I will refer to this staff person as the VA Certifying Official.

Campus Support Staff: Collective referral to both the Campus Resource Officer and the VA Certifying Official.

Student veteran center: A designated space on a campus with veteran-specific information and a physical space for veterans to connect with other veterans. Throughout this study the student veteran center may be referenced in full or abbreviated to veteran center.

Veteran-friendly: A term often used to describe a campus climate or culture which supports veterans or military-connected students.

Phenomenological: An approach to understand and make sense of an individual's life experience (Patton, 1990).

Case Study: A research design conducted to investigate variables within a bounded context (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994)

Chapter Summary

This study introduced the topic of women student veterans and provided a brief overview of the literature and conceptual frameworks used to guide this study. To ensure a successful transition, many college campuses have established specific resources, including devoted staff, to support student veterans. Women student veterans utilized their educational benefits at a higher rate than men suggesting they join the military for access to higher education (Vacchi & Berger, 2014).

Thus, this study explored the perceptions WSV had of campus services available to them (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff) as they navigated their transition to higher education. The purpose of this study was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV. This study also identified specific needs of women in the student veteran center which are aimed to support them.

To address the research questions, this study employed a phenomenological case study design. This qualitative method allowed for women student veteran participants to share their experiences so higher education professionals can begin to construct an understanding of what WSV need.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Much of the current student veteran literature has focused on student veteran transitions (DiRamio et al., 2008; Jones, 2017; Livingston et al., 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Wheeler, 2012) and veteran friendly practices (Brown & Gross, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Kirchner, 2015; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). These previous studies were conducted mostly with men, thus leaving a gap in the literature around women student veterans' voice related to their transition and experiences on college campuses. Therefore, the review of literature was framed by the following research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

To understand the perceptions of WSV I conducted a literature review on military culture, specifically military socialization as it related to women service members; veteran access to higher education and WSV; and student veteran transition to college and the resources and services created specifically for veterans. These topics are framed within a conceptual framework using Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran

support and Culver's (2013) model of gender identity development of women in the military.

To conduct this literature review, I utilized several search processes available through my institutional library system. I searched through Google Scholar to initially identify studies, books, and articles. I then, through my institutions database system, experimented with various keywords and search topics. Because of the scope of my research questions I was able to search through several types of databases including, educational, military and leadership, sociology, human resource development, psychology, and political science and identified various pieces of literature related to the research questions. Key words I used were: WSV, student veterans, military culture, military socialization, military culture and women, military socialization and women, student veteran transitions, veteran transitions and higher education, gender identity, gender identity development, and gender identity in the military.

Military Socialization and Culture

To first explore and understand women student veterans' perceptions and experiences of their campus resources and resource staff, it is helpful to provide context of their institutional environment. Naphan and Elliott (2015) explored veteran students' transitional experiences through a theoretical lens of *total institutions*. Total institutions are closed systems that solely support themselves from within. For example, prisons, the military, and even higher education are considered total institutions. The mission, purpose, structures, culture, policies and procedures are certainly different from the military to a higher education institution (Davies, 1989). Yet both institutions emphasize

leadership, team work, critical thinking, and problem solving (McReynolds, 2014).

Further, both institutions have similar demands of commitment and time (Naphan & Elliott, 2015).

Using the notion that the military and higher education can be viewed as total institutions, WSVs are transitioning from one total institution to the next (Naphan & Elliott, 2015; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Their experiences and transition to the college environment are influenced by the skills, knowledge, and traditions they gained from the military.

Military Socialization

Socialization into the military environment is a progression all soldiers take to learn and experience military culture. This process of socialization into any institution is where individuals begin to learn the knowledge, skills, and culture associated to that professional environment (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Oftentimes socialization is associated with integration into an institution or used in framing career development models. Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) wrote, “socialization has also been recognized as a subconscious process whereby persons internalize behavioral norms and standards and form a sense of identity and commitment to a professional field” (p. 6). For the military, socialization is a key formative process to train and develop their troops (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Redmond, Wilcox, Campbell, Kim, Finney, Barr, & Hassan, 2015; Snyder, 2003).

Military socialization begins in basic training where civilians become soldiers. The process of transforming someone into a warrior involves changing their identity; that

is removing the individuality of the person to become a soldier (Snyder, 2003). This process is conducted through a series of training events, “purposeful exhaustion, psychological intimidation, and personal humiliation, treatment aimed at breaking down feelings of individualism with new recruits” (Snyder, 2003, p. 191). Individuals take on cultured norms in the form of group membership by getting issued uniforms, receiving the same haircuts, and enduring the same group reprimands.

Basic training, however, is also the process in which the military builds its service members. The goals of basic training are to prepare soldiers physically (e.g. muscular strength and endurance) for the demands of the military (Dillon, 2007). Service members are also prepared for the mental requirements of the military. Dillon (2007) described this process where soldiers learn to “internalize the ability to follow orders and respect rank,” (p. 14). The physical and mental rigor service members experience during basic training is credited for building confidence. Successful completion of basic training is a major initial challenge all service members collectively experience (Dillon, 2007). In addition to confidence, other skills gained from military training include teamwork and leadership (Davis & Minnis, 2017; Dillon, 2007).

During training, to capitalize on military effectiveness, ranking officers must create a sense of selflessness among the new recruits. These practices were once seen as the “rite of passage into manhood” (Snyder, 2003, p. 192). Superior ranked officers may use demoralizing statements or name-calling for both men and women, of which the terms would be particularly negative towards women. An example is when a superior officer may use a derogatory term for the entire group, yet the term is typically associated

with women (e.g. ‘Let’s go ladies’ referring to the entire group). Oftentimes drill sergeants are found utilizing language that is highly sexist and denigrated towards women (Snyder, 2003).

Beyond language used during military training, Snyder (2003) cited military training was oftentimes developed after male physiology based on standards from decades ago. Further, women were not required to meet the same physical fitness standards (Knapik & East, 2014). In October 2018 the U.S. Army changed their physical fitness requirements to be gender-neutral (Chodosh, 2018). Military leaders cited the 38-year old standards were set by physiological science findings of the 1980’s and through better science and assessments they feel women and men can be equally measured by physical assessments (Chodosh, 2018). This change in policy was an example of the many traditions and structures are more tied to military history and less tied to military effectiveness (Snyder, 2003).

The socialization process into a military institution bolsters the male-dominated military culture and women are immediately faced with the prevalence of the dominant culture. Military socialization and culture contribute to women’s lived experiences while serving. Women veterans then carry those experiences into their new institutional environment- a college campus. Thus, the context of what WSVs have experienced in the past is important to understand WSV’s lived experience in their present setting.

Military Culture

Military culture is a uniquely constructed environment which for decades has been influenced by men. The oldest branch, the U.S. Army, was established in 1775

(Redmond et al., 2015) in a historical time-period where women had roles primarily as caregivers and were not permitted to join the military (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). The Militia Act of 1792 stated a description of able-bodied, white, male citizens between the ages of 18-45 were obligated to serve in the military (Snyder, 2003). Through the historical upbringing of the U.S. military, the military culture has been shaped considerably by male dominance (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978).

The military culture, in a large sense, is the social construction of values, traditions, beliefs, ideas, and symbols historically directed by men (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Pawelczyk, 2014; Snyder, 2003). The military is engrained in its traditions, structure, and order. Military traditions which shaped the culture included structured (hierarchical organization) made up of ranks and grades. Military personnel serve either as officer rank or enlisted rank in which these statuses themselves have culture embedded (officer versus enlisted) (Redmond et al., 2015; Schading, 2007).

Characteristics of military culture include obedience, respect, honor, teamwork, mission-driven, and pride (Redmond et al., 2015). An additional influence or ethos on the military culture is that of warrior (Redmond et al., 2015). This mindset places mission above all. The mission accomplished includes not accepting defeat, not quitting, and not leaving a fellow soldier behind (Redmond et al., 2015). Further, mission-completion oftentimes operates at a very rapid pace, thus veterans are conditioned to urgency and decisive changes (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012).

In an extensive study of 300 women service members, Herbert (1998) found the marginalization of women in the military began with the emphasis on developing manhood. The cultural values of masculinity created a competitive environment of who could demonstrate more masculinity, resulting in women having to navigate and act more masculine and less feminine or vice versa. Iverson, Seher, DiRamio, Jarvis and Anderson (2016) found women, while in service, had to hide their femininity in some circumstances or could use it as an asset to navigate the masculine environment, depending on their needs for navigating the military culture.

Carrieras (2006) cited the military as an extremely gendered organization for three distinctive reasons. First, women did not have full access to all military specialties or occupations. Thus, excluding them from various responsibilities and ultimately military ranks (Carrieras, 2006). Second, men outnumber women employed by the military. The gap was a result of years of no permissible access for women. These two reasons resulted in a pattern and culture of gender-defined interpretations of who was best suited for military roles (Carrieras, 2006; McElhinney, 1998).

The military environment and the environment of a university campus student veteran center, both have cultures which women veterans must navigate. Considering both environments are institutions, understanding military culture provides context on how women participants perceive the culture that exists within the veteran center.

Women in the Military

Women's roles have shifted greatly throughout military history. Early on, women served as caregivers (e.g. nurses, cooks, or laundresses) supporting male soldiers. Formal

military roles for women began in 1901 in the medical corps (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). Women's roles in the military slowly changed through the years, but a legislative act was required for women to be formally recognized in the military and be permitted to assume officer rank (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). From the 1940s through the 1970s women service members represented about 2% of the military.

Once the U.S. military became an all-volunteer force in 1973, women were heavily recruited because of a shortage of qualified male recruits (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). The human resource demands of the military outweighed the number of individuals willing to serve; women, however, were willing and able. From 1973 to 1980 the number of women service members increased 6%, from 45,000 active duty women to 171,000.

In 2015 women made up approximately 15.5% of the active duty military (U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, 2015). Since 2000, the percentage of men military personnel has declined by 1.5% while women have risen by 1.5% (U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, 2015). Yet, women continued to have a preverbal glass ceiling in the roles they could have in the military.

The past five years women were permitted into assume more expansive military roles and operations. The ban on women's service in military combat roles was lifted in 2013 and the military had two years to open these roles to women (Londoño, 2013). By

2015 two women completed the highly respected Army Ranger School (Neuman, 2015); were deployed to combat zones; and assigned to serve on submarines (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2017) report on women veterans described women's military service history as follows:

[Their] participation in the U.S. Armed Forces demonstrates the persistence of generations of women who fought against a traditionally male-dominated institution and paved the way, so today's military women have the privilege of serving their country, not as women, but as Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen (p. 5).

As of 2017, active duty women represent 15% of enlisted service members and 17% of officers. Women service members' representation is greatest in the Air Force (19%), followed by the Navy (18%), then by Army (14%), and finally Marine Corps (8%) (Parker, Cilluffo, & Stepler, 2017). A majority of women in the military fulfil roles considered administrative, followed by medical, supply, electrical and communications (Patten & Parker, 2011).

Women have participated in military missions and occupations since the first wars of the U.S. Change in their role opportunities and military occupations has developed slowly from those first wars to today. They remained invisible to the government for so long. The last several years women in the military have finally been afforded opportunities and change in military culture is slow but progressing (Parker, Cilluffo, & Stepler, 2017). Similar change is starting to progress in educational research as well.

Women Veterans

In 2015, nine percent of living veterans were women and by 2043 it is predicted 16% of living veterans will be women (National Center for Veterans Statistics and Analysis, 2017). Women veterans are a diverse sub-population within the military (Vaccaro, 2015). A survey of women veterans found 45% of respondents indicated they did not have different needs from their male counterparts (Foster & Vince, 2009). Yet, women veterans are a very diverse subpopulation compared to male veterans. They are more likely to be divorced, widowed, or never married (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2014) and single parents (Foster & Vince, 2009).

Sexual Assault in the Military

Military culture characteristics are male-dominated (Snyder, 2003). A characteristic often noted is that of gender-based violence, or sexual harassment and assault in the military (Heineman, 2017; Mattocks, Haskell, Krebs, Justice, Yano, & Brandt, 2012; Pershing, 2003). While this current research study was not focused on the topic of sexual harassment and assault in the military, it was imperative to acknowledge the heavy influence on military culture and women veteran's experiences while serving.

Military sexual harassment and assault is one of the most pressing issues that exists in the U.S. military (Rough & Armor, 2017). The term military sexual trauma (MST) has been used by the Department of Veterans Affairs and describes the experience of assault and/or battery of the sexual nature and sexual harassment while serving in the military (Barth, Kimerling, Pavao, McCutcheon, Batten, Dursa, Peterson, & Schneiderman, 2016; Heineman, 2017).

Of women who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, an estimated 15% experienced military sexual trauma (Mattocks et al., 2012). Further, some reports suggest women suffer more from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than men (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009), and military sexual trauma was cited as a significant source of PTSD for women (Carlson, Stromwall, & Lietz, 2013). Finally, an estimated 52% of women service members have experienced unwanted sexual advancements (e.g. stories or jokes) (Street, Vogt, & Dutra, 2009).

Military policies have improved reporting. In 2014, 4,760 official reports of sexual assaults were documented. Of these reports, 1,080 were reported by men and 3,690 were reported by women (Rough & Armor, 2017). Considering the number of women reporting sexual harassment in the military, MST remains a characteristic of the military culture they experience. When conducting interviews for this current research study, the researcher was aware examples of this cultural characteristic could potentially arise.

Student Veterans

Educational research on the student veteran population has had a paralleled historical path to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) shaping of veteran's educational benefits. Early research on the student veteran population sought to explore the rate in which veterans would utilize their education benefits (Olson, 1974; Smole & Loane, 2008). As higher education has enrolled more student veterans into colleges and universities, more research on the student veteran transition and experience has been produced.

DiRamio et al.'s (2008) seminal piece marked this modern, Post 9/11, era in educational research on student veterans. The Post 9/11 era marks the time period of military service after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Since then student veteran transition literature is abundant, yet WSV are hardly mentioned within the literature (DiRamio et al., 2008; Ghosh & Fouad, 2015; Jones, 2017; Livingston et al., 2011; Hammond, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Vaccaro, 2015).

Veterans Educational Benefits

Public support of veterans after their military service has been documented since as early as the Pilgrim establishment (Alschuler & Blumin, 2009). Through the U.S. Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the government provided men who served financial support oftentimes in the form of land grants (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 1997). The post-World War I (WWI) period was marked as a historical time-period where the government was not as forthcoming in post-war support of veterans (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency initiated veteran workforce and educational development support. Roosevelt's administration paid a great deal of attention and forethought to veterans' benefits.

Climate towards the military and veterans took a great turn when Franklin D. Roosevelt made it to office. Roosevelt's actions began to pave the path of a calculated vision of educational benefits for service men (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). The first major piece of legislation which addressed workforce development through education

was the 1940 Selective Service Act. The act guaranteed reemployment to anyone who left a job to join the military (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 1997).

As Roosevelt's used his platform to support the Selected Service Act, he also voiced his further concerns of veteran's adjustment back to civilian life. One aspect Roosevelt spoke was interruption of education and schooling of young men (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009). Roosevelt claimed young men gave up their educational path because of the requirement for military service. He felt strongly that the country owed veterans something for interrupting their education. Roosevelt's concerns foreshadowed his vision of a "comprehensive educational plan for veterans" (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009, p. 41).

After WWI the government lacked post-war support for veterans. As a result, Congress had another opportunity to redeem itself from the mishandling of the WWI veterans and passed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 also known as the G.I. Bill (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009; Olson, 1974). The act was "intended to help veterans readjust to civilian life, avoid high levels of unemployment, and afford returning veterans an opportunity to receive the education and training that they missed while serving in the military" (Smole & Loane, 2008, p. CRS-2).

Shortly after its passage, in 1947, veterans were 49% of college admissions applications (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, n.d.). The GI Bill did more than merely provide more access to higher education, it changed the perceptions U.S. citizens had of a college education (Clark, 1998). The legislation offered funding for one to four years of educational expenses plus an

additional cash allowance for monthly costs. The funding was an “unparalleled federal subsidy for college enrollment” (Bound & Turner, 2002, p. 790).

The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act was the launch point of many expanding social programs to support veterans. The two military campaigns following WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam War, were fought in different political climates resulting in limited expansion of veterans’ benefits including veterans’ educational benefits (Smole & Loane, 2008; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). The Montgomery GI Bill, like the 1944 Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, was the next catalyst for great change in support of veterans and their educational pursuits.

In 1973 the military became an all-volunteer force, requiring leaders to establish recruiting tools to entice individuals to join (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). The Montgomery GI Bill had a different implementation than the preceding legislation. The focus was on leveraging benefits for recruitment and retainment of soldiers, rather than just to reward for years or months of service (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Several benefit programs emerged at the time of the Montgomery GI Bill including the College Fund, Tuition Assistance program, Selected Reserve program; Reserve Educational Assistance Program; and the Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance Program (Smole & Loane, 2008). Each program was designed to support and hone in on specific sub-populations within the military community.

With each U.S. military engagement veterans’ benefits and educational benefits have been evaluated or amended by the federal government. The most comprehensive

veterans educational bill since the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, was the Post 9/11 Educational Assistance Act (Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, 2012). The Act more commonly referred to as the Post 9/11 GI bill went into effect 2009 (Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, 2008). No other bill has had such comprehensive and supportive educational benefits for veterans. However, unlike the 1944 GI Bill where military service was volunteered as a sense of patriotic duty, the current Post 9/11 is a significant recruiting tool to commit young people to service (Vacchi & Berger, 2014).

The Post 9/11 GI Bill covers educational expenses or on-the-job training (Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, 2012). Two major components of the Post 9/11 GI Bill which separates this legislation from previous bills is the Yellow Ribbon Program and the transfer of benefits option. Yellow Ribbon is a financial support program that subsidizes some costs for out-of-state student veterans (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, n.d.). Further the options to transfer benefits allows a service member to pass their benefits on to a spouse or dependent (child) (Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, 2012).

The VA educational benefits changed access to higher education for many service members and has certainly been utilized by women service members. Veterans benefits are critically important to women veterans.

Trends of Educational Benefit Usage

The 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act had a significant impact to higher education enrollment trends in the late 1940s through the 1970s. Olson (1974) cited enrollment trends increasing by approximately 50% with 2.2 million servicemen

attending college under the 1944 Act. Following the Korean War, it was estimated 2.5 million service members utilized their educational benefits to access higher education (Olson, 1974). The most significant impact of veterans accessing higher education, however, has been through the more recent legislations of the Post 9/11 GI bill (Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, 2012).

Since the passage of the Post 9/11 GI benefits by Congress in 2008, the VA has seen a 42% increase use of educational benefits by eligible veterans and dependents (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2014). Vacchi and Berger (2014) cited in 2008 4% of college students were veterans. Student veteran enrollment trends increased from 500,000 to 925,000 between 2005 and 2011 (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). By 2017, benefit payments supported 946,829 beneficiaries enrolled in a post-secondary setting (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, 2017).

The impact on higher education yields billions of federal tuition dollars to college campuses (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, 2017). By 2013, NASPA (2013) reported the Department of Veterans Affairs had spent an estimated \$9 billion annually on educational benefits for approximately 600,000 veterans and beneficiaries (NASPA Research and Policy Institute, 2013). In fiscal year 2017, the Department of Veterans Affairs funded six educational benefit programs with an estimated \$12 billion payments to colleges and universities to support students' educational aspirations (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, 2017).

Veteran educational benefits are critically important to women veterans. Researchers cited 82% of women veterans who joined the services Post 9/11 stated they joined the military specifically to gain access to educational benefits (DiRamio et al., 2008; Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Patten & Parker, 2011; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Further, Atkinson, Mobley, Brawner, Lord, Camacho, and Main (2018) found military occupation specialties (jobs) introduced women to their future educational studies and subsequently careers in engineering powered by the educational benefits afforded to them through federal veteran educational benefits.

There is a significant investment by the federal government to see the academic success and college completion of beneficiaries (Cate, 2004). Academic success and college completion are preceded by the transition from military service to college.

Student Veterans' College Transitions

Student veterans oftentimes experience simultaneous transitions: one from military service to civilian status and transition into the college setting (DiRamio et al., 2008; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). Both types of transition affect student veterans' academic success and completion, which is ultimately the desired outcome of enrollment. A majority of student veteran literature has been centered around transition and how they navigate transition to a higher education setting (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Jones, 2017; Livingston et al., 2011; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Wheeler, 2012). Student veteran transitional experiences have been researched through the lens of role change of military servicemember to civilian; challenge of academic rigor; adjustments

of sense of belonging on campus; and affordability of college (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Iverson et al., 2016; Jones, 2017; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

Role change. Several researchers have noted the role change of full-time military service member to full-time student has caused challenges for transitioning student veterans (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; Jones, 2017; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) discussed identity re-negotiation where the veteran is learning the new normal from their military identity to a civilian identity or even a student identity. Previous findings suggested the salient identity to recognize for this population is student veteran (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012; Hammond, 2015). Their findings concluded gender, racial and disabilities identities came second or third to the veteran identity (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012). Among student veterans in engineering, similar results were identified suggesting student veterans were more likely to identify their veteran status or branch engagement as their primary identity (Mobley, Brawner, Lord, Main, & Camacho, 2018).

Student veterans had an expanded world-view gained through their military service. Thus, returning to the classroom with peers who have had a limited worldview has posed a challenge for student veterans in transition (DiRamio et al., 2008). Further, student veterans come from a highly structured organizational system with many formalities and directed orders to implement. The civilian environment of a college campus, however, can leave the student veteran feeling lost and unstructured (Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Iverson et al. 2016).

Academic. For many student veterans, returning to the classroom is an experience many had not had since high school. Student veterans oftentimes arrive on a college campus with a skillset that is supportive for academic success (e.g. time management, punctuality, meeting deadlines, etc.) (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016). They, however, may experience needing academic refreshers of various content after their service (Shiavone & Gentry, 2014) or may feel their preparation for college rigor was diminished after their service (DiRamio et al., 2008). A positive experience gained from military service to college enrollment was often because of the refinement and determination of a career path based on their military occupation experiences (Atkinson et al., 2018; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Some literature suggested student veterans have had positive faculty interactions (Elliott, Gonzalez & Larsen, 2011; Livingston et al., 2008). Positive interactions included faculty mentoring or advising. While, other findings suggested political ideologies of both faculty and veterans were at odds (DiRamio et al., 2008; Lim, Interiano, Nowell, Thkacik, & Dahlberg, 2019). For example, DiRamio et al., 2008, noted the antagonistic roles of a “liberal professor and conservative veteran” (p. 89). Despite Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen (2011) citing helpful faculty and staff, they also noted uncomfortable in-classroom experiences for some student veterans. Examples included professors articulating during class their contempt for the current U.S. military conflicts and even service members carrying out the military orders. Lim, Interiano, Nowell, Tkacik, and Dahlberg (2019) noted cultural expectation differences between faculty and staff

members versus student veterans; especially surrounding the concept of leadership. Some veterans faced classroom experiences where faculty interactions were offensive.

Transfer experience. Oftentimes student veterans are transferring from one institution to another to complete their degree (Foster & Vince, 2009). The most common transfer is from a 2-year to a 4-year institution path (Cate, 2014; Cate et al., 2017).

As a transfer student, student veterans are affected by transfer credit policies. These process and articulation agreements vary from institution-to-institution and state-to-state (Hultin, 2014). Oftentimes depending on the type of institution (public vs. private or 2 year vs. 4 year) determines the ease of the transfer credit articulation, particularly for military service or training credit.

Student veterans experience first-hand the credit transfer process of their military service or training through matriculation into a 2 or 4-year institution (Persky & Oliver, 2010). Researchers have agreed one significant veteran-friendly practice identified is streamlining the transfer credit process and accepting credit awarded from the American Council of Education (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011).

Perskey and Oliver (2010) investigated the credit streamlining process for student veterans. They identified claims of students who were required to take up to three additional classes where the course content was perceived to be repeated from military training. Inconsistent policies and lack of acceptance of various transfer credits oftentimes leaves veterans feeling very frustrated and unaccepted (Perskey & Oliver, 2010). Further, veterans are used to fast-paced missions with decisive and quick

outcomes. Counter to universities' slow-to-change operation which often leaves student veterans feeling frustrated and unappreciated because of the lack of urgency (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012).

Involvement and sense of belonging. When enrolling in college, some veterans seek to interact with other veterans, finding camaraderie in the veteran identity (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011). Naphan and Elliot (2015) described camaraderie further through *social cohesion*. They defined social cohesion as “the degree to which members of a group like each other and feel emotionally close,” (p. 43).

Some veterans are faced with having to work through post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Others experience a stereotype from faculty and/or staff that all student veterans are struggling with PTSD or have anger management issues (Vaccaro, 2015; Osborne, 2013). Previous findings suggested to support the transitional experience of student veteran campuses could offer mentor programs or transition guides (DiRamio et al., 2008).

For WSV, coming from a male-dominated environment to an environment with more women, some found it hard to relate with other women students (Schivavone & Gentry, 2014). Women veterans relied on mentorship from fellow student veterans to help navigate their transition (Heitzman & Somers, 2009).

Non-traditional student experience. Student veterans have been characterized as a sub-population of the non-traditional student population (Culp & Dungy, 2014). Non-traditional students are defined by the National Center for Education Statistics (2002) as

a: (a) student whose delayed entry to college by one or more years after high school; (b) enrolled part-time; (c) employed full-time; (d) financially independent from their parents; and/or (d) having a spouse or dependents, or a single parent. Non-traditional students may also be described as adult learners. Students who identify as adult learners are cited to be more focused and motivated by their academic goals and independent (Wyatt, 2011). They may require flexibility in their schedules as they are juggling additional personal responsibilities. Student veterans are also described as adult learners with full time jobs and other priorities (Schiavon & Gentry, 2014).

Financial concerns. Despite the VA educational benefits serving as a major financial support for student veterans to complete their degree in some cases the funding did not fully support the cost of attendance. This deficit creates an additional stressor for student veterans (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Women Student Veterans

Student veterans are a small subset (four percent) of a nontraditional population enrolled in higher education. Women are an even smaller population within student veterans representing about 26% of student veterans enrolled at a college or university (Radford, 2009). To put into perspective, one out of every 100 undergraduate students would be a women student veteran. This breakdown contrasts with traditional women undergraduate students who typically make up 57% of an undergraduate population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

Heitzman and Somers (2015) investigated women student veterans' college choice and persistence. Their investigation suggested once women enrolled in higher

education they *disappeared* (Heitzman & Somers, 2015). The disappearance is evident by the number of WSV who participated in research studies on the student veterans' population. In fact, Heitzman and Somers (2015) began their investigation with 51 WSV completing an online survey, but by the time the researchers approached their next phase of data collection, only five participated in the interview and three participated in a focus group. Other researchers reported similar low participation by women. Table 1 provides a basic comparison of men versus women who participated in research studies on student veterans. The percentage proportion does, for the most part, fit the proportion of men and women veterans enrolled in higher education (74% v. 26%) (Radford, 2009). Most of these investigations, however, have been a participant mix of men and women. Very few studies have been devoted entirely to understanding the experiences and perceptions of WSV. This current study sought to contribute to the overall number of women participants to the empirical understanding of student veterans.

Table 2.1. The Comparison of Student Veteran Participants in Research Studies

Authors	Total Participants	% of Men Participants	% of Women Participants
DiRamio, Ackerman, Mitchell (2008)	25	76%	24%
Rumann & Hamrick (2010)	7	86%	14%
Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen (2011)	104	76%	24%
Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming (2011)	15	94%	6%
Wheeler (2012)	9	89%	11%

Jones (2017)	5	80%	20%
Schiavone & Gentry (2014)	6	84%	16%
Lim, Interiano, Nowell, Tkacik, Dahlberg (2019)	20	100%	0%

Note: These studies are empirical investigations on student veteran transition into higher education with a mix of men and women as participant. A majority of participants in each of these studies were men.

In the landscape of student veteran literature, WSV have had very little representation as participants. In the few studies where women veterans were participants, they noted challenges experienced during their transition to higher education or impacting their transition. Examples included childcare concerns (Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Iverson et al., 2016; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015); financial concerns (DiRamio et al., 2008; Heitzman & Somers, 2015); post-traumatic stress disorder or sexual harassment or sexual assault in the military (Albright, Thomas, McDaniel, Fletcher, Godfrey, & Bertram, 2019; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2008; Iverson et al., 2016); gender versus military identity adjustments (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Iverson et al., 2016); and the feeling of being unheard or invisible (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Iverson et al., 2016; Strong, Crowe & Lawson, 2018). Authors continued to call upon the need to empirically investigate the needs of WSV in higher education (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Of the studies that investigated student veteran experiences, however, four have provided the most significant contributions on women.

Heitzman and Somers (2015) utilized Schlossberg's (1984) 4-S transitional model (situation, self, support, and strategies) to investigate experiences related to women student veterans' persistence at four-year public institutions. Their findings suggested women student veteran select colleges based on the location of the institution, financial affordability of the institution, and the academic rigor or prestige of the program they are seeking. These factors suggested the need for specific support resources for women yet fall short of identifying what women student veterans may need for the specific support.

