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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

THE LIFE STORIES OF WOMEN WARRIORS:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FEMALE STUDENT-VETERANS
BALANCING THE TRANSITION TO COLLEGE

A dissertation proposal presented in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Jodi M. Senk

March, 2015

Margaret Weber, Ph.D. — Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Jodi M. Senk

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
DEDICATION	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	x
VITA.....	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xiv
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Study	5
Significance of the Study	6
Definitions and Terms.....	7
Theoretical Frameworks	9
Research Questions	10
Data Collection Plan	10
Analytic Techniques	12
Assumptions.....	12
Limitations	13
Summary.....	13
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	15
Historical perspectives of community college.....	16
Previous support programs at colleges	19
National Climate	22
Veterans and Unique Issues	23
Female student-veterans.....	27
Theoretical Frameworks	30
Life Story Framework.....	31
Transition Theory.....	35

	Page
Supporting Psychosocial Theories	38
Balance.....	46
Discussion	48
Conclusion	51
Chapter 3: Methodology	54
Restatement of Research Questions.....	56
Research Methodology	57
Setting	58
Population and Sample	59
Human Subjects Consideration.....	60
Data Gathering Instruments	61
Validity and Reliability of Data Gathering Instruments	64
Data Gathering Procedures/Strategies	65
Data Management	67
Proposed Data Analysis Processes.....	67
Summary	67
Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings	70
Data Collection Procedures	71
Selection Criteria	72
Interviews	73
Population Descriptions	74
Data Analysis	77
Findings.....	79
Additional Findings	106
Summary of Findings	106
Chapter 5: Conclusions	109
Overview/Summary of the Study.....	109
Findings Related to the Research Questions	109
Discussion of Findings.....	110
Limitations of the Study.....	118
Recommendations.....	119

	Page
Practical Applications	122
Researcher Reflections.....	126
Conclusion	127
REFERENCES	128
APPENDIX A: Instrument	143
APPENDIX B: Demographic Data Form	144
APPENDIX C: Informed Consent	145
APPENDIX D: Interview Protocol.....	148
APPENDIX E: Recruitment Letter.....	149
APPENDIX F: Executive Research Proposal Summary	150
APPENDIX G: Approval for Human Subject Research.....	152
APPENDIX H: Pepperdine University Integrated Courses.....	154

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Summary of programs implemented for at-risk college students	22
Table 2. Comparison of Theoretical Frameworks	45
Table 3. Life Story Framework and connections among theoretical concepts	53
Table 4. Population Description	76
Table 5. Nodes and references	86
Table 6. Respondents and references to themes	107

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Connection of the life story elements and coping strategies to balance college transition	34
Figure 2. The interconnection of conceptual theories affecting female student-veterans' transition to college.	48
Figure 3. Interconnecting the life story to female student-veterans and balancing college transition	56
Figure 4. Sample topic and analytic coding and interconnections for data analysis	68
Figure 5. Phases of methodology.....	69
Figure 6. Word Cloud	85
Figure 7. Veterans' Transitional Harmony Framework.....	122

DEDICATION

Our moral responsibility is not to stop the future, but to shape it; to channel our destiny in humane directions and to ease the trauma of transition.

-Alvin Toffler, *Change Management*

This dissertation is dedicated to the following persons:

- To all the service men and women who are active duty, reserves, and veterans dedicating their time, skills, and lives to fight for, and serve, our country.

-To the 17 female student-veterans who volunteered their time to provide insight in hopes of helping those who will follow in their footsteps to college.

-To my parents, the late John Senk (an Army veteran of the Vietnam War) and Rosemarie Senk, for their sacrifices and support for my education and life-long pursuits.

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Thanks to my in-laws, the late Jim McCluskey, and Penny McCluskey, and my extended family, for your constant support and encouragement.

And last, but not least, to my husband, Tom McCluskey, for the support, understanding, and time spent editing my papers. Thanks for keeping me sane and pushing me when I needed it most. I love you!

VITA

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- Senk, J. (2006) LifeLong Fitness Laboratory Manual, Rio Hondo College.
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ABSTRACT

Currently, there is an increase in veterans returning to colleges, yet little understanding exists of their unique circumstances. Limited resources, programs, and staff for veteran services, along with physical injuries, cognitive impairments, and emotional disturbances due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and military sexual trauma (MST) further complicate the transition to college. Further, female student-veterans have additional pressures, such as women's health issues and motherhood, creating additional exigencies which affect their return to college.

Few studies have specifically sought to understand female student-veterans transitioning to college. Obtaining insight on the experiences of female student-veterans, utilizing the life story framework (Giele, 2010; Weber, 2011) and Schlossberg's transition theory (1984), allows for the discovery of how one's life course impacts the transition to college.

Therefore, this exploratory study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Using semi-structured interviews, this study sought to examine the experiences and challenges of female student-veterans, as well as their identities, relationships, motivation, adaptability, strategies employed, and the role of health to determine the impact on transition from the military to college.

17 women participated in the study. Findings indicated a need to be different than family expectations or education level, with many female student-veterans being first-generation college attendees. Relationships played an important role in supporting and mentoring female student-veterans. Having a strong drive to succeed, pursue career goals, and obtain a better life were the prevalent motivating factors for college education attainment. Female student-veterans demonstrated the ability to be adaptive to many demands and milieus, although transitioning to college presented many challenges. Anxieties were further escalated when the added

responsibility of motherhood compounded demands, and created work-life-school balance issues.

In understanding that there are individual factors in the perceptions of work, life, and school demands, as well as strategies employed to cope with these obligations, a greater awareness and understanding can be realized. Further research in this area is necessary to develop a greater cognizance, discover additional issues, and ultimately inform and develop policies, programs, and services that can be implemented to meet the needs of female veterans transitioning from the military to college.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Sandberg (2013) states that women need to “speak out, identify the barriers that are holding woman back, and find solutions” (p.147). Even though women have made great strides in obtaining college-level education and employment, challenges still exist for women who are looking to have it all and how to balance the competing demands of work and life, all while maintaining their health and managing their stress.

Women now comprise the majority of the college student population and earn almost 60% of associate and bachelor degrees according to the U.S. Department of Education (2012). However, it is important to recognize the work-life-study challenges that exist, particularly in older, non-traditional female students who are returning to obtain a college education (Lowe & Gayle, 2007). This is especially true for the growing population of female student-veterans, who oftentimes do not have the resources, support, or understanding necessary to balance their return to college (Women Warriors, 2011).

Background

As World War II increased the need and opportunities for women in the workplace since the 1940's, women have sought out higher education and non-traditional careers in male-dominated industries. In the 1980's, women became 50% of the college graduates in the United States (Goldin, Katz & Kuziemko, 2006). Presently, women hold more high level leadership positions than ever before, many which consist of increased work responsibilities, requiring more time away from the home. As a result, women face the issue of balancing both work and family.

Today, women not only seek career opportunities as a result of war, they are returning to college and careers after serving in war. In 2009, the Post-9/11 GI Bill took effect and now, two million veterans, many of whom served in Iraq and Afghanistan, are able to attend college with

benefits equating to a full scholarship. This Bill may enable many colleges to double their student-veteran population, which includes an increasing number of females (Boodman, 2011; Women Warriors, 2012).

President Obama further proposed that community colleges would be the solution to strengthening our work force, providing access to low cost education and occupational training to meet the need for educated and skilled laborers, thus helping the United States keep pace with other global leaders (Adams, 2011). While this idea may be helpful in gaining access to education, there may also be issues of adults transitioning back to college for further education and training.

Such is the case in community colleges, which provide open-access and no admission requirements as compared to four-year schools. Community college students face several challenges when it comes to having strategies necessary for successful learning. Many of these students are also at-risk and come from lower socioeconomic neighborhoods, have little support or encouragement from their families to pursue higher education, and frequently lack the basic skills of reading, writing, and math (Coley, 2000). These factors may contribute to reduce self-efficacy and motivation (Bandura, 1993). In addition, many students at a community college are older and transitioning back for additional training and education, while balancing both work and family duties. Having numerous competing demands for time and focus may contribute to increased *disassociation*, which detracts from a student's concentration, increases stress hormone release, and may elevate the risk for health issues as a result (Johnson & Taylor, 2006). Further, many older adults do not relate to the traditional college-age students who lack both work experience and sometimes maturity. This may predicate the need for additional resources to help support these older students during transitions.

For example, in previous learning support programs, such as the Step UP program at Howard University, students were given weekly support and education from faculty, and the results demonstrated that participants had a higher GPA than non-participants due to the program (Frankel, Gale & Walton, 2009). Congruent to the previous findings, Smittle (1995) had found that student-faculty interaction was vital to doing well for at-risk students. Similarly, in an eight-week *College Survival Skills* course at Southern Louisiana Community College, at-risk students were taught time and stress management, study skills, diversity and adapting to college life, leading to increased student satisfaction (Jarrell, 2004). Further, in a study of undergraduates from a university in China, learning environments that support meaningfulness of learning and task accomplishment increased motivation, learning and health (Lijun, 2011).

Currently, there has been an increase in veterans returning to colleges, yet there is little understanding of their unique circumstances. Limited resources, programs, and staff for veteran services, along with physical injuries, cognitive impairments, and emotional disturbances due to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), and military sexual trauma (MST; Women Warriors, 2011) further complicate the transition to college. These factors lead to high rates of depression, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and sadly, suicide (Voelker, 2012). Combined with the already present demands and stress of academics faced by traditional college students, as well as the challenges faced by both at-risk and older students, student-veterans face a plethora of hurdles. Further, female student-veterans have additional demands, such as women's health issues and motherhood, creating additional exigencies which affect their return to college.

Assessing female veterans returning to college to complete their education presents many challenges. A gap exists in the literature that assesses gender differences in transitioning to

civilian life and college (Women Warriors, 2011). There may also be invisible wounds of war, such as PTSD, TBI, and MST that may affect mental, physical, and emotional health components and require additional support mechanisms. Many returning female student-veterans can be at-risk, come from disadvantaged backgrounds, have poor learning strategies, and lack family support. Issues also exist in balancing family with school, as more than 100,000 of the women deployed in the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are mothers (Bourne, 2010). According to Foster and Vince (2009) female veterans are more likely to also be single parents, as well as identify as being a minority. With the amount of competing demands, there is likely to be greater predisposition to increased level of stress, which can affect learning and the completion of a college education. To date, there have been no studies which specifically seek to understand female student-veterans transitioning to college to aid in minimizing these impediments, create resources, and ameliorate a positive experience in the transition from the military to college.

In addition, obtaining information on how female veterans balance the transition and manage their time and resources can be valuable for student services and academic personal, as well as future student-veterans. In understanding that there are individual factors in the perception of work, life, and school demands, as well as strategies employed to cope with these obligations, a greater awareness and understanding can be realized (Guest, 2002). Obtaining insight on the experiences of female student-veterans, utilizing the life story framework (Giele, 2008), allows for the discovery of identity, adaptability, motivation, and how relationships may impact one's life course.

Therefore, this proposed exploratory study uses a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Using semi-structured interviews based on the life course method (Giele, 2010; Weber, 2011), this study seeks to examine the experiences and challenges concerning how

female student-veterans balance the transition to college, as well as the identities they develop, their adaptability, strategies employed, relationships with those around them, and the motivation to succeed. Further, the role of health of female veterans will be investigated to determine the impact it plays on the transition from the military to college.

Statement of the Problem

Female veterans comprise about 10% of the veteran population (Women Warriors, 2011). While policies and program exist to help support veterans transitioning to college from a financial standpoint, there is little known about the life stories of female veterans, and the issues of work-life balance that may impact the transition to college that could assist in resources being developed. Additionally, with the emergence of unique health issues, such as PTSD, TBI, and MST, it is important to identify coping strategies employed during this life period of transition. Little has been done to understand and address these specific health issues of female veterans, which contribute to proliferated stress levels. Few, if any, studies have identified work-life balance issues and coping strategies needed by female veterans, especially if they have children, which present challenges in transitioning to college. As the motto of the Department of Veterans Affairs states, “take care of those who bore the battle” (Brazile, 2014, p.1), both an opportunity and need exists to examine the experiences of female student-veterans. Veterans have served our country. It is now time that we serve them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is twofold. The first purpose is to explore the life experiences, via narratives, of female student-veterans to understand the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ, in balancing the transition to college. A second purpose of the

study is to investigate if health issues (mental, physical, and/or emotional) related to combat impact coping strategies of female student-veterans in college.

Significance of the Study

During this time with the largest group of veterans returning to college, the needs of female veterans must be assessed to meet the demands of transitioning from the military to college. Further, with the high rates of traumatic experiences, which impact physical, mental and emotional health, there is a need to address stressors that have increased the high rates of suicide in our veterans.

This study provides awareness of the needs of female student-veterans transitioning from the military to college, and how they balance school, family, and work responsibilities. There have been few studies that have focused exclusively on female veterans who are transitioning from the military to college. Further, there have been no studies to date using the life story method to discover the factors that affect transition from military life to college, balancing college, work and family life, and the impact it has on health.

By gaining insight, this study may reveal if there are sociodemographic factors, relationships, identities, adaptations, motivational factors, and health issues that help or hinder female student-veterans in their return to college. This study may also bring awareness of the strategies that are utilized by the student-veterans that assist in their transition to college. Jackson, Firtko & Edenborough (2007) suggests strategies to enhance personal resilience may be a key factor to thriving by reducing vulnerability to stress. The findings from this study can provide the necessary information that can help both academic and student services personnel in facilitating the transition of female student-veterans to achieve the success of a completing a college education. In understanding the unique circumstances of these women, resources and

programs could be developed to assist in developing specific strategies for college completion, maintaining health, balancing work and family life, enhancing the quality of life, and saving lives.

Definition of Terms

Adaptive style: How an individual negotiates change during life transitions and circumstances, and can be innovative or traditional (Giele, 2010).

At-risk students: According to Donnelly (1987), “At-risk students are students who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts. They are usually low academic achievers who exhibit low self-esteem. Disproportionate numbers of them are males and minorities. Generally they are from low socioeconomic status families” (p. 1).

Community college: A public, non-residential academic institution known to provide students with academic, technical, or vocational education, or enable transfer to a four-year college (Coley, 2000). The focus is to encourage lifelong learning by providing an accessible and affordable quality education to a wide-range of individuals (American Association of Community Colleges, 2014; Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2013).

Health: According to the World Health Organization (1946), health is “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Identity: How one sees the self and personal qualities. Influenced by values and beliefs, identifies with being similar to, or different than, others. (Giele, 2010).

Learning: The ability to take information and knowledge, process, understand and analyze that knowledge, and perform a behavior (Tyler, 1949; Bloom, 1956; Knowles, 2005). Learning is influenced by many factors, such as interest in the subject, support by teachers,

family, and peers, trust, learning strategies, self-efficacy, and motivation (Bandura 1977a, 1993; Biech, 2008).

Military Sexual Trauma (MST): Related to sexual harassment or assault, associated with both the mental and physical health consequences (Suris & Lind, 2008).

Motivation: Motivation is the desire to do things, for the good of self or others, and is a crucial element in setting and attaining goals (McCombs, 1991). It may be intrinsic (doing it for self-satisfaction) or extrinsic (expecting a reward as a result).

Neurochemicals: Chemicals produced in the brain by delivery such as adrenaline, dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin (Johnson & Taylor, 2006).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): An injury that results from a psychological experience which induces fear and may cause emotional disturbances (Fischer, 2013).

Relational style: How one connects to others. The roles, social influences, and support, such as family, culture, or community networks, that affect personal development. (Giele, 2010).

Stress: A reaction to life events which causes a heightened response of the nervous system that may affect both mental and physical aspects of the body. The American Institute of Stress (2012) states *stress is difficult for scientists to define because it is subjective*; in other words, one person may find a situation challenging and stimulating, while another would find the same example stressful.

Thriving: Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein and Grant (2005) define thriving as an individual experience of vitality (aliveness) and learning (understand and knowledge).

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): The American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine defines TBI as a traumatically induced disruption of brain function that results in loss of consciousness, loss of memory, or being dazed and confused (McCallister, 2005). Significant

brain tissue damage occurs as a result of the pressure changes and sounds from a blast that exerts increased pressure through the blood vessels in the brain, causing both physical and physiological injury that may cause cognitive impairment (Brenner, 2010).

Veteran: Referring to veterans of military service, a veteran is one who has completed their military service. “A veteran is defined by federal law, moral code and military service as any person who served for any length of time in any military service branch” (Colemann, 1973, p.1).

Work-life balance: A term involving the stability of body and mind, or the physical and psychological, encompassing the competing demands of work to home life (Guest, 2002). This can be viewed as one’s subjective perception, varying according to individuals and circumstances (Guest, 2002).

Theoretical Frameworks

Life story: Studying lives through retrospective narratives that connect personal origins of historical times, from childhood and adolescence through the adult life cycle, to reveal the elements of change and individual outcomes (Giele, 2010). The life story method “allows for a deeper understanding of each participant’s life events” (Elder & Giele, 2010, p. 236). The elements include identity, motivation and drive, adaptive, and relational styles (Giele, 2010; Weber, 2011).

Transition Theory: Schlosberg’s (1984) psychosocial model of development examines the timing and sequencing of the life events of individuals. This is related to adult learners returning to school and includes four stages” preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (Schlosberg, Waters, Eilnor & Goodman, 1995).

Supporting Psychosocial Theories

Self-Efficacy: The ability of a person to believe in their competencies and the likelihood of achieving a goal defines self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy influences internal motivation and the drive to succeed and can lead to improved learning. Perceived self-efficacy influences students' belief in their abilities to regulate aspirations, motivation, and academic achievement (Bandura, 1993).

Social learning Theory: Also known as the cognitive learning theory. How people *learn together*, observing the relationships between students and how they may affect one another in support for learning and motivation (Bandura, 1977).

Stress Process Theory: Focuses on the causes of stress, resources for coping, and stress outcomes (Pearlin, 1980).

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide the study are:

- 1) What demographic factors (age, ethnicity, socioeconomics, first generation) of female student-veterans are associated with the life story elements (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) that impact the transition to college?
- 2) What experiences (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) shape the life course of female student-veterans balancing the transition to college?
- 3) To what extent, if at all, does the role of health (mental, physical, and emotional) impact stress and coping strategies of female student-veterans transitioning to college?

Data Collection Plan

The population selected for this study were female student-veterans from community colleges and four-year universities, and included graduate students. The study initially began

with female student-veterans enrolled in a community college in the greater Los Angeles area who were volunteers responding to a formal invitation to participate in the study and were referred by counselors who work in the veterans' service center at the college. Participants and counselors were also asked to refer other female student-veterans in a snowballing sample process (Richards, & Morse, 2013) to increase the sampling pool. As a result, additional individuals, referred by participants, a counselor at a private university, as well as an administrator in the Veteran's Administration, participated in the study. Thus, volunteers included female student-veterans from community college, four-year universities, and even graduate students nation-wide.

Via narratives, one semi-structured interview using questions addressing different stages of life, ranging from past, present, and future (including early childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and adult life), was used to gather information on the life experiences, events, and journeys (Giele, 2010; Weber, 2011). Utilizing the life story method helps to understand life course and is "useful in comparing individuals with varying origin and experiences and shows change over time" (Elder & Giele, 2010, p. 236).

Secondly, one additional question regarding the coping strategies was addressed to gain insight into the role of health and if various stressors may impact the transition from the military to college.

The following steps occurred for data collection:

1. IRB approval: The researcher assured the safety of the participants, ethical considerations, and that participants fully understand their rights to withdraw at any time and follow all guidelines of Pepperdine University for human subjects.

2. Recruitment of participants: The participants willing to participate in the study needed to meet criteria of student-veteran status and be representative of only females.
3. Pre-interview insights for participants: Copies of an executive summary of the proposal, interview protocol, and human subject approval paperwork were provided participants prior to interviews (see Appendix F).
4. A phone call prior to the interview to the participants established rapport, credibility, trust, and the development of empathy based on a mutual relationship (Letiche, 2006).
5. An in-person interview, lasting approximately 60 minutes, enabled the researcher to discover new social knowledge and perspectives that create meaning by understanding and investigating the *interrelationships* of life experiences (Conklin, 2007). Informed consent and socio-demographic forms were presented to each participant prior to the interview. The interview was recorded using an audio device.

Analytic Techniques

Audio interviews were transcribed into written format. The transcripts were then analyzed and identified themes were given codes. The codes were used to categorize themes such as identity, adaptation, motivation, relationships, and health as they relate to balancing the transition to college. The NVivo© software program was utilized to analyze the data.

Assumptions

As this is an exploratory study, it is assumed that the sample of female student-veterans will be not be representative of the population returning to college, and does not fully represent all female student-veterans. An evaluation of the demographics was done to validate this assumption. Conducting interviews also assumes participants were honest in responses and disclose all details. However, participants may have embellished if trying to impress the

researcher, or were embarrassed to report their true feelings and experiences to not be perceived as weak or unable to help themselves. Finally, this study assumed the participants did not partake in any discussion with other participants who had not yet been interviewed which could influence the results.

Limitations

The majority of the population in this research study were female student-veterans enrolled in colleges in the greater Los Angeles, CA area. Although additional participants were located throughout the country due to the snowball effect, the sample is not an overall representation of all female veterans returning to college. Expanding the study to other colleges in the future would provide a larger population of participants and data.

Further, an additional limitation to the study is that the researcher has chosen to utilize the life-story methods, much which is based on retrospective recall. Therefore, participants may not either recall or disclose all details of their personal histories.

Summary

As a result of increasing females in the military, there are more female veterans seeking higher education. However, transitioning from the military to college comes with many complications and increased levels of stress, which can impact the success and completion of college. Female student-veterans also have increased challenges of parenting and family commitments, with a higher number female veterans being of single-parent status. As a result of the many conflicts and competing demands of school, family, and even work life, female-veterans may at higher risk for stress, health issues, and reduced completion rates for their education. Therefore, a need exists to understand the experiences of female student-veterans who

are transitioning to college, and facing the many conflicts of managing their time for school, family, and health issues.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature regarding issues of the adult transition to college, work-life balance, and the stress process, and creates the background for use of the life story method, which may capture the data to create a sense of the complications faced by female student-veterans transitioning to college. Chapter 3 provides the methodology implemented to obtain the data, as well as the analysis of the findings. Chapter 4 will present the results of the study, while Chapter 5 discusses the findings and provides recommendations for future research and practical applications.

Chapter 2: A Literature Review

During his second inaugural speech, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed we should “take care of those who were in battle” (Brazile, 2014, p. 1). Therefore, this review of literature will be used to explore how female student-veterans transition from combat to community college, utilizing the life course framework. As there is limited research on female veterans transitioning to higher education, a need to review the literature and theories linked to transitioning college students and veterans is necessary to gain a greater understanding of this population and their experiences. Furthermore, the author hopes to acquire suggestions from previous research, connect the theories to complete the gaps in the literature, and necessitate the proposed research study as part of caring for our country’s veterans.

Using Academic Search Complete, a comprehensive review of the history of community colleges, students, and support programs will be detailed. Next, insight into the unique health issues female veterans face, such as PTSD, TBI, and MST will be discussed. The life story framework will then be presented, with insight on the four elements that include identity, relationships, adaptive styles, and motivation. The social paradigm of work-life balance will be reviewed and connected to the correlating theoretical frameworks of transition, self-efficacy, social learning, and stress process. Further, the kinship of the stress process, the life course, and transitions will be discussed as they interconnect and apply to coping strategies.

Key words used in the search will be detailed in each section. The need for the study will be presented, due to a gap in the research and urgency of helping female student-veterans. Finally, the literature may establish a foundation for the development and implementation of programs and resources needed to accommodate the unique needs of female student-veterans that

may help to cope with stress, enhance learning, and ease the transitions from the military to educational milieus that enhance work-life balance.

Historical Perspective of Community College

Community colleges may be considered a unique entity in the educational world because of their open-entry admission policy and low cost, serving almost seven million students and offering an abundance of opportunities to expand one's education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Community colleges provide access to all, and have provided higher education and training for about one-third of adults (Morest, 2004, as cited by Humphreys & Acker-Hocevar, 2012).

The underlying mission of these institutions is to provide lifelong learning, yielding knowledgeable and skilled individuals who can contribute to promoting economic growth (California Community College Chancellor's Office, 2013). These intricate dynamics may impact community colleges slated to play a significant role in educating and training future workers.

By offering a collection of both academic and technical classes, both in-person and online, students have an abundance of choices and opportunities to pursue both personal and professional growth. In addition, many students who are under-prepared for college can attend remedial classes to develop their learning (Adams, 2011; Cates & Schaeffle, 2011).

Environmental considerations. While there are various student services provided for the seven million community college students nationwide to aid in the process of navigating the college environment, these programs are geared towards basic orientation and general information (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). There has been little research in regards to assessing the unique needs of veterans and the delivery of programs to

support them. With relatively few, if any proactive programs that have an emotional component, integrated group support, and a scientific basis for applied learning at the community college level, the current programs do little to fully provide student-veterans with positive life and learning skills that can affect academic success (Biswas-Diener & Patterson, 2011; Oades, Robinson, Green & Spence, 2011). In addition, the selected programs found in the literature have little applied theories of self-efficacy, social learning, and stress reduction necessary during the transition returning to college.

Community college students. In a study by the Educational Testing Service, Coley (2000) as cited in Schmid & Abel (2003) found “seven demographic factors much more common among community college students than among students who attend four-year public universities” (p. 4). These include:

- Delayed entry
- Part-time enrollment
- Full-time work
- Financial independence
- Dependents
- Single parenthood
- Community college attendance without a high school Diploma (Coley, 2000, as cited in Schmid & Abel, 2003, p. 5).

Approximately 75 % of students entering community college have one or more of these demographic factors (Coley, 2000). Further, veterans returning school face these and many additional risks. As a result, not only are they entering adult education unprepared to deal with the demands of college coursework, but they have the added stress of difficult life circumstances.

When a person is in a stressful environment, it creates neurochemicals, such as adrenaline, that are released that can inhibit learning (Johnson & Taylor, 2006).

Challenges such as the demographic factors can lead to reduced motivation to learn, and many students drop out as they have not had positive experiences in the classroom. Jackson, Firtko, and Edenborough (2007) suggest strategies to enhance personal resilience may be a key factor to reduce vulnerability to stress. In an investigation of characteristics of college-aged learners, Wang, Peng, Huang, Hou, and Wang (2008) suggests that “learning motivation and learning strategy can have an impact on learning results” (p. 24).

The amount of effort a learner puts into an activity in the future is also based on a positive perception of the outcome, and can result in a behavior modification to maintain a positive self-image (Weiner, 1986). Johnson and Taylor (2006) suggest that learning is maximized when the learner is attentive and motivated as the neural structures stimulated to support learning are activated under positive conditions.

In previous learning support programs, such as the Step UP program at Howard University, students were given weekly support and education from faculty, and the results demonstrated that participants had a higher GPA than non-participants as a result of the positive support program (Frankel, Gale & Walton, 2009). Congruent to the previous findings, Smittle (1995) had found that student-faculty interaction was vital to doing well for at-risk students.

Similarly, in an eight-week *College Survival Skills* course at Southern Louisiana Community College, at-risk students were taught time and stress management, study skills, diversity and adapting to college life. As a result, increased student satisfaction was found due to filling a need for under-prepared students entering college (Jarrell, 2004). In addition, questionnaires from a random sample of 249 undergraduates from a university in China indicated

learning environments that support meaningfulness of learning and task accomplishment increased motivation, learning and health (Lijun, 2011).

For students to thrive during their years at college, they need a motivating environment that provides deep connections to learning, task accomplishment to enhance student efficacy, and stress management skills to reduce both psychological and physiological health problems (Lijun, 2011). Negativity and stress are found to inhibit the brain in regards to focus and learning (Johnson & Taylor, 2006).

Unfortunately, Americans are not strong advocates for proactive programs (Townley, Schmeider-Ramirez, Wehmeyer & Lane, 2001), and college faculty and staff are not being trained to understand the unique needs of student-veterans. Female student-veterans in particular have learned from their military training that they need a sense that they matter, and that they will have support from others to be successful (Women Warriors, 2011). There is a clear insufficiency of support services and educational resources that target understanding and supporting female veterans' behaviors, learning, and emotions to meet the aforementioned needs.

Previous Support Programs at Colleges

Historically, while Americans strive to implement improved learning strategies into the classroom, they do not often deal with approaches for improving behavior and reducing emotional issues. Few if any community college programs are specific to student-veterans, and little attention is paid to the needs of females (Women Warriors, 2011). While recommendations, such as the *8 Keys to Success* (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2013) have been implemented, there is still a lack of research to validate and provide comprehensive programs to serve student-veterans. In addition, although a plethora of information is provided by a student-veterans counselor, such as financial aid and enrollment, other college personnel have little

awareness of veteran needs or services (S. Katnik-Duran, personal communication, July 11, 2013). There are no universal resources or information provided to personnel to create an understanding of student-veterans, their invisible injuries, or the differences between male and female student-veterans, which may affect learning and classroom behavior, thus impacting their success at the college.

Therefore a review of college support programs will be provided to determine if there are possible solutions for future student-veteran programs. Using key words such as learning, student success, and at-risk community college students, the Academic Search Complete and Google Scholar revealed 66 articles. The *College Positive Program* by the University of Massachusetts and Dartmouth College (University of Massachusetts, 2013) met the search criteria, and similar to the Step-Up program implemented at Howard University, is aimed at helping at-risk students transition to college, providing students with weekly support, encouragement, guidance and attentive listening from a volunteer faculty member acting as a life coach (Frankel et al., 2009). While both programs did not provide training for improving learning skills or strategies in the classroom or life, the measured outcomes from the Step-Up program during the 2006-2007 year revealed that those students who participated in the program had higher GPA's and retention rates (Frankel et al., 2009).

Previous studies have found that conducting training workshops and programs that assist at-risk community college students by providing support and goal attainment can also influence learning (McCombs, 1991; Frankel et al., 2009; Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Adams, 2011). For example, in a study the GEAR-UP program, which served first-generation, low socioeconomic community college students in a rural area, there was an improvement in college readiness when

the college provided increased advising, home visits, college information in booklets, and speakers, which led to higher rates of completion (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011).

Similarly, Northern Virginia Community College, which serves 75,000 students and created the *Pathway to the Baccalaureate* in 2005 to assist at-risk students by having college counselors with high school seniors to provide insight on such things like applications, financial aid, and placement tests. As a result, non-participants had a pass rate of just 55% , while Pathway students had a 66% pass rate for placement tests and were twice as likely to graduate (Adams, 2011).

Finally, the *Self-Regulation Empowerment Program (SREP)*, assessed students' needs and then instructed students on how to use learning strategies, and was regulated based upon feedback and the outcome (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004). The program, like other student service programs, was developed to help students who had poor motivation and learning strategies. But, unlike the aforementioned programs, the SREP program provided more skills for the students to develop a greater awareness of their outcomes, based on the social cognitive theory (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2004).

While these student-services programs, summarized in Table 1, have demonstrated some success in helping students achieve goals as well improve retention, one could imagine more powerful programs. Higher education institutions can model such programs for veteran transitions, and expand to address the student-veterans. Female student-veterans need to balance multiple environment and roles they play: military/civilian, soldier/student, male-dominated/diverse environment, independent/family member; each will adapt in their own way, but also need to be recognized as individuals (Women Warriors, 2011).

Table 1

Summary of Programs Implemented for At-risk College Students

Author (Year)	Program Name	Population studied	Variables measured
Jarell, 2004	College Survival Skills	First year at-risk students	Time management, study skills, diversity, satisfaction
Frankel et al. (2009)	Step-Up	4 year college students	Higher GPA's and retention rates
Adams, 2011	Pathway	Seniors entering community college	Placement tests Success pass rate 66% vs 55%
Cates & Schaeffe, 2011	GEAR UP	Rural at-risk Latino students	College readiness and completion

National Climate

In 2008, President Obama declared that one of his main goals was to expand educational opportunities and produce five million college graduates to have a stronger work force and keep up with the pace of other growing nations like China and India (Adams, 2011). In 2009, the Post-9/11 GI Bill took effect and now, two million veterans, many of whom served in Iraq and Afghanistan, are able to attend college with benefits equating to a full scholarship. This Bill may enable many colleges to double their student-veteran populations (Boodman, 2011).

President Obama proposed that community colleges would be the solution to strengthening our work force, providing access to low cost education and occupational training to meet the need for educated and skilled laborers thus helping the United States keep pace with other global leaders. California needs to be a leader in this arena. As the largest community college school system in the world, serving almost 25% of all students in the community college system in the United States, California should be prepared to help students obtain an education and enter in the work force (American Association of Community Colleges, 2013). Assisting

students in obtaining such training parallels a mission in the California Education Code which is to help students reach their full potential (Townley et al., 2001).

However, many student-veterans need not only an education, but also an understanding of and a support mechanism for the effects of war. In August 2013, the Departments of Education and Veterans Affairs collaborated to create *8 Keys to Success* which are specific steps that schools can take to welcome and encourage our veterans (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2013). Although the *8 Keys to Success* include such things like building a culture of trust, having support from campus leadership, and collecting data so student-veterans can achieve educational success, there are several areas of this program that need to be augmented, especially with the distresses student-veterans face.

Veterans and Unique Issues

As a result of the prevalence of head injuries due to traumatic stress, concussive blasts and inconsistent assessment and treatment, military personnel are experiencing an abundance of detrimental effects and as a result, are not completing their education (J. Kelly, personal communication, May 28, 2013). Student-veterans with PTSD and TBI experience greater deficits in mental functioning, problem solving, and ability to focus. The American Council on Education (2011) has provided information on identifying symptoms, behavioral issues, physical and physiological reactions, recommendations, and insight into understanding the incapacitating effects of TBI affecting a student-veteran's mental health and well-being. Some of the cognitive difficulties associated with TBI and PTSD, which may affect academic performance, include:

- Attention and concentration difficulty
- Information processing challenges
- Learning and memory deficits

- Sluggish abstract reasoning
- Slowed executive functions (problem solving, planning, insight/awareness, sequencing)
- Additional stressors (home, work, unit, etc.)
- Sleep disturbances
- Difficulty with time management.
- Panic attacks (ACE, 2011, p. 3).

Moreover, without a knowledgeable, understanding, and supportive program to identify the invisible wounds of war and the nature of the injuries, student-veterans may become isolated, develop mental illness, drop out of school, fail to become productive and capable members of society, or worse, commit suicide.

As the nature of military combat is unpredictable, oftentimes returning soldiers are faced with struggles in dealing with injuries of varying physical, mental, and emotional natures. As Jose Narosky, a prize-winning Argentinian writer once stated, *in war, there are no unwounded soldiers.*

While many of our returning service members may appear to be unscathed, invisible wounds of war exist. This is the new reality with those returning from combat. Sadly, females suffer even further and are twice as likely to suffer from PTSD, with about 14% reporting symptoms that are left undiagnosed (Women Warriors, 2011). With exposure to blasts during training and battle, the phenomenon of brain injuries to our *military athletes* has increased dramatically. In particular, there are two indiscernible injuries military service personnel are facing: PTSD and TBI. Due to multiple deployments, these two medical conditions have increased dramatically over the past decade according to Dr. James Kelly, Medical Director at

the National Intrepid Center of Excellence in Bethesda, MD (J. Kelly, personal communication, May 25, 2013). Between the years 2000 to 2012, over 130,000 military personnel were diagnosed with PTSD while 253,000 were diagnosed with TBI (Fischer, 2013).