While DiRamio, Jarvis, Iverson, Seher, and Anderson (2015), conducted a study specifically investigating help-seeking attitudes and behaviors among WSV. Their findings concluded women were perhaps conditioned from the military culture to not ask for help and they need targeted outreach to ensure they had the support required in the academic environment. Through a process of inductive data analysis, DiRamio et al. (2015) identified three emergent themes of responsibility, worth and pride related to women's help-seeking attitudes. These three themes were positioned within a context of military culture (gender expectations, accountability, and male dominance) (DiRamio et al., 2015).

Secondarily, DiRamio et al. (2015) further explored these help-seeking attitudes and behaviors through the context comparing military culture and campus climate. They identified three dimensions of campus climate which paralleled military culture and their military experience. DiRamio et al., (2015) evaluated the campus climate towards women student veterans based on psychological, behavioral and structural dimensions. Based on women's attitudes and behaviors towards help-seeking combined with the campus

climate provided some context on how to better support women student veterans in general (DiRamio et al., 2015). While the emphasis on DiRamio's et al. (2015) study was help-seeking attitudes and behaviors, little was done to understand women's perceptions of what was available to them.

Iverson et al. (2016) focused on gender identity WSV experienced in the military and on campus. Their findings suggested women could downplay their femininity in the military just as equally as they could downplay their veteran identity on a college campus. These findings were viewed through a model of gender identity development for women in the military (Culver, 2013). Consistent with Culver (2013), Iverson et al., (2016) suggested women student veterans shifted their identities in the military environment and civilian campus environment. Further they noted women struggled to find same-gendered role models who had successfully navigated the transition (Iverson et al., 2016). Additionally, Iverson et al., (2016) suggested participants in their study desired an eagerness to not be a part of a male-dominated environment like a student veteran center or veteran specific events.

Next, Heineman (2017) conducted a qualitative investigation of 19 women student veterans enrolled in a community college. Findings from this investigation established a model of how women veterans navigated transition (Heineman, 2017). The model described women were willing to seek academic help which was consistent with findings of help-seeking behaviors of engineering WSV (Atkinson et al., 2018). Further Heineman (2017) found women student veterans were focused and independent and sought support through family members and faculty and staff. Heineman (2017)

suggested women student veterans hesitated interacting with men student veterans on campus because of their negative and gendered military experience while serving active duty.

Finally, Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) used a qualitative case study design to understand the lived experiences of WSV enrolled in a community college. They also used Schlossberg's (1984) 4-S transitional model (situation, self, support, and strategies). They noted women voluntarily exited from the military and into the college setting. The transition into higher education was compared to civilian career change. Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) also noted concerns of time restraints and child care. The researchers used a qualitative case study design yet their participants were the *cases* of the inquiry. They cited two cases, thus two participants.

Despite these studies gaining some insight into the women student veteran population, several had a deficit focus or only focused on the transitional period. Women student veterans explained how they experienced overcoming challenges. Even DiRamio et al.'s (2015) work defined *pride* with a negative tone. They found that pride was a factor on why WSV would not seek help; they were too full of pride.

Student veteran transition to higher education has been studied extensively (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). While there are several studies to describe WSV's transition, these studies have not necessarily been situated in the perceptions WSV have of support services that were created supposedly for them. One lens through which WSV have not been studied is that of understanding what actions or motivations they take to access resources and services. Further, identifying and understanding the perceptions they have

of these campus resources and services begins to shed light on any action or motivation to access resources. This study contributes to the overall number of women student veteran participants in empirical research as well as contributes to the understanding of their needs by exploring what perceptions WSV have of resources.

Student Veteran Center and Campus Support Staff

Veteran enrollment on college campuses has been increasing over the last decade. The enrollment growth among student veterans has created a trend in higher education to establish policies and practices considered *veteran-friendly*. Lokken et al. (2009) suggested:

The term veteran-friendly refers to the marked efforts made by individual campuses to identify and remove barriers to the educational goals of veterans, to create smooth transitions from military life to college life, and to provide information about available benefits and services (p. 45).

While there is no single organization that accredits an institution as veteran-friendly or military-friendly, there are several bodies in addition to the American Council on Education. For example, *U.S. News and World Report Best for Vets*, *GIJobs.com*, and *Militaryfriendly.com*, continue to strongly suggest institutional policies and practices which would be considered military-friendly. These veteran-friendly policies and practices include student veteran center and campus support staff.

Student veterans seek institutions based on variety of factors including transfer credit availability (Perskey & Oliver, 2010); academic program rigor or prestige (Heitzman & Somers, 2015); veteran-friendly status (Lokken et al., 2009). Particularly

for WSV they may be looking at the number of other WSV enrolled on campuses (Baechtold & DeSawal, 2009). The choices student veterans, particularly women, made to enroll in their respective institutions provides great insight on how and what institutions can be offering support.

While serving active duty, women veterans had various support services and resources available to them. The transition to college may leave a gap in access or even present a gap in knowledge of where to seek these resources (Greer, 2017). Further, many resources established are created from a generalized assumption that veterans are men (Greer, 2017). From veteran-friendly policies to specific programs and services, student veterans have unique needs for which many campuses have established various programs and services.

Previous literature has suggested various institutional veteran support services to employ. Examples of support services included student veteran center and resource officers (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jenner, 2019; Jones, 2017; Kirchner, 2015; Vacchi, 2013); peer support such as student veteran organizations (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Vacchi, 2013); academic support (Livingston et al., 2011; Vacchi, 2013); and institutional structures (e.g. policies and data management) (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). While these suggested services are certainly valuable, they are suggested from a predominantly male perspective of needs.

In addition to empirical research and literature describing veteran-friendly programs and services, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (2012) established a self-assessment guide specific to student veterans and

military programs and services. These guidelines are established through the process of collaboration and consensus of content experts and research for each standard (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012).

Student Veteran Center

An example a resource many campuses have developed over the past several years are on-campus student veteran centers. Since the more recent influx of student veterans, and likewise more research done on student veterans, the call for and creation of more veteran centers has occurred (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jenner, 2019; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Vacchi & Berger, 2014).

Student veteran centers can be the single point-of-contact for student veterans' services and programs. The degree to which a center offers support depends on the campus organization around supporting veterans. For example, at some institutions campus veteran centers are all-encompassing to include on-site counseling services. Other veteran centers may refer to external departments within the campus for specialized support (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

CAS identifies facilities and equipment which military and veteran programs and services should possess (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). Specific examples of facility components for a veteran center were cited as accessible and privacy space for resource officers to have private conversations with student veterans. CAS does not specifically outline the need for an all-encompassing service as Griffin & Gilbert (2015) suggested.

Veteran centers have also been cited as a place of academic and social support for student veterans which contribute to veteran success (DiRamio et al., 2008; Jenner, 2019; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). However, Vacchi (2013) found veterans centers also served as a conduit for peer support including a gathering place and resources from VA work study students. The informal connections and advice veteran peers provided each other presented as a valuable and veteran-friendly quality of the designated space (Vacchi, 2013).

While creating student veteran centers has become a suggested best practice in higher education (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Kirchner, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010), a majority of the perceptions and qualitative findings have been primarily from men veterans. This study would shift the focus to women and how they use and perceive the veteran center and its offerings.

Campus Resource Officers

A key component for successful student veteran transition has been identified as knowledgeable staff (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010). The CAS guidelines suggested:

...at least one staff member to serve as an institutional single point of contact to coordinate services, provide advice, and advocate for students with issues related to their military experiences and student status. (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012, n.p.)

Staff needed to support veterans need not be a veteran themselves, but possess a skill set that includes listening and acting. Some support staff or resource officers assume the role

of mentor, guiding the student veteran not only through their transition but their career path as well (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). CAS further recommended support staff either have a professional degree in the associated field (e.g. student affairs) or have related work experience (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012).

The resource officer has been identified as the purveyor of the student veteran center and general campus support for student veterans (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012). They have many identified responsibilities recommended for student veteran support. Examples included, training campus partners on student veteran needs; partnering with off-campus organizations who support veterans; and advocating for timely VA educational benefit processing and military transfer credit policies.

VA Certifying Officials

A certifying official is the institutional designee to verify enrollment in order for the federal government to process VA educational benefit payments to the institution. In order for an institution to receive federal money to pay for tuition, the institution must have a VA certifying official on staff to process the paperwork (Hill, 2012). This person's responsibilities are to ensure payments are legitimate, proper and legal for the federal government (Hill, 2012). The university appointed official is also required to verify enrollment any beneficiary who utilizes the VA educational benefits. Through this enrollment verification process, the federal government then process payments to the institution for tuition and fees.

A well-informed and training VA certifying official is an imperative role within an institution. Student veterans often cite feeling most frustrated when they are misinformed on various topics, especially educational benefits (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Student Veteran Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Several conceptual models have been developed to describe and unpack the student veteran experience. These frameworks are considered conceptual frameworks as they have not been extensively studied and validated (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Although they were developed through empirical research, compared to other heavily studied theories (e.g. Schlossberg (1984)), these frameworks are still works in progress. A benefit of this current study was to continue to investigate how the framework would apply to various sub-groups of the student veteran population.

Diamond (2012) and Livingston et al. (2011) established models that described student veteran transition into college. Wert (2016) developed a model which incorporated structured resources to scaffold a successful transition. Hammond (2015) developed a model to understand combat veteran identity. While Vacchi (2011, 2013) created a model for student veteran support with campus resources structured around the student veteran. Finally, Phillips & Lincoln (2017) adapted a veteran critical theory to understand issues from a student veteran lens. These conceptual models are established to frame an understanding of the student veteran experience in higher education to create practical approaches when working with student veterans (Vacchi, Hammond, & Diamond, 2017).

Diamond's (2012) Military Adaptive Transition Theory

Diamond (2012) completed a grounded theory study which informed the development of the Military Adaptive Transition Theory. The study and model were developed to explain student veterans' paths through transition. Diamond (2012) argued traditional transitional models (e.g. Schlossberg (1984)) were inappropriate for the student veteran population and the need existed for a transitional model unique to the student veteran population. Through Diamond's work, 18% of the participants were women, while the remaining were men. The creation of the model through data analysis was completed with mostly men's perspectives and transitional experiences. Despite Diamond's (2012) argument for practitioners to have a model informed by student veteran transitional experiences, the author did not have equal genders who provided experiences to inform the model.

Livingston et. al.'s (2011) The Student Veteran Academic and Social Transition Model (SVASTM)

Similar to Diamond (2012), Livingston's, et. al. (2011) established a theoretical transition model for student veterans. This model developed from a grounded theory investigation informs the academic and social transition of student veterans. The authors acknowledged in the limitations that their "study was solely the story of White male student veteran re-enrollment" (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 327). Of the 15 participants, one was a woman.

The SVASTM described environmental factors a college campus had including support structures and campus climate, which student veterans come into upon the re-

enrollment process. Further the SVASTM model was one of the only models which accounted for the military experience and influence on a student veterans' transition into higher education.

Wert's (2016) Veteran Transition Success Model

Wert (2016) created a model similar to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. At the bottom, or most basic need for student veterans was financial stability (Wert, 2016). Wert (2016) suggested institutions should be especially mindful of federal and state regulations to veterans' educational benefits and financial assistance.

Wert (2016) progressed the model from financial stability through career development and employment. Needs addressed prior to employment are mental health, social support, and academic success (Wert, 2016). Wert (2016) noted in order for student veterans to successful transition each level needed to be met for progression to the occur. Wert's (2016) model was adapted from DiRamio et al. (2008).

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) Model for Student Veteran Support

Vacchi (2011, 2013) created a model with the student veteran at the core and support services, resources, and experiences surrounding the student veteran to create a holistic support approach. Vachhi's (2011, 2013) model connected Bean & Metzner's (1985) emphasis of faculty and academic interactions while deemphasizing the social transition as outlined by other researchers (Livingston et al., 2011). The model for student veteran support will be discussed more extensively later as it was used as a conceptual framework for my study.

Phillips and Lincoln's (2017) Veteran Critical Theory

Following the work of other critical theories (e.g. feminist, disability, etc), Phillips & Lincoln (2017) created Veteran Critical Theory (VCT) which critically questions the status quo of an institutional system and the structures which were intended to support student veterans. The critical theory perspective acknowledges institutional systems “may disadvantage, exclude, or otherwise harm veterans” (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 658).

VCT was based on 11 tenets, or principled beliefs (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). The tenets are also viewed as themes or features of a critical theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Each tenet was inspired by previously established critical theories (e.g. feminist, critical race theory, queer theory, disability theory, and border theory) (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). As a result, Phillips and Lincoln (2017) suggested the tenets could serve as guiding research principles, or evaluative measures for institutional systems to evaluate their policies, procedures and practices. The 11 tenets are briefly outlined below. The subheading of each tenet is my own simplified identification of each tenets.

Civilian privilege. The first tenet identified is the recognized privilege of being a civilian compared to being military. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) related this to critical feminist theory in terms of a women working in a male-dominated field. The structure, policies and processes of most educational institutions were created from civilian practices.

Veteran microaggressions. Microaggressions are statements or hidden messages projected on to a group suggesting they do not belong in the majority group, or a level of

inferiority exists. Some microaggressions are inadvertently placed on marginalized groups by individuals who are unaware of their hurtful or hidden message (Sue, 2010). Phillips and Lincoln (2017) cited the assumption of all veterans have PTSD, a disability and are helpless are examples veteran microaggressions.

Deficit thinking. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) suggested veterans are often placed in a deficit lens because of civilian constructed measures and structures established in educational institutions. Another way to view it is veterans do not succeed because they are a round peg attempting to fit into a square whole.

For example, some measurements of degree completion identify veterans as unsuccessful. The degree completion calculation oftentimes is based on completion at one institution. Veterans who transfer (for any reason) may be identified as unsuccessful because the degree completion model or formula does not account for the loss of transfer credit.

Between cultures. Drawing from border theory, Phillips and Lincoln (2017) suggested veterans are separating their identity from the military and navigating a new identity as a civilian. The space between the two identities is cited as a lonely, private, and very personal (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). Student veterans often can float back and forth between the two identities depending on the culture or environment they are present. The oscillation between the two identities was also noted as “an effort to gain the power, privilege, or prestige associated with each culture” (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 661).

Narratives of veterans. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) suggested narratives as an opportunity to clarify the experience veterans have had. Further, they suggested sharing their stories can also produce a counternarrative from assumed experiences of the veteran population. A student veteran may appear to have fully integrated into a new institutional environment may be experiencing an alternate reality. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) suggested institutions should create opportunities for student veterans to voice, write, or express their story and experience.

Multiple identities. A common reality of a marginalized group is intersecting identities (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). For example, Black women have intersecting racial and gender identities, both which can be oppressed in different ways in different settings. Student veterans also may have intersecting identities. Further within the veteran identity itself there are confounding identities, such as enlisted and officer, rank, deployment, combat versus non-combat (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

Misidentified characters. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) paralleled this tenet to a tenet in queer theory: the notion that homosexuals are written as deviants. The notion that others (mostly media) portray marginalized individuals with varying assumptions and limited constructs. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) described “student veterans become either characters in a civilian story or caricatures of civilian assumptions” (p. 662).

Veterans know veterans. The unique experiences veterans have can be explained to civilian allies, but are empathetically understood by other veterans. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) suggested like disability theory, a member of the population must participate and engage in the drafting and direction of institutional policy and structures.

For example, an able-bodied planning committee would not fully grasp the scope of getting across campus in a wheelchair. Likewise, veterans should have a voice in establishing campus policies related to the student veteran population.

Veteran false advertising. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) suggested some institutional practices are created more for the benefit of the institution and less than actually benefiting the student veteran. The result of more benefit to the institution creates a false-sense of reality for student veterans in that environment. For example, an institution pre-occupied with setting up structures which makes the identified as veteran-friendly may not actually be considered veteran-friendly by the enrolled student veterans. The product of the institution was geared more toward the general public as a marketing tactic, and a secondary outcome of helping the student veterans enrolled (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

Blanket policies and procedures. This tenet suggested the characteristics and identities of student veterans represent a broad spectrum, therefore the development of blanket policies, procedures and programs pose challenges for an institution (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

Veteran culture. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) identified veteran culture are grounded in respect, honor and trust. Further they suggested this last tenet as a foundational understanding of veteran culture and oftentimes civilian higher education may have structures, policies and practices which run counter to these foundational values.

Conceptual Framework for Current Study

There are several conceptual models on student veterans which has aided in the understanding of their experiences and transition. Of these models, however, several were not utilized for this study because of specific reasons.

First, one must understand these frameworks were developed from mostly qualitative work with men. Much of the current literature on student veterans' transitions was developed through the lens of Schlossberg's (1984) Transitional Theory (Diamond, 2012; DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). However, Schlossberg's (1984) application does not neatly describe student veteran transition (Diamond, 2012; Hammond, 2015).

Next, with regards to Phillips and Lincoln's (2017) Veteran Critical Theory, while this is an excellent theoretical framework for a research study, at the heart of its critical focus is institutional structures, policy and practice. This current investigation, although situated within an institution's structures and practices, is about women who experience the practices.

Finally, the vast diversity of student veterans' experiences, backgrounds, and demographics make it challenging to neatly define a student veterans' transitional experience (Vaccaro, 2015). While these frameworks certainly provide a starting point for future research, a further understanding of women veterans' experiences should be acknowledged in a conceptual framework. Vacchi, Hammond, and Diamond (2017) argued for a more holistic understanding of veterans' college success. They did fall short

of stating what women veterans in particular might need within these conceptual frameworks.

Although the conceptual models on student veterans have been helpful in understanding student veterans, two models in particular were used to guide this specific study. First, Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support best fits a pragmatic approach to understanding and building student veteran support services, resources, and programs. Secondly, Culver's (2013) model on gender identity development of women in the military guided the understanding of how women service members navigated their military and feminine identity in a male-dominated culture. Literature on socialization into the military framed the purpose of developing soldiers and how the military views itself as having no gender (Schading, 2007), yet gender differences are present in the military (Snyder, 2003). The key to incorporating both conceptual frameworks is through intersectionality.

Intersectionality has great value particularly when discussing feminist development or identity theories. Davis (2008) referred to intersectionality as "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (p. 68). Initially, I considered Downing and Roush's (1985) feminist identity model. This model was based on the concepts of Cross's (1971) theory of Black identity. When discussing intersectionality, gender and race are often at the crux of the discussion and each component is influential. Both of these identity models were developed through a critical lens: critical feminist theory and critical race

theory. Downing and Roush's (1985) model particularly draws upon a developmental progression where women initially view themselves inferior to men, then evolve to a viewpoint that they are equal to men yet different. Along this progression, women also view men as negative and finding camaraderie only in other women (Downing & Roush, 1985).

The few citations in the literature on WSV suggested these veterans do not experience this critical feminist approach to their identity development (Atkinson et al., 2018; Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Iverson et al., 2016). The lack of critical feminist viewpoint was affirmed through the completion of my pilot study. Chapter 4 reviews the full scope of the pilot study.

My study was not framed through a perfect theoretical model but was guided by the two conceptual models to understand the experiences of WSV. First, Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support provided an approach to understand student veteran support services, resources, and programs. While through the use of intersectionality, Culver's (2013) model of gender identity development for women in the military combined with the understanding of the military socialization process was one lens through which to understand the experiences and perceptions WSV have of their campus resources and resource staff.

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) Model of Student Veteran Support

Vacchi's model of student veteran support was developed in a holistic approach with the student veteran at the core of the experience and support (Vacchi, Hammond, & Diamond, 2017). Additionally, Vacchi's (2013) model was developed and studied

through a similar lens of phenomenon as this current study: the experiences of student veterans.

The model was developed from theoretical models created for adult learners and non-traditional aged college students (e.g. Bean & Metzner, 1985; Wiedman, 1989). An interesting similarity between Vacchi's (2013) use of Wiedman's (1989) Conceptual Model of Undergraduate Socialization is the conceptual process of military socialization. Vacchi (2013) drew upon the socialization process of relationships building with peers and faculty to construct the student veteran support model. These characteristics are similar the components of teamwork and camaraderie seen in military culture (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Lim et al., 2019; Pawelczyk, 2014; Schading, 2007; Snyder, 2003).

The veteran support model is conceptualized in the four areas for institutions to address when supporting student veterans. The four areas which surround the student veteran includes (a) academic interactions, (b) transition support, (c) support, and (d) services (Vacchi 2011, 2013). Although the term veteran-friendly is subjectively defined, the four areas are suggested cornerstones in which to develop veteran-friendly practices and attribute to student veteran success.

Academic interactions. The interactions student veterans have within and outside the classroom setting (e.g. academic advising) are considered academic interactions. Several scholars have cited negative academic interaction experiences shared by student veterans and have suggested further training for faculty and staff to better understand the student veteran transition experience (Diamond, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Lim et al., 2019; Livingston et al., 2011).

Transition support. Support during the transitional period from military service to college for student veterans has included specialized orientations and supportive policies such as military transfer credit (Brown & Gross, 2011). Recent findings suggested student veterans may also benefit from a transition course (Cook & Kim, 2009). However, Vaccaro (2015) cited student veterans experienced faculty assumptions that student veterans desired to be grouped with other student veterans; which is not always the case.

Support. The general theme of support includes peer support or external support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013). Peer support is created through peer mentoring programs. Peer support or peer mentoring can be presented in a formalized structure or through informal interactions in organizations such as a student veterans' organization (Vacchi, Hammond, & Diamond, 2017). Peer support can be facilitated through a common space such as a veterans' center (Vacchi, 2013). External support oftentimes is found through general state or local agencies or non-profit organizations whose mission is to serve veterans (e.g. local Department of Veterans Affairs unit or local chapter of Veterans of Foreign Wars) (Vacchi, Hammond, Diamond, 2017). In this present study, the study site has a strong partnership with a local non-profit organization, Upstate Warrior Solutions (Upstate Warrior Solutions, 2018).

Services. Campus services are outlined as general services (e.g. student veteran center) or specific (e.g. veterans only resume writing workshop) (Brown & Gross, 2011; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Vacchi, 2014). These services are developed through an understanding and lens of student veterans' needs.

This current study will be situated in Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support and the cornerstone of services. While questions utilized in the semi-structured interviews certainly touched upon transition support and support experience in general, much of the focus was on women student veterans' perceptions of the student veteran center. Thus, the veteran center services.

Culver's (2013) Model of Gender Identity Development of Women in the Military

Despite the military's claim to have a gender-neutral approach (Schading, 2007), the military culture and socialization process has been noted as being male-dominated (Snyder, 2003). In an extensive study of 300 women service members, Herbert (1998) found the marginalization of women in the military began with the emphasis of developing manhood. The cultural values of masculinity created a competitive environment of who demonstrated more masculinity, resulting in women having to navigate and act more masculine and less feminine or vice versa. Herbert (1998) described women service members as developing a warrior-identity in order to function in the military.

Culver's (2013) model was developed as a result of two studies. First, Culver (2019) considered Herbert's (1998) findings of women's experiences navigating the male-dominated culture of the military. Then, Culver (2013) evaluated identity development through the lens of Edward and Jones' (2009) model of college men's gender identity development. Edwards and Jones (2009) suggested college men also fluctuated in levels of masculinity portrayed to peers depending on the context of the situation. They cited the need for college men to put on or remove the mask of their

masculinity. While Culver's (2013) model helped describe the experience of women veterans masking and unmasking their feminine identity, it is ironic this model was developed from a male-oriented model. Nonetheless, Culver's model was not used as a theoretical foundation for this study, but rather a conceptual framework in which to understand the experiences of WSV who participated.

Culver's (2013) model has four distinctive phases of gender identity development of women in the military. Culver (2013) suggested women enter a phase where they need to place on a mask; then the experience of wearing the mask; followed by feelings where the women recognized where they are wearing the mask and what consequences were associated; and finally removing the mask.

Placing the mask on. Culver (2013) noted this phase was when women recognized they must put on a front in order to navigate their experience. The researcher noted the struggle between taking on the identity of warrior versus maintaining their feminine identity. Each of these identities created feelings of insecurities in the military setting. When women are faced with the feelings of insecurities, they resort to women placing the mask on taking on the identity of warrior.

Wearing the mask. While the previous phase was the initial recognition of the two identities; warrior and feminine, this phase is the constant application of strategies to navigate within these two identities. Depending on what the context requires, the women may play up her warrior identity or feminine identity.

Recognition of Consequences. In this phase women in the military are cognizant of the navigation they are engaging in between two identities. They are recognizing there

is loss and gain between wearing the mask and not wearing the mask. An example of gain by wearing the mask, they are accepted by their unit colleagues because of actions or statements. While an example of loss, is the recognition that they had feminine characteristics they had to downplay in order to be accepted, and how the downplay is then affecting relationships with others.

Removing the mask. In this final phase, Culver (2013) noted women accept both identities and “develop a personal definition of what it means to be a woman, a warrior, and a woman-warrior” (p. 70).

While this model was a more accurate description of the identity dichotomies women veterans experience as compared to the critical lens Downing & Roush’s (1985) feminist identity development, the Culver (2013) model did not neatly pack women student veterans’ identity experience. A gap in understanding was at the final phase, especially when women veterans are enrolled in a college setting. At this point, women formally separated from the military and enrolled in college were not needing to remove the mask and accept a woman-warrior identity, in some cases they are shedding it, or letting it exist in the past. A benefit of this current study was to continue to investigate how these two frameworks would apply to the sub-population of the student veterans.

Chapter Summary

To understand the perceptions of WSV the literature placed into context military culture, specifically military socialization as it related to women service members; veteran access to higher education and WSV; and student veteran transition to college and the resources and services created specifically for veterans. These topics are framed

within the conceptual frameworks of Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support and Culver's (2013) model of gender identity development of women in the military. The literature presented help frame the research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

By utilizing a case-study phenomenological approach, this study explored the perceptions WSV had of campus services available to them (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff) as they navigate their transition to higher education.

Secondary, the purpose was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explored the experiences WSV had on a college campus. Through WSV's descriptions, this study sought to explore how their military experience influenced their transition to higher education. Further, this study explored perceptions of campus veteran resources available to them once enrolled (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). The purpose of this study was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV. Thus, this study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

Through this investigation, more women's voices were added to the conversation on student veterans in higher education. This study also identified specific needs of women engaging in the student veteran center, which are aimed to support them.

To address the research questions, this study employed a phenomenological case study design. This qualitative method allowed for women student veteran participants to share their experiences so higher education professionals can begin to construct an understanding of WSV needs. The study was conducted through semi-structured

interviews. To inform the study, I completed a pilot study in the spring of 2018. The IRB Approval of the pilot study can be found in Appendix A. Results from the pilot study informed changes to my conceptual framework as well as face-to-face interview sequence. As a result, an amended IRB was submitted for the full study. The IRB at the research site determined amendments were not required, and I was permitted to move forward with my planned changes for the full study. The IRB determined the proposed changes did not require any amendment approvals as the general scope and procedures had not changed. Permission from IRB without any further approvals is found in Appendix B. A summary of the planned changes informed by the pilot study are outlined in a section within this chapter.

Rationale for Methodological Approach

The research design employed a blended phenomenology and case study research approach. Patton (1990) described phenomenology as the study of an experience. Experiences are at the core of what constructs individual life stories. The current conceptual and theoretical models on student veterans were developed from a predominantly male experience. Thus, the need to study WSV through two conceptual frameworks created an opportunity to investigate and understand their experiences. Findings of this phenomenological study will create avenues for grounded theory analysis and other theory-generating models specifically about WSV (Boyd, 2001). Thus, the emphasis of this study was the phenomenon of women student veterans' experiences in a college setting.

Case study research is unique in that it is cross-disciplinary and can be conducted in both quantitative and qualitative efforts. One characteristic of case study research is its construction within a bounded system (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). Merriam (1998) identified a case as a single-entity. While Yin (1994) further described case study as the investigation of a phenomenon within a bounded context. Both researchers identified similar concepts of the case study approach; the investigation is focused on something or a phenomenon (Gibbert & Ruigrok, 2010). With case study research the investigation is situated within a context or bounded system. In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the experiences of WSV in a college setting. The bounded system in which WSV were providing their life-experiences was their interactions with one campus student veteran center and resource officer and staff.

Merriam (1998) suggested case study research has unique attributes of being pluralistic, descriptive, and heuristic. The pluralistic attribute focused on a situation, in this case the perceptions WSV had of their campus resources and resource officers and staff. The descriptive attribute was detailed on the phenomenon; thus, WSV were interviewed using a phenomenological approach with semi-structured interview questions. Semi-structured interviews, discussed below, allowed a detailed description of the phenomenon to emerge. Finally, Merriam (1998) suggested a case study attribute of being heuristic illustrates “the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Yazan, 2015, p. 138).

Positionality Statement

As a daughter of an Army officer I grew up in a military household. My fondest childhood memories involve military bases and BDUs (Battle Dress Uniform) surrounding me. Then, after college, I worked at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland with women student athletes. My interest in student veterans began when a group of student veterans approached me at my institution to seek better support of student veterans as they transitioned into our institution. In an instant, I felt my roots again after living away from the military lifestyle for twenty years. I felt as if my distant relatives were coming back to ask for help.

My previous role on campus was within orientation and transition. In 2009, because of my military-connection and general interest in student veterans I served on a task force led by the Dean of Students. The purpose of that task force was to simply understand who the student veterans were enrolled at our institution, and what services they would require as they enrolled on campus. The task force used some current research and a needs assessment to identify needs. The task force concluded dedicated space and staff would be the best support, however, this type of support was not an institutional priority.

In this similar time period, the University President's Chief of Staff was sent to one of the task force meetings on behalf of a Board of Trustee member to learn about how the institution was supporting student veterans. It appeared the recognition of their needs was found all the way at the top of the organizational structure of the University. Compared to other underrepresented groups on campus (e.g. LBTQA), student veterans

had more attention from upper ranks to understand and agree more needed to be done. At the time campus administrators agreed supporting student veterans was an honorable thing to do, especially considering the military history of the institution. Despite a very positive and supportive appearance, the institution did not make student veteran support a priority (e.g. space and funding). Further, I was not in an organizational leadership position to make significant change.

Then, in 2014 a group of student veterans met with me to discuss the ability of participating in new student orientation in order to reach fellow student veterans and help them navigate campus. By this point, I was in a position which I could advocate and make changes to the orientation program and accommodated their request. I agreed they support they needed, but orientation was only the initial step. Campus services and resources would be needed beyond just a programmatic event.

The campus administrators cleared a path for me to finally create change I recognized was needed years before. The Dean of Students and my department director asked me to lead a task force on campus which identified student veteran needs and outlined institutional changes needed to support these needs. Through research on best practices and a large needs assessment conducted on campus, our task for identified two major changes required. These changes included the establishment of a formal student veteran center and the creation of a full-time support staff position (the campus resource officer). The task force continued to identify institutional policy and practice that enhanced the student veteran experience thus making the campus more veteran friendly.

As I built relationships with the military-connected programs on campus (e.g. Army ROTC) they would also advocate for student veterans' needs as well as identify resources that would help me support them. For example, Army ROTC gave me a classroom space which was designated to them as a new space for the student veteran center. Soon after establishing the first official student veteran center on campus, I was able to secure a graduate assistantship position to hire a graduate student. Within a several months of hiring a graduate assistantship, I was working with upper administrators to secure funding for a full-time position and consulting with potential donors to support and procure items for the student veteran center. I was an integral part of improving student veteran resources and support on my institution. I further became an expert on my own campus of student veteran needs.

As I worked across campus to build support programs for student veterans, I quickly recognized I was often the only woman in meetings about the population. The initial task force included student veterans who recently served, retired male officers who now worked at the institution, and one Vietnam veteran faculty member who fervently supported student veterans. At first this group intimidated me. The feeling of being one-and-only gave me flashbacks to the time I worked at the U.S. Naval Academy. I was privileged in that I merely worked at Navy and did not actually endure the feeling of one-and-only in squad, platoon or company. The women at Navy were a small tribe among the sea of young men. Fast forward fifteen years, the feeling reemerged with me as I quickly relearned the male-centered military environment.

As I would meet WSV I had great admiration and pride for them to have navigated and operated in this environment. Although I have many women mentors at my institution, many college campuses continue to be influenced by their historical White-male origins. As a woman, I recognize the differences women experience in both the military institution and the higher education institution. My experience with military-connected students was not only been with student veterans at the institution which I am employed, it was a part of my life growing up as a military dependent, and my previous employment at a U.S. service academy.

Site Selection: The Case

The phenomenon of women student veterans' experiences in this study was bounded by the context of the case, or the specific research site (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). Merriam (1998) noted qualitative case study design is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process or a social unit" (p. xiii). The research site is the bounded context of the case studied along with the phenomenon of women student veterans' perceptions within the context of the veteran center and staff available at the research site. Further, Merriam (1998) highlighted "conveying an understanding of the case is paramount the paramount consideration in analyzing the data" (p. 193). Had this investigation been conducted at a different site, the themes of data may be different dependent on the context of that site.

The study was conducted at a large (more than 20,000), research-intensive institution in the Southeast U.S. The site was selected for the researcher's access to participants. Additionally, the site fit the criteria of the bounded-system of the case study

design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). Details on the institution and its services were described minimally to maintain the anonymity of the research site and confidentiality of participants but provided enough context to frame participants' experiences. The site which enrolled WSV had a campus student veteran center and a dedicated campus resource officer. A note of importance is the research site does not have a dedicated women's center as part of a larger multicultural center or network.

Socio-political Contexts

The research site was in the Southeast U.S. This location and the regional context of a pro-military ideology was critical in understanding the case. To reiterate, Merriam (1998) cited the details and understanding of the case is instrumental when analyzing case study data. One contextual element worth noting in this case was the regional location of the research site and the historical ideologies associated to the geographical region.

The Southern region of the U.S. is described as pro-military (Maley & Hawkins, 2018). Researchers described a phenomenon found in literature identified as *Southern military traditions* (Maley & Hawkins, 2018; Segal & Segal, 2004; Watkins & Sherk, 2008) Authors contributed two particular reasons for this phenomenon. First, the sociodemographic reasons and secondly, historical reasons (Maley & Hawkins, 2018).

Sociodemographic reasons for the Southern military tradition stemmed from higher enlistment rates. These higher enlistment rates were associated to, "a greater proportion of youth and minorities, lower levels of college-educated citizens, a fervent religious base, and a robust military presence" (Maley & Hawkins, 2018, p. 196).

Military enlistment was driven primarily by the effectiveness of recruitment. Recruitment of potential service members arose from “propensity for military service” (Maley & Hawkins, 2018, 197). Propensity was determined based on the probability of potential recruits’ decisions to join the military. To compare this to higher education, propensity could be compared to yield rates in the admissions process (Clinedinst & Koranteng, 2017). An in-state institution, for example, might have better yield rates with in-state student residents. The Southern region is ripe for potential recruits, thus making the region strongest to recruit and enlist service members (Maley & Hawkins, 2018).

Finally, the Southern region had historical and cultural roots to military heritage dating back to prior to the Civil War (Maley & Hawkins, 2018). Historical analysis suggested Southern military culture and tradition began as early as the colonial era. For example, Bonner (1955) cited vigilant patrols of Southern men to guard against Native Americans.

An additional sociodemographic and historical reason included the robustness of military installations across the South. Four of the five largest U.S. military installations within the continental U.S. were located in Southern states (North Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and Kentucky) (Hammons, 2016). The Southern regions heavy military presence was further demonstrated by the number of VA educational benefits processed annually by state.

In 2014, 23 U.S. states accounted for 80% of the VA educational benefits workload (National Center for Veterans Statistics and Analysis, 2014.) Meaning a majority of all VA educational benefits processed were done in about half of all states. Of

the 23 states identified, 10 were located in the South. The top four states for VA educational benefit processing in 2014 were CA, TX, FL, and VA (National Center for Veterans Statistics and Analysis, 2014). The state in which the research site resided was ranked #20 for VA educational benefit processing.

While the reasons related to sociodemographic, historical, and geographical factors might be compelling, an additional contextual factor related to the research site was the ideological culture which resides on the campus. In 2016, the Princeton Review cited the research site as one of the top 15 colleges in the U.S. with the most conservative students (The Princeton Review, 2016).

Outlining the socio-political contexts of this case study was imperative to understanding the full scope of the case and the data derived from participants. The research site can be considered a conservative, pro-military culture (Maley & Hawkins, 2018; The Princeton Review, 2016). The research site's ability to create veteran supportive services was also due to its rich military history. A brief description of the research site's military history can be found in Appendix C.

Student Veteran Center and Resource Officer

The research institution itself has a military history in that it was an all-male, military college, at its founding. The institution no longer has a corps of cadets but does offer ROTC training programs for Army and Air Force. In the past six years, the study site endured many changes to its current student veteran center. Since 2013 they have had three different spaces on campus. The institutional history of establishing campus

resource space and staff is paralleled. To best explain the historical context, the space and staff will be discussed simultaneously.

Initially dedicated space for student veterans was supported by student veterans themselves. The institution had a task force of faculty, staff, and students to identify student veteran needs through surveys and benchmarking research. The campus's student veterans' organization created a network of support to help student veterans transitioning to the institution. They advocated to several departments for dedicated space.

One supporter was a faculty member who was a Vietnam veteran. The faculty member found an unused space in an academic building on the edge of campus and gave it to the student veterans for their make-shift student veteran center in 2012. From 2012-2014 dedicated student veterans' space was a small room in an academic building on the research site's campus. During this time, there was no dedicated staff to support student veterans.

Through further advocacy by faculty and staff, more positive changes were established to support student veterans. In 2013 a new task force was formed to identify student veterans' needs at the research site. The momentum for student veteran support and the student veteran center gained greater traction. The advocacy efforts were led by the staff in the institution's orientation and transition office. Through assessment surveys, the task force identified student veterans' top needs as a larger dedicated space and the need for a full-time support person.

In 2014 the first graduate assistantship position was approved to support student veterans. The graduate student hired was a retired Army Sergeant Major who was

enrolled at the research site in a master's in business administration program. The Army ROTC program 'donated' a classroom in a different academic building to repurpose as a larger student veteran center.

The second student veteran center was formally opened in November 2014. The space was approximately 400-square feet and there were an estimated 250 enrolled student veterans. The space had a main table, a small desk for the graduate assistant, and three desks for computers and a printer. The veteran center was located on the second floor, which could be accessed by an elevator.

In late Fall 2015 a full-time staff position was approved to support student veterans. The current campus resource officer was hired in May 2016. Through assessment of veteran center usage, it became apparent that the student veteran population had outgrown the veteran center again and the resource officer began advocating for a larger space.

The space was moved once again in 2018 to a larger space within the building which that houses undergraduate studies and the student testing site. The current space had a traditional lounge space with a table, kitchenette, couches, and lockers. An adjoining space was designed as a study space with desks, computers, printing, defense card readers (used to electronically access military information online), and the office space for the resource officer. The new move set the veteran center on the first floor.

In addition to the changes in space and staff for student veterans, support had been built through the University President (although not financial support), and support

from development (fundraising) efforts. The once student-led initiative became an institutional priority.

Campus Resource Officers and Staff

As previously mentioned, the student veteran center first employed a graduate assistant to support student veterans. In May 2016, the study site employed a full-time campus resource officer. The campus resource officer employed at the site selection is a veteran of the U.S. Army. He was a full-time staff member who utilized his own VA educational benefits to fund his higher education. The resource officer was responsible for managing the student veterans center, creating programs and services that support student veteran transition and success, as well as serving as an advocate for the student veteran population through education and training of faculty and staff.

The institutional site also employed a VA educational benefits certifying official. A certifying official was the institutional designee to verify enrollment in order for the federal government to process VA educational benefit payments to the institution. This person's responsibilities were to ensure payments are legitimate, proper and legal for the federal government (Hill, 2012). In order for an institution to receive federal money to pay for tuition, the institution must have a VA certifying official on staff to process the paperwork.

The VA certifying official's position was housed in the Registrar's office. Organizationally, the position was in a different division than the resource officer's position reporting line. The VA certifying official had been in her role for 15 years. Her spouse was a military veteran.

Summary of Pilot Study

To help inform my full study, I completed a pilot study in Spring 2018. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the interview questions, the timing of the interview process, and to allow myself a chance to practice interviewing as a novice researcher. I followed the same recruitment strategy for the pilot study as I did for the full study. To fulfill the pilot study purpose, it was predetermined to only interview two WSV.

Planned Changes from Pilot Study

After completing the pilot study, considerations for the full study were made to: (a) change the frequency and duration of the face-to-face interviews; (b) change the participant incentive and the timing of incentive distribution timing; (c) amend questions for their constructs and to narrow in on the content or phenomenon; and (d) change the conceptual model guiding the research study.

During the pilot study, the main face-to-face interviews lasted 75 mins and 105 minutes. Previous literature suggested time restraints student veterans' experiences (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Considering the duration of the pilot study interviews, a process change I made for the full study was to break up the face-to-face interview into two separate meetings. In my member checking process with the two participants, they confirmed splitting the interview would be a better use of student veterans' time.

Study participants were offered an incentive for their time. The initial incentive was planned to be a Starbucks gift card. Starbucks had two stores available at the research site. During the member check process of the first pilot participant, she commented she was not a "girly-girl" and did not go to Starbucks for coffee, food, or

socializing. I reflected the Starbucks brand may not be the right incentive for the student veteran population. In the full study, I changed the incentive process to include a gift card to a more general store for more a more practical use.

After completing the pilot study, I amended or removed several questions from the full-study interview protocol. I refined the questions about their military experience, specifically the culture of each unit they were a part of. Secondly, the pilot study provided more insight to mentor programs the military created. I further probed in the full study regarding mentor programs.

Next, I had originally asked about campus support staff in a singular question, despite campus support staff being two different individuals at the research site. Interview questions regarding campus support staff were divided between the resource officer and the certifying official. Further, in my pilot study I coupled the student veteran center with the resource officer. To understand these entities separately, I separated the questions regarding these. The pilot study face-to-face interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Finally, the most significant change which informed the full study was the change to one of the conceptual models. In my proposal I considered using Downing and Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development. This model was developed from Cross's (1971) Black identity development. I had considered this model because Downing and Roush (1985) noted "it is assumed that women may recycle through these stages, each time experiencing the challenge of the stage more profoundly and using previously learned skill to work through the particular stage again" (p. 702). Downing &

Roush's (1985) model had an emancipation tone, yet in the pilot study WSV did not describe the need to be freed from the male-dominated culture.

Instead, Culver's (2013) model of gender identity development of women in the military was considered a more appropriate conceptual model for this study. A more detailed description of the pilot study and the informed changes of the pilot study for the fully study can be found in Appendix E.

Participant Selection

To reach the sample size desired, purposive sampling was used in the full study. Purposive sampling simply outlines the average individual within the population identified under the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

Participants were undergraduate students enrolled at a four-year, public, research-intensive institution in the Southeast U.S. during the Fall 2018 and Spring 2019 semesters. Students identified as female and had a military status as either U.S. veteran, active duty, or reservist. The term military-connected is used as an umbrella term to identify students as U.S. veterans, active-duty, reservist, National Guard members, dependents of U.S. service members or Reserved Officer Training Corps (ROTC) (Molina & Morse, 2015). For the purposes of this study, I chose to not use the term military-connected as my participants were U.S. service members who identified as veterans, active-duty, reservists or National Guard status. I did not interview students who were dependents or enrolled in the research site's ROTC programs. Student veterans are oftentimes also seen enrolled in graduate education. I did not recruit graduate students for this study as their needs are generally different compared to undergraduate students.

The campus resource officer agreed to place my recruitment email in the monthly student veteran newsletter. This newsletter was emailed to any enrolled student who identified in the student information system as a veteran. Students had the option to self-identify through the university admissions process or self-identify within the student information system once they are enrolled. Student veterans had the option to self-identify or de-self-identify at any point of time during their enrollment. The newsletter was emailed to both undergraduate and graduate students who identified as student veterans. The advertisement for the study went in the November and December 2018 newsletters. My recruitment email can be found in Appendix F.

Due to timing of the institution's military appreciation events, holiday breaks, and final examinations, the timing of the academic calendar made it difficult to recruit for participants. A secondary recruitment strategy was employed. I was given permission to post my recruitment message on the student veterans' organization Facebook page. Because of my previous role in working with student veterans at the research site, I was already a member of this Facebook group.

The recruitment messages included a link to a short recruitment video which included an introduction of myself. I created this video to begin to establish rapport and allow WSVs to hear a bit of my personal story and connection to the military. A sample of the newsletter can be found in Appendix G.

The other component in the recruitment messages included a link to an online participant qualification questionnaire. This questionnaire collected background demographic information regarding their connection to the military and facts about their

military service. Using Qualtrics skip logic feature, participants were guided through one to 25 questions. Students who identified as men in the qualification questionnaire completed one question before being brought to the end of the questionnaire. Students were thanked and reminded this study sought to interview WSV. Conversely, through the skip logic WSV were guided up to 25 questions. The total number of questions varied depending on responses. For example, if a women student veteran responded “no” to the question on deployment, she did not answer the question on number of times deployed. A complete online participant qualification questionnaire can be found in Appendix H.

Participant interviews were conducted from November 2018 into January 2019. Sixteen individuals began the online participant questionnaire. Four participants did not complete the questionnaire or identified as a man, which precluded them from participating in this research study. Additionally, two respondents identified as graduate students, thus precluded them from participating in the study. A graduate student also completed the online participate questionnaire for the pilot study. A total of three graduate students volunteered to be in the study but were not selected. Finally, two respondents identified they did not want to participate in the study.

The remaining eight participants were contacted for face-to-face interviews. I emailed the participants directly to setup an interview time. I included the informed consent with this initial direct email. Of the eight participants invited for an initial interview, six completed the face-to-face interview process. The full descriptions of participants and their demographics can be found in Chapter 4.

Data Collection

Data was collected through face-to-face, semi-structured individual interviews. On the continuum of interviewing techniques, semi-structured interviews allowed for the most flexibility to be responsive to each participant's statement (Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interviews were composed to frame the phenomenon at hand and through the sequential process of the participants' experience (Beven, 2014).

The questions were drafted in three sections: context about participant's military experience, current experience with the on-campus student veteran center and its staff, and imaginative reflection of what could be helpful for WSV. These questions were drafted in this framework to narrow in on the phenomenon at stake (Bevan, 2014). Additionally, at the end of the pilot study, several additional questions were added to provide reflection and insight to the questions themselves. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix I. Further, the interview protocol was mapped to the research questions, conceptual framework, methodology to provide further justification for interview questions. The mapping of in-depth interview protocol can be found in Appendix J.

Prior to the interviews beginning, I reviewed the informed consent with participants. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using a third-party service. The interviews were conducted on campus during business hours at sites other than the student veteran center. The initial face-to-face meeting lasted approximately 25-30 minutes and the follow-up interview lasted approximately 45 mins. This duration allowed the interview to occur between two class meetings or an opening in their daily schedule.

Using Bevan's (2014) framework to narrow in on the phenomenon, I established the purpose of the first meeting was to ask the questions on their past military experience. While the second face-to-face meeting was focused more on their current experience at the research site. Additionally, through a shorter first encounter, I was also able to build rapport with participants. The interview timeline and process for the full study can be found in Appendix K.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed through several processes before identifying the final themes and findings. I used the following to conduct my analysis process: (a) reflection memos; (b) open coding; and (c) codebook development. This process allowed me to make sense out of the data and began to make meaning of WSV experiences (Merriam, 1998). These multiple analysis processes provided an interactive opportunity to sift through the data to begin make sense. Making meaning or sense out of the data comprised of consolidation, reduction and interpretation of the data (Merriam, 1998).

Upon completing each face-to-face interview, I drafted reflection research memos to capture my first impressions and thoughts after completing the interview (Stake, 1995). Research memos allowed me to identify participant statements I needed to verify in the member checking process. The process of drafting reflection memos gave me the opportunity to rely on my impressions and was a suggested practice for novice researchers (Stake, 1995). Finally, research memos were an initial source to begin identifying codes from my reflective thoughts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Each interview was transcribed using a third-party transcription service. I then verified the transcripts by reading while listening to the audio recordings. This process provided a secondary period to making reflections. The process of concurrently reviewing transcripts allowed for simultaneous data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Merriam, 1998).

My data analysis included open coding through first and second round coding processes. First round coding allowed me to identify the initial codes (Saldaña, 2013). I used an initial or open coding process to analyze the data in the first round. Initial or open codes are coded themes developed the researcher based on the direction the interpretation of the data (Charmaz, 2006). The open coding process allowed me to remain open to the various topics or theoretical directions the data took me (Charmaz, 2006). Once initial codes were completed, I was able to sort and categorize them into various groupings (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). During the process of sorting and categorizing the initial codes, I began to make sense of the data and began to make meaning of the women student veterans' experiences. This process of making meaning allowed me to link open codes together.

Once I established the open codes, I used a secondary coding analysis. Secondary analysis is the process where the research can start to identify meaning and linking conceptual ideas together (Saldaña, 2013). I used an axial coding process to tie the codes together. Axial codes are developed when relationships between open codes are lined together (Saldaña, 2013). I derived themes of data and link them together to help

illustrate the phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). From the axial codes I created a codebook and coding framework.

To document the codes and themes, I created two documents which served as a codebook and coding framework (Saldaña, 2013). A codebook serves as a tool to compile and document the codes the researcher records during their analysis (Saldaña, 2013). The codebook was the initial document I created. I listed all the various codes I identified in my analysis and then grouped them together into major themes. I identified eight themes each with a varying number of sub-themes or codes within. I developed the codebook along with the description of the code and short citations of literature which helped me develop the theme and code. An example of my codebook can be found in Appendix L.

From the codebook, I utilized the conceptual model to help develop my coding framework. For the secondary research question related to experiences and perceptions of campus support services, I used the axial codes identified and further linked them to themes within a conceptual model (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). One conceptual model used in my study was Vacchi' (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support. I linked my coded themes to themes consistent within the model of student veteran support (Vacchii, 2011, 2013). This coding framework simplified my overall process and conceptualized how the various themes and codes fit together. Once I had my codebook and coding framework established, I was able to re-read the transcripts for a third to ensure congruence (Saldaña, 2013).

The coding framework was a way for me to conceptually visualize the overall phenomenon of women student veterans' experiences. I used my codes and identified examples and quotes from the interviews which illustrated the code and its description.

Trustworthiness

A distinctive difference between quantitative and qualitative research methods is within the way data is validated and determined reliable (Stake, 1995). Case study design provides an opportunity for analytical generalization rather than statistical (Yin, 1994). While validity and reliability are traditionally associated to quantitative data, I selected Lincoln and Guba's (1985) approach to address the trustworthiness of the qualitative data collected. The four criteria used to judge the quality of the work were credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility is the congruency of participants' views to the researcher's interpretation of the views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is built from the depth of data gathered (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017; Patton, 1990). In my study, credibility was established from thick descriptions, member checking, and peer reviewing.

Thick descriptions of data provide an in-depth understanding of the setting and contexts of the experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thick descriptions of participants' experiences were gathered in my study by using a phenomenological approach to interviewing participants (Bevan, 2014). The depth of data was ensured by constructing the semi-structured interview questions in three contexts: women's past experiences in the military, women's current experiences within

the student veteran center and with the resource staff, and imaginative reflection of what could be helpful for WSV. This three-prong interviewing approach ensured I captured the general understanding of the phenomenon (Bevan, 2014; Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998). Further, in chapter 4 I provided thick descriptions of participants' lived military experience through their matriculation at the research site. I also provided a thick description of the research site as the case identified in my study.

Next, I was able to ensure the credibility of my data through a member checking process. Member-checking is the process through which the researcher checks the accuracy of the researcher's findings with participants after the initial data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through the member-checking process, the participant has the opportunity to review the researcher's major findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To complete member-checking, I sent participants transcripts of their respective interviews to verify the accurate statements they made during our time. Through member checking I also used my research memos and initial coding to follow-up with participants to ensure I had accurately interpreted the statements they made during the interview (Hoepfl, 1997; Merriam, 1998). For example, as I completed my first read-through of the transcript, I also followed-up via email with specific questions if I did not understand the statement made by the participant.

Finally, through the use of peer reviewing I called upon a PhD prepared colleague, who was familiar with qualitative research design, to comment on my data collection process and analysis (Merriam, 1998). Peer reviewing or debriefing is the process of an outside reviewer examination of the researcher's analysis process and

findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Through their review, the peer reviewer can ask the researcher questions or provide comments so that the data can resonate with others. These comments aided in monitoring my assumptions which could have influenced the findings. Peer reviewing assisted in the creditability of the data, as well as, the conformability and dependability discussed shortly.

Transferability of data is another approach to judge qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Hoefpl (1997) suggested transferability, “depends on the degree of similarity between the original situation and the situation to which it is transferred” (p. 59). Rather than achieving generalizable results, my qualitative goal was to create data that was transferable. To create transferable findings, I provided a detailed description of my methodology, the case setting or research site (including the campus resource staff), participants, and the interview questions. These rich descriptions allow future researchers to determine the closeness of their case sites to my study and determine if the findings are transferrable (Merriam, 1998).

Finally, dependability and conformability ensure findings are consistent and valid (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability refers to whether research findings are consistent (Nowell et al., 2017). Conformability determines whether the researchers’ findings come directly from the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) cited conformability was met when credibility, transferability and dependability are all met (Nowell et al., 2017). To reach consistency, I provided my positionality and triangulated the data in the methods and analysis processes. As a researcher, my positionality within the study contributed to my understanding and interpretation of participants’ statements. This positionally aided in the

conformability of the study. I also used a peer review or debriefing process to enhance the validity of my interpretation. The peer review process allows a researcher external from the study to ask questions and further interpret the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This process added great value in helping refine my codebook and coding framework.

Through the uses of thick descriptions, member checking, peer reviewing, and positionality statement I ensured the trustworthiness of my study. Yin, 1994). The four criteria used to judge the quality of the work was through creditability, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter Summary

This study explored the experiences WSV had on a college campus. Through WSV's descriptions, this study sought to explore how their military experience influenced their transition to higher education. Further, this study explored perceptions of campus veteran resources available to them once enrolled (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). The purpose of this study was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV. Thus, this study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

Through this investigation, more women's voices were added to the conversation on student veterans in higher education. This study also identified specific needs of women engaging in the student veteran centers, which are aimed to support them.

To address the research questions, this study employed a phenomenological case study design. This qualitative method allowed for women student veteran participants to share their experiences so higher education professionals can begin to construct an understanding of what WSV need. The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. Data was analyzed using a thematic coding process. Transcripts were verified as initial data analysis was conducted. A pilot study informed the full study methodology.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

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design, WSV's experiences at the research site were unique to the support structures available specifically at the research site.

The study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. To inform the study, I completed a pilot study in the spring of 2018. The IRB Approval of the pilot study can be found in Appendix A. The changes applied from the pilot study to the final methodology were outlined in Chapter 3. The pilot study process changed my conceptual framework as well as face-to-face interview sequence. As a result, an amended IRB was submitted for a full study. The amended IRB was determined not necessary and I was able to move forward in my study. The approval from IRB to move forward can be found in Appendix B.

Participants

Participant interviews were conducted from November 2018 into January 2019. Participants were recruited through an email newsletter distributed to self-identified student veterans on campus and a student veterans' organization Facebook page. Due to timing of the institution's military appreciation events, holiday breaks, and final examinations, the timing of the academic calendar made it difficult to recruit for participants.

Sixteen individuals began the online participant questionnaire. Four participants did not complete the questionnaire or identified as men, which precluded them from participating in this research study. Additionally, two respondents identified as graduate students, thus precluded them from participating in the study. Finally, two respondents identified they did not want to participate in the study. The remaining eight participants

were contacted for an initial face-to-face interview. Of the eight participants invited for an initial interview, six completed the face-to-face interview process.

Participants selected pseudonyms and remained anonymous throughout the interview and data analysis. The use of pseudonyms was a recommended ethical guideline to ensure anonymity of participants (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). The demographic characteristics of participants can be found in Table 4.1. Following the table of demographic characteristics, brief profiles outlined a personal history of each participant and their path of military service to the research site.

Table 4.1. Demographics of Participants

Name	Military Status	Branch	Years Served	Military Occupation	Enrollment to Institution	Application Type	Previous Degrees Earned
Adeshola	Reservist	Navy	8	Hospital Corpsman	2014	Transfer	-
Vivian	Reservist	Air Force	5	Medic	2017	Transfer	-
Savannah	Discharged	Navy	6	Communications Electrician	2018	Transfer	Associate's
Stephanie	Discharged	Navy	3	Hospital Corpsman	2016	Transfer	-
Leigh	Reservist	Army	2	Veterinary Technician	2018*	Transfer/Former Student Returning	Bachelor's
Lynn	Discharged	Marine Corps	18	Ammunition Technician	2018	Transfer	Bachelor's Associates Master's

* Returned in 2018 to University as a Former Student Returning; this is a classification the University gave the student; she had begun her first Bachelor's degree in 2013.

Participant Profiles

Adeshola. Adeshola joined the Navy in 2009. Her primary reason for joining the military was access to educational benefits the VA affords after service. She attended an in-state four-year college for two years and accumulated a lot of debt. She quickly determined she would need an alternative path to help pay for college.

Adeshola wanted the military occupation of hospital corpsman. She had desired to go into nursing for her educational path, and this occupation was the right fit for her path. Because they were only accepted men for the hospital corpsman position at the time of her enlistment, Adeshola had to select sonar technician.

When her military enlistment contract ended in 2014, she signed a new contract as a Reservist and applied to college to use her VA educational benefits. A benefit to a new contract with the Reserves was she to change her military occupation to hospital corpsman. Additionally, when she applied to college she was accepted as a nursing major at the research site. She selected the research site institution as it was considered a quality in-state educational institution.

Adeshola enrolled and attended the required new student orientation in Fall 2014. The research site offered an additional veteran-specific orientation which she additionally attended. During this orientation she was introduced to the student veterans center available on campus. From the first semester she was enrolled, she utilized the student veteran center.

Vivian. During her second year of college, Vivian committed to the military through an Air Force Reservist contract. In high school she was part of an Air Force Junior ROTC program.