Defining and differentiating between TBI, concussions, and PTSD. The American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine (1993) defines TBI as a “Traumatically induced disruption of brain function that results in loss of consciousness of less than 30 minutes duration or in an alteration of consciousness manifested by an incomplete memory of the event or being dazed and confused” (p. 86-87). There are three levels of TBI:

1. Primary – Barotrauma (blood pressure increases in blood vessels)
2. Secondary – Objects being put into motion
3. Tertiary – Individuals being put into motion (Brenner, 2010)

However, it is important to note that TBI is different from a concussion. Concussion is defined “as a complex pathophysiological process affecting the brain, induced by traumatic biomechanical forces and includes several common features that incorporate clinical, pathologic and biomechanical injury” (McCrorry et al., 2009, p. 436). In other words, a concussive head injury may include a direct blow to the head, face or neck or a blow elsewhere on the body with an *impulsive* force transmitted to the head. There may be impaired neurological functions, but a concussion does not reveal abnormalities during neuroimaging (McCrorry et al., 2009). Although TBI includes similar physical trauma as a concussion, neuroimaging displays significant brain tissue damage only seen during TBI. This is likely a result of the pressure changes and sounds from a blast that exerts increased pressure through the blood vessels in the brain (J. Kelly, personal communication May 28, 2013).

As a result of these injuries to the brain in TBI, there are symptoms such as severe headaches, dizziness, and augmented sensitivity to light (similar to that of an athletic concussion), as well as behavioral complaints of reduced capacity to focus, increased rates of depression, feelings of helplessness, irritability, and in most severe cases, suicide (Brenner, 2010). The Department of Defense (DOD) estimated that there was one military suicide per day related to TBI in 2012, and according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), a veteran dies by suicide every 80 minutes (Voelker, 2012).

Additionally, TBI should also be distinguished from PTSD as they involve different impairments. Essentially, PTSD is an injury that results from a psychological experience and may cause emotional disturbances, while TBI is both a physical and physiological injury to the brain that may cause cognitive impairment. Dr. Michael Carino defines PTSD as having two or more outpatient visits for mental health or more than one hospitalization, as a single visit may mean they are evaluated, but not diagnosed (Fischer, 2013). There are no physical defects of the brain in PTSD as compared to TBI. According to a RAND study, there are close to 300,000 diagnosed with TBI, and close to one million have been diagnosed with PTSD (Fischer, 2013).

While many veteran initiatives, such as the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP), have been proposed to deal with health and physical injuries (Wounded Warrior Project, 2013) or the aforementioned *8 Keys to Success* (U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs, 2013), none have been specifically designed to deal with the student-veterans diagnosed with TBI and PTSD and how to integrate them into academia, civilian life, or society in general (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2011). In addition, few programs have identified that female veterans are twice as likely to suffer from PTSD, TBI, MST, and depression, and little or none has been done to develop female-specific support programs or increased both access to and availability of healthcare

(Foster & Vince, 2009). With little focus on the behavioral aspects, as well as the learning and emotional needs of those with TBI and PTSD, military personnel are experiencing an abundance of detrimental effects. This includes frustration, not getting their education or contributing to society (J. Kelly, personal communication May 28, 2013). As the brain is influenced by emotions, perception of the surrounding milieu, and relationships with others, the ability to learn can be either inhibited or enhanced (Johnson & Taylor, 2006) and may impact student success. Thus, there needs to be greater collaboration of experts to provide educational resources and strategies to those working with student-veterans, such as college personnel.

As previously stated, Americans are not strong advocates for proactive programs (Townley et al., 2001), and college faculty and staff are not being trained to identify brain injury issues or understand the unique needs of the student-veteran. According to Dr. James Kelly, this is a missing component for veterans, especially those with TBI and PTSD, and educating those who work with veterans about behavioral insight and emotional problems is greatly needed (J. Kelly, personal communication, May 28, 2013). For example, when concussive injuries in athletes were increasing, new medical protocols were developed by leading authorities and resources were made readily available to educate sports medicine personnel to improve treatments (McCrory et al., 2009). The same should be done for student-veterans with invisible wounds, especially our female student-veterans.

Female Student-Veterans

Foster and Vince (2009) reported there are 1.8 million female veterans nationwide, with California not only having the greatest proportion of female veterans at 167,000, but the largest percentage of racial and ethnic minorities. The growth of this population is predicted to rise from

7.5% to 14%, with Hispanics comprising 15% of all female veterans by 2020 (Foster & Vince, 2009).

Many females join the military for a variety of reasons. Some feel a sense of duty and patriotism to their country, while others want to travel, find adventure, seek out a career, access education, provide for their family, escape abusive homes, and kindle their independence (Foster & Vince, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011). Nevertheless, joining the armed services is not without challenges. Females student-veterans have faced trials in the male dominated military, and may have experienced psychological and sexual trauma (Street & Stafford, 2007, as cited by Ackerman, DiRamiro & Mitchell, 2009). Fewer women have progressed to leadership position due lack of opportunities or needing time off for children, perceptions of being too feminine or too masculine, or as a result of injuries, depression, and trauma (Foster & Vince, 2009), leading them to leave the military for other opportunities. Once their service is complete, they attain veteran status with hopes of returning to society to lead a productive life.

Although these aspirations exist, female veterans face difficulties in adjusting to civilian life, returning to school, and being a parent (Women Warriors, 2011). Those who choose to return for their education face specific issues in the academic milieu. Many feel invisible, unheard, or isolated in the classroom, unable to connect with other students who tend to be younger and lack life experiences or complain about little things (Foster & Vince, 2009). Faculty, staff, and administrators have limited training and understanding of female veterans' needs. In addition, there is limited information available on services, benefits, resources, and healthcare that are easily accessible for female student-veterans (Ackerman et al, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011). Despite such barriers, research has shown that female student-veterans have

actually fared better than males in obtaining an education, with 70% having higher levels of education compared to 57% in males (Women Warriors, 2011; Foster & Vince, 2009).

However, gaps in the data and knowledge of female student-veterans needs are still crucial for planning purposes and support programs (Ackerman et al., 2009; Foster & Vince, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011). A survey of 170 women veterans reflected their specific needs:

- recognition and respect
- opportunities to interact with their sister warriors
- support and services
- child care options
- gender-specific healthcare
- mental and behavioral health
- MST care and treatment
- suitable and affordable housing
- education, employment, and training opportunities
- information about existing services, including outreach efforts (Foster & Vince, 2009, p. 5)

Moreover, female student-veterans have a need for validation and a sense of *mattering* (Women Warriors, 2011). Knowing they matter and are respected may be key for academic success for female student-veterans. If female student-veterans are noticed, feel important and cared for, are recognized for both success and failure, and feel needed and appreciated, they have a better chance at being successful in higher education (Evans et al., 2010; Women Warriors, 2011). One woman who was participating in the Wounded Warrior Project and recovering from PTSD was quoted saying, *the VA (Veterans Affairs) and the DoD (Department of Defense)*

should value talk therapy and counseling, especially for people who have dealt with life and death (Wounded Warrior Project, 2013). Allowing them to tell their story and share their concerns, specific needs, and ideas for support programs, parallels their desire to contribute, feel that they matter, help them to heal, and warrants the use of the life story method as a way to honor the voice of women warriors.

Theoretical Frameworks

Several theories frame the background for this research. With limited studies on female student-veterans, several frameworks and theories will be presented to provide a foundation that would be meaningful to this study. The relationships between the theories offer insight into how the theories are connected, and why there should be inquiry to justify the need for programs to be incorporated into colleges for female student-veterans.

The following theoretical frameworks and supporting psychosocial theories used for this study include:

1. *Life-story framework*: Giele's (2008, 2010) framework identifies several time periods that impact one's life path, from childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, present life circumstances, and future aspirations. The narrative, or life-story, is foundational to this study by reflecting upon the changes, adaptations, and life transitions of female veterans returning to college.
2. *Transition Theory*: A psychosocial model of development, developed by Schlossberg (1984) that examines life events, including timing and sequencing, which affect various aspects of an individual's life. The main use of transition theory is with adult learners and their return to higher education.

3. *Stress Process Theory*: Pearlin (1981) focused on three fundamental concepts: the causes of stress (stressor), the resources for coping with stress, and stress outcomes.

When optimal health is achieved, there is less stress, and reduced impact on energy level reserves, allowing for greater energy expenditure on accomplishing many tasks and balancing work and life.

4. *Self-efficacy*: The ability of a person to believe in their competencies and the likelihood of achieving a goal defines self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy influences internal motivation and the drive to succeed and can lead to improved learning. Perceived self-efficacy influences students' belief in their abilities to regulate aspirations, motivation, emotions, and academic achievement (Bandura, 1993).

5. *Social Learning Theory*: Also known as the cognitive learning theory. How people learn together, observing the relationships between students and how they may affect one another in support for learning and motivation (Bandura, 1977).

Life Story Framework

The power of storytelling goes back to ancient times, bringing an awareness of history, human existence, and transition throughout the lifespan. Stories can inspire and educate others, bringing a greater awareness of life transitions through the experiences, events, and interactions between people.

Life stories allow for a reflection of personal journeys and meaningful events that occur over time which impact individual growth and change (Giele, 2010). Such insight provides researchers with a view into the world of each individual's biographical history and the interconnection of experiences from early life to the present, which is useful in comparing both similarities and differences of the life path (Giele, 2010). Such experiences can affect the

pathway to adulthood, as well as potentially alter the course of life due to historical times, personal connections, and journeys. Looking back on major time periods in life, such as childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood, can provide insight into both current and future adult life outcomes (Giele, 2008, 2010; Weber, 2011). As a result, both opportunities and constraints provide diverse dimensions of human emotion, behavior, motivation, adaptation, and identity.

Giele (2010) states that the life story method “connects personal origins to individual outcomes” (p.238), distinguishing individual identity and adaptations. Using this narrative method, combined with semi-structured interviews, allows individuals to share experiences and interpret their own journeys from the past, present, and future, encapsulating the person as a whole. This provides researchers with qualitative data entailing a gestalt-like view to examine the abundant elements, encounters, and personality traits which guide an individual’s life path.

The life story method, developed by Giele (2008, 2010), encompasses a “four-factor framework” (Giele, 2010, p. 252) which shapes individual life stories and outcomes. The four elements include:

1. *Identity*: How one sees the self and personal qualities. Influenced by values and beliefs, identifies with being similar to, or different than, others.
2. *Relationship Style*: How one connects to others. The roles, social influences, and support, such as family, culture, or community networks, that affect personal development.
3. *Motivation*: Motivation is the desire to do things, for the good of self or others, and is a crucial element in setting and attaining goals (McCombs, 1991). It may be intrinsic (doing it for self-satisfaction) or extrinsic (expecting a reward as a result).

4. *Adaptive style*: How an individual negotiates change during life transitions and circumstances, and can be innovative or traditional (Giele, 2010).

These elements of the life story methods reflect the development of the female student-veteran. In returning from the military to college, the female student-veteran learns to adapt by balancing multiple environments and roles such as military or civilian, soldier or student, male-dominated or diverse environment, independent or family member (Women Warriors, 2011). Each learner will need to adapt in their own way, and develop a distinctive sense of identity. They are motivated to learn, set goals, and to find a career (Ackerman et al., 2009). They realize they need to function individually instead of as teammates; they are disciplined; they become independent but recognize the importance of mentors; they rely on and value their own competencies; and they tolerate disequilibrium (Ackerman et al., 2009; Women Warriors, 2011). They have already figured out who they are and what they want to become as *identity achievers* (Josselson, 1987 as cited by Women Warriors, 2011). As the college environment is about self-advocacy, developing relationships and seeking help to feel a sense of belonging is necessary (O'Donnell, 2007). Having peer support from other female student-veterans, subsets of female student-veteran support groups, learning communities in the classroom, counseling, and psychological services on campuses provide the resources and support necessary for supporting the relational style element (Foster & Vince, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011). By using the life story method, women warriors can impart their wisdom to aid in the collection of robust evidence for their needs during college transition.

Previous studies using the life story method also included the study of college-educated women. In this seminal study, Giele (2008) found differences in the life course that accounted for distinctions in marriage patterns and roles, but similarities in the use of education to

overcome barriers in life, such as discrimination or disability. Krymis (2011) employed the life story framework to discover work-life balance concerns faced by women, finding that both professional and personal relationships played a vital role. Further, the framework was utilized in additional work-life balance studies to discover how women deal with the dual of roles of work and family life. Results indicated the four elements, identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive styles influenced a multitude of applicable strategies essential to coping with the demands of balancing career and family (Weber, 2011; Heath, 2012). Coping strategies are especially critical for female student-veterans, with the four elements impacting their ability to seek and ask for help and support. It is these components of the life story method which embody the driving forces that affect individual life paths as well as becoming contributing factors to changing one's course in life as shown in Figure 1.

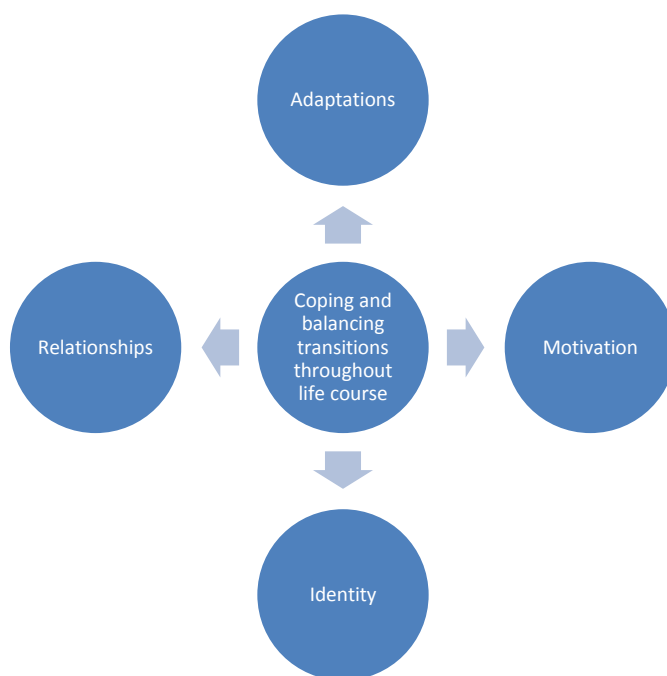


Figure 1. Connection of the life story elements, coping strategies, and college transition.

Congruently, changes in life pathways may also be impacted by trauma. Goerge (2010) states “psychologists view traumas that result in PTSD as turning points in mental health” (p. 169). Further, military service during early adulthood influences such turning points and leads to “enhanced socioeconomic achievement and reduced criminal behavior” (Sampson & Laub, 1996 as cited by Elder & Giele, 2010). Therefore, using the life story framework may allow for insight of female student-veterans transitioning to college to fully understand their experiences, needs, and resources essential to effective support programs.

Transition Theory

Although transitions occur throughout life, it is the acceptance to adapt to new situations that allows for success. Transitions are the result of a changing situation, in which one needs to reorient, redirect, and make the effort to adjust in order to be successful (Wheeler, 2011).

Transitions are destabilizing experiences that pose challenges, and may be even more trying for those with ethnic and socioeconomic disadvantaged backgrounds (Azmita, Syed & Radmacher, 2013).

Schlossberg’s (1984) Theory on Adult Transitions makes important observations related to the complications female student-veterans are facing. The main use of this transition theory is with adult learners and their return to higher education to understand how a person is affected by changing life events. As a psychosocial theory of adult development, transition theory is focused on the type, context, timing, and impact of an event, as well as the person’s perception of the transition through four stages: preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (Schlossberg, 1984; DiRamiro & Jarvis, 2011; Wheeler, 2011).

A related model of transition further expands on this transition theory theme for student-veterans. The transition process of “moving in (in relation to deciding to join the military),

moving through (service), moving out (by returning home), and moving in again (as they transition to college)” identifies individual coping factors associated with transition (DiRamiro & Jarvis, 2011, p. 76). It is in balancing a combination of individual characteristics, the environment, support resources, and the transition itself that allows for the coping strategies to be effective.

Transitioning from the military to college may be exciting yet confusing, as the need to change and adapt to a new environment comes with a set of unspoken rules. Veterans, particularly those with PTSD and TBI, are experiencing issues transitioning to college and adapting to campus life (Wounded Warriors, 2013). Female student-veterans are faced with going from a structured, teamwork-centered atmosphere, to one where ambiguity and individualism prevail (Women Warriors, 2011). Ackerman et al. (2009) found during interviews with veterans that oftentimes, there are constant reminders of the horrors of war, affecting mental health and making it difficult for them to fit in at college. To further complicate the transition, older adults, such as female student-veterans, have different life circumstances and priorities than traditional college students, including family responsibilities, work, and other lived experiences which make them more serious about classroom time and learning (Paul, 2013).

Fortunately, female student-veterans have learned to adapt to various academic and social situations and settings, and have proven their abilities navigating the male-dominated culture of the military (Ackerman et al., 2009). When returning to college, it was found that many female student-veterans will use their own knowledge and develop their own unique strategy to transition to college (Women Warriors, 2011). Further, females may be better able to assimilate during transition than their male counterparts, as they have an uncanny ability to “integrate many and diverse emotional experiences” (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 80).

College transition may also affect the identity of female student-veterans, which is negotiated within the contexts the transition process. Findings in a study of adult college students who did not complete high school evidenced that the college environment and learning may shift perceptions of past and present experiences, changing meaning and future aspirations (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Identity development transpires when there is "internal sense of coherence" that occurs over "time and experiences" (Erikson, 1968, pp. 745-746, as cited by Azmita et al., 2013). O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) found adults transitioning to college struggled with identity due to self-esteem, perceptions, lack of clear goals, or negative feelings from past experiences in education due to lack of educational success and impact transitioning. However, in a study where 167 adults took part in interviews and surveys, results indicated that developing a healthy identity is important in transition and is a predictor of persistence in college (Azmita et al., 2013).

Similarly, support networks may impact identity and adaptations for adults transitioning to college as emotional support from others was instrumental in success (O'Donnell & Tobell, 2007; Azmita et al., 2013). In exploring transition, O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) looked at social connections and communities of practice to determine the relationship to learning. The results of the study buttressed participation in campus life, learning through hands-on practices, and sense of belonging played important roles in successful transitions. This is consistent with the needs of female-student veterans, in having a sense of connecting to others with similar experiences, having accessible services, and feeling like they have peers, family, and academic personnel who understand them and can help assist them in transitioning to college (Ackerman et al., 2009).