After high school, she initially attended an out-of-state four-year college through an Army ROTC program. Once completing her first year at the out-of-state school she experienced a great financial burden and medical issues related compounded by the ROTC experience. She expressed her concern the Army did not care about her injuries and felt she would receive better care through the Air Force. She chose to change her ROTC program to Air Force Reserves. The change of programs continued her access financial assistance for college. Vivian additionally transferred to a small in-state four-year college.

Vivian started out as a psychology major desiring to help veterans with PTSD. Upon her transfer to the small in-state college, she changed her major to nursing. After one semester at the small in-state college, she determined she wanted a bigger, more academically challenging, college environment like her first institution. She transferred again to the current research site in Spring 2017.

To fulfil her Reservist contract, she reports to her duty station one weekend each month. She initially was a part of a unit in a neighboring state, but the unit shut down and individuals assigned were dispersed to other units. Her current unit was in the same state as her current institution. At the time of her interview, Vivian was a student leader within the student veterans' organization at the research site.

Savannah. Savannah joined the Navy shortly after graduating from high school in 2011. She cited several reasons for joining the Navy. First, she felt her parents were controlling her throughout high school. Joining the Navy was a decision she could make for herself and thus take control of her own life. Secondly, she was concerned about the financial control her parents could have should she had enrolled directly into college after high school. The military essentially offered her the freedom she wanted for the first time in her life at the time. The military contract additionally helped her identify a way to pay for college in the future.

Upon the end of her military contract Savannah was offered a promotion which would have set her for a longer career path in the Navy and a change in her duty station. She elected to end her contract and enroll in college. She is originally from the South and wanted to return to the region for college. She found the research site through a former boyfriend; he was familiar with the institution. She investigated the school and the quality of academic programs appealed to her.

During her time in the Navy Savannah completed an associates degree remotely. She applied to the research site as a transfer student and was accepted initially as an electrical engineer. Immediately upon attending her required new student orientation, she changed her major to finance.

Savannah learned about the student veterans center at the research site when she met a fellow veteran in class. He informed her about the center and she began to utilize the space. In addition to utilizing the student veterans center, she also was employed as a

VA work study for the student veteran center at the time of her interview for this research study.

Stephanie. Stephanie had a unique path through her military service. She was the youngest of three siblings. Both her older brothers completed military service in the U.S. Marine Corps. Her eldest brother was killed in action in Afghanistan.

During her college search process in high school, she determined she and her family would incur a great financial burden to pay for college. She elected to join the Navy based on the inspiration to follow in her older brothers' footsteps combined with the knowledge that the military would eventually pay for college.

Stephanie joined the Navy in 2012. Upon signing her contract, she completed the required testing to determine her military occupation. She scored high enough she was able to select any military occupation she desired. At the time hospital corpsman was an available occupation in the Navy. Once in the Navy, Stephanie completed the required boot camp and A-school (Navy training program) before being placed in her first station unit. During the first station assignment her path deviates greatly compared to other participants.

The Navy offered a unique program which took enlisted personnel and extended admission to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. This program was a unique opportunity which sailors who demonstrated high training scores combined with observed leadership potential are offered the opportunity to formalize their education at the federal four-year service academy. Sailors must be recommended for this service academy program and then apply for acceptance.

Stephanie was identified by a superior officer as a potential candidate for the service academy program and encouraged to apply. After only a short time in her first unit, Stephanie was accepted and was sent to the Naval Academy Preparatory School (NAPS) in Newport, Rhode Island. NAPS is a year-long academic and naval training program that prepares students to fully enroll in the U.S. Naval Academy. Student enrolled at NAPS may additionally be high school students who were conditionally accepted to the U.S. Naval Academy and must complete a year at NAPS. Once Stephanie completed her year at NAPS, she was offered full admission to the U.S. Naval Academy and enrolled in Summer 2015.

Stephanie completed her plebe requirements (first year student at the U.S. Naval Academy). After completing her first full year at the U.S. Naval Academy she determined the career path of sailor was not what she desired and began to look to transfer to another institution.

Stephanie applied and was accepted to research institution in Fall 2016. She essentially transferred from one four-year institution to another. No other participant in this study attended or transferred from a service academy.

During Stephanie's transition to the research site institution, she attended new student orientation and a recommended student veterans' orientation. The transition programs introduced her to the student veteran center. In addition to utilizing the student veteran center, she also was employed as a VA work study for the veterans' center at the time of her interview for this research study.

Leigh. Leigh's background was unique in that she was enrolled at the research site for a second time. She had completed her four-year degree in 2016. Upon completion of her degree, she felt she did not know what to do with her degree. At the same time, she attended her brother's Army basic training graduation. Her brother and stepfather both had served in the Army, so Leigh was familiar with the military lifestyle. At her brother's graduation she reflected she liked the military lifestyle and wanted to pursue her own military career.

Leigh joined the Army in 2016 and served as a veterinary care specialist. She returned to the research site as an enrolled undergraduate student to further her studies in veterinary medicine. Leigh completed two years of active duty before re-enrolling as an undergraduate student. At the time of her interview, Leigh was fulfilling her military contract in the Army Reserves and reporting for duty on weekends throughout the month.

Lynn. Lynn served the longest in the military compared to all other participants. Lynn was in the U.S. Marines for 18 years before separating from the military and starting her educational journey. At the time of the interview for this study, Lynn was working on her 4th academic degree. She had previously completed an associate's, bachelor's, and master's degree. She was currently enrolled at the research site for a second undergraduate degree in modern languages. Her aspirations were to teach nursing in a bilingual program.

Lynn is a self-described, non-traditional student by age. She did not disclose her actual age in the interview. Lynn described she was clearly older than many of her academic peers, and even some of her professors and academic advisors.

Lynn had not physically utilized the student veteran center as much as other participants of this study. She, however, reviewed the monthly newsletter and communications the veteran center put out for student veterans. Further, she did use her final duration of her VA educational benefits, therefore utilized the VA certifying official at the research site.

Coded Themes

Interviews were coded using a framework I developed after completing my initial coding process. I identified eight coded themes. Coded themes were organized by the secondary research questions.

Four coded themes were identified to understand how WSVs military experience influenced their transition to the research site. The coded themes were:

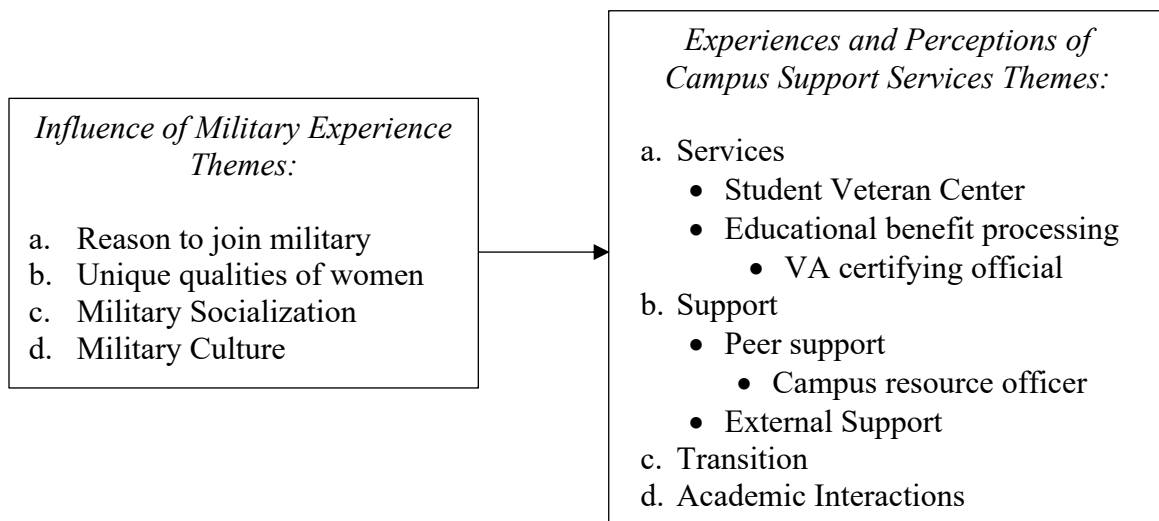
- a) Reason to join the military;
- b) Unique qualities of women;
- c) Military socialization;
- d) Military culture.

The second coded themes were guided by Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support. I coded for their overall perceptions of the veterans' resources and staff through:

- (a) services;
- (b) support;
- (c) transition;
- (d) academic interactions.

The women student veteran’s experiences coding framework is depicted in Figure 4.1. Each of these themes had related sub-themes. The sub-themes can be found in Appendix M. The findings are presented by the secondary research questions’ each coded themes and sub-themes.

Figure 4.1 Women Student Veterans’ Experiences: Coding Framework



Note: The secondary research question specifically noted WSVs’ perceptions of the student veteran center and support staff. This figure included those specific sub-themes. There are additional sub-themes to each thematic finding.

Influences of Military Experience

Through the interview dialogue, it became apparent women’s military experience influenced their transition to the college setting and the research site. The influences were thematically coded: (a) reason to join the military; (b) unique qualities of women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture.

Reason to Join the Military

Women's reasons to join the military greatly varied, but they each distinctively discussed the impetus to join. Sub-themes within the greater theme of reason to join included: (a) general interest in the military; (b) family history; (c) a potential career path; and (d) access to educational benefits.

Several themes overlapped, for example, family history and potential career. The final sub-theme, access to educational benefits, was the common thread among all participants. The financial benefit of the military paying for college influenced decision to join the military.

General Interest in the Military. Several participants noted they had not initially considered the military as part of their future. Lynn and Vivian, however, each expressed a general interest in the military.

Lynn had a friend in high school who was generally interested in the Marines. The recruiter encouraged the friend to bring two of his friends along to learn more about the Marines; Lynn was one of the friends he brought. Lynn had not contemplated the military though high school, but after her initial interactions with the recruiters, she felt it was a good opportunity. Lynn recalled, "It was actually a complete accident, and I actually joined two separate times...I thought 'Yeah this doesn't sound like that bad of an idea.' Kept going back, and talking to them [the recruiter] and stuff and I decided to join."

Lynn was separated from the military shortly after she began the Delayed Entry Program because she became pregnant. After Lynn had two children, she decided she wanted to continue her military interest and enlisted again.

Vivian's interest in the military was also because of her career interest. She expressed, "I wanted to do PTSD at the time and the Army has a lot..." She had completed an Air Force Junior ROTC program in high school, so she continued her military interest through the military ROTC programs available.

General interest in the military for participants stemmed mostly from high school experience. For other participants the military experience was salient in their lives longer than high school.

Family History. Leigh, Stephanie, and Lynn, all noted a family history with the military. Their connection to the military then became their reason to join the military. Leigh recalled, "My father served for 24 years, my brother was in...I went to his basic training graduation and I realized how much I missed it and how much I missed being in the [military] lifestyle." Leigh's experience attending her brother's military graduation sparked her interest in creating a military path for herself.

Stephanie also joined the military because of family. She joined the Navy to follow in the footsteps of her older brother. Stephanie recalled, "...my brother was my biggest inspiration. Other than that, my family had no real military connections...[I] just kind of following in the footsteps of my older brother that was a Marine."

Lynn was proud of her family's history of military service. She stated, "...my dad was in the Army, all my uncles were in the Army, so I'm the only Marine in the family." Lynn was particularly proud that she chose her own path by going into the Marines.

Savannah stated, "My father was in the Coast Guard," additionally, her grandfather and a few uncles served in the military, but she did not indicate their service as a reason she found interest in the military.

Some participants had familial connections to the military, making their reason to join the military tied closer to their family history. For other participants the military offered a potential path to their career interests.

Career Path Potential. Several participants noted the military would provide them the start to a career path. Leigh, as stated in combination of family history, joined to combine her passion for the Army with her academic degree. Leigh completed her first bachelor's in wildlife and fisheries biology. In the Army, she had an opportunity to serve and use her degree as a veterinary tech. She stated, "I found something [veterinary tech] in the Army that I was passionate about and I just pursued it." Leigh was now enrolled for her second bachelor's degree to more firmly define her career path in the military. Leigh's current major was animal and veterinary science.

Adeshola had no previous interest in the military, but upon the need to fund her college education, she determined she could get experience in her career path in the military. Upon her enlistment she had hoped to be selected for a corpsman position (Naval medic). At the timing of her enlistment, however, they were only accepting male corpsman. Adeshola explained:

All I knew I wanted to do because it [corpsman] has to do with medical, and that's what I intend on doing. So the [recruiting] officer there, he'll say that corpsman isn't open for females at that moment but they're more granted towards men so that they can go out and help Marines and what not.

Adeshola was given a limited selection of military occupations and chose sonar technician. Upon her discharge from the military and enlistment into the Reserves, she was able to change her occupation from sonar technician to corpsman and was pursuing a path toward nursing school.

Vivian also noted the military could support her potential career path and interest. While enrolled in high school she was part of the Air Force Junior ROTC program and had an academic interest in psychology. Vivian recalled, "I wanted to do PTSD at the time and the Army has a lot." She was interested in working with soldiers who had PTSD. A military career path provided her the opportunity to work with PTSD patients.

Participants found the military influenced a path to their career or career interests. Participants formalized their career interests through a degree program using VA educational benefits; afforded to them by military service. The access to VA educational benefits was one of the greatest assets for participants to gain from joining the military.

Access to Educational Benefits. The most common theme of women's reasons to join the military included the financial benefit of military educational benefits. Each participant highlighted how the VA educational benefits influenced their decision to join the military.

Adeshola was confident in her decision to join for access to the benefits. She had previously attended college but had to drop out because of building college debt. She stated:

I never had any intention of going into the military. I didn't necessarily go in with a plan, just as far as the end result was getting that 9/11 Bill and I ended up doing whatever I needed to do for that.

Adeshola had learned about the military funding a college degree through a family friend. Although she had not initially considered military service, the idea of college funding was her motivation.

Savannah and Stephanie also had access to educational benefits in the back of their minds when they joined the military. Savannah primarily joined the military as a way to control her own life and separate herself from her parents (whom she perceived were very controlling). The access to the financial educational benefits was an added benefit that would remove additional parental control.

Likewise, Stephanie joined primarily following in her brother's footsteps. The added aspect of accessing educational benefits relieved the cost of tuition. To further support college costs, Stephanie selected an in-state institution. Stephanie shared:

It [college] was also a financial burden for my family.... so it was a bit harder for me to think about just going anywhere I wanted and just seemed like a lot of stress on my parents to have to take out loans.

Leigh and Lynn both utilized their VA educational benefits, but different than the Post 9/11 benefits. Leigh stated, "I have certain veteran war tuition waiver because of my

stepdad and I also have chapter 1606 benefits.” Chapter 1606 benefits are VA educational benefits offered to Reserve servicemembers (Educational Assistance for Members of the Selected Reserve, 2011). Later during the interview, Leigh explained her stepdad was a Purple Heart recipient (awarded to soldiers wounded during war).

Lynn used tuition assistance while on active duty to complete her associates degree. She stated she used her Post 9/11 for her first bachelor’s and master’s degrees (nursing education). Lynn stated, “My goal is to move back to Arizona, and teach in a bilingual nursing program.” Due to Leigh and Lynn’s service type and duration, they were each utilizing different types of VA educational benefits other than the Post 9/11 benefits.

Reason to join the military theme summary. Each participant had distinctive reasons why they joined the military: (a) general interest in the military; (b) family history; (c) a potential career path; and (d) access to educational benefits. These reasons influenced their college transitions. Yet, all participants described the underlying reason was access to VA educational benefits. Once in the military, their personal qualities combined with their military experiences influenced their college experience.

Unique Qualities of Women

The next thematic finding which women’s military experience influenced their college transition were the unique personal qualities in which they each had. The qualities were self-described personality traits to attitudes which their military experience made stronger or solidified within them. The sub-themes within the main theme of unique

qualities included: (a) leaders; (b) helping others; (c) professionalism; (d) independent; and (e) information seeking.

Leaders. All participants discussed leadership or being a leader during their time in the military. Adeshola, Savannah, and Stephanie served in various leadership roles within their training units and duty station units. I included a more specific analysis of their military leadership in the military socialization section. However, because of their military experience they all had a quality of being a leader.

Vivian and Adeshola both described qualities of being initially being ‘backstage leader.’ Vivian explained “I don’t mind doing everything so everyone else looks great, but don’t put the spotlight on me.” Her leadership qualities advanced her to a leadership position within her unit as a cardio-pulmonary resuscitator (CPR) instructor.

Vivian took her value in leadership a step further when she joined a student organization at one of her institutions. Her second institution of enrollment only had two Greek organizations. She took it upon herself to research the core values of each organization to better align herself with that group. Vivian decided:

I was not that college girl that just went and oh let’s rush to go Greek. I was like no, I want to see what you’re about. An [anonymous Greek organization] actually was about building strong girls and having strong leadership models. I was like, “I want that one.”

Vivian validated her value of leadership by researching and joining an organization which she perceived to also value leadership.

Adeshola identified the military as the catalyst which changed her as a leader. She stated:

I got to be more involved in things and actually take on more roles that had me in a place where I was actually having to talk to a big amount of people, rather than staying in little roles where I'm behind the scenes, or whatever. It [leadership role] actually was a good outlet as far as that is concerned.

Adeshola appreciated and valued her military experience in developing her leadership role.

The quality of being a leader influenced women's military leadership roles and their experiences at the college setting. The influence of a leader quality is discussed further in participants' leadership skills and roles during military socialization. The next finding related to the unique qualities of women, was their attention to helping others.

Helping others. Several participants described their genuine interest in helping others. Savannah's military occupation was related to communications, but she oftentimes found herself helping peers with financial planning. She recalled:

I had a superior that kind of like noticed that I was financially savvy, so I was helping people make budgets and helping them kind of understand their retirement plans, and then he kind of placed me in a collateral position for a financial counselor.

Savannah's desire to help others morphed into a leadership role and eventually into her academic path as well.

Vivian's quality of being helpful stemmed from her own military transitional experience. As she was transferring from one reserve unit out-of-state to a reserve unit in-state, she found it hard to engage with the new unit. When a colleague soon followed and was transitioning to her unit, Vivian stepped up to be helpful during the transition. Vivian helped her peer by guiding her through tasks. She said:

Remembering what I have to go do trying to help her facilitate that. That I think helped because I know how it felt to be kinda like an outsider so I try to and be a little more proactive and I think that's helped a lot.

Vivian desired to support others during their transition as she reflected on her own transitional experience both between units and between colleges.

Participants described their interest in helping others while in the military, which influenced their desire to help others during their college transition as well. Helping others in a professional manner was also a quality participants described.

Professionalism. Savannah, Adeshola, and Vivian all spoke about being professional or valuing professionalism. The military either helped them build this value or helped reinforce the value of professionalism. Savannah recognized the qualities of being a professional and its importance to her when she joined a business fraternity. When Savannah was introduced to the business fraternity, she recalled the student who recruited her. Savannah recalled, "...this girl [other student] is super professional. I want to be like her." She went on, "...the fraternity is helping develop me professionally."

Adeshola recalled she was raised valuing professionalism and maturity. She stated:

Basically, in school and before the military and even when I got in, I kept the same mentality and personality I've always had. Whenever I'm out, it's just this professional attitude and just getting the job done. That's how our mother raised us, so it was like you could act crazy at home, but when you're doing things that are going down as evaluations and someone's looking at you out in public, just act sensible and professional self.

Adeshola described how her military experience was an extension of her instilled family value of maturity and professionalism.

Vivian noted the military very much was an influence on her value of professionalism. The military changed her. She explained, "I feel like I've become a little bit more professional about it. I know when to... it's so much easier with the military, when to flip it on and when to flip it off."

Participants described the importance or value of professionalism. Professionalism was a quality the military helped instill in participants. The military also contributed to women's sense of confidence and independence.

Independent. A quality that was salient in many participants was their independence. For some they noted the military clearly helped establish this quality.

Savannah stated her desire to be independent and free from her parents was a main reason she chose to join the military. She felt in high school her parents were very controlling over her. She saw her independence and decision to join as, "A way to control my own life." Her quality of being independent led her to join the military.

Lynn and Leigh both suggested direct ways the military instilled independence in them. Lynn said “[The military] made me a lot more independent... I’m also very independent as a follower, it’s like ‘okay, you tell me what to do, and I’m gonna do it. I don’t need any babysitting, or anything like that, I’m just gonna get to it.”

Leigh had similar sentiments about the military instilling independence. She said, “I feel like I’m doing things that other women are not doing and that’s exciting and empowering.” The military allowed for participants to develop empowerment which manifested into independence by the expectations it set.

Participants’ military experience helped establish their personal quality of independence. Another quality participants described, however, was more innate. Participants discussed their willingness to seek out information.

Information seeking. One of the qualities several participants suggested was that of being natural researcher. This quality particularly stood out to me as it relates to asking for help and seeking support.

Lynn stated she had thoroughly researched how her VA educational benefits would be used when she enrolled at the research site. She stated, “I researched all that [support for veterans] before I ever applied.” She affirmed, “If I don’t know something...I need to know this. Let me go find it.”

Leigh also used resources and web sites heavily to identify answers to academic questions she had. She said, “People know more than me about all of these things and if I can get as much knowledge as possible...” Leigh and Lynn both described their desire and willingness to seek out information.

Unique qualities of women theme summary. Unique qualities of women theme was identified by the various self-described personality traits or attitudes they had before or established during their military experience. The sub-themes within the main theme of unique qualities included: (a) leaders; (b) helping others; (c) professionalism; (d) independent; and (e) information seeking. This theme had influenced their college experience through ways they gathered information to aid in their transition, or how they got involved on campus.

Military Socialization

Another component of context which framed the women student veterans' experiences was military socialization. Socialization into any institution is a process in which individuals begin to learn the knowledge, skills, and culture associated to that professional environment (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Military socialization was the process to train and develop its soldiers to establish a sense of identity and commitment to the military. Based on this definition of socialization, I categorized the sub-themes related to the process of learning the knowledge and skills for job completion and success.

The military socialization had six sub-themes. Each sub-theme was related to military job duties or the experience surrounding the fulfillment of those job duties. The sub-themes I identified were: (a) leadership (skill); (b) mentorship (formal and informal); (c) training and job placement; (d) personal development; (e) military transitioning; and (f) veteran identity.

Leadership (Skill). While participants demonstrated the quality of being a leader, it was through their military experience they developed the skill of leadership. According to participants, military exposed women to various leadership positions and emphasized the value of leadership. The leadership experiences participants were afforded in the military, thus was also instilled as a valued quality of women as highlighted in the previous theme.

Vivian's demonstrated proficiency in her job as a medic yielded her serving in a leadership position. She recalled, "[The military] definitely pushed me to be a leader... they've pushed me up to the CPR instructor... they push you to succeed."

Stephanie was placed in a leadership role for her core school class. She was in charge of hundreds of other peers. Stephanie recalled, "In peer training settings, I was almost always the designated leader." Stephanie served as a starboard watch leader (military leader of a small group within her division). Then when she was at her first duty station, her leadership role was disinfectant representative; she described the role as "...really small stuff, nothing big." Stephanie chuckled describing that leadership role.

Savannah was put into her leadership role as a financial counselor. This leadership role eventually would influence her academic major at her current institution. Savannah remembered:

I had a superior that kind of like noticed that I was financially savvy, so I was helping people make budgets... he kind of placed me in a collateral position for financial counselor. So people that made NCO, or non-commission officer, had to come meet with me before they could get paid for non-commission officer.

Savannah's personal interest in helping colleagues influenced not only her leadership role in the military but her future career interest as well.

Adeshola volunteered to serve in several leadership roles within the military. Adeshola described the military's process of using leadership roles to implement key programs or disseminate key information. She described, "There's things that the big Navy wants to be implemented within that Naval ship or that unit." Adeshola took on the leadership role. She stated:

I'm very interested in this particular topic, there's no reason for me to shy away from it if I feel like I can be very good at it. So I took on roles like sexual assault advocate on the ship. I also took on the training petty officer for my actual department rather than just my unit.

Adeshola was responsible for training people working with all types of combat systems, not just her unit which was sonar technicians.

The leadership skill building participants gained in the military influenced their leadership roles once enrolled. For example, Stephanie and Savannah both served as VA work study students in the student veteran center. While Vivian was a leader within the student veterans' organization. Additionally, after the data collection of this study, Savannah informed me she was elected to a leadership position in the student veterans' organization. Participant's leadership roles and development were supported by the military's use of mentor relationships.

Mentorship (Formal and Informal). The sub-theme of mentorship was very insightful. After the interviews, I gleaned how formalized or informal each branch

approached mentorship. Adeshola, Savannah, and Stephanie were all in the Navy and explicitly discussed the formality of a mentor and that relationship.

The Navy appeared to have required mentors, especially during transitional periods between duty stations. Mentors would help the new sailor get acquainted with the geographical area and duty station even prior to arrival. Savannah recalled they would correspond prior to arrival and the mentor would meet you upon your arrival (at the airport or bow of a ship).

Stephanie affirmed and described the mentorship as “comforting to having somebody [to] ask questions. I mean it’s always overwhelming to be the odd man out that doesn’t know anything.” Adeshola also stated:

It’s like if you have somebody that’s on your side and they’re on the ship with you, experiencing the things you’re experiencing, at the end of the day, they’re going to be able to say you should do this, or don’t worry about that, that’s not something you should worry about, ... Then they give you their own experiences, and it’s like I did this and it resulted way worse, so you’re in good hands, you’re great.

Stephanie and Adeshola had come to expect mentorship for their military transition and personal support.

Although the Navy’s approach to mentorship was required, it seemed it was fluid. Someone could be assigned a mentor, but if there was someone else a rank above that the mentee informally gotten to know, the mentor relationship could be re-formalized. I

found this insightful because the mentee really dictated what they needed from the mentorship relationship.

Savannah described her mentorship as starting off informal and how it grew into a formal relationship. At one point in her Naval experience, she thought she was interested in recruitment for the Navy. She spoke with the Naval staff responsible for educational programming and recruitment. She recalled, “He was a good person to talk to, to learn about the skills needed for that [recruitment] job.” She went on, “...the mentor was an information relationship at first, then our ship required everyone to have mentors, so I asked him to be my official mentor.”

Adeshola also expressed a similar experience. Her mentor was an informal individual whom she turned to for career development advice. Adeshola chose to look for individuals who had achieved the things she was interested in achieving for herself. She stated “It’s sorta like in a way that you’re choosing people that were the essence of what you already are, what you want to be so that they can encourage that to come out more.” Adeshola went on and reflected, “If I would have gone without a mentor, I feel like I definitely probably wouldn’t have gone the route I did or became a little bit more outspoken and involved.”

Leigh’s experience with mentorship was not as formalized as Adeshola’s, Savannah’s or Stephanie’s. Leigh consulted her instructor and military advisor in technical school while in the Army. He became her sounding board to discuss her military and academic future. She remembered, “They helped me decide that I’m gonna go back to school. I’m going to pursue becoming an officer and things like that instead of

just going active duty and getting stuck.” Her advisor guided her to her current academic path to receive more academic training. Once she completes her second degree, she will return to active duty status. The mentorship also contributed to her path towards her future career discussed later.

Lynn described the most informal mentorship. She learned about opportunities via word of mouth. Combined with her natural information seeking quality, Lynn described, “I’m a natural researcher anyway, so if I couldn’t find it... if somebody didn’t know, I was gonna go online and do my own research...but it was usually word of mouth, was the best way to find out.” An example of word of mouth was when she heard about the tuition assistance program. She said:

I think somebody just told me about it, they were like, ‘Well, you know you can get your college paid for while your on active duty.’ I’m like, ‘Yeah, I have a GI bill.’ They’re like ‘No, no, no.’ There’s this thing called tuition assistance,’ cause I had no idea.

Tuition assistance was a different educational benefit program the military offered. Additionally, tuition assistance was primarily provided for servicemembers while they are still active duty (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, 2015).

While in service, mentorship was a required experience for some participants. For others mentorship was more informal. Participants further described the qualities of the mentors who were supportive to them during their military experience.

Qualities of mentors. As a follow-up question about mentor relationships I asked what qualities mentors had which made them so helpful. Participants who had both formal and informal mentorships described their mentors as approachable; knowledgeable; interested in their success/advancement; good listeners or a sounding boards; funny; down-to-earth; professional; and sometimes no-nonsense. These qualities were helpful to hear as we dove further into our conversation about their experiences on campus with the qualities of campus support staff.

Training and job placement. The military, for several participants, provided them training and job placement that helped influence their academic planning. Savannah was a communications technician on her Naval ship but through her leadership role of financial counselor she determined the finance major was a better fit for her career path. She stated, “I liked helping people with their finances, so that led me to finance and financial planning route of finance.”

Vivian considered herself “very lucky” to have her military occupation. As a reservist she had the occupation of medic. She expressed this role was particularly hard for reservists to secure (due to popularity). Additionally, besides the training and skill set she has built in her role, she gained leadership and training skills as a CPR instructor. She stated, “They [the military] give you the skill to success. If you want to take on extra responsibilities, they’ll send...they swamp me with emails, hey we need this. Hey we need this. What do you want to do?”

Leigh also described how the military supported her in training and job placement for her career. She described:

I was really, really enjoying my time as a tango, as a vet tech, and I was like ‘well I just want to do this all the time. I feel so energized and like ‘hooah’ and really just like ‘yeah the Army.’ And I wanted to go active duty and I talked to my advisor and he’s like ‘Calm down, one second...Maybe think about going back to school if you’re really passionate.’ I had already a degree and they really wanted more for me.

Leigh’s supervisor and mentor supported her to seek out further training and degree completion in order for her to advance her military career.

Participants’ training and job placement influenced their college transition. Through their military job duties participants served in leadership roles which later influenced their academic path. Participants’ military job training and experience also influenced their own personal growth and development.

Personal development. In addition to training and job placement, the military exposed women to experiences which contributed to their personal development. Savannah described, “The military gave me a sense of purpose.” She learned about herself from her military experience. She stated, “I like to have purpose in my conversations, not talk about superficial things.” Savannah also recalled her military occupation required her to be responsible for her own time. She stated, “I maintained my own schedule. I had flexibility in my job and I was the main person to do the phone system. I liked what I did.”

While Adeshola stated the Navy helped her “get out of her shell” giving her the confidence to socialize and network more. She specified:

I got to be more involved in things and actually take on more roles that had me in a place where I was actually having to talk to a big amount of people, rather than staying in little roles where I'm behind the scenes.

Adeshola spoke highly of how the military overall contributed to her personal development. She valued her experience in the military.

When reflecting on her military service, Leigh also described her feeling of empowerment which contributed to her feeling of independence. Leigh expressed:

I feel empowered, I guess. I feel like I'm doing things that other women are not doing and that's exciting and empowering. It feels good, invigorating, I guess, and it makes me want to do more.

Adeshola and Leigh reflected on their internal personal development, while Stephanie's personal development was recognized by her leadership. Stephanie applied to a program where she would go from enlisted sailor to admission to the U.S. Naval Academy. She remembered, "There was a representative that came and was kind of handing out pamphlets.... then my chief was like, 'You would be a really good candidate for this. You should apply.' So, I applied." Stephanie's leadership recognized she had the qualities to be a successful Naval officer as a future career.

Military transitioning. The nature of the military had some participants transitioning from one military assignment to the next. Savannah and Lynn expressed unique experiences where they did not have many re-assignments. Savannah said, "I was in the same division my entire duration." Lynn also reflected, "Two units in 18 years."

While Stephanie described only being in each duty station for a short period before she would move to the next location. Stephanie expressed,

I definitely had a lot of questions every time I was transitioning to a new...because that is something that I guess I did do is move around a little bit between; boot camp, base school, and Texas, and then Beaufort and then Newport. Every time, I don't know, there was a lot of questions in I guess where am I going to be living? Who's going to show me around?

Stephanie explained, "you're all new together." Due to the support structure of the mentor program, however, she had someone to rely on to guide her through the transition. Participants were used to transitioning between institutions because of their experience transitioning between military units.

Veteran identity. The final sub-theme within military socialization is veteran identity development. As noted by Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001), socialization contributes to the identity and commitment to a field, in this case veteran identity and commitment to the military. Veteran identity development resonated with participants differently. Although, veteran identity was not the scope of the study, there were influences where women's veteran identity was present and certainly influenced their interest and engagement in veteran support services once enrolled on campus.

For example, Vivian made a point to designate herself as not a "true veteran" because she was serving through the Reserves. Leigh expressed a similar identity. While enrolled for her first bachelors degree, she enlisted in an Army Reserve unit. She elected

to not search for any veteran or military support services. She reflected, “I didn’t consider myself a veteran or military related then, so I didn’t talk to anybody about it, really.”

Interestingly, Adeshola, Savannah, Lynn, and Stephanie did not indicate one way or another the status or interpretation of their veteran identity. I also did not directly ask their perceptions of their veteran identity since that was not the scope of this study. However, based on participants’ descriptions and uses of support resources, I inferred they have a strong sense in veteran identity. As a result, their veteran identity has influenced their engagement in campus veteran support services.

Military socialization theme summary. Military socialization exposed women to a number of experiences which they carried over to their college transition. Their military socialization process trained and developed them into servicemembers. The military socialization sub-themes were related to military job duties or the experiences surrounding the fulfillment of those job duties. The sub-themes identified were: (a) leadership (skill); (b) mentorship (formal and informal); (c) training and job placement; (d) personal development; (e) military transitioning; and (f) veteran identity.

Military Culture

The final component of military experience which influenced women’s college transition was military culture. The military culture is the social construction of values, traditions, beliefs, ideas, and symbols historically directed by men (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Pawelczyk, 2014; Snyder, 2003).

Based on this definition of culture, I organized this theme into six sub-themes. The description of military culture was broken into five sub-themes. The sub-themes

were (a) camaraderie; (b) rank and order; (c) traditions; (d) social and gender identity dominance; and (e) sexual misconduct.

Camaraderie. Each participant described the military culture of being family-oriented, mostly in terms of camaraderie. Much of this feeling of camaraderie was the fact they lived and worked in such close quarters. Savannah described the Navy assigned her, her friends. She stated:

My division [was] essentially my friend group. We ate together. We slept in the same area together. We worked together. We went out in town together. We played fantasy football together... We did all these things, and it was they became your family.

Savannah had come to rely on her military peers as her military family. After Savannah's military experience, she continued to seek out a military family at her college campus.

Adeshola was concerned about initially joining the military but the family oriented-ness calmed her concerns. She reflected:

I was kind of worried. I was thinking I wasn't going to do that well, there's going to be high standards, but once I got in there, the family oriented-ness, the fact that is very diverse in gender, cultures, and what not, it just became a bit more relaxing and just helped me.

Adeshola spoke frequently about the family-feeling the military provided her. Despite some negative experiences she described, the comfort of having a the family-feeling was extremely important to her.

Vivian described the activities the units did together outside of the daily work experience aided in unit cohesion. Stephanie also described cohesion:

What I enjoyed the most about being [in] the military unit setting is just the camaraderie. Everybody's kind of going through the same either struggles or not struggles, and you're all doing it together. So, a lot of good friendships built.

Military socialization of teamwork created a culture of camaraderie which women came to appreciate and expect.

Rank and order. A component of military culture is rank, order, hierarchy, and structure (Redmond et al., 2015; Schading, 2007). The participants described how this culture characteristic was experienced. Rank, order and hierarchy impacted what, when, and how participants sought information or asked for help. Vivian described seeking support or help depended on the nature of the question, but she typically followed rank order.

Adeshola described when she was in the lower ranks she would observe to learn from others. She reflected on when she was at a lower rank she:

I was mostly expected to lend in and start understanding what the whole ship life was about... we're expected to do different exercises and different responsibilities are expect of us in that role there. It was mostly just me falling into the place and learning from all those that are higher ranking than me at that point in time.

Adeshola and Vivian both noted that they followed the military's rank and order, even when learning from peers or asking for help.

Traditions. The military has many traditions, but one I found intriguing that was discussed was that of uniforms. The tradition in the military was last name placed on the right chest placement of the uniform. Savannah recalled this tradition. She stated, “I don’t remember names very well because in the military everyone has their last name on their uniform. I’m good at remembering faces but not names.” As a result, servicemembers would refer to each other by their last names or at least had a visual clue as to their last name.

Gender and racial identity dominance. My interview protocol included probing questions on how participants’ military experience affected them as a woman (see Appendix I). While this study was not solely focused on gender identity, it was a variable to consider. I did not directly question racial experiences, yet for one participant it was discussed for both her experience in the military and at the research site.

Within the sub-theme of gender and racial identity dominance, I included the findings related to (a) gender identities stereotypes; and (b) racial identity. Within gender identity dominance specific examples included experienced sexual misconduct. Participants discussed experiences where their gender and racial identities were disregarded, or they experienced differences.

Gender identities and stereotypes. Some participants reflected on the impact of the military on their gender identity. Vivian stated she felt the military made her a stronger woman. She explained:

I was a very shy person. I did not like making small talk. I did not hang out well with females. I still kind of don’t hang out very well with females...it [the

military] gave me my little niche I think because I was more of a tom-boy and this let me feel like a tom-boy at the same time.

Vivian felt as if she broke her own gender stereotype by referring to herself as a tom-boy.

Participants reflected on the military experience on gender stereotypes. For example, Savannah described herself as “not-girly.” In high school she stated she had a lot of female friends, but after her military service she found it harder to relate to other women. The “not-girly” sentiment was also discussed during my pilot study with my initial interview incentive. I had planned on giving a Starbucks gift card and Vivian expressed she was not that girly and did not go to Starbucks.

Vivian described how her leadership style as a woman was stereotyped in the military. She recalled:

It [the military] also made sure hey you have a voice. You need to speak up. This is on you. They hold you accountable. And you get used to realizing I have to be in charge and so a lot of the military women come across as bossy, but we’re just used to being told what to do and so we tell other people what to do. We delegate it and we expect it to get done.

Stephanie described a similar sentiment of labeling her leadership abilities.

Stephanie said:

A lot of men kind of label you as maybe being a bitch if you are sort of commanding.... So being put in charge of your hundred other peers, and you’re expected to delegate the daily orders and stuff, it’s definitely challenging to

immediately be thrown into that and see how my peers are judging me. I'm just telling them what I'm told to tell them.

Stephanie and Vivian both felt the pressure of gendered stereotypes related to their leadership roles and military order of leading other groups.

Although participants did not directly state they felt gender stereotypes or male-dominance over their gender in their military experiences, their descriptions suggested they experienced such. Another common experience women witnessed or experienced within the military was sexual misconduct.

Sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct and harassment appeared to be a cultural characteristic of the military. As I attempted to understand the context of their full military experience, I asked what made participants feel uncomfortable in their units or military experience. Participants' experience of sexual misconduct in the military was beyond the scope of this study. I included it as a finding because it was referenced, but I did not probe any further on the details of the experience.

A majority of women suggested a situation where a man inappropriately approached them or made a comment towards them. They also equally stated when they reported the situation their superior officers or leaders took action.

Savannah described a situation where one individual would make statements and advancements towards multiple women in her unit. She described, "There was a chief who made calls and the environment uncomfortable for us. We chatted amongst each other. Some would say he brushed up against them or lean against them- he wasn't grabbing but just made us feel very uncomfortable." She and other women were able to

report it to their superiors. She stated, “We went through the proper channels to address this person. Several leaders above us did not do anything, but the master chief addressed the satiation.” Savannah concluded, “He was reassigned to a different part of the ship because the incident was described as harassment and harassment was not enough to warrant a move off ship- if it had been assault it would have been.”

Leigh also reflected on her family’s response to her decision to join the Army and their concern of sexual misconduct. When she elected to join the Army, her father and brother warned her. She recalled, “I got warnings from people like ‘Oh, you’re gonna get sexually harassed if you go in the military. It’s gonna happen, be prepared for it.’” Leigh went on, “I think everybody kind of knows the culture’s still there, but the Army’s trying to reverse that.”

Leigh also described a situation where she filed a complaint about sexual harassment against someone. She stated, “I did file a SHARP [sexual harassment/assault response and prevention] complaint to sexual harassment...against the sergeant. It wasn’t a formal complaint or anything but it was like a ‘Hey, somebody should probably check this out.’ Because he was harassing other females in the unit.” She had enough cause for concern because of his actions towards other women in her unit.

Adeshola inferred a situation related to sexual misconduct. She did not outwardly state an incident but described an “uncomfortable situation.” As a result of her experience, she did express her interest then to help others. Adeshola said, “I think that’s one of the things that also prompted me to become a sexual assault advocate.”

Sexual misconduct was not a focus in this study but was a described aspect of military culture. The finding of sexual misconduct experiences was part of women's lived experience in the military, thus, was important to include in this write up. An additional finding outside the scope of this study but a described lived experience was the marginalization of one racial identity experienced in the military.

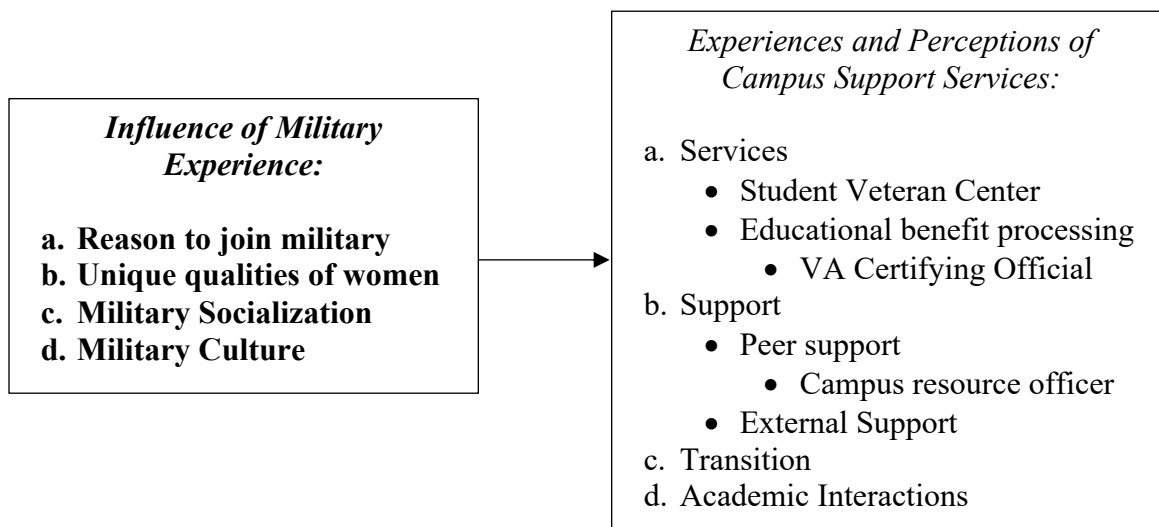
Racial identities. Of the six participants, one identified herself as Black. Racial identity was not Adeshola's Black identity came up in our conversation both about her time in the Navy and her time on campus. In her Naval experience she suggested her racial identity was what made her feel uncomfortable in a military unit. She stated, "Sometimes as a person of color I felt uncomfortable, but that was only when things came up that way. Maybe even gender. Sometimes they have jokes like that. Not everybody." Adeshola experienced racial identity dominance in the student veteran center as well. Her experience was more thoroughly discussed in the next section.

Military culture theme summary. Women's experiences within military culture influenced their experiences in the college setting. The military culture is the social construction of values, traditions, beliefs, ideas, and symbols historically directed by men (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Pawelczyk, 2014; Snyder, 2003). The experiences of military culture were organized into five sub-themes. The sub-themes were (a) camaraderie; (b) rank and order; (c) traditions; (d) social and gender identity dominance; and (e) sexual misconduct.

Influence of Military Experience Summary

Participants described their military experience to provide context to their current experience on campus. Their descriptions highlighted influences the military experience had on their transition to the college setting. The main-themes identified were (a) reasons to join the military; (b) unique qualities of women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture. These themes were one component of their overall experiences on a college campus (see Figure 4.2). The themes in the figure are bolded to draw attention to the influences of military experience.

Figure 4.2 Women Student Veterans' Experiences: Coding Framework



Note: Influences of military experience is bolded to draw attention to this side of the conceptual model.

Perceptions of Campus Veteran Support

One of the secondary research questions which guided this study was to explore the perceptions WSVs' have of campus support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). When conducting the data analysis, I used Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of

student veteran support to organize the coded themes. The model of student veteran support was developed in a holistic approach with the student veteran at the core of the experience and support (Vacchi, Hammond, & Diamond, 2017). As a result, the coded themes to explore WSVs' perceptions of campus veteran support were: (a) services; (b) support; (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions.

This study specifically called attention to participants' perceptions of campus support staff. The two campus support staff identified in this study were the campus resource officer and the VA certifying official. The model for student veteran support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013) did not indicate the role of campus support staff. Nor did the model indicate where roles necessarily fall in one of the four cornerstones identified in the support model.

Based on the analysis of participant interviews, I found the student veteran resource officer served as a peer support individual, as much as an advocate for student veterans. Thus, within the theme of support, I thematically organized the role and qualities of the veteran resource officer. The role and qualities of the VA certifying official, however, I thematically organized within the service of processing educational benefits processing. Their role was described as much more transactional in the process of benefit verification; thus the VA certifying official role fit within the service of educational benefits processing.

Participants' perceptions of campus veteran support was coded within four themes: (a) services; (b) support; (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions. I identified sub-themes within each of these main themes. Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model included

examples within these model components, some of my sub-themes are included in the model, while others I have been added based on my participants' responses.

Services

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support included a component of services. Services were defined as specific or general (Vacchi, Hammond, & Diamond, 2017). Examples of specific services were micro-leveled services such as a veteran writing group, while general services included the offering of a student veteran center. During the analysis of interviews, the participants in my study discussed three general services: (a) student veteran center; (b) benefits processing; and (c) web site information. Within the sub-theme of benefits processing, I included participants' perceptions of the VA certifying official.

Student veteran center. The student veteran center was identified as service at the research site. Participants described ways they physically used the student veteran center. Of the six participants, five women regularly used the student veteran center; two of which were employed as VA work study students (Savannah and Stephanie). Overall participants were pleased with their experience in the student veteran center. Leigh had used the veteran center as a study space to keep her focused on her academics. She noted her appreciation for the flexibility of the center's hours. She stated, "I will come here anywhere between 6:00am and 10:00pm."

Savannah, Adeshola, and Vivian all described their initial visit to the student veteran center as a time to casually check it out. Vivian described her desire to be "a fly

on the wall.” After this initial visit they developed a comfort to regularly go back.

Savannah was apprehensive after her first visit. She described:

So the first day I went into the vet center was kind of awful, I’m not going to lie. I went in there. The work study didn’t say anything to me. There was a bunch of people having lunch in there and having a political discussion, and I was like ‘Oh man, this is weird.’ And then finally somebody said something to me, like, ‘Hey, are you new here?’ I was like, ‘Yeah.’ And they were like, ‘Oh, okay. Well, if you want like 24/7 access, just email [the resource officer],’ and that’s the extent of the conversation I had. And then I was like, ‘Okay. Well maybe I’ll come in here when it’s less crowded and try to figure out what this place is about.

When Savannah returned during another day, a work study student welcomed her and showed her around the student veteran center. Stephanie also described the work study student’s introduction around the student veteran center as helpful to her daily use of the center.

Lynn stated she did not physically use the student veteran center but selectively took advantage of services as they were presented to her in the monthly newsletter. For example, the only time she had visited the student veteran center, “It was for a complete ulterior motive.” She stated, “...because I knew that they had the posters for the football team.” Lynn felt assured knowing the student veteran center was available as needed.

Several participants noted specific things or services missing from the student veteran center. First, several participants suggested a sub-gathering for women student

veterans would be a helpful experience. Leigh described a “sensing session” as they offered in the Army. She explained:

Having a meeting where a couple of the women get together and talk about, ‘This is what we want out of the club,’ because it is a boy’s club for the most part.

Saying, ‘Hey this is what we’re experiencing right now’.

Leigh noted the male-dominated culture of the club when she suggested what and why WSV might need a separate gathering.

Adeshola also recommended an opportunity for women to gather and talk. She pointed out the student veterans club did do an outing to a shooting range. She reflected:

Yeah, we’re all probably interested in shooting because we had to do it in the military too, but there’s not something that’s more just female driven. I’m not saying we have to get pedicures or anything like that, but something where we actually can sit and just talk about what we’re probably going through as female veterans.

Lynn also suggested a subgroup but was short to put a label on it. She described,

I don’t want to say support group, because that makes it sound like the military, which is tragic...but maybe their own group, because our experience may be a little different, depending on what branch we were in, or who we served with.

Adeshola also stated it did not need to be labeled as a support group. Lynn concluded, “I think a lot of women need the support and camaraderie of other women.

An interesting observation Savannah had of the student veteran center was the lack of women veterans or military service members depicted in the available artwork. As

work study students were preparing for a ribbon-cutting ceremony of their new student veteran center space, Savannah was tasked to find more artwork for the walls. Savannah noted the only artwork she could find was “risqué pinup stuff.” She described:

I was looking for artwork, and military-esque stuff. So, I was looking at all different kinds of artwork, and I couldn’t find a single thing with a woman in it, and it kind of made me sad that... I mean, you have all the old stuff that’s like the WAVES and that kind of stuff, but there’s nothing contemporary with women that are in it or women in the military in it, this cool-looking, like the guys do.

Savannah felt having women service members artwork would have added to an inclusive environment for WSV.

Stephanie affirmed the student veteran center “...does a really good job of not specifically singling out women in any way.” She did not cite the need for specific services for women.

Participants in this study described they physically used the student veteran center. Most participants reported regularly using the student veteran center. The next most commonly used veteran service at the research site was the service of VA educational benefits processing.

Benefits processing. An important service for institutions to support student veterans is through timely VA educational benefit processing (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Vacchi, 2011, 2013). Several participants described a positive and timely experience with having their benefits processed. Leigh described the VA certifying official as “on the ball” and noted the person helped her a lot with her benefits.

Adeshola agreed the VA certifying official was helpful in processing benefits. She took a course at a near-by two-year institution and had a “seamless” transfer of her benefits between the two institutions. During my interview with Adeshola, she made a comment worth noting, yet was outside the scope of this study. When applying for schools after her Naval service, she desired to attend a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) “for the culture.” Yet she noted:

...but the way they handle the 9/11 bill, I would still be paying out of pocket and as stated before, I couldn't afford to rack up more debt or be thinking about finances, because that was definitely a stressor when I first went into school.

Savannah and Lynn described less positive experience with benefits processing. Savannah experienced great difficulty in having her benefits processed when she first enrolled and did not get paid for two months. The delay in payment and benefits processing impacted her ability to prove income and ultimately search for an apartment. She recalled:

...was very frustrating for me, so I have a lot of trust issues with anything that comes from the certifying official. So now when I ask them a question, I definitely follow up with the VA itself because it's very hard for me to trust the information coming out of that [VA certifying official] office.

Savannah explained processes were improving as they had added more staff to support benefit processing. This improvement included creating a communication loop to inform student veterans when their benefit paperwork was verified and sent to the VA.

Lynn also experienced issues related to benefit processing. Mid-way through her first semester she received a tuition bill because her VA educational benefits had run out down to the exact date (the bill was thus prorated for the remainder of the semester). Lynn had been proactive and asked the VA certifying official about the potential of this incident prior to enrolling. Lynn stated, “It was very conflicting information that got me into a bad place right near the end of the semester.” She stated had she had the correct information up front, she “would not have ever enrolled.”

The process of verifying benefits was handled by a specific staff member at the research institution. While the timeliness of the benefits oftentimes was at the hands of the VA, the effectiveness and qualities of the certifying official was also imperative.

VA certifying official. There were mixed perceptions of the VA certifying official. Some participants had really positive experiences and described the certifying official as organized, responsive, and willing to help. Other participants who had negative experienced described the certifying official as more unresponsive and unorganized. Further, one participant described an initial positive experienced yet was left at the end of the semester with a very negative experience.

The VA certifying official was an integral part of participants’ educational experience as they had to utilize her to process their VA benefits. Leigh stated:

I have made countless phone calls to her. She’s usually really on the ball. If you need help with benefits information, you need help with enrolling at all, she’s got full time staff in there too I’ve had nothing but good things to say about my experience with her.

Another participant, however, had a very different experience with the VA certifying official. Savannah stated, “I feel like she hates us [women veterans], like hates working with us, hates talking to us.” When I pressed how so, she stated, “Because none of the men have had the encounters...I feel like the male veterans send her emails and get an immediate response back.” No other participants described this experience of bias from the certifying official.

Lynn began her coursework at the research site knowing she had limited coverage left on her Post 9/11 GI Bill. Up until the unexpected tuition bill, Lynn had felt the certifying official had a “good grasp” on the benefits processing. However, when Lynn confronted the certifying official about the misinformation. Lynn stated, “She [certifying official] was a little standoffish about it, which made me a little disturbed.”

Web site information. Several participants described their regular use before and after enrollment of the student veteran information available on the research site’s web site. Lynn described, “I researched all that [veteran support information] before I ever applied.” She was aware of the transfer credit policies, student veteran center, VA certifying official, and veterans’ orientation prior to enrolling. Leigh also described the Web site as being her first line of information gathering.

Services theme summary. The model of student veteran support identified services as an aspect to create a student-centered approach to supporting student veterans. Through the findings in this study, participants’ perceptions were gathered around three services. The services were: (a) student veteran center; (b) benefits processing; and (c) Web site information.

Support

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support depicts support as a major component for student veteran success. Within the theme of support, the model was broken down to peer support and external support. In the analysis of interview data, I found consistent statements related to peer support and external support. I also found statements related to the student veteran center and the culture within the center.

I categorized the student veteran center also within the theme of support because it was a conduit of peer support. Further the veteran center culture contributed to participants' experiences of peer support. Finally, based on the analysis of participant interviews, I found the student veteran resource officer served as a peer support individual as much as an advocate for student veterans. Therefore, the role and qualities of the resource officer, I thematically organized in the theme of support.

The sub-themes within support were: (a) peer support; (b) student veteran center; and (c) external support. Within the sub-theme of student veteran center, I also described participants' perceptions of the student veteran center culture and the resource officer.

Peer support. Peer support seemed to be the most common area of support described by participants. All six participants described the importance of peer support from fellow student veterans.

A common experience of peer support was using peers as sounding boards or to verify various information they had heard; especially information related to VA educational benefit processing. Lynn would read various information online and verify with others what she had read. Stephanie also used the student veteran center to gather

peer support on educational benefits. She stated, “Having other people that are also using their benefits to say like, ‘Hey, I didn’t get paid either. Yeah, like this is what’s going on’.”

Adeshola relied on peer support for financial and academic advice. She recalled a conversation in the veteran center:

The last semester of school, I only has physics to get my degree requirement over with, but there was someone [in the student veteran center] saying just make sure ... they were talking to someone else, they're like, ‘Make sure you get any type of course you want your last semester because the VA actually pays for any course rather than just your degree requirements.’ I'm like oh, that's great. That enabled me to get a minor, because I would be able to ... and because the fact that I was stressed about I'm not going to have a full-time schedule, I'm not going to get the VAH, which is the housing allowance they [VA] give you as well.

She was pleased because through the advice from her peers she was able to determine a plan that gave her a minor and maintained her full-time status. The full-time enrollment status also assured her for full VA housing allowance funding.

Peer support was a staple for Savannah’s experience. She relied on peer support in many aspects both inside and outside the classroom. She stated:

The resource officer and the other vets supported me in a financial crisis, helping me find the finances or going through financial aid and helping me along that struggle was amazing, just the way that people support each other in the veterans’ center is just amazing, and we all kind of pick on each other, each branch picks on

each other, but we all have a great time. I'm on the flag football intramural team...so it's just extracurricular. Academic, I have a couple of veterans that are also in finance and accounting majors that I kinda navigate towards in my classes, so we study together or do our projects together.

Savannah described how the support she received from fellow student veterans ranged from social to academic. Later in her academic interactions she goes on to further describe this support as her veteran family, or her "true people."

An interesting statement Adeshola said in terms of peer support drew upon her military experience. She explained:

Others have already experienced it, so they feel it natural to tell you what to do...within the military, it's natural to pass down things because even when you're about to be relieved from watch, you have to pass everything you experienced. You're giving them all that knowledge so that once they're on that watch after you, then there [are] no questions... A lot of people in there [veterans' center] are just wanting to give you information.

Adeshola's explanation provided a concrete example of perhaps why student veterans are used to supporting each other and open to sharing information.

Peer support was imperative to WSV's experiences and it was most often utilized through the student veteran center. In their description of the student veteran center, participants also described the veteran center's culture and the resource officer who directed the veteran center.

Student veteran center. The student veteran center was a conduit for peer support. The facility was a common place for student veterans to gather. While the veteran center was also categorized as a specific service, because of its role in facilitating peer support, I also described it as a support mechanism.

Savannah described how the veteran center served as that support mechanism.

She stated:

The veterans' center is great. I have found a friend group through the veterans' center, a job obviously, kind of a community, and it's kind of let me to networking for my eventual job because I want to work with veterans...All that stuff in one, just the veterans' center has become by new division of my new family.

Vivian, Stephanie and Leigh all described the student veteran center as a source of camaraderie. Stephanie added:

It's like a mixed place of kind of learning a civilian type professionalism, but also getting to like tie into your whole like the military like... it's the camaraderie, the shared kind of language and acronyms, things that make sense.

Stephanie shared the student veteran center was an initially place to find peer support because she had not found her niche within her major. She stated:

A lot of the reason I like to go there [student veteran center] was because I didn't really felt like I belonged in my classes and like didn't have a friend group because the people in my major were already... a lot of them know each other from high school.

Leigh appeared to have the same sentiments as Stephanie. Leigh contributed “100%” of her feeling of belonging at the research site because of the student veteran center. With this environment of support, the participants also identified the culture created in the veteran center described below.

Student veteran center culture. Each participant described various aspects of the culture created in the veteran center. Leigh described the veteran center as a place with open dialogue. She explained:

People talk about politics in there, but you really can't talk about that in your classes. 'Oh, don't bring that in here. We don't want to talk about that.' We'll talk about their deployments and hearing that is really insightful. We'll talk about alcoholism and PTSD, things that you don't really talk about anywhere else.