To ease this transition, veterans need opportunities to connect with their peers, blend in with other students, and work with faculty (DiRamiro & Jarvis, 2011). In addition, they should have a campus connection, with access to utilize the campus veteran's office, finances, students with disabilities, and mental health or PTSD programs on campus (Foster & Vince, 2009, Ackerman et al., 2011; Women Warriors, 2011). College campuses need to implement programs for adults, and especially female student-veterans transitioning to college, that is congruent with their mission. Without adequate support and knowledge, these transitions may be more difficult, may reduce the number of women, particularly if they have families, who return to get and education after their military service, and increase the stress levels which impact health, learning, and success in an academic environment.

Supporting Psychosocial Theories

Stress process theory. Stress is a prevalent factor influenced by roles, settings, and experiences, and has been linked to effects on psychological, physical, and physiological health (Thoits, 2010; Pearlin, 2010). Since 1956, stress has been the topic of many researchers, beginning with Hans Selye, who researched physiological consequences of stress and adaptations (Thoits, 2010). Holmes & Rahe (1967, as cited by Thoits, 2010) later developed the Social Readjustment Scale to measure stressors, concluding that major life events required behavioral readjustments and made people vulnerable to health disorders and illness. Still, it has been said that "stress is rooted in social and experiential conditions still not fully understood" (Pearlin, 2010, p. 207).

The process of how stress occurs and impacts one's life has been studied extensively by Pearlin et al. (1981), focusing on how stress plays a role in achieving optimal health and balancing everyday responsibilities, encounters, and pressures. This has become known as the

stress process (Pearlin, et al, 1981), and is comprised of three central concepts. The first is the stressor, or the cause of stress, which may be a person, situation, or demand. The second is the process to cope with stress. This may consist of managing time, social support, and strategies such as exercise or breathing techniques. The third is the outcome of stress, or conditions such as psychological, emotional, or physiological dimensions that are impacted. How one adapts, overcomes, or becomes overwhelmed in accomplishing goals depends on how much energy remains.

Stress is the relationship between the person and the environment, and may also be touted as being subjective, part of an emotional reaction based on perception (Lazarus, 1990).

“Stressors are major disruptive events, hardships, and problems built into the fabric of social life” (Pearlin, 2010, p. 208). The stressors some label as minor annoyances may be perceived to be the source of imminent stress for others. This may also be due to number of stressors that layer or cluster upon one another. Developing such chronic stress over time, known as the “snowballing effect” (Thoits, 2010, p. S49), causes deep psychological distress by “depleting a person’s resources and abilities to cope with excessive demands” (Lazarus, 1990, p. 3). This process is also known as stress proliferation, and occurs when the initial stressor gives rise to additional stressors, carrying from one area to another, such as work life to home (Pearlin et al, 2005, as cited by Thoits, 2010). Furthermore, Avison, Ali, and Walters (2007, as cited by Thoits, 2010) found women, especially single mothers, face a more cumulative burden of factors, and suffer more than men with added mood and anxiety disorders. Cornwell (2013) added that switching roles and settings throughout the day also impacted stress levels by placing a high cognitive demand on the brain, and affected women more greatly than men.

Timing and sequence of transitions in the life course also appertain to the stress process and proliferation that impact health status (Pearlin, 2010). Pearlin (2010) suggests that “stability or change in circumstances and direction of people lives as they age or change conditions, affects their well-being” (p. 207). As factors in one’s life situation accumulate, such as marital status, children, socioeconomic status, settings, roles, and switching between roles and settings, stress can propagate and sway one’s life course and well-being (Pearlin, Scheiman, Fazio & Meersman, 2005; Pearlin, 2010).

An additional factor that should be noted that impacts the stress process is trauma. Prior to 1995, traumas, such as witnessing or experiencing combat, assault or abuse were neglected in researching stress (Thoits, 2010). However, one’s present and future life course is affected by past traumas that “never separate one from origins” (Pearlin, 2010, p. 212). Such “direct effects of trauma or threatening experiences can result in risk, or a series of hardships and problems” (Pearlin, 2010, p. 213).

Encountering an abundance of these stressful domains during their transition to college can affect the educational attainment and success of female student-veterans (Foster & Vince, 2009). In the study by Azmita et al. (2013), adult learners were surveyed and interviewed finding that stress occurs with transition and impacts persistence and completion. Darab (2004) explored balance, and the difficulty of females adult learners transitioning to college. Further, as female student-veterans return to college as learners having exposure to the horrors of war and experiencing traumas such as PTSD, TBI, and MST, they may develop cognitive impairments that affect identity and behavioral decline, influencing their life path to education (Foster & Vince, 2009; Pearlin, 2010; Thoits, 2010; Women Warriors, 2011). Further, if women take on multiple roles and role switching, such as in childcare, there is an increase in stress and reduced

coping mechanisms (Cornwell, 2013). With “multiple stressors, along with psychological deficits and a lack of coping skills” (Thoits, 2011, p. S48), several detrimental health issues may increase the burden to our women warriors.

Given that education is the “gateway to occupational and economic status” (Pearlin, 2010, p.212) and potentially connected to health disparities, resources and policy are necessary to help combat the stress process during the college transition of female student-veterans. Pearlin (2010) suggests resources could be developed to “lessen the harmful impact of transition” (p. 214) including “social integration, belief systems, coping, and self-concept to impact adaptive systems of individuals” (p. 209). Thoits (2011) proposed policy development to institute intervention programs for coping and adapting for those at-risk, including building a sense of empowerment and improved self-esteem. Foster & Vince (2009) found in surveying women warriors they need things like “opportunities to interact with their sister warriors, support services, child care options, gender-specific healthcare, and training and educational opportunities” (p. 5) to reduce their stress.

However, “young adults have not been looked at from a scholarly point of view for life course or stress” (Pearlin, 2010, p. 209), nor has there been research to provide evidence of the specific needs of female student-veterans in coping with the stress of college transition (Foster & Vince, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011). As female veterans continue to suffer deeply, a continued need exists to assess the life stories of female student-veterans, their losses, risks, and stressors to determine the support they need for a successful transition from the military to college and to mitigate their stress process for learning.

Self-Efficacy. Learning also stems from having self-efficacy, or the belief in one’s ability to learn and be successful. Academic achievement has been consistently associated with self-

efficacy (Zimmerman, 2000; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990). When a learner has a positive concept of self, there is a greater chance of attaining knowledge and demonstrating success. This may be due to the learner's resiliency, hardiness, and ability to control one's destiny (Pearlin, 2010). Findings have suggested that self-efficacy has been found to be positively impact motivation (Schunk, 1991; Wang, Peng, Huang, Hou & Wang, 2008).

In a study of 135 distant learners, questionnaire results, grades, and self-assessment showed self-efficacy had a significant impact on the use of learning strategies, which has an impact on a learner's success (Wang et al., 2008). Further, self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of academic achievement (Hsei & Schallert, 2008).

In addition to self-efficacy, motivation has been thought of as a factor that can play a role in learning and success in one's life. While both motivation and self-efficacy have been investigated as to their effect on learning, they have not been considered together (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008). Since self-efficacy and motivation are connected to persistence, performance, and emotions, researchers found that when comparing both self-efficacy and motivation, self-efficacy was found to have a greater impact over motivation in terms of predicting achievement. (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008).

This may be important in characterizing female student-veterans and determining their level of success. While these women have a moral compass of duty to others, they first have a duty to themselves and survival, and they respect and value what they have accomplished and overcome. Female student-veterans have been said to have high levels of motivation and want to achieve independence, education, and career (Foster & Vince, 2009; Ackerman et al, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011). However, it may be important to identify whether motivation or self-

efficacy is the dominating force driving their capabilities, achievement, and potential for success in piloting their college transition.

Social learning. Building into the needs of the academic environment and transitions is social learning. People have the ability to learn from one another, and do so in three ways: observation of a live model, verbal instruction, or via symbolism where a fictional character, such as in a movie, demonstrates a particular behavior (Bandura, 1977). The exchange of information between individuals is a natural process, and therefore should be integrated as part of the learning environment in numerous styles.

Integral parts of social learning also include motivation and self-efficacy. In a report on student success, student engagement was based on desire to learn as well as the support from the institution (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, as cited in the ASHE Higher Education Report, 2007) concluded, “The impact of college is largely determined by individual effort and involvement in the academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings on a campus” (p. 602).

However, in a study of first-generation students and their need for interdependent learning further supported the need for social learning. Stephens, Fryberg, Marcus, Johnson, and Covarrubias (2012) reported that when students were part of a community and had support, there was improvement in academic performance.

Congruently, O’Donnell (2007) assessed adult learners in transition and found three areas which positively impacted a learner’s success: 1) peripheral participation, or being within close proximity of services, was important for access to academic resources; 2) academic practices that included both applied learning and independent study provided meaningfulness; and 3) a sense of belonging, where students had opportunities to exchange dialogue and to work with others.

This shows that it's not just what is taught, but how it is presented that impacts adult learners in transition, and creating a sense of belonging to a group or community is an important aspect of social learning (O'Donnell, 2007).

Support from others allows a learner to exchange ideas, and when in the presence of motivated individuals, may allow a learner to be influenced by those around him (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, self-efficacy can shape social learning. When a learner observes others experience a sense of accomplishment, this may provide the encouragement to believe in one's self and abilities, leading to a sense of satisfaction.

In the case of women warriors, females are often more concerned with connecting with, and caring for, others (Women Warriors, 2011). In many ways a sense of healing comes from interacting with people who have similar experiences, particularly those who have joined the military, served in war, and returning to the classroom (Ackerman et al., 2009). The idea of individuality in college may not fit the needs of female student-veterans. Female student-veterans often feel unheard in the classroom and isolated (Ackerman et al., 2009, Women Warriors, 2011). Emotional issues also affect their social interactions and learning (Wounded Warrior, 2013). Similar to both first-generation and adult learners in the aforementioned studies, female student-veterans would benefit by having learning communities to experience a sense of belonging, support, and watchfulness between group members. In addition, having peer mentors may also provide guidance from those with similar experiences and offers the sense that one is not alone (Wounded Warriors, 2013). This may contribute not only to developing relationships essential for learning, but also crucial to navigate balancing college transition. These selected theories encompass a gestalt of history, perceptions, relationships, adaptations, identity, and coping strategies that develop over the course of one's life and influence present and future

outcomes. In addition, they address the awareness needed for understanding the female student-veteran within an academic institution. These theories may play a role, and when integrated, have some relationship to the optimal state for learning and success in transitioning to higher education from the military. The concepts and characteristics are summarized and presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of Theoretical Concepts

THEORY	Researcher and Year	Definition	Further Characterization	Relevance
Life story framework	Giele, 2008, 2010	Identity, relational style, motivation, and adaptive elements comprise the framework.	Identifies several time periods that impact one's life path, from childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, present circumstances, and future aspirations.	This framework of narrative/life-story is foundational and reflects upon the experiences, changes, and adaptations of female veterans return to college.
Transition theory	Schlossberg, 1984	A psychosocial model of development that examines life events, including timing and sequencing, which affect various aspects of an individual's life. Four stages include: Preparation, Encounter, Adjustment, and Stabilization.	Includes the type, context, and impact of an event, as well as the person's perception of the transition. Important to understanding how a person is affected by his/her changing life events.	The main use of transition theory is with adult learners and their return to higher education, and relates to all four elements of the life course. Includes how elements are interrelated to coping and transition.

(continued)

THEORY	Researcher and Year	Definition	Further Characterization	Relevance
Stress Process Theory	Pearlin, 1981	Focus on three fundamental concepts: the causes of stress (stressor), the resources for coping with stress (moderators/mediators, and stress outcomes.	The stressor is the cause adapting to stress; processes or change, including coping strategies, personal resources and social support; and outcomes are conditions (psychological, emotional, or physiological) resulting from exposure to stressors.	Relates to concepts of the life story method and health issues. When optimal health is achieved, there is less stress, reduced impact on energy level reserves, and resources for accomplishing many tasks and balancing work and life.
Self-efficacy	Bandura, 1977, 1993	The ability of a person to believe in their competencies and the likelihood of achieving a goal. Can influence internal motivation and the drive to succeed, leading to improved learning.	Perceived self-efficacy influences students' belief in their abilities to regulate aspirations, motivation, and academic achievement.	Relates to the Motivational theme of the life story method.
Social learning theory	Bandura, 1977	How we "learn together". The relationships between students and how they affect and support one another.	One's behavior, environment, and personal qualities all impact each other.	Relates to the "relational style" of the life story method.

Balance

With the growing number of women in the workforce and attaining higher education, the demands on women to balance career and family has drawn attention (Guest, 2002; Weber 2011; Krymis, 2011; Health, 2012). As these pressures arise, it may be important to note few women

are prepared to balance the plurality of roles (Weber, 2011). Conflicts continue to arise when additional commitments impede work and life demands, such as additional schooling or starting a family.

Examples by Guest (2002) include balance being a noun and refers to a scale, implying an “equal distribution of weight” (p. 261); it may also be used as a verb meaning to “bring into equilibrium” (p. 261). Balance may also relate to the concept of time management, resources, the mind and body, or even power (Guest, 2002). Clark (2000, as cited by Guest, 2002) defines balance as “a satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum role of conflict” (p. 264). Further, balance can be described as the ability of one to maintain harmony of time, responsibilities, and relationships between the dual role of work life and home life either by integration or separation (Guest, 2002; Weber, 2011). For purposes of this literature review, balance will revolve around investigating the life stories, transitions, and stress management of female student-veterans as they relate to work, life, and school to achieve the optimal function in transitioning to college.

In a study of college students faced with balancing work, family, and study aspects of life, survey results cited both coping strategies and social support played the largest role in the student’s success (Lowe & Gayle, 2007). These students also declared a strong need for support from both work and school settings, with the additional desire for cultural change and support programs at the college, which did not exist (Lowe & Gayle, 2007). Congruently, Grawitch and Barber (2010, as cited by Krymis, 2011) conducted a review of 385 articles regarding work-life balance. Only 37 of the articles discussed work-life issues, and few discussed the idea of support programs (Krymis, 2011). Therefore, programs to assist adults in the college transition either do not exist, or have not yet been employed or examined further.

This lack of support should be considered as female student-veterans return to college. With 38% having children and 11% being single moms, female student-veterans struggle with balancing home and college life. While these women are faced with the task of balancing such demands in all areas of their lives, as well as dealing with health issues such as PTSD, TBI, or MST, little preparation or support for educational transitions and life balance exist (Women Warriors, 2011). This may affect quality of life as the demands of college impact family life and produce imbalance. To date, only one study on balance has evaluated women in the military. Those findings indicated that high involvement in work or home led to distress in the less involved area and created family-work conflict, resulting in mental health issues (Vinokur, Pierce & Buck, 1999 as cited by Guest, 2002). Such outcomes reflect the potential for female student-veterans to perceive their life is out of balance and hampers their ability to transition, thrive, and be victorious in achieving academic aspirations. A visual of these interconnecting theories and concepts is presented in Figure 2 below.

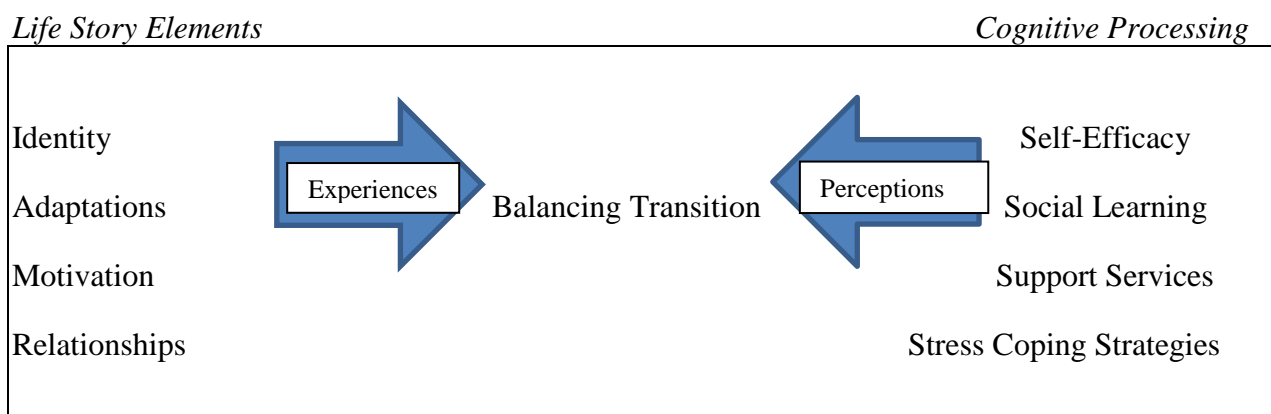


Figure 2. The interconnection of conceptual theories affecting the transition to college.

Discussion

Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, there has been limited research on female veterans, and little if any on those who are transitioning from the military to college,

especially community college. Learning from these women could inform those looking to create resources and support programs that would be beneficial for those who may be at risk due to overlapping health issues, stress, and the accumulation of responsibilities that stretch their time and resources. The opportunity to utilize the life story method could provide a comprehensive scope that envelops the unique situations and needs of our women warriors returning from war and give honor and meaningful to their accomplishments.

While previous programs for at-risk students can be used to inform the guiding principles for resources and support services, few programs currently exist that assess the specific needs of the female student-veterans. Without knowing where students are starting, or even if they have a need, programs will not be able to show value or change.

Community colleges have the challenge of developing programs, policies, and initiatives for adults in transition, and especially female student-veterans. As these institutions provide both academic and technical education, many female student-veterans have chosen them to initiate their educational pathway. While many of these colleges have done the best they can with limited resources to provide student and support services, female student-veterans still remain underserved and invisible. Assessing their abilities and needs would provide a foundation for understanding and serving them better, and perhaps lessen the stress involved with the college transition.

Institutional advocacy for implementing *a two-way process* between the learner and institution is needed (Bamber & Tett, 2000). First, helping female student-veterans have an understanding of themselves, their starting points, and knowing which strategies to use is vital in assisting them to deal with difficult life or learning situations. Designing the assessments and individualized feedback to suit the needs of female student-veterans could be developed based on

findings in individual life stories. Knowing one's self and working on interpersonal skills can further allow the female student-veteran to prevail in personal trials. By equipping students with tools to combat stress, poor self-efficacy and motivation, and reduced mental health and well-being, support programs can help female student-veterans thrive and learn (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein & Grant, 2005; Johnson & Taylor, 2006). Second, cultivating relationships, such as a supportive environment of faculty and peers, as well as community and family partnerships, can assist and lessen the burden of attaining higher education and instill hope. The institutional culture must also encourage such relationships and support by informing and educating faculty and staff about the effects of war and needs of our female veterans both in, and out of, the classroom (Women Warriors, 2013).

Faculty must be prepared to integrate female student-veterans within the classroom setting and incorporate active learning, problem solving, meaningfulness, autonomy, and group interaction into the curriculum. These actions also not only augment learning, they lay the groundwork for developing communities of practice (Azmita et al., 2013). Such learning partnerships impact brain functioning and have been shown to improve positive emotions, effecting neural adaptations that affect both positive mental and physical health (Johnson & Taylor, 2006).

Female student-veterans also expressed the need for additional social connections. Mentoring was cited as a potential way for female student-veterans to connect (Foster & Vince and Women Warriors, 2011). Having vet-to-vet, faculty-to-vet, or even student vet-to-student athlete can be instrumental in transitioning to college. Establishing safe, authentic, and positive relationships can be corrective and healing to survivors of trauma (Foster & Vince, 2009).

Providing these opportunities facilitates much needed peer support, focuses on strength and resiliency, and establishes future goals (Foster & Vince, 2009).

Moreover, when students are faced with challenging situations such as college transitions, having skill sets and support communities to overcome these issues is empowering. The potential for integrating resources and a support program at community colleges for female student-veterans can result in many benefits and practical applications which include:

- Helping students work collaboratively, develop communities of practice, and support one another.
- Become both independent thinkers and interdependent learners.
- Inspire motivation by fostering meaningfulness.
- Emphasize the importance of self-efficacy and its cultivation.
- Enhance neurocognitive function.
- Support both mental and physical well-being.
- Enhance coping and stress management skills
- Feel they matter.
- Increase retention.
- Increase student success through graduation, transfer, or certificate completion.

Conclusion

The gap in the current literature postulates a need to look at the different gender needs in the transition from military to college. As female student-veterans may face extenuating circumstances upon entry into the academic institution, programs that advocate instructional and interpersonal support may be beneficial to the learning environment. While there is awareness of the many traumatic experiences female student-veterans have encountered, more insight from

these women is necessary in order to acquire a deeper perspective of the problems they face, obstacles they must overcome, and needs they have during this transitional stage.

Little is also known about the life stories of women warriors returning from combat to higher education, the indiscernible injuries they may be facing, and how they are balancing their personal, family, student, and work life. Further, understanding how the identity, relationships, motivations, and adaptations of female student-veterans impact their ability to adjust to the new environment is vital in discovering specific needs. While there is no one story which may encapsulate every need of female student-veterans, the life story method may capture reoccurring themes of many individuals that offer salubrious insight of issues of these women warriors. The culmination of both individual life and military experiences, may also impact coping strategies and stress mechanisms, making it necessary to realize the numerous factors that affect these female student-veterans. The gestalt of how the life story elements are interrelated to theoretical concepts in balancing the college transition provide a strong background and need for the study. These connections of the life story framework and theoretical concepts are presented in Table 3.

Exploring the life stories of female student-veterans transitioning to community college is necessary in comprehending how and why these variables impact them. More importantly, by recognizing the power of the life stories of these women warriors, we will be able to show them how much they are needed, honor them and those who follow, and work together to create the programs that will make a difference for those who have served their country.

Presently, no one has addressed the specific problems proposed in Chapter One. Given the information outlined in Chapters One and Two, it is time and appropriate that this research should be conducted to provide for a foundation to inform leaders, develop programs, and create policies to meet the needs of female student-veterans balancing the transition to college.

Table 3

Life Story Framework and Connections Among Theoretical Concepts

Life Story Framework	Transitions	Stress Process	Self-Efficacy	Social Learning
Motivation	Situational preparedness	Stressor/stimuli	Belief in self-ability	Environment for support; available peers/family
Identity	Encounter and Self-awareness	Experience	Perception of event's impact and self-expectations	Historical and peer examples
Adaptive style	Adjustment and support	Response (fight or flight)	Belief in risk taking and abilities to succeed/change	Supported from others to "act"
Relational style	Stabilization and use of Strategies	Feedback	Experience instills learning and achievement, regardless of outcome	Accepted and respected by others

Chapter 3: Methodology

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

-Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

This qualitative, phenomenological study seeks to explore, via narratives, the life stories of female student-veterans returning to community college. In addition, coping strategies used by these female student-veterans to balance their transition to community college will also be examined.

The literature regarding female student-veterans has been limited, with many studies utilizing just quantitative inquiry methods comprised of surveys, which may limit the information being captured. In addition, most studies have been limited to male student-veterans as subjects, perhaps due to the larger percentage who have served in the military or the traditional perspective of the military being a male-dominated industry (Women Warriors, 2011).

Very few, if any, studies have focused on female veterans who are transitioning from the military to college. Furthermore, there have been no studies to date using the qualitative methods, such as the life story method, to attempt to uncover the unique factors and elements that affect a female's transition from military life to college, how they balance college, work and family life, and the coping strategies they employ.

Phenomenology investigates the lived experience, encapsulating human experiences and relationships from which the essence of meaning results (Creswell, 2009). Congruently, Conklin (2007) suggests a researcher may discover new social knowledge and perspectives that create meaning by understanding and investigating the *interrelationships* of life experiences. In addition, phenomenology investigates a certain theme or occurrence within a group of select

people to get a deeper understanding of their own life experiences that relate to the phenomenon. Employing the life story method (Giele, 2008) allows for a distinctive exploration of the numerous stages of one's life course: from childhood and adolescence to early adulthood, the present life, and future aspirations. This investigation provides the potential for the discovery of information that may be unknown or unique, allowing the human connection to be uncovered, and reveals emotions and thoughts of individuals that are meaningful. The purpose of this study is to first to explore the life experiences, via narratives, of female student-veterans in understanding the challenges they face and the coping strategies employed in balancing the transition to community college. In addition, the study also seeks to investigate if unique health issues related to combat are affecting female student-veterans transitioning to college. The goal of this study is to allow for a better understanding of the challenges, needs, and coping strategies female veterans have in transitioning from combat to college, which leads to the creation of resources and/or guidelines that will ease such transitions, and allow for maintaining balance in their personal life during educational attainment. Figure 1 demonstrates an example of how the life story method may provide connections to female student-veterans balancing the transition to college.

This methodology section includes a restatement of the research questions. The author of this paper will further provide an overview of the research process, including subject identification and selection, the instrument used for data collection, including its validity and reliability, and techniques for gathering and analyzing data. Finally, the process for ensuring human subject protection through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be presented.

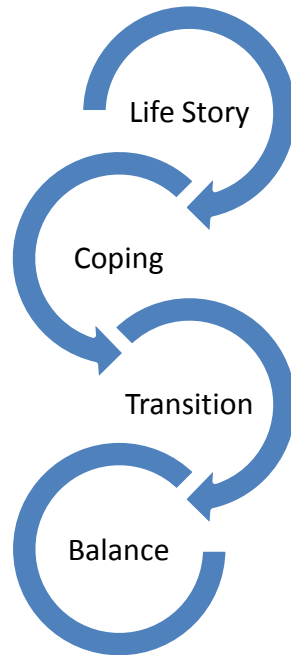


Figure 3. Interconnecting the life story to female student-veterans and balancing college transition.

Restatement of Research Questions

The following research questions have been utilized for the study, with the first identifying demographic factors of the subjects. The second research question explores life experiences in the areas of adaptation, identity, motivation, and relationships utilizing Giele's (2008) framework. The final question focuses on the role of health the impact it may have on coping strategies.

- 1) What demographic factors (age, ethnicity, socioeconomics, first generation) of female student-veterans are associated with the life story elements (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) that impact the transition to college?
- 2) What experiences (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) shape the life course of female student-veterans balancing the transition to college?

3) To what extent, if at all, does the role of health (mental, physical, and emotional) impact stress and coping strategies of female student-veterans transitioning to college?

Research Methodology

The intent of this study is to guide the methodology with phenomenology. Qualitative research methods, such as phenomenology, provide the potential for the discovery of information that may be unknown or unique (Creswell, 2009). Patton (2010) contends that qualitative studies allow researchers to learn about previously undiscovered knowledge and because it allows for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon based on the perceptions of participants. Conklin (2007) further suggests a researcher may discover new social knowledge and perspectives that create meaning by understanding and investigating the *interrelationships* of life experiences. Further, the life story method (Giele, 2008) is employed for the study to “allow for deeper understanding of each participant’s life events” (Elder & Giele, 2009, p. 236) and uses a series of questions designed for the Digital Women’s Project (Weber, 2011). The data collected is from a “purposefully selected group” (Creswell, 2009, p. 178) and the research design “aligns”, or builds on each element the other in order to make sense and justify the choices for the research. While participants are recruited through counselors, emails, and posted flyers, they were also asked if they could recommend others who may be willing to participate. This creates what is known as a snowballing effect, or the method of adding to participant recruitment by asking each participant “to refer acquaintances to join the research project” (Health, 2012, p. 68). This purposeful sampling technique allows for valid representation of a multitude of experiences (Richards & Morse, 2013).

The data sources included:

1) *Via narratives, one semi-structured interview.* Participants were asked a set of questions addressing different stages of life, ranging from past, present, and future (including early childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and adult life) located in Appendix A. These interviews were used to gather information on the life experiences and challenges current female student-veterans face in their return to college. Secondly, coping strategies were assessed to determine if the role of health increases various stressors that may impact the coping ability during the transition from the military to college.

2) *Socio-demographic data.* Subject were asked to fill out a form (Appendix B) that includes the following information: mother's maiden name (for coding purposes), birth date, place of birth, education level, occupation, employer, marital status, date of marriage, spouses birth date, spouses education and occupation, children's gender and year of birth, mother's education and occupation, father's education and occupation, siblings gender and year of birth, total household income, own earnings, health/illness/accidents/disabilities, religion, languages, countries visited and lived.

3) *Informed Consent.* This form provides the subject with information regarding the study. It includes options for sharing information, confidentiality, and the option to withdraw from the interview at any time found in Appendix C. Further protection of human subjects and their information will be discussed later in the chapter under Human Subject Consideration.

Setting

The initial setting was a community college in the greater Los Angeles Area, deemed a *veteran-friendly* school (Military Friendly List, 2014). This setting was chosen due to the large number of student-veterans enrolled at the college (over 500) and a favorable percentage of those veterans being females (approximately 20%) who could be potential volunteers and provide an

adequate sample size for the study (Jane Doe, personal communication, January 2014). In addition, the researcher works in close proximity to these students on campus, and has a positive relationship with the Veterans' Center, counselor, and staff, who were willing to assist in recruiting subjects for the study.

Population and Sample

The population for this study began with female student-veterans currently enrolled in a community college in the greater Los Angeles area. In-person communication and an electronic letter was provided to all female student-veterans from the Veteran's counselor, along with posted flyers at the college, inviting potential subjects to contact the researcher directly. The individuals selected for this study were volunteers who responded to the invitation to participate in the study and referred by counselors who work in the Veterans' Center at the college.

Participants and counselors were also asked to refer other individuals in a snowballing sample process (Richards & Morse, 2013). As a result, additional individuals referred by participants, a counselor at a private university, as well as an administrator in the Veteran's Administration, participated in the study. Thus, the final pool of volunteers included a total of 17 female student-veterans from community college, four-year universities, and even graduate students located in the Los Angeles area, as well as throughout California, Virginia, Florida, and one in Canada.

Beginning in September 2014, interviews were conducted either in person at the college, or via phone if out of the vicinity of the researcher, during scheduled times conducive to both the subjects' and researcher's schedule. Seventeen women were interviewed, and "saturation" began

to occur, whereas evidence showing consistent, replicated, and rich data without new direction, events, or elements, prompting the conclusion of continued sampling (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Human Subjects Consideration

The ethical consideration of subjects is necessary. Awareness of possible psychological risks due to participation in the interviews was taken into consideration. Subjects may struggle with feelings and emotions triggered by the interview, causing unease and possible angst (Krymis, 2011).

The primary goal of the Pepperdine Institutional Review Board (IRB) is to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects participating in this research study (Pepperdine University, 2009). The procedure for Internal Review Board (IRB) included a cover letter identifying that ethical principles in accordance with research will be followed at all times, and no infringement on copyrights or legalities occurred. All forms and processes of the research were included, as well as a statement that all other department requirements have been fulfilled. An informed consent for each subject was used to explain the research, assure their safety and protection, confidentiality, comfort of using and sharing information, and recording the interview. Reassuring the subjects they will be able to discontinue the interview, or refrain from answering any questions any time during the interview was also included in this form. Likewise, socio-demographic forms were presented to the participants to obtain additional information about the characteristics of the subjects. Since the interviews took place in person or on the phone, participants will not be anonymous to the researcher. However, the participants' responses and their information remain confidential and anonymous in the written study and are not identifiable. To protect the anonymity of individuals, forms and interviews were coded using mother's maiden name for organization of the data by the researcher. Participants were also

assigned a random pseudonym, to help protect the identity of each individual (Creswell, 2009). A written interview protocol is presented in Appendix D.

The IRB application was filled out and submitted to the dissertation chair for approval. The application, aforementioned forms, and research proposal were then sent to the department chair and IRB. An exemption was requested and granted to proceed forward with the research study (Appendix F).

Little to no contact of participants occurred after the interview except where the researcher needed clarification, or participants indicated their request for a final copy of the research. The ultimate goal was to protect the individual and gather information that is beneficial to both the researcher and subjects. Creswell (2009) states that such a reciprocity heightens the engagement of subjects as “co-researchers” (p. 90), possibly improving responses and heightening their investment in their contribution to others.

Data Gathering Instruments

The instrument is a semi-structured interview with five sets of questions (see Appendix A). Four questions have been utilized in a study by Giele (2008), while one question was crafted to identify strategies for work-life balance, currently utilized by researchers at Pepperdine University (Weber, 2011; Heath, 2012). As this is a retrospective interview process, a person will need to rely on recall, and reflect on both high and low points of a person’s life story (Scott & Alwin, 1998, as cited by Heath, 2012).

Each subject was asked to participate in a recorded interview using the following questions:

The first set of questions regarding early adulthood:

- What is the level of your education?

- Did it include college education or graduate education?
- What did you think you would like to become in terms of occupation and type of lifestyle or family life?
- What were you thinking then and how did things actually turn out?

The second set of questions is regarding childhood and early adolescence:

- What was your family's attitude toward women's education?
- What did they think about you going to college?
- What did they think about what you would become?
- What was the effect of your parents' education on your attitudes?
- What about brothers and sisters? Did they influence you?
- What about family finances?
- How about you or your family's involvement in a faith community?
- What about your families' expectations?
- How was your education different from or similar to that of your parents and brothers and sisters?

The third set of questions is regarding current adulthood:

- Since college, what kinds of achievement and frustration have you experienced?
- What type of mentors have you had?
- What has happened that you didn't expect in employment?
- What about with family?
- What about your faith?
- How about furthering your education?
- Has there been job discrimination?

- Have you had children?
- Has there been a change in marital status, like separation or divorce?
- What about health problems of yourself or a family member?
- What about moves, how have these influenced you?
- What about your memberships in the community?
- How has your involvement or lack of involvement in faith community impacted your life?
- What types of housing issues might you have encountered and how did they impact you?
- Have racial and gender integration or non-integration influenced you?
- What about a job search or loss and its impact on your life?
- And feelings about yourself? Have there been good things such as particular rewards, satisfaction, or recognition?

The fourth set of questions regards the future of adulthood:

- Looking back at your life from this vantage point, and ahead to the future, what are your main concerns at the moment?
- Looking further out, what are your goals, hopes and dreams for the next few years?
- What problems do you hope to solve?
- Where do you hope to be a few years from now with respect to work or finishing school?
- What are your hopes in regard to family?
- What are your expectations for your community or faith community?

- What are your concerns around mentors?
- What about health?
- What type of concerns do you have around finances?

This fifth set of questions concerns coping strategies:

- What coping strategies do you use to respond to concerns related to the plurality of roles?
- Have you ever felt pressured to choose between work and home? What made you think that you could do both successfully?
- Do you feel that your family life or work life have suffered because of your involvement in work or family?
- Have you felt any guilt related to either family or work?
- Are there times that you felt particularly successful at juggling the demands of both work and home? Why?
- Were you prepared for the demands of work and life balance? Why or why not?
- What strategies do you implement in your own life in order to remain balanced?

Validity and Reliability of Data Gathering Instruments

The researcher for this study has had training and previous experience as an investigator for the Digital Women's Project (Weber, 2011) and in building rapport and trust with subjects. The researcher also has an augmented interest in understanding the many unique needs of military service personnel to establish credibility. With that, the researcher holds no expectations or assumptions of participants, and is aware of the need to be open and void of personal opinion regardless of knowledge and experience (Richards & Morse, 2013). In addition, the researcher has experience with working with community college students, but does not have any

participants currently enrolled in her courses, or provides services to student-veterans, removing incentive or motive. However, if participants do enroll in a class taught by the researcher, there will be no conflict of interest or impact on the participants' grades. It is important to also note that the researcher, while female, is not a military veteran, and is pursuing this investigation with the intention to learn and contribute to the research. Therefore, with no history of military service, the researcher is in unfamiliar territory and is able to remove assumptions and bias to enhance the discovery of a phenomenon (Richards & Morse, 2013).

As prior researchers have already used the instrument for the Digital Women's Project at Pepperdine University for numerous studies (Weber, 2011; Krymis, 2011; Heath, 2012), content validity has been established. The subjects will be chosen from a purposefully selected group due to their particular characteristics as well as being representative of the "phenomena of interest" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 221).