Leigh continued to describe the acceptance of “brash” language. She said:

That's how the military is and that's okay in there [veteran center]. You're not gonna run somebody the wrong way by saying something controversial. They're like, 'Whatever F you.' Get on with it.

Vivian also described the culture as a “safety place” which they do not have to censor themselves. She said they were “...not worried about hurting somebody's feelings or somebody getting the wrong impression.”

Despite a perceived comfort of not worrying about hurting feelings, some women described an environment or culture that was biased. Some participants described the student veteran center as a “boys club,” having a “bro-mentality,” or listening to “locker room talk.” Savannah stated sometimes there would be conversations that were

demeaning towards women. She appeared to have the confidence to say something to others. She stated:

If they do say something sexually suggestive of women, I'll kind of spin it and say, 'Hey, if it were in my perspective, then it would be this for a man.' They're like 'Oh, you shouldn't say that' and I was like 'Well, you shouldn't say what you said.' I don't think they quite get it from a woman's perspective until we say something... I've definitely had to be outspoken about it. Otherwise it would just continue.

Further, Adeshola described her experience in the veteran center in terms of her own racial identity. She stated:

The fact that I'm different, there's not a lot of people that are looking from my perspective... so when they're talking about certain things, they either don't apply to me or they may come off as offensive towards me.

I asked further if her feeling of being different was because of being a woman or a Black woman. She affirmed:

I think its Black, just Black. The woman is fine. I don't really have any other female friends there, because like I said everybody's mostly White. I'm not saying that they have to be Black for me to be friends with them, but certain qualities or personalities they have, they wouldn't match mine.

She added in her observation she was likely the only Black person using the student veteran center:

For the most part, most of the time I'm in there, I'm usually the only Black person there... till this semester I saw one Black guy in there one time, and I was sitting there and I was like wow. I was like, for the most part, I thought I was going to be the only one.

Adeshola's statements suggest the intersectionality of her gender and racial identities. Her feelings of differences were certainly more heightened because of her racial identity.

The student veteran center was led under the direction of the resource officer. Oftentimes the resource officer was cited as much as peer as they were a staff member serving student veterans. The resource officer was a key contributor to the development of the support experienced in the student veteran center.

Campus resource officer. Overall participants painted a positive image of the resource officer; a person who served more as a peer support. The student veteran resource officer at the research site was a male, Army veteran.

Several of participants described the resource officer as approachable, personable, quick-responsive, professional, helpful, and funny. Leigh added the resource officer was motivating. She said, "He's really pushing people to do the extracurriculars, go to conferences, if they want to. He's really pushing people to do more things." Savannah had similar sentiments. She stated, "All he wants to do is see veterans succeed and wants to help them in that journey." Lynn appreciated his professionalism and directness. She identified:

...[it] is what you would expect somebody that was in the military at some point that they're going to respond to you quickly, they're going to be thorough, and they're going to be direct, so I value that. There's no tiptoeing around things.

In terms of their gender, participants stated that as a man the resource officer was receptive to women. Savannah stated, "I've never met a woman veteran or a woman in general that's not comfortable around him or not comfortable talking to him in any capacity." Leigh added, "I'm a very shy person and I know some of the other women are, they're not very likely to approach somebody if they're not inviting and welcoming."

Vivian identified, despite the resource officer being the "right fit for females," there were some questions she might not feel comfortable approaching a male resource officer. She cited, "I think one example I think somebody used was if they had to pump for milk... I didn't know if I would ask [the resource officer] that." She suggested, "It would be nice to have a female assistant" to ask those types of questions.

Participants, particularly the work study women, described the resource officer as overworked. Savannah said, "He tries to make us a priority, but with everything going on in his life, I feel like he just doesn't have enough time to do all the things that he envisions for us."

The model of student veteran support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013) cited peer support as a major component within the cornerstone of support which aided in the success of a student veterans in higher education. The additional component of this part of Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model also included external support.

External Support. Another structure within the theme of support in Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support cited was external support. External support was described as community-based resources outside of the campus community which support student veterans (Vacchi, Hammond, Diamond, 2017). Based on participants' feedback, it seems there is a strong relationship with one community agency. That agency was able to provide external support to women student veterans.

Savannah and Adeshola described their experience with an external support agency, Upstate Warrior Solutions (Upstate Warrior Solutions, 2018). Savannah said their support included "...kind of help with like finding housing or getting benefits started or applying for VA benefits, your health benefits." Adeshola described a deeper support outlet through this agency. She stated:

It's actually helped me with my Reserves status as well because I'm affiliated with them so I'm doing community work outside [the] unit. Upstate Warrior Solution, they go out, find homeless, help them and stuff. I'm able to do the things I like to do as a person, like go out, help and be part of the community.

Although external support was not directly asked about during the interviews, participants discussed various external support agencies which were helpful to them in their college experience. The agencies provided support with other VA benefits and served as an outlet for participants to engage in community service.

Support theme summary. The theme of support was a major component of the model of student veteran support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013). The model described peer support and external support. As a result of the data analysis, I included the student

veteran center as a conduit for peer support. Additionally, as the veteran center contributed to providing a space for peer support, I included WSVs' perceptions of the student veteran center culture. The main sub-themes in support outlined were: (a) peer support; (b) student veteran center; and (c) external support.

Transition

The model for student veteran support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013) described transition support as orientations, veteran courses, academic planning, access to courses, and support specifically for the National Guard and Reserves. These components identified in the model for transition seem more specific examples of what institutions should do to support a successful transition.

In my interviews with women student veterans, however, the more dominant themes which stood out was their experiences and perceptions of that transitional period. They discussed several specific transitional experiences. The experiences were: (a) finding the student veteran center; (b) their basic living needs; (c) adapting to school work; (d) finding friends and getting involved; and (e) their non-traditional student experience.

Finding the student veteran center. All six participants had different ways they discovered the services of the student veteran center. Lynn expected some type of support structure due to the research site's military institutional history. Lynn recalled:

I would assume considering that [the research site] has a very longstanding veteran's history and military history, that they probably would have been pretty

solid with their resources and knowledge and what they could do for us if we needed it.

Lynn had researched much of the veterans' support resources prior to enrollment. As a result, she was aware of the veterans' orientation. Stephanie and Adeshola also attended the veterans-specific orientation and learned about the student veteran center.

Savannah did not know about the student veteran center but found it shortly after the semester began. She stated, "I had a class with a veteran that had a service dog, so I automatically knew that he was a veteran." Savannah learned about the veteran center through word of mouth.

Leigh also learned about the student veteran center through word of mouth. She discovered it after her first full semester. She remembered, "It was more of my friends told me about the vet center and I was like, 'I'll go check it out. I need a place to study. I don't like the library'."

An interesting point about Leigh's experience finding the student veteran center was she did not receive information about the veteran center because of the way she was coded in the student information system. She described, "They didn't even know I was here." When Leigh enrolled at the research site, it was for her second degree and the institution considered her a former returning student. This classification has a different code in the student information system. As a result, Leigh did not receive any electronic communication about the student veteran center because she was not on a new student list.

The theme of finding the student veteran center was interesting because each participant found the center in different ways. Yet, because of their desire and need to be around other veterans, they all did find the student veteran center. The next transitional need identified was where they would live at the research site.

Basic living needs. Savannah and Stephanie both stated their biggest concern when they first came to campus was finding a place to live. Savannah experienced delays in her VA educational benefits payments and therefore did not have the income to get an apartment. She recalled:

If I had not had my boyfriend at the time, where I was going to live would be a big issue just because that money transition. A lot of apartments are not good with that, so going from having a lot of money to no money and then waiting on the GI Bill to kick in...I had no incoming, so I had no way to prove I had money coming in.

Savannah lived with her boyfriend's parents for the first two months she was enrolled until her financials were in order.

Stephanie also was concerned about finding a place to live. She reflected during her military experience mentors in the Navy would guide her through the initial transition to her new duty station. Coming to campus, however, she noted, "Trying to figure out how I was going to like move here and live here and doing all that on my own for the first time. I think that was the most difficult thing."

Several participants described their worry in finding a place to live when they transitioned to the research site. The next experience participants described was adapting to college work again.

Adapting to school work. Despite several women having completed previous degrees, they still expressed a concern about adapting to school work again. Leigh had been out of school for just two years but felt she had to relearn how to be a student again. She described:

I went from being an adult to having to come back into the mindset of being a student again. Last semester, I almost failed half my classes in all honesty, because I lied to myself. I was like, I can study at home. It's fine. I can also have a full-time job while I'm here. No big deal. I'll do all the things I was doing before when I wasn't in school and I'll be fine. I don't need to put that much work into it.

Savannah had to learn the structure of face-to-face college coursework. She completed her associate's degree while serving on her ship. She reflected:

I didn't really do that [adapt to studying] while I was in. Even with taking the classes on the ship, they were all self-paced, so I just kind of did all the stuff whenever I wanted to, so I never had a structured schedule for school, so that was weird getting used to.

Participants identified the experience of adapting to college work again once transitioning back to higher education. For some, they thought they would draw upon their previous college experience only to find they had been too far removed from the

college study routine. For others, the experience was more about getting back into a structured study schedule. The next concern participants experienced during their transition was finding friends and getting involved.

Finding friends and getting involved. Several participants expressed a great interest in getting involved, but moreover their concern was for finding friends during their transition. Leigh stated:

[Finding friends] riddled me with anxiety because I don't know how to relate to all these people. I don't want to go out and party with all these 19-year-old kids, so I had to find a group of friends that I actually related to.

Savannah recalled during her military experience her friends were essentially “assigned” to her because of her unit. So, stepping on to campus she felt she had to “actually make friends now.” She thought, “I have to start over.”

Vivian, Stephanie, and Savannah all were heavily involved in the student veterans' association. Stephanie and Savannah further found involvement through their VA work study assignment in the student veteran center. At the time of the interview, Leigh had recently began using the student veteran center and fully intended to join the student veterans' association. Lynn described desire to get involved. She affirmed:

I really wanted to get involved in stuff because I like to be involved in clubs and activities and stuff like that, but then I had to come to the realization, ‘You know, you kind of got a grown-up job that you got to worry about, and all these classes you're going to have homework, so take it down a notch.’ And that's kind of

bothered me a little, that I can't be more active in things that I want to do on campus.

Adeshola found involvement opportunities around her racial and cultural identities. She stated, "I joined here the African Caribbean Student Association for culture and what not. The veterans' association I've done that as well. So just to be part of things I'm interested in." Later in the interview Adeshola described her participation in other campus opportunities. She described:

It's not necessarily a club or anything, but the MSSSI, Minority Student Success Initiative. Yes, and the [research site] Black Alumni. They have a lot of different events that will happen as far as speaking with different people that have already graduated from here and hearing how they've done after they've moved on.

These outreach initiatives seemed to have a positive support experience for Adeshola.

She further explained:

Being able to be a part of those things and talk to the people you network during that time with, that definitely helped a lot as well, to meet people I could talk to and ask questions and get further knowledge about stuff like that.

Participants described the concern of meeting new people at the research site.

Their military experience had conditioned them to find friendships based on the structure the military provided. Yet, the college setting required participants to seek out friendships instead. For some participants they found involvement through their veteran identity. For others they found involvement through other identities. The next transitional experience participants described was the feeling of being a non-traditional student.

Non-traditional student experience. During their transition, several women described the reality of feeling like a non-traditional student. Leigh was humbled when she had a 17-year-old tutor during her first semester. She stated, “I had to put my ego aside a little and say, ‘Okay, I probably need some help, but this is weird.’”

Lynn was the eldest woman student veteran interviewed. She described several situations where her age impacted her transitional experience. Lynn recalled:

Orientation was hilarious. I got the whole ‘oh is your daughter or your son signing up for classes?’ I’m like ‘No, I’m the student.’ They’re like, ‘Oh.’ And even when they had the little veterans’ thing when we were going to go to the meeting for veterans’ services and stuff, they were like, ‘Oh, this is for students only.’ I’m like, ‘I’m the student.’

The most described non-traditional student experience was related to participants’ ages. Participants did not describe other experiences related to being a non-traditional student.

Transition theme summary. Participants described the most salient experiences related to their transition to the research institution. The research site had transitional support structure in place such as a veterans’ orientation. Some participants were aware of this program prior to enrollment. Other participants found services including the student veteran center in different ways. The transitional experiences participants described were: (a) finding the student veteran center; (b) their basic living needs; (c) adapting to school work; (d) finding friends and getting involved; and (e) their non-traditional student experience.

Academic Interactions

The final component of the student veteran support model (Vacchi, 2011, 2013) was academic interactions. While the purpose of this study was not the academic experience inside the classroom several women explained experiences related to academic interactions. The described experiences with: (a) academic involvement; (b) faculty and teaching assistant interactions; and (c) academic advising.

Academic involvement. Savannah and Stephanie both suggested their academic engagement was what gave them the biggest sense of belonging at the research site.

Savannah joined a business fraternity. She described:

I was trying to find a family, and I ended up finding two separate families, but with the veterans' center it's just they understand me a little bit better. The [business] fraternity is helping me develop me professionally, but the veterans' center is my true people, I guess.

Stephanie also felt she belonged more once she progressed to her higher-level coursework. She stated she utilized the student veteran center heavily in the beginning because she did not feel like she belonged in her engineering classes. Once participants found the friend-group within their major, their sense of belonging to the major and the research site strengthened. Participants also engaged with faculty in different ways.

Faculty and teaching assistant interactions. Participants described different interactions with their faculty and teaching assistants. Despite being questioned about being a veteran, Savannah still sought her faculty for specific questions. She said, "It's not easy telling people that you're a veteran and they're kind of like, 'No, you're not.'"

I'm like, 'Yeah, I'm a veteran. I served in the military for six years.'...I have to bring up pictures." Savannah would use faculty office hours when needed help on a particular topic. She stated, "I've very specific. Like, 'Question 15, section eight. That's the particular part I didn't understand.'...And they're [the faculty] are taken aback." Her perception was faculty are used in office hours for general tutoring or "explain everything again;" not specific teaching points from class.

Leigh engaged with her teaching assistants more to inform them of upcoming Reserve drill she had. She said, "I had to take off for my drill and I need make up assignment. I need help with all of that military related." I asked further had anyone given her guidance on what departments could help her with being out of class for military drill. She responded, "Other than the head professor...It's really a case by case basis, I think. Some people are like, 'I don't know about that'."

Lynn had experienced condescending attitude from a faculty member. She stated, "...so I tried to avoid asking her [faculty member] any questions if I could possibly avoid it." While, Stephanie was always very encouraged by her faculty or academic advisors to seek any support she may need.

Academic Advising. Despite participants transferring many credits into the institution, few of them discussed concerns about lack of transfer credit or issues of transfer credit. The only academic advising experience that was discussed was Lynn's modern language advising.

Lynn's situation was complicated not because of her veteran status or transfer credit but because of her previous degree completion (associates, bachelors and masters).

Lynn's first assigned advisor was unfamiliar with how to advise Lynn on her Spanish coursework since she had started a Spanish degree years ago. Lynn worked with a more experienced advisor. She stated, "[The new advisor] helped me plan my future here a little better than kind of leaving things up in the air." Lynn felt complete having an academic plan that mapped her to graduation.

Academic interactions theme summary. The purpose of this study was not necessarily the academic experience inside the classroom several, but participants described experiences related to their academic interactions. The described experiences with: (a) academic involvement; (b) faculty and teaching assistant interactions; and (c) academic advising

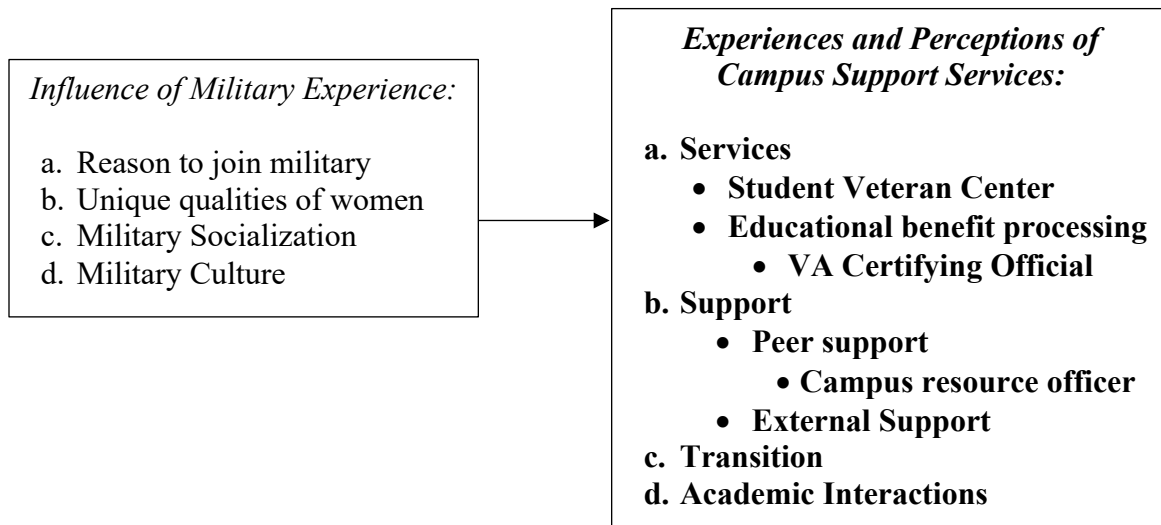
Perceptions of Campus Veteran Support Summary

The model of student veteran support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013) conceptually guided this research study. The model was developed in a holistic approach with the student veteran at the core of the experience and support (Vacchi, Hammond, & Diamond, 2017). The secondary research question which directed this study was to explore the perceptions WSVs' have of campus support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). As a result, the coded themes to explore WSVs' perceptions of campus veteran support were: (a) services; (b) support; (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions.

The research questions additionally called attention to participants' perceptions of campus support staff. The two support staff identified in this study were the campus resource officer and the VA certifying official. The model for student veteran support (Vacchi, 2011, 2013) did not indicate the roles of campus support staff. Nor did it

indicate where roles necessarily fall to one of the four cornerstones identified in the support model. Through the data analysis, I placed the support of the campus resource officer and the qualities they possessed within peer support. Next, the role and qualities of the VA certifying official I thematically organized within the service of educational benefit processing. The themes of the perceptions and experiences WSV had of campus support are depicted in Figure 4.3. The themes in the figure are bolded to draw attention to the themes outlined through Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support.

Figure 4.3 Women Student Veterans' Experiences: Coding Framework



Note: Influences of perceptions of campus support services is bolded to draw attention to this side of the conceptual model.

Summary of Findings

Women student veterans have been an underrepresented population within the literature on student veterans on college campuses (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Radford, 2009). The findings from this study yielded further knowledge on how women student veterans are navigating their college experience.

Prior to this study, research on student veterans' experiences were centered around transition and how they navigate transition to a higher education setting (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Jones, 2017; Livingston et al., 2011; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). Further, much of the literature was developed with mostly male perspectives. A gap in the literature included how men and women experience differently their transition to the college setting and civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The uniqueness of this study was the transitional experience of WSV to higher education and their perceptions of support resources available to them.

To address the research questions, this study employed a phenomenological case study design. Six women student veterans participated in semi-structured interviews. While extensive measures were taken to draw more participants, women student veterans simply did not volunteer for this research study. The low number of participants was consistent with Heitzman and Somers (2015) notion that women student veterans disappear once they enroll in higher education.

The bounded case of this inquiry was the support services and staff available at the research site. The qualitative method allowed for women student veteran participants to share their experiences so higher education professionals can begin to construct how to serve women student veterans. From the data analysis, I identified eight coded themes. The first four themes were within the influence of their military experience on their college transition. The first themes were: (a) reason to join the military; (b) qualities of women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture.

The second four coded themes identified women's experiences and perceptions within the campus support services. These coded themes were conceptually framed by Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model for student veterans support. Identified themes included: (a) services (including student veteran center and educational benefit processing; (b) support (including support staff); (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions. These coded themes fit within a framework in which to holistically understand women student veterans' experiences at the research site.

Summary of Chapter

This study explored the experiences of WSV, who participated in this study, on a college campus. Through WSV's described their military experiences, this study sought to explore how military experience influenced their transition to higher education. Further, this study explored perceptions of campus veteran resources available to them once enrolled (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). The purpose of this study was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV. Thus, this study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 1. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 2. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

Through this investigation, more women's voices were added to the conversation on student veterans in higher education. This study also identified specific needs of women engaging in the student veteran centers, which are aimed to support them.

To address the research questions, this study employed a phenomenological case study design. This qualitative method allowed for six women student veteran participants to share their experiences so higher education professionals can begin to construct an understanding of what is needed by WSV.

Through the data analysis, I identified eight coded themes. The findings were presented by the secondary research questions' each coded themes and sub-themes. The first four coded themes were identified to understand how WSVs military experience influenced their transition to the research site. The coded themes were: (a) reason to join the military; (b) unique qualities of women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture.

The second coded themes were guided by Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support. I coded for their overall perceptions of the student veterans' support through: (a) services; (b) support; (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions. Each of these themes had related sub-themes. The sub-themes can be found in Appendix M. These themes and sub-themes tell the story of WSV lived experiences within the bounded-context of one institution.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study explored the experiences WSV had on a college campus. Through WSV's descriptions, this study sought to explore how their military experience influenced their transition to higher education. Further, this study explored perceptions of campus veteran resources available to them once enrolled (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff). The purpose of this study was to continue to fill a gap in the literature on WSV. Thus, this study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

Through this investigation, more women's voices were added to the conversation on student veterans in higher education. This study also identified specific needs of women engaging in the student veteran center, which are aimed to support them.

To address the research questions, this study employed a phenomenological case study design. This qualitative method allowed for women student veteran participants to share their experiences so higher education professionals can begin to construct an understanding the needs of WSV. However, because of the bounded context of case

design, WSVs' experiences at the research site were unique to the support structures available specifically at the research site.

Influence of Military Experience

The first research question which guided this inquiry was to explore how WSV's military experiences had influenced their transition to higher education. Livingston et al. (2011) found veterans' military experience influenced their transition to the college setting. However, Livingston et al.'s (2011) investigation was composed of primarily men participants, while my study was all women. The consistency in these findings further suggest military experience has a convincing influence on student veterans' transitions.

In this current study, participants' previous military experiences provided valuable insights to their current experiences on campus. These descriptions helped frame their intent to use the student veterans support services once enrolled on campus. Based on the results of the data from my study, WSVs' military experiences were broken down into four main themes: (a) reason to join the military; (b) unique qualities of military women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture.

Reason to Join the Military

One of the first insights on how their military experience influenced participants' transition to college was purely their reason to join the military. Women in this study identified the following for joining: (a) general interest in the military; (b) family history; (c) career path potential; and (d) access to educational benefits.

Participants who saw the military as a path to their potential career selected military occupations based on what they were interested in pursuing as an academic degree. This finding was consistent with Atkinson et al.'s (2018) finding that military occupation specialties (jobs) introduced women to their future educational studies.

Holder (2011) suggested women veterans use their veteran educational benefits at a higher rate than men veterans. Although this study did not produce quantitative findings to support Holder's (2011) notion at the research site, similar to previous investigations, WSV in this study used military service as an access point to VA educational benefits (Patten & Parker, 2011; Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Iverson et al., 2016). While several participants cited various other primary reasons to join the military (e.g. family history, general interest, career path) all of them cited the educational benefits after service as a secondary reason. An interesting statement made for one participant in this study, was her desire to attend an HBCU. Unfortunately, even with her eligibility of VA educational benefits she was not going to afford the tuition.

The reasons influenced their college transition by way that all participants underlying reason was access to educational benefits. Once in the military, their personal qualities combined with their military experience influenced their college experience.

Unique Qualities of Women

Through participant interviews, each woman appeared to have a set of unique personality qualities they both brought to their military setting and developed as a result of their military setting. The qualities uncovered in this investigation included: (a) leadership; (b) helping others; (c) professionalism; (d) independence; and (e) information

seeking. Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) and Pellegrino and Hoggan (2019) cited WSVs juggle many personal responsibilities. In my participants' descriptions of their experiences both in the military and at the research site, they did not indicate many outside responsibilities. Several participants discussed their spouse and relationship, or full-time work, but no participant described an overwhelming feeling of juggling responsibilities.

The quality which stood out the most among participants was information seeking. A reason this quality was interesting because of the connection of their self-description of information seeking or natural researcher, to that of the help-seeking behavior culture of the military. This finding of participants' acceptance or willingness to seek out information appeared in conflict with descriptions of military culture. Military culture was built on the identity of warrior (Snyder, 2003) and asking for help can be interpreted or viewed as a sign of weakness (Culver, 2013). However, the descriptions participants provided in this study conveyed a military environment which was open to asking for help to ensure the job was performed accurately.

The quality of information seeking and inherently feeling comfortable asking for help influenced participants' transition to college by seeking out information prior to enrollment. Women in this study suggested, in both the academic and non-academic settings, if they felt they did not have the information they required, they would ask until they acquired the information. The willingness to seek information manifested into a help-seeking behavior. This manifestation, especially on the academic side, was not consistent with previous findings of WSV's helping seeking behaviors (DiRamio et al.,

2015). DiRamio et al. (2015) suggested as a result of women's military experience and training, women demonstrated too much pride in the academic setting to ask for help. Participants in my study did not demonstrate nor describe the feelings of too much pride to ask for help.

The remaining qualities identified in this study were inherent to the military socialization process. For example, the purpose of military socialization was to transform civilians to soldiers (Snyder, 2003). Creating a mission-focused soldier included instilling a mindset of team-work, leadership, honor, obedience, and respect (Redmond et al., 2015). The qualities found in the results from this study were consistent with those learned through military training. Participants described their practice in professionalism, leadership and independence. Heineman (2017) also found women student veterans were focused and independent.

The one aspect not discussed by participants which has been germane to military culture was that of warrior identity. Culver (2013) established a model of gender identity development of women in the U.S. military. Through this model women servicemembers followed a non-linear experience of masking and unmasking their gender identity in the military on an as-needed basis. Depending on what the situation was in the military environment, women would either play up or downplay their femininity. This gender identity development process was found in Iverson et al. (2016) study of WSVs. In my study, however, women did not describe situations where they were masking their gender identity.

Culver's (2013) description of gender identity development can be interpreted to have occurred when women were within their military units. The results of my study can be interpreted that participants had already gone through Culver's (2013) phases of gender identity development. A gap in understanding in Culver's (2013) model was the final phase, especially when women veterans are enrolled in a college setting. At this point, women formally separated from the military and enrolled in college were not needing to remove the mask and accept a woman-warrior identity, in some cases they are shedding it, or letting it exist in the past. Participants of my study demonstrated the acceptance of both their gender and veteran identity. These results also differed compared to Iverson et al.'s (2016) findings where participants were still navigating between two identities.

Yet, their veteran identity appeared to be more salient as compared to their gender identity. The saliency of participants' veteran identity is more thoroughly discussed later in the theme of military socialization and academic interactions. Participants' descriptions of masking their veteran identity was more present when engaging with faculty.

The unique qualities of women theme were identified by various self-described personality traits or attitudes participants had before or established during their military experience. This theme has influenced their college experience through ways they gathered information to aid in their transition, including asking for help. The next influence of military experience on participants' transition was military socialization.

Military Socialization

Military socialization exposed participants to a number of experiences which they carried over to their college transition. Their military socialization process outcomes were to train and develop them into servicemembers. The military socialization sub-themes were related to military job duties or the experience surrounding the fulfillment of those job duties. The sub-themes identified were: (a) leadership (skill); (b) mentorship (formal and informal); (c) training and job placement; (d) personal development; (e) military transitioning; and (f) veteran identity.

Naphan and Ellilott (2015) described the similarities of the military and higher education through the lens of a total institution. Total institutions are closed systems that solely support themselves from within (Davies, 1989). Participants in this current investigation identified many ways the military was self-sustaining as an institution. For example, from services related to healthcare to spiritual care to education, military services supported its personnel almost exclusively from within. The total institution structure of the military impacts the way civilians are transformed into soldiers during the socialization process (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Redmond et al., 2015; Snyder, 2003). Participants in this study described how the military supported them through their training and socialization process into the military.

Leadership development was a skill developed through the military training process (Dillon, 2007). Leadership as a skill appeared to have an influence over women's leadership engagement once they enrolled on campus. Of the six participants, one served as an officer in the student veterans' organization and two were employed as VA work

study students within the student veteran center. Additionally, after interviews concluded I learned one woman was elected into a leadership position in the student veterans' organization.

Mentorship was a major component of several women's military experience. Some branches, such as the Navy, appeared to have a very formal mentorship program which sailors relied upon when they transitioned into the military and into college. Participants who had formal mentor support with their military transition appeared to seek that mentorship when they came to college. The reliance on mentorship during the transition to college was consistent with previous studies (Heitzman & Somers, 2009; Livingston et al., 2011).

The military provided participants with training and experience which contributed to their career development or career interests. Several participants parlayed their military occupation directly to an academic major once they transitioned to higher education. While others experienced other military roles, which contributed to their selection of an academic major once enrolled. The influence of military experience on academic major selection was consistent with previous studies (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Atkinson et al. (2018) also found military occupation specialties (jobs) introduced participants to their future educational studies and subsequently careers in engineering powered by the educational benefits afforded to them through VA educational benefits.