Use of this methodology demonstrates the rigor and complexity of qualitative inquiry, which seeks discovery and new understandings, rather than relying on prior research or theory (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Data Gathering Procedures/Strategies

The data collected was from a "purposefully selected" group (Creswell, 2009, p. 179). Female student-veterans were contacted in person and via e-mail to assure there will be an adequate representation of willing participants for the study. Los Angeles, CA will be designated as the geographical area for the subject pool due to the proximity of the researcher. However, referrals of additional participants lead the researcher to veterans outside of the designated region. The timeline for the interviews occurred during September 2014, and allowed for immediate recruitment of new and continuing students early in the semester, increasing

availability and participation of the participants, before academic obligation consumed time and focus. The following steps were followed for data collection:

1. IRB process: The researcher obtained full approval of the IRB committee at Pepperdine University prior to beginning any recruitment or interviews. This assured the required steps were taken to ensure the safety of the participants, ethical considerations, and that participants fully understand their rights to withdraw at any time and follow all guidelines of Pepperdine University.
2. Recruitment of participants: The participants willing to participate in the study will need to meet criteria of female veteran status and college enrollment. As this is an exploratory study, participants are not limited to specific working status criteria, family circumstances, such as being a parent or caregiver, age, or branch of service.
3. Pre-interview insights for participants: Copies of the executive summary of the dissertation proposal, interview protocol, and human subject approval paperwork were provided to participants, either in person or via email, prior to interviews.
4. A phone call prior to the interview to the participants to establish rapport, credibility, trust helped develop empathy based on a mutual relationship (Letiche, 2006). In addition, text messages were sent to some participants to follow up and confirm appointments.
5. An in-person interview, scheduled for an hour, was used to help the researcher discover new social knowledge and perspectives that create meaning by understanding and investigating the interrelationships of life experiences (Conklin, 2007). Informed consent and socio-demographic forms were presented to each participant prior to the interview. Upon consent, the interview was recorded electronically, via an electronic recording device using the Evernote© program, and later transcribed in to written format.

Data Management

Informed consent and sociodemographic forms have been stored and protected in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. All electronic recordings and transcriptions are kept in a password protected device, and saved in a cloud-based program, also password protected.

Proposed Data Analysis Processes

In consulting with an expert qualitative researcher, Dr. Kay Davis, she recommended that "each response needs to be examined to determine the topics" (personal communication, Davis, 2012). Although the interviewer will have been present to hear the recordings, each transcript was carefully reviewed and coded for key words identified in the research questions.

During the transcript review, themes were identified and coded by topic. These "topic codes" represent categories of the emerging themes, such as identity, motivation, adaptive, and relationships and help with "description, categorization, or reflection" (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 156).

After topic coding, further analysis of the data ensued. Analytic coding extends topic coding to formulate ideas and grow a "tree" of categories, such as "stress" and "transition" and is instrumental in discovering "new themes, developing concepts, or pursuing comparisons" (Richards & Morse, 2013).

NVivo© software was used to analyze the data and to connect the interviews to demographic data. An example of topic and analytic coding is presented in Figure 4.

Summary

This methodology investigated the life stories of female student-veterans who are transitioning back to college, and included women of different ages, ethnicities, and career pathways. This study adhered to the stated interview protocol and to the ethical standards

approved by the Pepperdine IRB. The researcher acted in accordance to stated guidelines, and was objective when discovering themes found within the data. The summary of methodology phases is presented on the following page in Figure 5.

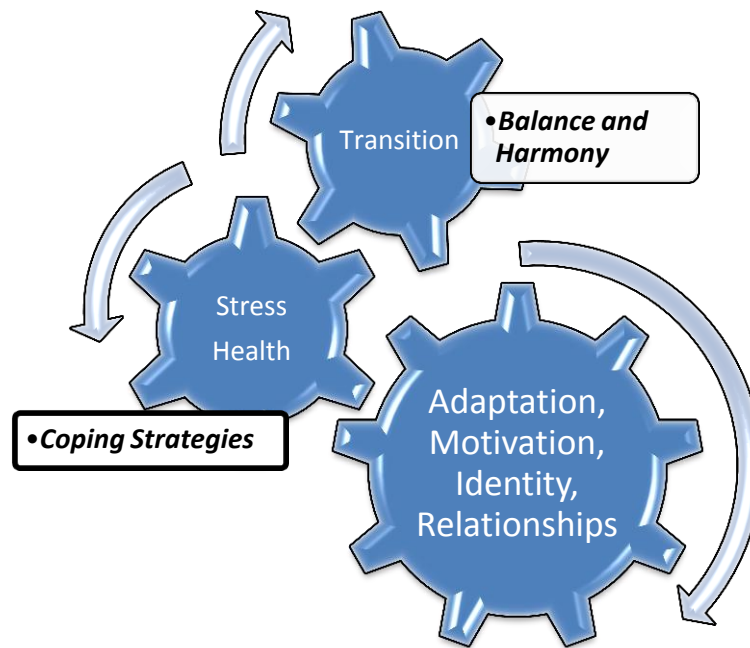


Figure 4. Sample topic and analytic coding and interconnections for data analysis.

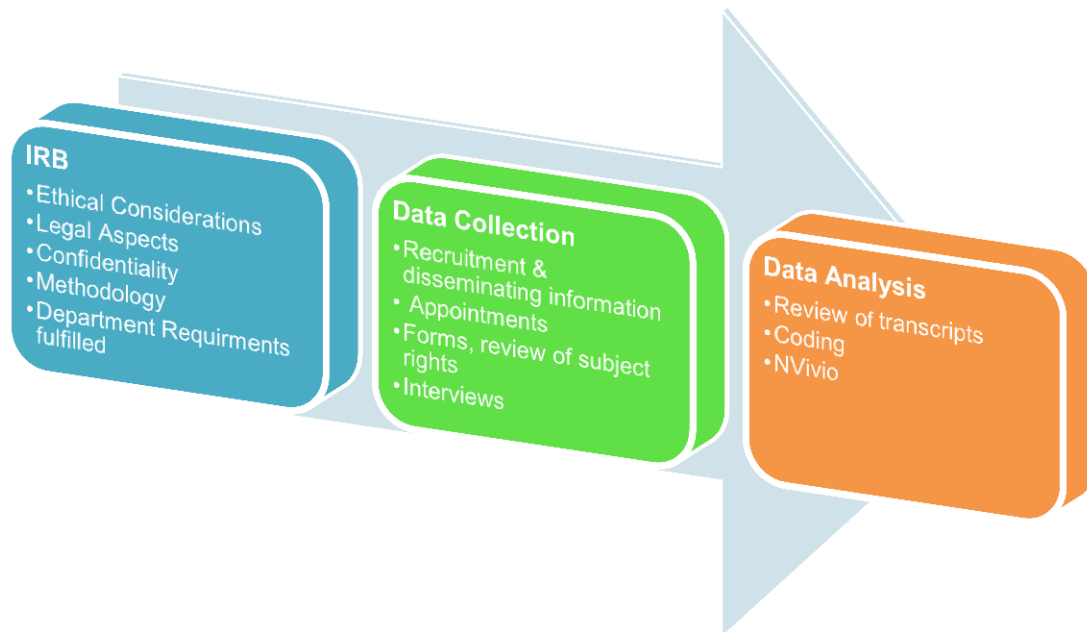


Figure 5. Phases of methodology.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Each person has a story to tell, and the result is a culmination of individual experiences, perceptions, and relationships. While there may be commonalities, people have unique histories that impact who we become. The life story method (Giele, 2010) was utilized to explore the narratives of female student-veterans. Although the questions remained the same for each interview, no two stories were alike. In recalling a lyric from the song, *Closer to Fine*, Sailors (1990) composes a line that parallels this exact connotation: “There’s more than one answer to these questions, pointing me in a crooked line”. This allows the beauty of phenomenological research to emerge with new information provided by the unique perspectives of participants.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to explore the life experiences of female student-veterans to better understand the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ, in balancing the transition to college. A second purpose of the study is to investigate whether or not health issues (mental, physical, and/or emotional) related to combat impact coping strategies of female student-veterans in college. While the post-911 GI bill is providing funds for our veterans to attend college in return for their service, many veterans are facing challenges returning to civilian life and obtaining their education. This study sought out the experience and stories from female student-veterans in determining factors that affect their transition to college. Given the predicted growth of female veterans by 2020 (Foster & Vince, 2009), this research is significant as it provides insight into both the life stories as well as transitioning issues. It also contributes to the much needed research on female veterans, and may provide a greater understanding of their needs, leading to policy and program development. Creswell (2009) concurs that using phenomenology is useful in instances where little is known or there is no pre-existing research.

The research questions used to guide the study were:

- 1) What demographic factors (age, ethnicity, socioeconomics, first generation) are associated with the work-life balance issues of female student-veterans returning to college?
- 2) What experiences (adaptations, identity, motivation and relationships) shape the life course of female student-veterans transitioning to college and impact work-life-study balance?
- 3) To what extent, if at all, does the role of health (mental, physical, and emotional) impact coping strategies of female student-veterans in college?

The data being analyzed comes from 17 participants who are female veterans enrolled in college. The study used the life story framework (Giele, 2010; Weber, 2011), buttressed with Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory, to investigate how the elements of identity, motivation, adaption, and relationships impact female student-veterans in balancing the transition to college.

Chapter 4 describes the findings from these interviews through identifying the themes regarding transitioning to college. An additional analysis was done to explore if health issues had an impact on stress and coping strategies when balancing school, work, and home life to determine if there are any considerable findings.

Data Collection Procedures

The study entailed recruiting female student-veterans enrolled in a community college in the greater Los Angeles area. The individuals for this study were volunteers who responded to a formal invitation to participate in the study and were referred by counselors who work in the veterans' service center at the college. Six women volunteered, and later referred other individuals to participate, also known as the snowballing effect (Richards & Morse, 2013). As a

result, additional individuals, referred by participants, a counselor at a private university, as well as an administrator in the Veteran's Administration, participated in the study. Thus, the final pool of volunteers totaled 17 female student-veterans from community college, four-year universities, and included two graduate students.

This process allows for a greater diversity of experiences and outlooks of those in the sample. The pool represented various ethnicities, ages, military branches, marital status, children, and generations.

The intent of this study is to guide the methodology with phenomenology to discover unknown information, perspectives, social knowledge (Creswell, 2009; Conklin, 2007). A deeper understanding can occur based on the perceptions of participants (Patton, 2010). The life story method (Giele, 2008) will be employed for the study to "allow for deeper understanding of each participant's life events" (Elder & Giele, 2009, p. 236) and the interrelationships of life experiences (Conklin, 2007). Using this methodology demonstrated the rigor and complexity of qualitative inquiry, which sought to uncover undiscovered knowledge, rather than prior research or theory (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Selection Criteria

The data collected are from a "purposefully selected group" (Creswell, 2009, p. 178) and align with the research design to build on each element in order to justify the choices for the research. Selecting specific participants also provides unique perspectives to afford an understanding of the phenomenon (Patton, 2010). This purposeful sampling technique allows for valid representation of a multitude of experiences (Richards & Morse, 2013). The participants were chosen due to their particular characteristics as well as being representative of the

“phenomena of interest” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 221). Participants needed to meet three criteria: a) enrolled in college; b) military veteran; and c) female.

Participants were initially recruited by counselors in the Veterans’ Center at the selected college, as well as via emails and posted flyers. Those who took part were also asked if they could recommend others for the study. This created a snowballing effect and added to participant recruitment by asking each participant “to refer acquaintances to join the research project” (Heath, 2012, p. 68). This led to a total of 17 participants who volunteered for the research study. The 17 interviews that resulted were then coded and analyzed, providing the findings described in this chapter.

Interviews

Via narratives, one semi-structured interview using questions addressing different stages of life, ranging from past, present, and future (including early childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and adult life), was used to gather information on the life experiences, events, and journeys of the female student-veterans (Giele, 2010; Weber, 2011). Utilizing the life story method helps to understand life course and was “useful in comparing individuals with varying origin and experiences and shows change over time” (Elder & Giele, 2010, p. 236).

Using the same set of open-ended questions also allowed for consistency and structure. According to Heath (2012), this “allowed participants to answer the questions with as much detail as they so desired” (p. 90), and assured the interviewees’ time was well spent.

The interviews were done in person or via phone, depending on the proximity of the researcher and the participant. Each interview began with a brief summary of the study, ethical considerations, and an explanation of the multiple purposes. Aside from relaying the informational aspects of the study, the researcher took the time to explain the practical

importance and implications that could lead to future programs to further engage each participant as a contributor. Creswell (2009) indicates this reciprocity heightens the engagement of participants as “co-researchers” (p. 90), possibly improving responses and investment in their contribution to the study.

Once participants felt comfortable and were willing to proceed, the informed consent was administered. Participants signed the form to acknowledge they were informed of their rights, and also completed the demographic information form. As each interview began, the Evernote© software program with an integrated recording feature on an iPad© mobile device, was activated as the researcher requested the participant’s mother’s maiden name. This was done to protect the identity of the participant. In addition, a random pseudonym was later assigned to each participant to use for quotes to help protect the identity of the individual (Creswell, 2009). The researcher utilized the same set of open-ended questions for each participant to maintain consistency, and also asked additional follow-up questions if deemed necessary or for further clarification of an answer. Each interview lasted an average of 40 minutes, with times ranging between 25 to 75 minutes, and were later transcribed into written Word© documents.

Population Descriptions

The demographic data were computed with the following report generated and presented in Table 4. A total of 17 female student-veterans participated in the study. Each of the participants of this study was enrolled full-time in a two- or four-year college. These women vary in marital status and number of children they are raising. Six reported they are single, five are married, four are divorced, and two are separated. Ten of these women have children: four have one child, four have two children, and two have three.

The diversity of ethnicity is also important to the study. Given the origination of the study began at a community college in the east Los Angeles, CA area, nine of the participants stated they are Hispanic, and is reflective of the predicted growth of Hispanic female veterans (Foster & Vince, 2009). Due to referrals from the snowball effect, additional ethnicities, ages, and regions of the country were represented. Three women reported they are Caucasian, one is African American, one is Asian, and three have mixed ethnicities. Although the sample size was small, and there were not an equal number of each race or ethnicity, the responses didn't suggest any differences or discrimination.

The women in the study also represented four generations. One woman was born in the 1950s, two in the 70s, 12 in the 80s, and two in the 90s. Sixteen are supported by the military benefits, three work full-time, and two work part-time. In addition, they also represented various birthplace locations. Fourteen of the women were born in the United States; eight were born in California, two in New York, one in Maryland, one in Mississippi, one in South Carolina, and one in Texas. Three were born outside of the US; one in Honduras, one in Mexico, and one in Venezuela.

Currently, the women in the study represent various geographical locations with 16 women living in the United States; 14 reside in California, one in Florida, and one in Virginia. One woman lived in Canada.

While there was no specific focus on any branch of military service, all branches were represented. Eight women reported they served in the Marine Corp., three served in the Army, two served in the Air Force, one served in the Navy, and three are currently enlisted in the Army reserves. Sixteen of the women were the first member in their families to enlist in the military.

Table 4

Population Demographics

	Age	Vocation	Ethnicity	Status	Children	1 st gen	1 st gen F
1. Anna	34	Nursing	Hispanic	Separated	2	x	x
2. Lisbeth	26	Sociology	Hispanic	Single	0		x
3. Emi	26	Criminal Justice	Hispanic	Married	1	x	x
4. Nancy	55	Nursing	Mixed	Divorced	3		
5. Hope	26	Medical	Hispanic	Single	0		
6. Lucy	30	Sociology	Asian	Single	0		x
7. Barb	29	Forensics	Black	Single	0		x
8. Carrie	27	Psychology	Caucasian	Married	2		x
9. Mary	36	Special Ed	Hispanic	Divorced	2	x	x
10. Dana	30	Forensics	Mixed	Divorced	3		
11. Gina	26	Business	Hispanic	Divorced	1		x
12. Rose	28	Health	Hispanic	Separated	1	x	x
13. Kim	21	Education	Hispanic	Single	0		x
14. Fran	27	Nursing	Mixed	Married	2		x
15. Jill	23	Psychology	Caucasian	Single	0		
16. Sue	40	Business	Caucasian	Married	0		x
17. Lisa	25	Criminal Justice	Hispanic	Married	1	x	x

Finally, as education was their primary goal of attainment, it is important to note that five were first generation college students, with an additional eight being the first female in the family to pursue a college education. Eight were the oldest in their family. Seven expressed that

English is their second language, and 11 reported they are bilingual in Spanish. In their educational pursuits, all had clear goals and majors. Five are pursuing a degree in the medical/nursing area, two are pursuing business, two are majoring in criminal justice, two are education majors, two are enrolled in forensic science, two are focused on psychology, and two are concentrating on sociology. Of the 17 participants, 15 are either attending, or had attended, a community college. However, regardless of college level, the participants had few differences in responses, providing adequate insight, details, experiences, and useful information to the study.

Data Analysis

As it was recommended that “each response be examined to determine the topics” (personal communication, Davis, 2012), interview transcripts were initially analyzed by reviewing each individual transcript to discover emerging themes. Although the interviewer was present to hear the recordings, each transcript was carefully reviewed for key words identified in the research questions and literature review themes.

During the transcript review, themes were identified through extracting personal statements or reflections to formulate meaning, and topic codes were created. The researcher chose four topic codes that represented categories of the emerging life story themes (Giele, 2008), which were identity, motivation, adaptive, relationships. Further, six additional categories for transition, coping, strategies, balance, health, and stress were created and the codes were applied. Qualitative research uses coding as a technique to highlight data and themes to help with “description, categorization, or reflection” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 156).

After topic coding, further analysis of the data ensued to develop sub-themes. With this addition coding, or analytic coding, topic coding is extended to formulate ideas and grow a *tree* of categories, such as different education, mentors, and career goals, instrumental in discovering

new themes, developing concepts, or pursuing comparisons (Richards & Morse, 2013). The coding schema is outlined below:

Coding Schema

A. Identity

- a. Different education (than family members)

B. Relationships

- a. Family support
- b. Mentors

C. Motivation

- a. Better life
- b. Career goals

D. Adaptive

E. Health

F. Balance

G. Transition

- a. Military
- b. College

H. Stress and Stressors

I. Coping

J. Strategies for College Transition

The transcripts were imported into NVivo 10© software for analysis. The Excel© file of demographic data was also uploaded for software analysis. Topic codes from the emerging

themes were used to create *nodes*. Once the initial analysis was done, topic coding was further extended and a second set of coding analysis was performed.