Finally, participants described their military experience helped them feel empowered and gave them the confidence to network. These experiences certainly helped them engage on campus and seek out various opportunities such as leadership positions

and campus involvement opportunities. Military training begins with a service member's participation in basic training. A main outcome of basic training is to build a confident and respectful servicemember prepared to follow orders (Dillon, 2007). Participants' military experience trained them to be confident in their performance.

Previous findings suggested the salient identity for the student veteran population was student veteran (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012; Hammond, 2015). Military or veteran identity development is an outcome of the socialization process to the military.

Socialization into any institution is a process in which individuals begin to learn the knowledge, skills, and culture associated to that professional environment (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Although this study was not intended to focus on participants' veteran identity, I inferred they have a strong sense in veteran identity.

The saliency of participants' veteran identity influenced their actions of seeking out veteran resources at the research site. Further, participants desired to find camaraderie in other student veterans. Participants in this study also appeared to hold their veteran identity saliency higher than their gender identity. Previous studies concluded gender, racial and disabilities identities came second or third to the veteran identity (Atkinson et al., 2018; Cook, et al., 2012; Mobley et al., 2018).

Although veteran identity was discussed by participants, they did not identify with their military branch other than through the descriptions of branch services (e.g. the Navy and its mentor programs). Mobley et al. (2018) suggested student veterans had branch identity in addition to their overall veteran identity. Further Mobley et al. (2018) suggested branch identity was more salient than gender identity. The findings in my study

indicated military branch identity was not as salient as participants did not extensively discuss their identity to a particular branch. Participants only discussed their general veteran identity.

Finally, previous studies found student veterans had to re-negotiate identity during their transition to higher education. Studies cited veterans had to navigate between a military or civilian identity (Iverson et al., 2016; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Participants in this study did not describe situations where they were negotiating between a veteran or civilian identity. Instead they found comfort in seeking out other veterans because they had been socialized to military culture. The military culture was described as family-oriented. Further discussion on military culture is examined below.

WSV's military socialization appeared to have a large impact on their transition to college. Military socialization influenced participants leadership and involvement on campus through the leadership skills they built and their sense of veteran identity. Military socialization also influenced their career development from their military training and job placement.

Military Culture

During this study I attempted to further understand participants' perceptions of military culture. By framing my understanding of their experience within military culture, I saw connections to how participants used campus support services. The description of military culture was divided into sub-themes: (a) camaraderie; (b) rank and order; (c) traditions; and (d) gender and racial identity dominance.

Naphan and Elliott (2015) described the military as a total institution or closed system in which all support comes from within the organization. Military and veteran identity development was fostered through the socialization process (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). Further, women in this study described their military friendships came directly from their unit. Through the structure of military units, military culture characteristics included team-work and mission focused (Redmond et al., 2015)

Participants in my study described their units as their families. The military culture created a sense of family among their unit peers (Naphan & Elliot, 2015). Participants need of camaraderie they were familiar with (e.g. veterans) on the college campus appeared to be an impetus as to why they sought the veteran center. The need for interaction with other veterans, and finding camaraderie, in veteran identity was consistent with other studies (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Jenner, 2019; Livingston et al., 2011).

During interviews in which participants shared military experiences, they noted impacts on their gender identity. Due to the sheer number of men they engaged with daily in the military, participants noted their uneasiness with working with other women. For WSV, coming from a male-dominated environment to a college environment with more women, some found it difficult to relate with other women students (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

One of my questions was to explore participants' perceptions on when they felt they belonged to the unit and when they felt uncomfortable with the unit. In almost every instance, women in this study suggested a situation which depicted sexual misconduct.

Several previous studies identified gender-based sexual harassment and assault in the military as a characteristic and pressing issue within the military (Albright et al., 2019; Heineman, 2017; Mattocks et al., 2012; Pershing, 2003; Rough & Armor, 2017). I did not seek out to elicit these examples, yet participants identified these situations.

In each situation, participants shared they took control by reporting the incident to superior officers. Their experience with handling situations of sexual harassment highlighted their ability to also navigate the culture within the student veteran center. An example was Savannah's willingness to confront peers when they made an inappropriate jokes or comments regarding women in the center.

Summary of Influence of Military Experience

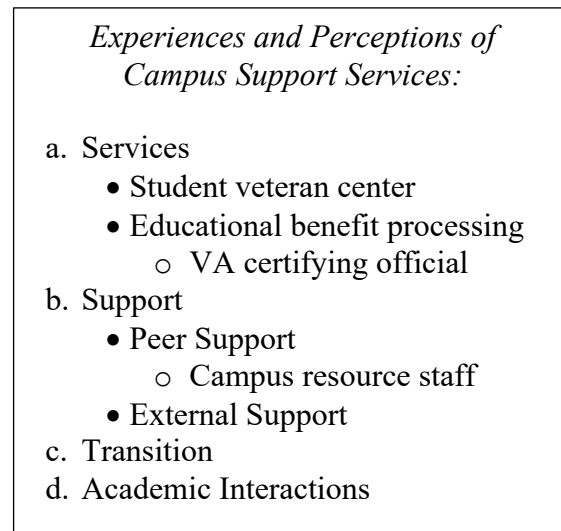
The first research question explored how WSV's military experiences have influenced their transition to higher education. Through this inquiry, women student veterans' military experiences were broken down to four themes: (a) reason to join the military; (b) qualities of women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture. These descriptions helped frame participants' intent to use the student veterans support services once enrolled on campus.

Perceptions of Campus Support Services

The second research question guiding this study was to understand the experiences and perceptions women student veterans had of support services available to them on a college campus. Using Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model for student veteran support, this study was able to capture experiences participants had in utilizing several specific services including the student veteran center and support staff (see Figure 5.1).

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model for student veteran support positioned the student veteran at the core of the support model with: (a) services; (b) support; (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions. The findings of this research study were organized thematically by components of the support model.

Figure 5.1 Experiences and Perceptions of Participants Guided by Student Veteran Support Model (Vacchi, 2011, 2013)



Services

Participants in this study cited three main support services they utilized. Participants in my study discussed three general services: (a) student veteran center; (b) benefits processing; and (c) web site information. In addition to the service of benefits processing, I included participants' perceptions and experiences of the VA certifying official.

One service identified in the literature was childcare services available on campus (Heitzman & Somers, 2015). Participants did not state a need for this type of

service as all, but one woman had children. The participant who was a mother had grown, adult children.

The service of student veteran center was identified as a best practice to create a veteran-friendly environment (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Kirchner, 2015). However, many resources established are created from a generalized assumption that veterans are men (Greer, 2017). Based on the participants' description of the veteran center in my study, it was evident the center was male-dominated. Their descriptions of being a "boy's club" or having a "bro-mentality" suggested the center had a male-centric culture. However, despite this environment, women in this study still chose to regularly utilize the center.

The finding from my study of WSVs use of the male-dominated veteran center was not consistent with previous studies. In Heineman's (2017) study, they cited women student veterans were hesitant in interacting with men student veterans on campus because of their negative and gendered military experience while serving active duty. Further, Iverson et al., (2016) suggested participants in their study desired an eagerness to not be a part of a male-dominated environment a veteran center or veteran specific events.

The WSVs in my study found camaraderie in utilizing the student veteran center. They described the veteran center as a place in which they felt a sense of belonging. Participants reported gender difference did not preclude them from engaging in the center. They found the center a place to relate to other student veterans based on the commonality of the veteran identity. The sense of belonging created through student

veteran center usage was consistent with previous investigations (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Jenner, 2019; Livingston et al., 2011).

Participants relied on their VA educational benefits to finance their education. Previous research cited 82% of women veterans who joined the services Post 9/11 stated they joined the military specifically to gain access to VA educational benefits (Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Patten & Parker, 2011; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). All participants in this study identified the access to their educational benefits as a main reason to join the military and enroll at the research site.

Issues related to educational benefit processing manifested as a major stressor for student veterans (DiRamio et al., 2008; Heitzman & Somers, 2015). Several participants from my study reported specific points of frustration related to their benefits processing including mis-communication. Part of miscommunication was between the VA and the VA certifying official, and part of the challenge was a misunderstanding of various VA educational benefit policies.

Participants were split on their experiences with the VA certifying official. Some participants had highly positive experiences, while others had highly negative experiences resulting in delayed payments or unanticipated tuition responsibilities. The feeling of extreme frustration and distrust related to VA benefit processing by some participants was consistent with previous literature (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The descriptions participants provided of their VA benefit processing experiences further affirmed Wert's (2006) suggestion that correct benefit processing was a foundational need for student veterans.

Previous studies did not note Web information as being a main conduit for help-seeking for new student veterans. Web information was a consistent theme identified in this study which participants relied on. Participants who stated they relied on Web information all stated the Web site was their first source of seeking out information. Participants would seek out information before their enrollment (e.g. during the admission process) and while enrolled (e.g. current institutional policies). An important detail to call attention to is the need for accuracy and in-depth information available for student veterans on the institution's Web sites.

Support

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support was broken down to peer support and external support. As a result of the data analysis I added the support of the student veteran center as a conduit for peer support. Additionally, through data analysis the resource officer was found to be a major source of peer support. Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model does not necessarily call attention to this role functioning in the peer support component. Based on participants' descriptions, however, I would argue the resource officer was a staple in peer support for participants. Finally, the model included external support. The participants in this study identified several external support agencies which they found helpful.

Peer support. As seen through the military culture aspect of camaraderie, peer support was an essential component of support for women in this study. Participants of my study needed peer support ranging from a friend group to getting insights on VA benefit processing delays. Previous studies support this finding that peer support

generated through student veteran centers contributed to student veterans' sense of belonging (DiRamio et al., 2008; Jenner, 2019; Livingston et al., 2011; Vacchi, 2013). The veteran center also served women as an academic support system in that it had study space (DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

Although participants used the student veteran center for support from peer veterans, their descriptions suggested the center maintained a male-dominated culture. Veteran centers were cited as a best practice to create a veteran-friendly campus (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jenner, 2019; Kirchner, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). From the results of my study it appeared students using the veteran center created a culture that mimicked the military atmosphere. Despite previous studies suggesting women would avoid the veteran center setting with a male-dominated culture (Heineman, 2017), women in my study found the veteran center comforting and family-like.

One reason attributed to participants use of the student veteran center was perhaps the saliency of their veteran identity. Veterans seek to interact with other veterans, finding camaraderie in the veteran identity (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011). Participants found the veteran center as a place to relate to fellow student veterans based on the commonality of the veteran identity. When participants came to the research site, their need to find they camaraderie of other veterans was a reason why they sought the veteran center.

Campus resource officer. The research site employed two support staff specifically for student veterans. The campus resource officer manages and directs the

student veteran center, while the VA certifying official processes the VA educational benefits. Both positions report through two separate organizational units.

Participants' perceptions of resource officer support was overall positive. Women in this study described an individual who was professional, motivating, approachable, personable, and responsive. These qualities are recommended in the Council for Advancement Standards (CAS) within the human resources standard for veteran and military programs and services (Council for the Advancement of Standard in Higher Education, 2012). In some respects, the resource officer was perceived as much as a dimension of peer support, in addition to, being a knowledgeable staff member. Previous studies suggested a successful student veteran transition was supported by knowledgeable staff (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2010).

Although participants in this study did not directly identify the resource officer as a mentor, they described the resource officer as someone they valued for guidance and advice. Griffin and Gilbert (2015) suggested oftentimes resource officers assumed the role of mentor. This recommendation of serving as mentor was also outlined as a standard of practice in the CAS standards for military and veteran programs and services (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012).

Considering the military experiences for participants in my study, formal and informal mentorships were a strong part of their past. They likely were relying on the resource officer in their new college environment. Further, participants suggested the resource officer advocated for their needs and was familiar with their past military experience. Overall, the resource officer seemed to demonstrate standards of practice as

outlined by the CAS guidelines for veteran and military programs and services (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012).

External support. Participants in my study described the use of external agencies local to the research site that supported their needs as veterans. Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student support suggested some veteran support be provided by agencies that specialize in veteran affairs. In this case, the student veteran center had a strong partnership with a local organization whose mission was to serve veterans (Vacchi, Hammond, Diamond, 2017). External agencies are also highlighted as standard of practice within the CAS guidelines for military and veteran programs and services (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2012).

Transition

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model for student veteran support identified very specific components to support a student veteran's transition. Support mechanisms included orientations, academic planning or veteran specific courses (Wheeler, 2012; Vacchi, 2011, 2013).

Although the research site employed a veteran-specific orientation, not all participants participated in the orientation program. For one participant, she did not attend because she did not receive information. The reason she did not get information was because of the way she was coded within the student information database. The need for accurate data tracking and data management on student veterans was a finding in this study as well as previous studies (Livingston et al., 2011).

Participants who attended the veteran-specific orientation program learned about the student veteran center and visited it shortly after. Other participants learned about the veteran center through word of mouth. While veteran orientations have been cited as a veteran-friendly practice (Brown & Gross, 2011; Wheeler, 2012), the detailed components of an orientation have not been clearly defined. Based on the findings of this study, navigation of campus and the veteran center location was identified as an essential need.

An area of great concern for participants in this study was finding friends (peers) as they transitioned to college campus. The need for finding peers was consistent with their unit experience in the military and the support of mentorship that was available during military transition. Heitzman and Somers (2015) also found women veterans relied on mentorship from fellow student veterans to help navigate their college transition.

Participants described the feeling of being a non-traditional student, especially by age. Student veterans are characterized as a sub-population of the non-traditional student population (Culp & Dungy, 2014). Additionally, participants' previous military experience provided them the independence and confidence typically seen in adult learners (Wyatt, 2011).

Several participants identified their transition back to the academic setting was somewhat challenging. Consistent with previous literature, some participants suggested the need for some type of academic refresher of various content after their military service (Shiavone & Gentry, 2014).

One major academic transition component for student veterans was the lack of transfer credit awarded for either military training, military experience, or previously earned credit (Persky & Oliver, 2010). Several participants discussed the general concern of how transfer credits would be applied to their curriculum when they transferred to the research site. Overall, however, the frustrations of transferring credit to the research site were not identified by participants interviewed (Persky & Oliver, 2010).

Previous findings also suggested a veteran-friendly practice was a streamlined transfer credit process (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). For one participant, she experienced a smooth transfer credit and VA educational benefit processing experience from a technical college back to the research site institution. She took a summer course at a nearby technical college. She was impressed by how seamless the process was to transfer back the academic credit to the research site and how easy VA educational benefit processing as well between the two institutions. Although the transfer credit process was not specifically asked about, participants overall minimally described their transfer credit experiences.

Academic Interactions

Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model for student veteran support included academic interactions. Academic interactions were cited as key engagements for an academically successful student veteran. The model called for inside and outside the classroom academic interactions (Vacchi, 2011, 2013). While the purpose of this study was not to

investigate the academic experience inside and outside the classroom, several women described experiences related to academic interactions.

Several participants found an academic home through their involvement in academic-based student organizations. Previous studies have suggested veterans need academic support (Livingston et al., 2011; Vacchi, 2013). The finding in my study of participants' sense of belonging within their academic college was through academic student organizations. This finding was an example of a more defined academic interaction outside the classroom.

Several participants briefly talked about the support they sought outside the student veteran center which included mostly academic advising or faculty support. Some women suggested they were questioned on their veteran status or questioned on their request for missing class due to training. In studies with mostly men participants, previous findings described stereotypes from faculty and/or staff that all student veterans are struggling with PTSD or have anger management issues (Osborne, 2013; Vaccaro, 2015). In this study, however, women were able to mask their veteran identity as needed when engaging with faculty and staff.

Participants' action of masking their veteran identity was a similar possibility as to masking gender identity as outlined previously in the theme of military culture (Culver, 2013). Participants could mask or unmask their identity as needed by the context and environment they were in. However, compared to Culver's (2013) description of masking gender identity, this was a different identity to mask. Participants were able to mask their veteran identity so to navigate their classroom experiences. Davis (2008)

noted intersectionality was the interaction between multiple social identities within an individual (e.g racial and gender). This study demonstrated the intersectionality of both participants' gender identity and veteran identity. Participants were able to shift the saliency of these identities depending on the contextual environment.

Summary of Perceptions of Campus Support Services

The second part of this study was to understand the experiences and perceptions women student veterans had of support services available to them on a college campus. Using Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model for student veteran support, this study was able to capture the experiences participants had in utilizing specific services including the student veteran center and support staff. The findings of this research study were organized thematically by the support model's components.

The Case

The phenomenon of women student veterans' experiences in this study was bounded by the context of the case, or the specific research site (Yin, 1994). Merriam (1998) highlighted the details and understanding of the case is instrumental when analyzing case study data.

In my study, the bounded context of the case was the research site in which this study was implemented. The phenomenon of women student veterans' experiences was within the bounded context of this particular case. The contexts and structures created at the research site were unique, therefore participants' experience at the research site were also unique. A similar study conducted at a different institution with different support structures or contexts may not expect similar participant experiences (Merriam, 1998).

This study was not quantitative, and therefore data cannot be considered generalizable to the WSV population. The findings, however, can be analytically generalized to theory or models (Yin, 1994). Hence, the use of Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support as a model in which to analyze the phenomenon of WSVs experiences within a case study.

The unique contexts of the research site were its military history, its service of a student veteran center, dedicated resource officer and a VA certifying official. Organizationally, the resource officer and the VA certifying official reported through different divisions within the research site's organizational structure. The resource officer was responsible for the daily management of the student veteran center. As a result, the services developed in the veteran center fell within a separate organizational structure than the service of VA educational benefit processing. A previous research study suggested veteran-friendly or best practices for veteran services was to create one-stop-shop or a single-point-of-contact model (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). The research site did not employ that model.

Next, the resource officer employed by the research site was a U.S. Army veteran who identified as a man. A majority of participants described male supervisors in the military, then they enrolled on a campus where the student veteran center was directed by a man. These implications were not unique to this research site and this case. Interestingly, a finding in this study, consistent with previous literature, was women veterans identified they did not always get along with other women (Schivone & Gentry, 2014). The VA certifying official at this research site identified as a woman, and several

participants described negative experiences with her. An institution with different structures and different staff would yield different contextual experiences of participants.

Further, the research site is located in the Southern U.S.. The political climate of the state and U.S. region, in which the institution is located, has been described as being pro-military (Maley & Hawkins, 2018). Previous literature has cited veterans mask their identity in fear of negative reaction from faculty and staff to their military service. Negative reactions were in terms of faculty and staff ideologies either in favor or not of favor of recent U.S. military conflicts (DiRamio, et al., 2008; Elliott, Gonzales, & Larsen, 2011). The research site has also been cited as a politically conservative campus (The Princeton Review, 2016). Participants did not describe situations where they received negative comments regarding their military service, yet I did not ask about that type of academic interaction as it was beyond the scope of this study. This example of the geographical location of the research site provided a unique context within this case study.

The case in my study was the research site. The phenomenon of women student veterans' experiences was within the bounded context of this case. Had this investigation been conducted at a different site, the themes of data may be different dependent on the context of that site.

Limitations

While the results of this study have many practical applications for campus student veteran's centers and helped fill a gap in the literature on women student veterans the study had limitations. First, the bounded system within this case reside which was

within one institutional site. Increasing the number of participants from this institutional case would address concerns of reliability and demonstrate a stronger data set for the case study (Merriam, 1998). Like the previous studies focused on women, but with lower participation (DiRamio et al., 2015; Heineman, 2017; Heitzman & Somers, 2015, Iverson, et al., 2016), producing a sample proved harder than one my expect. Women are juggling many things outside of school, let alone participating in a research study.

Next, participants who engaged in this study overall had a strong sense of veteran identity and desired to be associated with the student veteran center. I did not have a participant who chose to let their veteran identity go and not engage in the center. The unknown in this study, was what women student veterans needed who did not engage in the veteran center. While this unknown may also be an implication for future research, it was a limitation in that this study only gained descriptions from participants who voluntarily chose to engage in the veteran support services available.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The findings from this inquiry offered several implications for practice and future research. An intentional outcome of this inquiry was to identify practical applications to apply to the college setting. The interview protocol allowed for participants to specifically identify areas in which campuses can better support women student veterans. Although a limitation was the number of participants, women student veterans from this study provided some excellent suggestions for institutions desiring to boost their veteran-friendly status.

Implications

The most suggested implication for practice was a sub-group for WSVs to come together to meet and support each other. While participants suggested they did not necessarily have needs that were different than men in the student veteran population, they each identified they would appreciate being able to come together with other WSV. In my previous role, when I more directly supported student veterans, I attempted to create a coffee hour specifically for women student veterans. As I did not have much success in women participating, I learned later it was due to the timing I had offered this support program; women student veterans stated they were mostly in class during this time frame.

Another implication from these findings was the imperativeness of maintaining Web sites with accurate and timely information. A consistent finding in this investigation was the reliance on the research site's Web site for information. Women used Web site information prior to enrollment and continued to use it after enrollment. In order to support women student veterans, and ideally any student veteran, an institution should review its Web site information and hyperlinks each semester to ensure information is correct and functioning. Student veterans were socialized for accurate and timely information during their military experience; they are expecting this setting when they enrolled in higher education.

A situation perhaps unique to this case institution, but could be for other institutions, was the data used to inform re-enrolling student veterans. One participant identified she was not informed of the various orientation and transition programs open to

student veterans. She determined it was due to her status as a former student upon matriculation. Compared to other participants who matriculated as transfer students, one participant was coded as a former student returning. Nonetheless, campuses should be mindful of the way student veterans are coded in the student database systems to ensure all potential matriculation points are covered to inform new student veterans.

For administrators establishing or directing student veteran centers, several implications were identified through this inquiry. First, the environmental décor or images in the veteran center should represent all social identities. One participant discussed her search for artwork to display in the veteran center and her struggle to find artwork that depicted women military service members. She was faced with gender stereotyped artwork in her search. In addition to gender identities, campus administrators should be mindful of racial and ethnic identities of service members in the center artwork or photographic images used in marketing pieces.

Next, participants suggested a male-dominated culture that existed in the center space. The culture was defined by jokes and comments. Center administrators should establish center policies that support an inclusive and safe environment for all student veterans. Center administrators may find it helpful to partner with diversity and Title IX educators on campus to create educational programming or center ‘bylaws’ to form a culture of respect.

Another implication from the results of this study was the recommendation for basic transitional programming. Participants described the way the various military branches facilitated mentorship while in their military service. Whether the military

branch was good or bad at transitioning servicemembers between duty stations did not change the fact that there were basic needs and questions women had when coming to the research site.

As mentioned previously, Web sites and marketing sources should have accurate and relative information. A finding from this study demonstrated the WSVs need of identifying places to live in the new community. For example, Web information directing student veterans of local areas and apartment complexes to live. Campus administrators might benefit from reviewing transitional information for other campus populations such as graduate students or even new faculty/staff transitional information. The transitional information provided to these populations are likely similar to student veterans. For example, information related to local schools, daycare, healthcare providers, dentists, real estate agents, etc.

Next, a robust mentorship program may be helpful in this transition. Mentorship programs have been highlighted in previous literature (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Livingston et al., 2011; Vacchi, 2013). My study highlighted very specific ways participants experienced mentoring in the military and perhaps what they would expect from a mentorship relationship in a higher educational setting. Mentorship opportunities may not be limited to student veterans mentoring new student veterans. Mentorship opportunities can be inclusive of supportive faculty and staff to mentor and introduce new student veterans to their new campus and greater community. Retired veteran faculty and staff may be highly interested in helping a fellow veteran.

Implications are also available for campuses looking to hire veteran center staff or support staff for student veterans. From the findings in this inquiry, participants suggested very specific qualities which made the resource officer a positive support person. When hiring support staff, hiring decision makers should look for qualities such as approachable, welcoming, thorough, professional, inclusive, and responsive. Hiring managers can incorporate interview questions which could ascertain an individual's skill and ability with these qualities.

Finally, the most thorough implication or recommendation for practitioners is to conduct a self-assessment utilizing the CAS guidelines for veterans and military programs and services (CAS, 2012). The guidelines outline programmatic components for the standard of practice when working with student veterans. The self-assessment tool can identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of campus support services related to student veterans. The CAS standards specifically include sections on human resources (e.g. campus support staff) and facilities and equipment (e.g. student veteran center). The other 10 components of the standards additionally offer guidance for support staff and veteran centers.

Future Research

The opportunities for future research are still great within the phenomenon of student veteran experiences and especially women student veterans. This study could be conducted with a different sub-population of student veterans. For example, instead of focusing the phenomenon around a gender identity, focusing on a racial or ethnic identity. The findings in this study suggested veterans of color had different military

experience and experiences in the student veteran center. A phenomenological study focused on veterans of color would continue to identify ways college campuses can support all student veterans.

During the participant recruitment process two students who responded to the participant questionnaire were graduate students. Graduate students were excluded from this study as they have different needs than undergraduate students. In addition to the two graduate students who completed the participant questionnaire, I have met and consulted with many other graduate student veterans who have been engaged in the student veteran center. A research implication could be a study which focuses on the experiences and needs of graduate student veterans.

The focus of this study was WSVs experiences within the student veteran center and with campus support staff. A follow-up study could be understanding the motivations and experiences of campus support staff, specifically resource officers. There currently is no master list of student veteran centers nor resource officer contacts in the U.S. Additionally, a thorough quantitative descriptive study would benefit researchers to know how many student veteran centers exist.

Chapter Summary

This study explored the experiences WSV had on a college campus. Through WSV's descriptions, this study sought to explore how their military experience influenced their transition to higher education. Further, this study explored perceptions of campus veteran resources available to them once enrolled (e.g. student veteran center and student veteran support staff). The purpose of this study was to continue to fill a gap in

the literature on WSV. Thus, this study was guided by the primary and secondary research questions:

1. What are women student veterans' experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans' perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and student veteran support staff)?

Through this investigation, more women's voices were added to the conversation on student veterans in higher education. This study also identified specific needs of women engaging in the student veteran center, which are aimed to support them.

This study employed a phenomenological case study design. By using a case study design, the experiences of the WSV were bounded by the campus on which they were enrolled. Eight themes were identified in support of the research questions.

The first four themes were within the influence of their military experience on their college transition. The first themes were: (a) reason to join the military; (b) qualities of women; (c) military socialization; and (d) military culture. The second four coded themes identified women's experiences and perceptions within the campus support services. These coded themes were conceptually framed by Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model for student veterans support. Identified themes included: (a) services (including student veteran center and educational benefit processing; (b) support (including support staff); (c) transition; and (d) academic interactions.

This study offered insights to current experiences WSV had on college campuses. The lack of women student veteran participants in the overall academic literature, allowed this study to fill a gap and provide practical implications to support WSV. As more WSV enroll in higher education, it is important for colleges and universities to acknowledge their needs as well as the needs of veterans with other social identities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

IRB Approval (Pilot Study)

Dear Dr. Havice,
The Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the protocol “Women Students Veterans’ Perceptions of Campus Resources Centers and Officers: A Phenomenological Study” using exempt review procedures and a **determination was made on April 2, 2018** that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as **Exempt under categories B2** in accordance with federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101.

No further action, amendments, or IRB oversight of the protocol is required except in the following situations:

1. Substantial changes made to the protocol that could potentially change the review level. Researchers who modify the study purpose, study sample, or research methods and instruments in ways not covered by the exempt categories will need to submit an expedited or full board review application.
2. Occurrence of unanticipated problem or adverse event; any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, complications, and/or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance immediately.
3. Change in Principal Investigator (PI)

All research involving human participants must maintain an ethically appropriate standard, which serves to protect the rights and welfare of the participants. This involves obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality of data. Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after completion of the study. The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title when referencing the study in future correspondence.

Good luck with your study.

Best,

Amy Smitherman

IRB Coordinator

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Appendix B

Amended IRB Approval

Subject: Re: Request for amendments to IRB2018-141 | Women Student Veterans'...

Hello Pam,

The proposed changes does not change the Exempt determination. A formal amendment is not required. You may implement the changes without further IRB oversight.

Best,
Nalinee

Nalinee Patin, CIP

IRB Administrator

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Appendix C

Military History of the Research Site

The research site had a long and rich military history. The site was established as a land-grant institution through the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. The institution had an educational emphasis on military training and agriculture. From its establishment, through the early 1950's the research site had a corps of cadets.

At the height of World War II, the research site was noted to have the country's largest infantry ROTC unit. The research site additionally served as training grounds for the Army Air Corps and the Army's Signal Corps. The institution's president at the time was encouraged by its trustees, to make the research site's facilities and land available in any way to support the war efforts. More than 1000 students from the research site served in the military up to the middle of World War II. Some reports noted the research site sent the most military officers to the war-front, only third behind the U.S. Military Academy and Texas A&M. Enrolled students were encouraged to focus on their studies and be fully ready for duty when they would finally be called upon.

The end of World War II provided an opportunity of great influx of veterans to the research site but generated a new set of problems. Many returning veterans returning to the institution were former students. Upon completion of their military service, they returned to complete their degree. Admissions operated on a priority system through their acceptance practices. Students who were former students had first priority for re-admission; veterans in general had second; and finally, men ages 17-19 who had

completed 11th grade (12th grade was not added to the research site's state education system till the 1945-1946 school year).