Findings

The analysis for this study employed Giele's (2010) theoretical framework from the four life story elements: identity, relational style, level and type of motivation, and adaptive style. In addition, the analysis looked to include Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory to explore the challenges of transitioning to college, as well as the major themes of the findings are presented in that order.

Research Question 1.

The first research question, sought to investigate if demographic factors associated with the life story elements impacted the college transition.

Identity

Giele's (2010) identity theme encompasses how one sees the self and personal qualities, and how they are influenced by values and beliefs, and if one identifies with others similar or different than herself. "Does she mention her race, ethnicity, social class, religion, or how she is different or similar to her family, or what qualities does she mention that distinguish her—intelligence, being quiet, likeable, innovative, outstanding, a good mother, lawyer, wife, etc.?" (Giele, 2008, p. 401-402).

Findings indicted the majority (13/17) of the participants in this study were first generation female college students. As few of their mothers had a college education, and in some of the cases, neither parent had education beyond high school, the hopes were that their daughters would achieve more education. Many participants said they wanted to achieve more than their parents and wanted a different life-path and may have been influenced by parental

values and beliefs that impact such identities. Eight were the oldest in their family. Seven expressed that English is their second language, and 11 reported they are bilingual in Spanish. Sixteen of the women were the first member in their families to enlist in the military. As a result, these demographic factors, similar to many at-risk students described by Coley (2000), impacted who these women are, but intensified the difficulty in having resources to assist with the college transition.

The following participants expressed these sentiments:

Anna: I'm the first generation (attending college). I was born in Mexico and raised here. And I was the first one to graduate high school, and the first one to enter the military. I have a background of all sisters, I have no brothers. My parents did have good intentions for me as far as for me to continue my education, but I think they were just as lost as I was.

Hope: I'm not going to say that education wasn't big in my family, but to say although my mom doesn't expect this of me, I expect it of myself. I have the most college education and have gone the furthest with a career and the military.

Lisbeth: I didn't ask anybody's opinion about the military, I just did it. I said, you know what, you're doing this and you're going to do it first.

With nine of the participants identifying themselves as Hispanic, most were focused on a career path versus the pursuit being traditional and having a family. Most are pursuing non-traditional majors and careers including business, criminal justice, and forensic science.

Reinforcing this concept, the following participants shared their viewpoints:

Mary: I grew up in a culture where when I was in sixth grade (I went to school in Honduras), a lot of my friends were getting married or having kids. I remember my grandma taking me to a job interview right after sixth grade and the job was supposed to be for me to clean someone's house and cook and babysit and do all the house chores. I remember at that point I snapped at my grandma. I stood up to her and I said, "I don't want to do this. I want to go to school."

Hope: When I was seeing which way I wanted to go for in college, it seemed firefighting was cool, because not a lot of women do it. I've always worked well with males.

Lisbeth: My dad's dream for me was to become a lawyer. My mom's dream for me was to become an actress or a model-- and then all of that was shattered when I said, "I want to become a Marine." In the military, I felt like I was where I was supposed to be.

Relationships

The relationship theme is how one connects to others, and how the roles, social influences, and support, such as family, culture, or community networks, that affect personal development (Giele, 2010). Several of the women were influenced by their family circumstances growing up, and sought to build better lives for themselves and their families. Further, five were married and relied on their partners' support, while the four who were divorced and the two who were separated relied on parents or in-laws to help them with housing or parental duties while they were attempting to return to college.

Participants relayed these statements about their families and how they impacted their choices and educational aspirations:

Kim: They were very supportive. The main goal was to get me to college. For the longest time I wanted to be a veterinarian. But they didn't have the highest income so I felt a little pressured.

Nancy: My mother was the one to ground us all together. So education was very key and she used to tell me at a very young age to get an education and in order to be an independent person, as well as a woman, to get an education because you never know what is going to happen in the future. I decided I wanted to go to college, but my parents didn't have the money.

Rose: After high school I just started working, so I didn't really have an opportunity to go to college, which I wanted to, but my parents couldn't afford it.

Dana: My grand-dad's beliefs were that I was going to college, but it wasn't affordable.

Gina: Growing up with my mom, a single mom, she really enforced education on us and she said that school was really important, and that even if it takes you awhile to finish, the one thing is that you did finish.

Some of the women, such as Barb, had no parental support, financial or emotional:

Barb: I was in foster care. I'm just thinking that I have to do it for me.

None of the participants reported having training workshops, support for education, or peers to learn from in pursuing college. As findings have shown that programs to support at-risk students have proven beneficial (McCombs, 1991; Frankel et al., 2009; Cates, 2011; Adams, 2011), participants conveyed that family support was most influential.

The women who participated in the study also vary in marital status and number of children they are raising. Six reported they are single, five are married, four are divorced, and two are separated. Ten of these women have children and many of them noted that having children inspired them to continue with education and be a role model to their children, as well as providing better for them.

Nancy: My daughter says “Mom you’re not home, and when you are home you’re constantly in the books.” I’m trying to show her I’m a role model. It’s not going to come easy. It’s not just going to drop in your lap. I tell her “I’m providing the tools for you now, because if I get an education and get ahead in life, then I can provide for you when it’s your turn to go to college.”

Lisa: I have a three-year old who needs her mommy, and sometimes she gets sad. But I explained to her mommy has to work to get a bigger house, to pay for school, and pay for food.

Motivation

The third theme, motivation, is the desire to do things, for the good of self or others, and is a crucial element in setting and attaining goals (McCombs, 1991). It may be intrinsic (doing it for self-satisfaction) or extrinsic (expecting a reward as a result; Giele, 2010). The participants in the study conveyed a strong drive to complete their goals, citing financial stability, personal need for achievement, and desire to help others as common reasons for returning to college, reflecting both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Giele, 2010). They also expressed confidence in their ability to achieve (Bandura, 1993), despite expressing slight fear in the initial stage of college transition.

The women who participated in this study represented four generations and had a strong desire to better their lives. As many expressed the issue of finances being a motivating factor, many also wanted to reach goals, have careers, and serve others.

Barb: When I got to my unit, there were some things that I saw that I didn't like. I kind of used those situations to motivate me to go back to school.

Dana: I was going to succeed and I was basically going to get out of the small town I lived in.

Emi: I just did not want to, necessarily be a burden, but I wanted to be able to pay for my own education.

Carrie: My mom, I don't think she ever got her GED. I don't know. Just seeing that made me want to pursue an education.

Gina: My mom and my dad don't have degrees or anything so they live a life to make sure there's money for rent. That's still how it is. So watching them struggle with that made me realize that I never want to have what they have right now. It just pushes me to be a better person and to have a better future ahead of me than what my parents had.

Lisa: My sister graduated because of me-I'm her motivation. I want my daughter to be better than me. That's what keeps me going.

Two of the participants conveyed they joined without having financial need. One said she did it to serve her country and give back. The other participant attended college for three years, but after changing her major several times, and not knowing what she wanted to study, she joined the military to get direction.

Adaptive Style

The adaptive style theme seeks to explore how one seeks innovative ways to adjust to various encounters, or if they are conventional (Giele, 2010). As 16/17 of the participants were the first member of their family to join the military, they seemingly adapted well to the male-dominated environment of the military. They expressed their need to escape their culture and tradition of being a housewife, and become independent women, as well as the importance of a college education.

Finances drove 14/17 to the military so it could help them later pay for college later, many also said they needed direction or it was the only option to get out of poverty and they felt the military would help them figure out a career.

Lucy: I realize now that my education is important.

Anna: It's just having a positive attitude and looking at the bigger picture.

Lisa said: I joined the Marine Corps because I couldn't afford to go to school and everything changed. Also, I didn't have the best grades when I joined, and I learned how to value a lot of things. I wanted to go to college later because I knew I needed to get out. I started to see my friends and a trend that they were stuck. I went to camp—it was my first time away from home and it was hard for me. It was different for me in that everyone is from all over the country and had different expressions—it was hard for me to adapt. I come from a traditional Mexican family, so this was hard.

The women represented various birthplace locations and geographic regions. Being in the military, they had to adapt to a male environment, different cultures and people, as well as being stationed or deployed in other states or countries. This indicated that female student-veterans were able to navigate multiple environments and roles, but also needed to maintain individual adaptive styles in doing so (Women Warriors, 2011).

Research Question 2

The second question explored the experiences (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) that shape the life course of female student-veterans balancing the transition to college.

A word query was initialized to highlight the most frequently occurring words used during all interviews, producing a key word cloud (Figure 6). The larger words represent the increased frequency of use. The list of the most used vocabulary words included school (759), going (634), work (464), family (444), military (398) time (398) education (392), and college (377). This produced an overall visualization that represented the participants and correlated to

their parental situations as children. In using the word query for identity, the most common words were school (80), college (51), military (50), family (35), and work (28)/career (11).

Table 5

NVivo© Analysis of Participants Mentions of Themes and Number of References

	Themes	Number of References
Anna	7	24
Lisbeth	10	152
Emi	8	76
Nancy	9	52
Hope	10	100
Lucy	6	20
Barb	9	42
Carrie	7	26
Mary	7	42
Dana	10	56
Gina	8	37
Rose	9	47
Kim	10	33
Fran	10	37
Jill	7	25
Sue	8	46
Lisa	10	108

The participants shared clear ideas of who they are and how they are different:

Lisbeth: I feel like a lot of people are so influenced by society, family, etc. Which is not bad, but when you're trying to find out who you are, it can, because then you're not who you are, you are who they want you to be. One of the biggest reasons why I went into the military was to prove that I can be not average, or that I was different.

Emi: I graduated high school and I already knew that I wanted to go into something that dealt with the military and the law enforcement. From a very young age, I looked up to police officers and any other military personnel. I knew I wasn't into Barbie dolls, I was into G.I. Joes.

Hope: Coming from the military, everything is high speed. Out here it's a lot different. And patience (is needed) with civilians. And I hate to use the word "civilians" because it makes it sound like you guys are a bunch of animals. But military personnel, working with them is easy. You do what you gotta do. But civilians don't have that discipline. I've been denied jobs because people think I'm too headstrong or maybe I pose a threat. But

there's a reason I've gone this far. If you feel I'm a threat that tells me you don't want me up to your level and you're worried.

At least six articulated that they had the desire at a young age to achieve a specific career, also known as "Identity Achievers" (Josselson, 1987, as cited by Women Warriors, 2009, p. 79), and are concentrating their studies to work in specialized areas (e.g. dentist, veterinarian, coroner, police officer). Fourteen of the participants noted finances drove them to the military as they did not have the financial means to attend college immediately after high school:

Carrie: I just graduated high school and when I joined the marine core right after that, I always knew I wanted to go to college. That was the reason why I joined. I've always wanted to be a dentist since I was little. That's what I'm working towards now.

Nancy: I knew that I was going to be in nursing, believe it or not, from the age of six. I knew, but my parents didn't have the money. So I joined the military in order to get my college education.

Mary: I wanted to be a teacher, maybe a high school teacher or an elementary teacher. I focused more in special ed. because I love doing that.

Fran: Initially in my young teenage and even in my childhood, I wanted to be a doctor. and I ended up going through a really rebellious stage, and after that when I turned 19 I joined the marines and left town. The marines just sort of told me, "Hey, you picked your path that way." It sort of forced me to grow up and after when I got out of the marines I decided to get my life on track and go to college.

Some of the participants were unclear in their identities or what to do in life, and felt the military was their only way out. Similar to findings from Foster and Vince (2009), in situations where finances were not an issue or where college was not the initial goal, many participants expressed the need for direction and focus, wanting to be adventurous and travel, find a career path, with one even stating she joined the military to serve her country. They also reflected the military helped them with discipline, citizenship, or influencing a career. The participants who were the youngest in their families tended to not want to follow the path of their older siblings or parents, observing their struggled with finances, careers, alcohol or drug issues, and even incarceration.

Dana: I went into the Marine Corp when I was 18. I had maybe four or five college classes under my belt. I didn't really like school at that time. So I was just taking them because I had to. I did not know what I wanted to be at that time. I was only 20 years in the marine core and college was not a factor. I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for the military. They have bad moments, but they have more good than bad and they actually set me up to be the person I am now.

Rose: I didn't really have an idea (of what I want to become) because I didn't want to work. I just wanted to go to school but with having a family and being a wife and a mother at the same time

Lucy: I wanted to get into nursing. I figured out after two years it wasn't for me. So at age 23, I decided to join the military. I wanted to explore.

Lisa: I graduated high school and went straight into the Marine Corp. I wanted to be a coroner, but I couldn't afford to go to school and I didn't have the best grades.

Fran: One of the main things in me joining the military was because I was arrested and it was an easy way for me to become a U.S. citizen.

Two participants who were graduate students enlisted in the military after attending college. The other two were the graduate students I interviewed. Neither of them said finances played a role in joining the military.

Mary: Since I was in high school, I was in ROTC, and I always wanted to join because I felt like I owed the country so much. I came here and was so lucky to come with papers and go to school and get a free education.

Sue: I had gone through three years of college but lost my patience, so I decided to enroll in the Air Force. I didn't know how many times I would change my major, so I thought it was time to try something different for a while, until I got the maturity I needed to make a more informed decision.

It is also of importance to note these women not only are looking to help themselves be better and increase their education levels, but are choosing careers that have an impact on others:

Lisbeth: From the moment I went into the Wounded Warriors© to help them, is that I'll do whatever I can until the last breath I have on this earth to help them.

Relationships

Like identity, relationships and support played a role in the participants' transitions.

Participants expressed that while their families wanted them to be educated, especially the

mothers, family finances impacted college education attainment. The most frequently used words in the interviews during the relationship theme were school (72), military (49), college (40), family (35), and people (33).

Family support. Many parents and family member were supportive of their daughter's choice to join the military for education benefits, or later became supportive once they realized this would help bring about a better life than they had. Family finances also created the need for 14 of the participants to join the military. Many of the women enlisted so they could obtain the educational benefits necessary to attain a college education, and also wanted to make their families proud of them.

Fran: My mom and my whole family were really pushing me to go after my dreams to become a doctor. She still is, but I don't really want to do all that work. But they were very supportive of me going off to college and doing well.

Kim: They (parents) were very supportive. The main goal was to get me to college. For the longest time I wanted to be a veterinarian. but they didn't have the highest income so I felt a little pressured.

Lisa: I saw my brother went into the Marines and I saw he was a different person. He had a lot of confidence and that's what I wanted to be-confident.

Rose: My mom and my dad were excited for me to complete it (education). Basically, I'm the only one in my family to actually reach that level of education where it was more than just high school and into college. Even joining the military, I think I'm the only female in my family that joined the military. I think I'm at the height of completing my education at that level.

Hope: I grew up in a single-parent home. It was required to obtain good grades, and it was expected of me from my family as a whole that I was going to go to college. But the attitude was like "you figure out how you're going to get there."

Emi: I joined 100% to pay for college. I grew up in a middle class family with hard-working parents. I just did not want to necessarily be a burden, but I wanted to pay for my own education. In my eyes, when I turned 18, I was going to be seen as an adult.

Aside from the single participants, all who were married, divorced, or separated chose to marry a fellow military serviceman, except one. Of those who remained married, the spouses

were instrumental in supporting them in their return to college. The word *husband* appeared 10 times:

Sue: My husband and I—we got married at a very young age. We completed our undergraduate together, we both got commissioned together, we both got our first master’s degree together, and so we help each other out along the way.

Emi: My husband was a lot of help for me, because we both had pretty messed up schedules. I think he (my husband) is my number one mentor. He gives me life.

Carrie: Having my husband being so supportive has helped. So I’m able to take the classes I need, and if I have to stay late, he’s willing to pick the boys up from daycare.

Lisa: He’s my motivation. I’ll bring him my paper and he’ll say “good job babe.” Or when I’m feeling overwhelmed, I just sit down and talk with my husband.

Mentors. In addition to parents and husbands, many women mentioned that mentors played a role either during their military service or in the transition to college. Most spoke of male leaders in the military, professors, and school counselors. Mentors (9), professors (9), and support (8) were most frequently used during this sub-theme.

Fran: I have my uncle and my aunt- they have always been great mentors. They always try to guide me into making the right decision. I have had a few people that I have come across, mostly teachers in my technical schools and even my nursing schools, people that, I don’t know if I would call them mentors or role models, but they have really helped me into taking the path that I’m working on.

Emi: There was a teacher by the name of Mr. Goldberger, and he was in the Vietnam War with the marine core. He educated us that the military was a good option.

Emi also continued: Sally, she’s like the transfer angel. She has all the information. Again, they offer so many pamphlets and they have so much information ready to go. You just let them know what it is that you want to do or in the direction that you want to go. You don’t necessarily have to know what it is that you want to do, and they’ll make sure they mentor you and guide you to put you in the right direction.

Nancy: In the military there was quite a few. I learned from another mentor who opened the door and showed me a different way of teaching people. I accepted that and then that person became a part of me and I was able to give back. My mentor is Sally here at Veteran Services. She’s been great, positive and pushing me to get my goals, very supportive, absolutely.

Lisbeth: The professors that genuinely jump out of my mind because they changed who I am as a person and how I perceive the world especially, is Professor R. Speaking to him, the way he is about life, he's awesome. Before, I saw the world different -- the way I was raised. Now I see it from so many perspectives because it's insane how culture changes the perspective of people and how a person in one culture can jump to conclusions about another culture being weird or not normal when they are completely normal.

Conversely, one woman expressed her family did not support her in joining the military:

Hope: Because one of my uncles who was a father figure for the most part pretty much almost put it to me like "you know the military is kind of like a second option. There's no good coming from it. People that go to the military are more than likely people that don't have the money to go to college and don't have anything else going for them." So I took that negative behavior and adopted it for myself and thought "I don't need to go to the military. What good is it going to bring to me?" But when it came down to it, that's the route I needed to go to be able to get that money for school.