Veterans returning often had college credits when they re-enrolled. The registrar had to assemble various administrators and faculty to review credits and determine an appropriate matchup to their curriculum to award credit. Despite the research gaining some enrollment from veterans, enrollment did decline in the late 1940's.

The assistant registrar was determined to understand the pattern of the enrollment decline and what was causing a decline. Through a survey and interview assessment process they determined students were not interested in the research site for three distinctive reasons: limited curricular choices, the four-year military requirement (e.g. corps of cadets), and no women.

By the early 1950's, the institution hired management consultants to evaluate the effectiveness of the administration and thus the performance of the institution. The consultants found through assessment and document analysis the institution needed a change in order for it to thrive in the next decades. Change needed was specifically noted in admitting women and changing the military requirement.

In 1953, the research site was one of the last institutions to still have a four-year military requirement. Other institutions include Texas A&M and Virginia Polytechnic. The Board determined the research site followed the footsteps of other land-grant institutions and reduced the military requirement to the first two years for men, then they could choose their final two years if they desired to continue the military route.

The irony related to my study, was the turn for both women and military heritage at the institution occurred at exact same moment. The Board of Trustees were at a crux to address declining enrollment knowing two main reasons were related to military requirement and women's enrollment.

Appendix D

Pilot Study Semi-Structure Interview Questions

Researcher: To begin, I'd like to gain some context about your experience in the military.

- Why did you decide to join the military?
- What was it like to be apart of a military unit?
 - Probe: What was daily life like? How did you socialize/make friends?
 - Probe: When was the first time you felt like you belonged to a unit?
 - Probe: Share with me a time you felt uncomfortable in a unit. Why?
- When you had a question/concern/problem in the military, who would you turn to?
 - Probe: How did their support help you navigate? How did you feel about turning to that person with that question/issue?
 - Probe: What qualities made them approachable?
- How did your experience in the military change you?
 - Probe: How did it change you as a woman?

Researcher: our next set of questions are more about your experiences here at [the research site]

- What made you apply to enroll at [the research site]?
 - Probe: What was your path to get here (community college, etc)?
 - Probe: How (if any) did your military occupation influence your selection of major?
- What aspects of being a college student are similar to being in the military?
 - Probe: What new skills have you had to develop since becoming a college student?
- Where do you go for information/guidance at [the research site]?
 - Probe: What information or guidance have you sought?
 - Probe: What qualities do you look for in individuals to support you?
 - Probe: What encourages you to seek that support?
- Describe your experience using the student veteran center or the resource officer.
 - Probe: How often do you utilize these resources (center or officer)?
 - Probe: What expectations (if any) or experience did you have of veterans' resources prior to enrolling at [the research site]?
 - Probe: Was there someone in the military who had similar qualities as the veteran resource officer?
 - Probe: How would you describe the atmosphere of the veteran's center on campus?
 - Probe: What is daily life like in the veteran center? How did you socialize/make friends?
 - Probe: When was the first time you felt like you belonged at [the research site]? Or within the veteran center?

- What kind of staff support do you seek from individuals related to your [the research site] or college student experience outside the veteran center/officer?

Researcher: Final set of questions...

- Describe the ideal support of the student veteran center and officer.
 - Probe: In what ways or areas do you have a need from [the research site] but are not receiving support from the veteran center or officer?
 - Probe: What ways could the veteran center/officer better support women student veterans?
- If another woman veteran was transitioning out of the military and into [the research site], what advice would you give her?
 - Probe: what advice would you give women student veterans using the student veteran center for the first time? Or talking to the resource officer for the first time?
- What advice would you give to resources officers working with women student veterans specifically?
 - Probe: what could be added to the veteran's center that would be specifically beneficial to women student veterans?

Pilot Study specific questions:

- Was there a question I should have asked that I didn't?
- Are there any questions I'm asking in the wrong way? Considering military experience?
- Any questions in the demographic survey that I should ask differently?
Were there any questions that didn't make sense?

Appendix E

Planned Changes Write Up from Pilot Study

To help inform my full study, I completed a pilot study in Spring 2018. The purpose of the pilot study was to test the interview questions, the timing of the interview process, and to allow myself a chance to practice interviewing as a novice researcher. I followed the same recruitment strategy for the pilot study as I did for the full study.

Pilot Study Participants

Nine individuals began the online participant qualification questionnaire; five individuals completed the questionnaire and specified their interest in participating in the study. One of the five indicated she was a graduate student. I followed-up with her via email thanking her for her service and informing her that the study would only include undergraduate students so as to not skew results. The remaining four WSV were all eligible to participate in the pilot study.

To fulfill the pilot study purpose, it was predetermined to only interview two WSV. I reviewed the online-demographic responses of the four eligible participants and knew one of them through my work with student veterans. I was aware she was close to graduation, thus I selected her to participate in the pilot study since she would not be available for the full study in the future. The second participant I selected because she indicated she was a reservist and had a different branch of service than my first participant. The demographics of the two women interviewed for the pilot study are found in Table 1. Participants selected pseudonyms for confidentiality purposes. The

participants transcribed interviews were folded into the full study and analyzed along with the participants from the full study.

Table Appendix E.1 Demographics of Participants in Pilot Study

Name	Military Status	Branch	Military Occupation	Enrollment to Institution
Vivian	Reservist	Air Force	Medic	2017
Adeshola	Reservist	Navy	Hospital Corpsman	2013

I followed-up via email with the final two women who responded but whom I chose not to interview for the pilot study. My reply included an appreciation for responding to the questionnaire and to inquire if they would be willing to wait and participate in the full study in the future. One woman responded that she did want to be included in the future; the second I did not receive a reply.

Planned Changes from Pilot Study

After completing the pilot study, considerations for the full study were made to: (a) change the frequency and duration of the face-to-face interviews; (b) change the participant incentive and the timing of incentive distribution timing; (c) amend questions for their constructs and to narrow in on the content or phenomenon; and (d) change the conceptual model guiding the research study.

Frequency and Duration of Face-to-Face Interviews. My initial interview protocol included a main or single face-to-face interview going through all the semi-structured interview questions in one sitting. The second face-to-face meeting was through the member checking process and shorter in length.

During the pilot study, the main face-to-face interviews lasted 75 mins and 105 minutes. Both women were forthcoming in descriptions of their experiences and time. Previous literature had suggested time restraints student veterans' experiences (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Considering the duration of the pilot study interviews, a process change I made for the full study was to break up the face-to-face interview into two separate meetings. In my member checking process with the two participants, they confirmed splitting the interview would be a better use of student veterans' time.

Additionally, despite my past connection to the military, I was a stranger inquiring about these women's lives. By establishing a first face-to-face interview, I was able to build rapport which aided in their comfort to open and share their experiences. I hoped to develop a sense of trust during our initial meeting. In the interview with Adeshola, she noted after our meeting our conversation felt "therapeutic" and she was comfortable talking about her experiences with me as a fellow woman. At the end of her interview, she even invited me to a family gathering as she stated she felt she really got to know me.

Participant Incentive. My incentive process during the pilot study called for the distribution of a gift card after the member checking time-period. I moved the incentive process to be given after the second face-to-face interview. By distributing the incentive at the conclusion of the second face-to-face interview allowed for flexibility of conducting the member checking process through a virtual experience. I was concerned with the time restraints the participants have between school and their other responsibilities, I desired to keep their participation as streamlined as possible. A virtual

member checking provides more flexibility while maintaining a face-to-face experience to verify the information I gleaned from the interview.

Additionally, my initial protocol and IRB application stated the distribution of a Starbucks gift card. Starbucks had two stores available at the research site. For the full study, I changed the gift card to a more general store instead. During the member check process of the first pilot participant, she commented she was not a “girly-girl” and did not go to Starbucks for coffee, food, or socializing. This comment made me consider the Starbucks brand and the consumer base of that company. Despite my assumption that college students desired coffee, the Starbucks brand may not be the right incentive for the student veteran population. In the full study, I changed the incentive process to include a gift card to a more general store for more a more practical use.

Interview Question Constructions. After completing the pilot study, I amended or removed several questions from the full-study interview protocol. I needed to amend questions related to past military experience and breaking out questions related to campus support.

Military experience. The questions surrounding the context of the military experience needed to be refined. The first area for refinement was their experience within their military units. From the pilot study it became apparent the question was asked from a singular stance (e.g. describe life in your unit), yet participants suggested they had multiple duty stations and subsequently multiple units. Each duty station participants were assigned to had different unit makeup and culture, like every college campus has different student populations and campus culture. Further, Vivian offered service

members are often asked about unit culture and it was appropriate to directly inquire about culture rather than skirt around the topic with language in the questions regarding daily life experience.

The next area noted during the interviews was the existence of mentor programs within a duty station. Adeshola's interview described a military mentorship program in which she voluntarily participated. For context, Adeshola was active duty before signing her reservist contract and enrolling in higher education full time. Vivian, on the other hand, had always been in a reservist contract and enrolled in school. During Adeshola's active duty time, she discussed the option of having a mentor at her various duty stations. Not all sailors were required to participate in the mentor program, but participation was highly encouraged. The mentor program was organic in that despite mentors self-identifying as individuals willing to support newly assigned sailors, the mentee or newly assigned sailor could also find a mentor outside the formal program. Adeshola described the mentorship programs were encouraged:

While you're there [in the units], especially when you're new, to find somebody...that could benefit you as far as helping you along with your career on that ship, and just introducing you to things that you may not know or be aware of on the ship.

Considering the military has mentor programs established, I asked in the full study about women's experience's in these mentor programs. These programs are often cited in the literature as best practices for supporting student veterans in transition (DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Heitzman & Somers, 2015).

Veteran resource officers. Several questions were updated to reflect more accurate constructs or definition of terms. For example, the question related to where participants go for information was too broad. Information as a construct needed to be broken down further into types of information (e.g. academic or educational benefits). Additionally, when questions were initially drafted the focus was meant to be on the student veteran center and resource officer. In both interviews it was apparent the veterans' educational benefits certifying official was an integral part of the participant's educational experience. They considered the certifying official as part of the staff supporting student veterans. The questions regarding resource officers were edited to include the certifying official as well.

Secondly, questions needed to dig further into the construct of support staff qualities. Both participants suggested the resource officer had the "right qualities" that made him approachable and supportive. Participants described the resource officer as open, friendly, and knowledgeable of different resources. These descriptions were secondary responses from the interview questions. As a result, I updated the question to directly ask what the positive qualities and negative qualities are of the resource officer when working with participants. This question offered a further probe to get specific examples in addition to descriptive qualities.

Student veteran center. In the original interview protocol the veteran center and resource officer were coupled together. These two constructs were parceled out to understand the women's perceptions of these individually. Statements made by participants indicated women had different perceptions of these two constructs.

Participant interactions with the resource officer was different than her experiences within the veteran center. Adeshola described a negative encounter with another man veteran in the center. She described her feelings at times in the veterans' center:

The fact that I'm different, there's not a lot of people that are looking from my perspective, so when they're talking about certain things, they either don't apply to me, or they may come off as offensive towards me because in my eyes, that doesn't seem right or that doesn't seem like something that should be encouraged.

Adeshola separated out the negative experience from the people in the veterans' center and the resource officer. She described the resource officer as someone who is "very good at wanting to be there and make stuff happen so everything's a very positive experience, or people are getting something out of the center." These dichotomies of descriptions suggested the topic of resource officer and student veteran center need to be approached separately in the interview.

Change to Conceptual Model. The final change planned after completing the pilot study was the consideration of an alternative conceptual framework. Initially my conceptual framework for this study was guided by Vacchi's (2011, 2013) model of student veteran support and Downing & Roush's (1985) model of feminist identity development. Downing and Roush's (1985) model was developed from Cross's (1971) Black identity development. Downing and Roush (1985) noted the experiences women had were similar and relevant with developmental experiences of minorities. Cross's (1971) model of Black identity development was developed in a five-stage linear progression: (a) preencounter, (b) encounter, (c) immersion-emersion, (d) internalization,

(e) and internalization-commitment. Downing & Roush (1985) paralleled Cross's (1971) model through the development of a five-stage progression for women. Their progressive developmental stages included (a) passive acceptance, (b) revelation, (c) embeddedness-emanation, (d) synthesis, and (e) active commitment.

I had considered this model because Downing and Roush (1985) noted "it is assumed that women may recycle through these stages, each time experiencing the challenge of the stage more profoundly and using previously learned skill to work through the particular stage again" (p. 702). Downing & Roush's (1985) model had an emancipation tone, yet in the pilot study WSV did not describe the need to be freed from the male-dominated culture, just the experience of either navigating through it, going along with it, or moving past it once they are enrolled.

Culver (2013) described similar phases in her model of gender identity development of women in the military. While WSV are transitioning from one institution to the next, their interactions within the male-dominated culture and the college campus culture may be shifting the perceptions they have of themselves as a woman. Culver (2013) described a process of masking and unmasking a feminine identity in order to navigate their male-dominated environment. Considering WSV have experienced the male-dominated military training prior to enrolling in their current college, women may be drawing upon strategies to navigate the campus and campus resources that once were needed to navigate the military environment.

An example from the pilot study data collection of the lack of a critical feminist lens was evident in both pilot study interviews. Vivian noted:

There's also a time when the women aren't going to be women anymore. They're going to turn on guy mode and I think people need to understand that it's not ... it's sometimes how they cope with things or how to get through to other people because they feel they're not getting through and they're not being respected. Adeshola also stated a feeling which demonstrated a need to mask through conversations she had in the veterans' center. She said:

But there's not something that we can like let's just talk about women stuff, or whatever, and not feel like we're always trying to hang with the boys and keep up with them. I mean, I'm not saying keep up like we're behind them, but it's just more so like let me talk about guns because he's talking about guns and tell him how I did all this stuff with guns in the military or let me talk about sports and talk about things that keep us in the conversation.

For the full study, considerations were made to: (a) change the frequency and duration of the face-to-face interviews; (b) change the participant incentive and the timing of incentive distribution timing; (c) amend questions for their constructs and to narrow in on the content or phenomenon; and (d) change the conceptual model guiding the research study. Finally, the pilot study allowed for initial analysis of the pilot data collected.

Appendix F

Final Study Recruitment Email

Dear student veterans,
My name is Rebecca Atkinson and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program here at [the research site]. This email is being sent to student veterans identified through [the research site] application process.

I am completing a research pilot study exploring the perceptions and needs of women student veterans. These insights will help find ways college campuses can better serve women student veterans. Participation is completely voluntary, and your individual responses will be confidential.

Below is bulleted information regarding the details of this study or you can watch this short video where I introduce myself and tell you about this study. [VIDEO SCRIPT BELOW]

Who: Women student veterans who served in the U.S. military and are now enrolled at [the research site] University.

What: Participation in a 15 minute online demographic survey; then 60-90-minute face-to-face interviews; followed by a 15-30 minute meeting to confirm your responses. Participants will receive a \$20 Walmart gift card for their participation following the final 15-30 minute meeting.

Why: To help us learn about your experiences as women student veterans and understand the resources you need to navigate college. Your insights will help suggest programs, policies, and practices for other women student veterans enrolled in college settings.

When & Where: Interviews will be scheduled and held at a time convenient to the participant

What's Next: Complete a short survey if you are interested in participating

This pilot study will help determine the full-study interview experience. Your participation is voluntary. Each interview will be assigned a pseudonym to help ensure personal identifiers will not be revealed during the analysis and write-up. The informed consent to participate is attached to this email.

To let the researcher know your interest in participating, please complete a short survey through the link provided below. This survey will provide background/demographic information and determine your eligibility to participate. The survey will take no more than 15 minutes to complete and does not commit you to fully participate in the interview.

To access the demographic survey click here [LINK INCLUDED TO QUALTRICS]

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me.

Rebecca Atkinson
Educational Leadership Doctoral Student
[the research site]

VIDEO SCRIPT:

Hello! My name is Rebecca Atkinson and I appreciate your time reading my email and watching this short video! I am currently a doctoral student in Education Leadership here at [the research site]. I also work full time in new student orientation.

A little bit about myself, I am also military-connected in that I was an Army Brat growing up. My family was stationed in Virginia, North Carolina and in Germany. My dad was deployed for 13 months in the first Gulf War in the 90's to Kuwait. After college, I worked as a civilian for the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. It wasn't until my doctoral studies began I realized how much this military influence had on my interest in student veterans.

In my studies, I have found myself particularly interested in women student veterans. I certainly can identify being a woman and think they are a strong entity within our community. My study seeks to understand and explore women student veterans' experiences; and specifically, the perceptions they have of the resources available to them on campus.

In the email provided there is information about participating in my research pilot study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you are interested in participating, there is further information about the study, including an online demographic survey and my contact information to setup our interview time. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes, after the interview I will setup a follow-up meeting to confirm your responses, once we have met the final time, you will receive a \$20 Walmart gift card.

I appreciate your time in watching my short intro video and reading my email about participating. Thank you!

Reminder Email

Email would be sent 24 hours prior to scheduled interview

Dear <Student Name>,

I hope this email finds you well! Thank you again for your participation in my research study. I'm writing to remind you that tomorrow we are scheduled to meet for your interview. The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. I will be audio recording the interview to help me transcribe and listen more closely to the themes you are describing to help with my research. At the end of your interview, you will receive a \$20 gift card to Walmart. Should you have any questions or need to reschedule, please let me know at your earliest convenience.

Thank you!

Rebecca


Rebecca Atkinson

Education Leadership Doctoral Student

Appendix G


Student Veteran Newsletter Sample

SITREP [REDACTED] - NOV 2018

 Rebecca Atkinson
Thursday, November 1, 2018 at 1:01 PM
[Show Details](#)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

STEM Vets: Oak Ridge National Lab Weekend Trip



Oak Ridge National Laboratory is the largest US Department of Energy science and energy laboratory, conducting basic and applied research to deliver transformative solutions to compelling problems in energy and security.

The National Lab Weekend Trip will take place November 4th-5th. USMC Veteran Patrik Schuler is the trip organizer. For more details email [\[REDACTED\]](#)

Women Student Veterans Research Study

Doctoral student Rebecca Atkinson, in the Educational Leadership Program [\[REDACTED\]](#) is conducting a research study exploring the perceptions and needs of women student veterans. These insights will help find ways college campuses can better serve women student veterans. Participation is completely voluntary and your responses will be anonymous. In addition, participants will receive a \$20 Walmart gift card for their participation. Click here to watch a [short video](#) about Doctoral Candidate Rebecca Atkinson.

[To access the demographic survey, click here](#)

Appendix H

Online Participant Qualification Questionnaire

First Name:

Last Name:

Email address:

Phone number:

Preferred method of contact:

- Email
- Phone call
- Text message

Gender identity:

- Female
- Male {SKIP LOGIC- if responding male- takes them to conclusion to say thank you}

1. Please indicate your current military status: [drop down box]
 - a. Honorably discharged
 - b. Active Duty
 - c. Reservist
 - d. Medically discharged
 - e. Retired military
 - f. Other [text entered]
2. Please select your branch of service: [drop down box]
 - a. Army
 - b. Navy
 - c. Air Force
 - d. Marines
 - e. Coast Guard
3. What year did you join the military? [text entered]
4. Please describe your military occupation/job: [text entered]
5. Where were you deployed? [yes/no]
6. How many times were you deployed? [text entered]
7. Please state the number of years served. [text entered]
8. Please indicate your rank upon discharge: [text entered]
9. How did you apply to [the research site]?
 - a. New Freshman application
 - b. Transfer application
10. What year did you enroll at [the research site]? [text entered]
11. Please indicate your current academic major: [text entered]
12. Please indicate your current home state: [text entered]
13. Please indicate your home state when you joined the military [text entered]

14. Please indicate your relationship status:
 - a. Single
 - b. Committed relationship
 - c. Married
 - d. Divorced
 - e. Widowed
 - f. Separated
15. Do you have any children or dependents? [yes/no]
16. Do you wish to participate in the interview portion of this research study? [yes/no]
{SKIP LOGIC- if respond no, take them to end to say thank you}
17. Please indicate your date preference for interview format (*two formats used for pilot study*): *Dates and time frames to be determined; offered approximately 6 timeframes*

Appendix I

Full Study Semi-Structure Interview Questions

Interview Part 1:

- Researcher: To begin, I'd like to gain some context about your experience in the military.
 - Why did you decide to join the military?
 - What was it like to be a part of a military unit?
 - Probe: what was your unit(s) culture like?
 - Probe: When was the first time you felt like you belonged to a unit?
 - Probe: Share with me a time you felt uncomfortable in a unit. Why?
 - When you had a question/concern/problem in the military, who would you turn to?
 - Probe: How did their support help you navigate? How did you feel about turning to that person with that question/issue?
 - Probe: What qualities made them approachable?
 - What kind of resources were available to you or that you used when you were in the military?
 - Probe: ae there any resources you used that were specifically for women in the military?
 - How did you grow as a person from your experience in the military change you?
 - Probe: How did it change you as a woman?

Interview Part 2:

- Researcher: This set of questions are more about your experiences here at [the research site]
 - What made you apply to enroll at [the research site]?
 - Probe: What was your path to get here (community college, etc)?
 - Probe: How (if any) did your military occupation influence your selection of major?
 - What information or guidance have you sought?
 - Probe: Where do you go for information/guidance at [the research site]?
 - Probe: What encourages you to seek that support?
 - Probe: What qualities do you look for in individuals to support you?
 - Describe your experience using the student veterans center,
 - Probe: How often do you utilize the veteran center?

- Probe: What expectations (if any) or experience did you have of veterans' resources prior to enrolling at [the research site]?
 - Probe: How would you describe the atmosphere of the veteran's center on campus? OR What is the culture like in the veterans' center?
 - Probe: When was the first time you felt like you belonged at [the research site]? Or within the veteran center?
 - Describe your experience interacting with the veterans' resource officer or VA certifying official.
 - Probe: What are the positive qualities the resource officer has? What are the negative qualities?
 - Probe: What are the positive/negative qualities of the resource officer when working with you as a woman?
 - Probe: Was there someone in the military who had similar qualities as the veteran resource officer?
 - Probe: As a woman, are there qualities that make the resource officer more approachable? Less approachable?
 - What kind of staff support do you seek from individuals related to your [the research site] or college student experience outside the veteran center/officer?
- Researcher: Final set of questions...
 - Describe the ideal support of the student veteran center and officer.
 - Probe: In what ways or areas do you have a need from [the research site] but are not receiving support from the veteran center or officer?
 - Probe: What ways could the veteran center/officer better support women student veterans?
 - If another woman veteran was transitioning out of the military and into [the research site], what advice would you give her?
 - Probe: what advice would you give women student veterans using the student veteran center for the first time? Or talking to the resource officer for the first time?
 - What advice would you give to resources officers working with women student veterans specifically?
 - Probe: what could be added to the veteran's center that would be specifically beneficial to women student veterans?

Appendix J

Mapping of In-Depth Interview Protocol

1. What are women student veterans’ experiences in a college setting?
 - a. How do women student veterans’ military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?
 - b. What are women student veterans’ perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?

	Interview Questions	Connection to Research Question, Conceptual Framework, Methodology Justification, and Other Sources
Part 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you decide to join the military? 2. What was it like to be a part of a military unit? 3. Where their points in your military experience where you had questions/concerns/ problems? 4. When you had a question/concern/problem in the military, who would you turn to? 5. What kind of resources were available to you or that you used when you were in the military? 6. How did you grow as a person from your experience in the military change you? 	<p>RQ: How do women student veterans’ military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?</p> <p>RQ: What perceptions do women student veterans have of campus student veteran centers and/or support staff</p> <p>Context to frame the phenomenon (Beven, Merriam, 1998; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 1994)</p> <p><i>Military culture/unit culture</i> (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Carrieras, 2006; Iverson et al., 2016; Pawelczyk, 2014; Snyder, 2003);</p> <p><i>Role change</i> (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010);</p> <p><i>Women’s military identity</i> (Cook Francis & Krause, 2012; Culver, 2013)</p>

Part 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What made you apply to enroll at [the research site]? 2. Describe a little about your transition to [the research site]. 3. What information did you learn about when you came to [the research site] that was supportive to veterans? 4. What information or guidance have you sought? 5. Describe your experience using the student veterans center, 6. Describe your experience interacting with the veterans' resource officer or VA certifying official. 7. What kind of staff support do you seek from individuals related to your [the research site] or college student experience outside the veteran center/officer? 	<p>RQ: How do women student veterans' military experiences influence their transition to the college setting?</p> <p>RQ: What are women student veteran's perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?</p> <p><i>Educational benefits access</i> (Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Patten & Parker, 2011);</p> <p><i>Transition to college</i> (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Heitzman & Somers, 2015; Jones, 2017; Livingston et al., 2011; Naphan & Elliot, 2015; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014);</p> <p><i>Help-seeking attitudes and behaviors</i> (DiRamio et al., 2015; Schiavone & Gentry, 2014);</p> <p><i>Sense of belonging</i> (Alschuler & Yarab, 2016; DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011);</p> <p><i>Veteran-friendly practices</i> (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Greer, 2007; Livingston et al., 2011; Lokken et al., 2009; Persky & Oliver, 2010)</p>
Part 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the ideal support of the student veteran and officer. 2. If another woman veteran was transitioning out of the military and into [the research site], what advice would you give her? 3. What advice would you give to resources officers working with women student veterans specifically? 	<p>RQ: What are women student veteran's perceptions of campus veteran support (e.g. student veteran center and campus support staff)?</p> <p><i>Women veteran needs</i> (Bache Foster & Vince, 2009);</p> <p><i>Women veteran identity</i> (Culver, 2013)</p> <p><i>Veteran-friendly practices</i> (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Greer, 2007; Livingston et al., 2011; Lokken et al., 2009; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Vaccini, 2011, 2013; Wert, 2016)</p>

Appendix K

Full Study Interview Timeline

Online participant qualification questionnaire (5 min)

Interview Part 1: Military background and experience (25-30 mins)

Interview Part 2: Experience on campus (45 mins)

Incentive provided at conclusion of 2nd interview

Member checking- done virtually through FaceTime/Skype (15-20 mins)

- Participant provided with a summary of themes- are they accurate in what was implied?
- Participant asked few clarifying questions

TOTAL PARTICIPANT TIME: 1 hour 35 mins- 1 hour 45 mins

Appendix L

Sample of Codebook

Research Question & Methodology Rationale	Main Theme/Code	Sub-Codes	Connection to Literature
Context description (Bevan, 2014)	Military Socialization/Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership (skill) • Mentorship (<i>informal and formal</i>) • Training/job placement • Military Transitioning (btwn unit)/transitioning support • Personal development • Sense of belonging 	Socialization- <i>knowledge, skills and culture creating a sense of identity and commitment associated to the career field (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001)</i>
Context description (Bevan, 2014)	Military Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camaraderie/family feeling • Rank/order/hierarchy • Traditions • Leadership (value; structure) • Equal/gender-neutral • Male-dominated • Sexual misconduct • Branch • Veteran identity 	<p>Culture- <i>values, traditions, beliefs, ideas, symbols (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978; Pawelczyk, 2014; Snyder, 2003)</i></p> <p>Military culture- <i>traditions, structure, order, hierarchy, obedience, rank, respect, honor, teamwork, mission-driven, warrior, gender-defined interpretations (Arkin & Dobrofsky, 1978;</i></p>

			Pawelczyk, 2014; Snyder, 2003)
Context description (Bevan, 2014)	Reason to join military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest in military • Family history/personal history • Access to educational benefits (college affordability) • Control of life/life decision • Career path/potential career path 	Patten & Parker; Heitzman & Somers, Iverson et al.,

Appendix M

Women Student Veteran's Experiences Main Themes and Sub-Themes

Influences of Military Experience on Transition

- a. Reason to Join Military
 - a. General interest in the military
 - b. Family history
 - c. Career path potential
 - d. Access to educational benefits
- b. Unique Qualities of Women
 - a. Leadership
 - b. Helpful
 - c. Professional
 - d. Independent
 - e. Information seeking
- c. Military Socialization
 - a. Leadership (skill)
 - b. Mentorship (formal and informal)
 - i. Qualities of Mentors
 - c. Training and Job Placement
 - d. Personal Development
 - e. Military Transitioning
 - f. Veteran identity
- d. Military Culture
 - a. Camaraderie
 - b. Rank and Order
 - c. Traditions
 - d. Racial and Gender Identity Dominance
 - i. Sexual Misconduct
 - ii. Gender Stereotypes

Perceptions of Campus Support

- a. Services
 - a. Veterans Center
 - b. Benefits Processing
 - i. VA certifying official
 - c. Web Information
- b. Support
 - a. Peer Support
 - i. Veterans Center
 - ii. Veterans Center Culture
 - iii. Campus resource officer
- b. External Support

- c. Transition
 - a. Finding Veterans Center
 - b. Basic living need
 - c. Adapting to school work
 - d. Non-traditional student experience
 - e. Campus involvement/Finding Friends
- d. Academic Interactions
 - a. Involvement-Academic clubs & organizations
 - b. Faculty & TA Interactions
 - c. Advising