Three women relied on friends in their return to college, but most attempted to transition on their own, demonstrating a lack of social learning with peers (Bandura, 1977):

Rose: Actually my brother in-law is in the National Guard and he helped me a lot with my classes. Basically, I would go to him and I would tell him what I need to get or enroll in, and he would even help me enroll on it. Even my classes here at school, he set a guide for the whole semester in what I need and what I don't need.

Dana: When I was going through my associate's, I was a full-time marine, I was a single mom of three and I was 18 with two classes every eight weeks just so I could finish my associate's. It was very hard because I didn't have many people to lean on because I was here and didn't really know anybody, so I was paying babysitters a lot. I had a moment where I wanted to quit. I called a marine core mom and she really pushed me and said, "I understand it's tough, I know it's hard." She really encouraged me to keep going to school. I wasn't really listening to the male figure that I had in my life because I'm like, "Well you have a wife who stays home so it's kind of hard for you to feel my pain."

Motivation

The motivation theme revolves around drive, goals, and achievement to satisfy either inner needs or helping others. In addition to many of the words frequently used in the aforementioned themes, able (21), degree (15), and goal (12) most often appeared during this query.

Better life. This element was fairly significant as the driving force to transitioning to college. The participants in this study were driven to have a better life for themselves, future, and

their children, as well as help others. This is consistent with having both motivation and self-efficacy to impact achievement (Hsieh & Schallert, 2008). The word *better* occurred nine times in this sub-theme.

Gina: My mom and my dad don't have degrees or anything so they live a life to make sure there's money for rent. That's still how it is. So watching them struggle with that made me realize that I never want to have what they have right now. It just pushes me to be a better person and to have a better future ahead of me than what my parents had.

Anna: It was very hard for me to find a job, and still haven't found a job in there, but that actually motivated me to continue on into the medical portion of it.

Lisa: I say this is mostly for me, but I look at my daughter's pictures and it's mostly to better her future.

Lisbeth: I told myself, "You know what, if there's anything on this earth I will ever do, it will be putting myself through the most rigorous and intense possible anything I can go through and prove to myself I can be there and accomplish anything from there and after."

Dana: I earned my associate's degree, moved into my new home, and I basically started living for me in a sense of that I feel more comfortable now that I know I can do it. I'm stronger than I led myself to believe. I planned very smartly to get out so I did not have to struggle, because I did hear the horror stories and I didn't want to be one of those horror stories of people becoming homeless or relying on government systems to get by.

Career goals. Participants expressed the need to have a career, in both bettering their lives and to fulfilling inner needs, validating previous studies on the impact of motivation on education and career attainment of female veterans (Foster & Vince, 2009; Ackerman, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011).

Nancy: I served 16 and a half years in the military and started out as an operating room technician. I had a 3.69 GPA and I graduated in the top 10 percent of my class. A year later I became an instructor at the same school. So that was very rewarding. I enjoyed teaching. Teaching is a big goal for me. My goal is to be a health educator.

Lucy: I realize my education is important. I want to get my bachelor's degree, get a job, then go to graduate school. I just feel I have to finish school to succeed.

Sue: I've never had a job where I never received some form of recognition, both formal and informal. That's something that's been able to transfer, wherever I've gone.

Hope: I loved it, I enjoyed it, but in the Marine Corp there isn't a whole lot of opportunity for women. They provide a good foundation for young people and it's great, but as you grow into an adult, you start to say "you know what, this is not what I want for the rest of my life."

Adaptive Style

The final theme revolves around the ability to negotiate change during life transitions and circumstances, and can be innovative or traditional (Giele, 2010). Ironically, military (33) and school (33) were tied for word frequency and topped the list during the query for this theme.

The participants in this study are adaptable, perhaps due to the fact they were in a male environment and needed to prove themselves, often sustaining emotional traumas (Elder, 2010) or encountering new and destabilizing experiences (Azmita et al., 2013). They are focused, control their emotions, and do not take things personally. These characteristics are turning points, leading many to focus on enhancing socioeconomic achievement (Elder & Giele, 2010). As part of their adaptability, they tend to also be problem solvers.

Lisbeth: I like to think I'm a chameleon. I adapt to people and I can basically get along with anybody. In a sense, it's acting. It's pretending to care about another, but it's your responsibilities to the role. I'm natural at shifting my mood, my personality, who I need to be. That's a strategy I guess I didn't even know I had. I'm very adaptable to people.

Dana: I was living on base housing at the time when I was told that I would no longer be able to live there. From then on, I just started going forward into college. I was very driven and determined to at least finish that now that I know my Marine Corp career was not going to carry for 20 years. From there, I moved off base and came into the house that I'm in now. I purchased my home, I went and used my VA benefits. I got something affordable that I knew that I could pay even when I get out. At that point I started saving money more, to where when I got out I would be a little more comfortable and wouldn't fall completely flat on my face. I earned my associate's degree, moved into my new home, and I basically started living for me in a sense of that I feel more comfortable now that I know I can do it.

These women sought to pave the way for education and career pathways. Having experiences and successes in the military led to an improved self-efficacy, and perhaps plays a role in their confidence to return to the classroom.

Lisbeth: When I realized in order to get that job I have to take Sociology, it was like, boom. It didn't even hurt me to say I'll get it. I'm not going to take the easy way out. I'm going to take the hard way. It's okay, I'll have to do multiple years of school versus less years, but I don't care because this is going to benefit my brothers and sisters, and they need that. I'm capable of it, and they're not in a state of being able to do it, or wanting to do it, but I can, so that's why I'm going to do it. That's how I change things.

Even when there was not family support, the participants adapted:

Hope: So as hard as it was for me to go against my family's wishes of joining the military, I did it because in the long run, they weren't going to do anything for me except discourage me from going. That's not going to pay bills or pay for education. So I went and you know, I did what I had to do and I came back and everything was fine and they had a different outlook on being in the military because I had done so well while I was in.

Conversely, the one thing participants do not adapt well to is the language and behavior changes required in the civilian sector, as well as in the transition to college. It is difficult to break habits in a short period of time or without knowledge of expectations.

Sue: I would say that the first thing I would say to anyone in the military to consider the differences in culture between the military and ones that are not in the military. One of the biggest challenges I had was being able to communicate, speaking the same language as those around me--both verbal and written. I know they have transition programs where they sort of give us a heads up, but you don't really know what it means until you're going through it. So be mindful of what that learning curve is and observe and make adjustments along the way.

Nancy: I was frustrated when I integrated back into the civilian sector because they were not allowing me to work in critical care. You had to be a RN, despite the fact that I had six years of experience. That's another reason why I went back to medical school. So even though I've been an LVN for 28 years, the reason why I'm coming back is for my education. So that way I can be appreciated for my skills and knowledge and as well get the pay that I deserved. That's a big frustration, the transition from the military to the civilian sector. It's a big change. You're not appreciated for your skills. There are a lot of rules and regulations. In the military you have more freedom.

Lisa: It was different for me in that everyone's from all of the country and we're all different so when you put this in room it's like a lot of people don't like California, people especially when you're from LA. They are like "Oh you think you're all fancy" and I'm like no we had different friends and different expressions. It was hard for me to adapt.

Research Question 3

The third and final question sought to investigate if health issues had an impact on stress and coping strategies of female veterans returning to college.

Health

As there has been an increase in TBI, PTSD, and MST in the latest VA reports (Sander, 2012; Women Warriors, 2009; Foster & Vince, 2009), few of the participants shared that health issues had any impact on their college transition. In observing participants reactions and voice changes during these questions, many appeared to become uncomfortable or quiet, and did not want to disclose or talk about injury. Therefore, the researcher did not pursue follow-up questions in the area of health to prevent emotional discomfort to the participants, and as well as limiting the influence further questioning may have on the data (Richards & Morse, 2013).

Only three of the women reported PTSD. While reports from the VA indicate one in five females experiences MST (Sander, 2012), only one participant in this study reported that occurred.

Physical injuries, such as back injuries were mentioned by three women, one woman reported hearing loss in both ears, one reported a skin disease, and one mentioned thyroid issues. This may have been due to the fact that only three women stated they were deployed to war. Most had served for an average of four years to get their educational benefits and did not see time in combat. None reported having TBI.

Anna: Health-wise, I expect to be in shape and healthier.

Emi: I actually got hurt in the military. I had a pretty big accident, but I was not deployed.

Dana: I knew my military career was not going to 20 years, due to medical issues. I had to have my thyroid removed as I was developing a goiter and I couldn't breathe.

Lisa: I got diagnosed with my skin disease last year and it affects my bone marrow, and I'm allergic to everything. Now on top of family, work and school, I have to go to doctor's appointments. It's overwhelming and sometimes I don't like taking my pills because there are too many.

Lisa also had problems during her pregnancy, and issues with being sick during her service:

Lisa: At first when I was pregnant was actually getting kind of hazed. When you're pregnant in the military you're not supposed to do a lot of things. I had the worst pregnancy all the way up until eight months throwing up. The first Sargent and he found out about all what was going on, how they were trying to make me walk all around, and he just ran them down. Four hours- he just had them running. He said that's what a pregnant woman deals with, so since then they stopped.

Stress and stressors. Many of the participants spoke about stress, the causes, and how they perceive it, embodying the stress process (Pearlin, 1981). However, given the limited reports on how stress affected their health or transition to college, there is little discovery on how it impacted mental and physiological health. These women have learned how to be problem solvers and so they can tolerate high demands without expressing many complaints. However, stress was proliferated in the women who were parents.

Kim: I'd leave before my daughter was awake and I'd come home and all I'd have was about an hour with her before it was time for her to go to bed. That started to get stressful.

Single mothers faced increased burdens of stress affecting mood and anxiety (Thoits, 2011). In addition, Cornwell (2013) contends switching roles throughout the day increases cognitive demands:

Mary: It's a dilemma I'm constantly dealing with, because I work because I love my job but also because I need to for my kids so they have a place to live and at the same time, I go to school, because like I said, education is so important in my life that I feel like I need to get this done. Coming from work and switching back to the school mentality, and at the same time the, "Mom, I have homework. Mom, what are we going to eat?" It's about prioritizing.

Stressors further increased under conditions where the participant's spouse was unsupportive.

Nancy: I was married before and I had two children with another Army member. He wasn't big on education. It irritated him. It was, "Why do you have to do this?" I guess in his family, education was not important. While for me it was the opposite. So we had tension there.

Dana: I got pregnant, and once we found out they were twins in May, he told me that he didn't want two. He just wanted one. When he asked for a divorce, we actually legally separated in August of 2009. We separated, I went my way and he went his.

Residency issues were concerning:

Barb: When I left active duty and came back to LA, the only thing really stressful was finding a place to live.

Departure from the military also had an effect:

Lisbeth: because I feel like females that have gone through postpartum depression I started experiencing all this stress, and it makes you feel down, it makes you think about negative entities.

Issues concerning school also emerged:

Lisbeth: I had to drop a class, now I'm not a full-time student. Which is better than not being a student at all, but it sucks because than I'm not getting my full BAH, which is Basic Allowance Housing, which is what they give us for going to school. So, if you're not a full-time student, depending on how long you go, like a three-quarters student, you're going to get three-quarters of your pay. If you're only a half-time student, you'll only get half your pay. It keeps going until whenever. So I go from getting \$2,200 to only getting \$1,700. And now that's huge chunk, I have to make the difference for it. That's a stressor for me, that I have to deal with, and it sucks, you know, but if I had more time, maybe I could have figured something out where I could have dropped this class and added another class I needed, but I can't, I don't have that choice.

One participant addressed mental health and weakness:

Emi: Talk to somebody you can trust. The military has this and they do have counseling and they do have fellow marines you can reach out to. Chaplains are a big help, but a lot of people don't really go to them because they don't want to be seen as weak.

Another mentioned making healthy choices:

Nancy: I have a very healthy outlook. I don't smoke. I don't drink. I don't do drugs. That's by my personal choice. As far as relaxing, I'll read a book or take a walk around the block.

Balance

When participants were asked about balance in their life, many women reported issues of conflict with the plurality of roles (Guest, 2002; Weber, 2011) pertaining to sacrificing time with family, impacting their ability to raise children. Sander (2012) found female veterans are more likely to have children and be single parents if under the age of 35. Congruent to this study, seven of the 10 women who had children met that age criteria. Further, five of the 10 women with children reported they are also working, three declaring full-time hours while also raising children and going to college. Participants shared their struggles, reflecting similar findings in previous research (Foster & Vince, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011):

Anna: There are challenges when it comes to being a full-time student, single parent, and also working. I am thankful I have my military benefits that help out a lot. I had to drop a night class because I was too absent from my home and I was starting to see the effects on my kids and my kids just started school, and before it got worse I decided to drop it.

Carrie: I'm usually the one that will have to miss class to stay home with them instead of my husband taking off work when the kids get sick.

Rose: As a single parent, I'm getting back on track with my school work, because it was off balanced, way off balanced in the beginning of the semester. It's just been really hard and difficult (being separated), I know that I have to get back on track and focus on what I have to do because I don't have that worry or stress anymore because I already passed that.

Mary: It's a dilemma I'm constantly dealing with, because I work because I love my job but also because I need to for my kids so they have a place to live and at the same time, I go to school, because like I said, education is so important in my life that I feel like I need to get this done. Coming from work and switching back to the school mentality, and at the same time the, "Mom, I have homework. Mom, what are we going to eat?" It's prioritizing.

Barb: I think it's harder for females in the military to have that work, home and family life.

Some participants shared the challenges they faced while on active duty or serving in the reserves. Being in the service means the mission comes first and they must drop everything, and there was a lack of childcare or understanding if asked to deploy or move to a new station. These findings had not been observed in the previous literature or research on female veterans.

Emi: I decided I didn't want to put him in daycare. I just didn't want to expose my child to everything from death to you know, mistreatment. I wanted to take a year off and just spend it with my son and just develop that bond because it was not there. I felt guilty that I wasn't there for my son. I wasn't there for his first step. But I do advise if you're graduating the military and if you're a private or a lance corporal, or whatever rank you are, don't jump into getting married. Don't immediately jump into having a family because it's stressful and painful for them, especially a child.

Rose: I'm having a tough time right now trying to balance work and family and school work, and with the army too. Because the army is requiring me to go to training and sometimes the army doesn't really care about the college life or where you're going to school. It's hard to say that you can't do this training in order to get caught up in the semester. It also required me to do their training, and it's just hard to balance.

Dana: When I was in active duty, I had to choose work over family a lot. I had to send my kids to South Carolina for deployment and things like that because working towards paying the bills, I had to sign a contract. I felt very guilty having to send them to South Carolina for a job. It made it even worse they told me that I was getting the boot, releasing me. I felt really guilty because I was like, "I chose my job over my family a lot." In doing that, I missed a lot of my oldest child's childhood. I saw him acting out, but I turned a blind eye because I was so tired. So I'm making up for lost time.

However, even those who did not have children expressed issues with balance and their family life and how they put others ahead of themselves because it is the military way.

Lisbeth: For five years of my life I felt pressured between choosing between work and home. But I chose to (be deployed). That meant for a year I was giving up my family. The choice was made for the greater good for those marines who I have to train, and who will eventually get deployed. They will have the most knowledge I could possibly give them about that experience, so that when it comes down to it, they can survive in that environment. The reason I thought I could do both successfully, part of it was because I was young. It was naivetés.

Sue: My husband and I were working opposite shifts. After that four year period, we had to do a little repair work to get to know each other again. I struggled with my lack of

understanding that they (civilians) did not put the job or other people first. There was a lot more self-interest in civilian employees than I expected.

Hope: It broke my heart when I was away from my family because they had no one to lean on. But I had to do what I had to do to be able to get where I'm at today.

Essentially, these women had little time for themselves, were the primary caregivers responsible for childcare, sacrificed time with their loved ones, and made little to no mention of having doing things with either friends or even other female-student veterans with similar circumstances.

Transition

Military issues. Specific references were made to the poor preparation for transitioning from the military to both civilian and college life. Although military personnel who are separating from their service are provided with the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), participants shared that it is not useful. It is offered in the period of one week, and did not help change or prepare them adequately. After four years or more of service, living a certain way of life, and developing a system to survive a male-dominated field, it was difficult for them to understand civilian or academic worlds--behavior, language, and the way things operate. Participants indicated that they are still active duty while attending, there was no application of the knowledge or behavior change, and there was little information about attending college:

Emi: There were a couple of months where you just don't which direction to go. Thankfully I was referred to the college because if it weren't for them, I don't think I would have found my path.

Lisbeth: It was very confusing. It was like, if people had information, it wasn't enough.

Dana: We are required to take a one week separation class, where we go to everyday and it basically gives you all the fundamentals on how to separate successfully. Well to me, it is not effective. Nothing in that class was really beneficial, I felt like it was all about checking a box.

Gina: The only weird part was when I was in training with the army we had to have such strong values and discipline, so when I came back to school and back home, it was hard for me to relax a little. I felt like I always had to be on my toes.

The TAP program also does not provide specifics on benefits entitlement. Participants stressed they oftentimes didn't know what their benefits were or how to they could get them, nor do they inquire or ask for help. This is revealed in many participants' responses:

Emi: Making it known that it is ok to reach out for help. That needs to start in the military.

Rose: Just going back to college after the military was an experience where I was very nervous and excited at the same time because I wasn't sure of what to expect because I graduated high school in 2005 and then coming back in 2012 and then going back to civilian life and college life, I wasn't sure of what to expect.

Nancy: That's a big frustration, the transition from the military to the civilian sector. It's a big change. You're not appreciated for your skills. There are a lot of rules and regulations. In the military you have more freedom. "Gather your papers, sign this and sign that, and out you go." There was no program to tell me what to do. It was just, "Here's your honorable discharge, and out the door you go." They didn't tell me that I needed to get my college transcripts together, or that I needed to see a counselor. They did not prepare me to come out to the civilian sector. If they had some sort of transitional program and to help them find out, "Well what is a grant? And what is a scholarship? What is PELP? How do I get those? What's an educational plan?" I had no idea until I started attending college. You can miss out on deadlines, which means you can miss out on money. If you miss out on money, how are you going to pay for your tuition and books?

Carrie: My counselor, she told me what to do. She told me well, "You need to do this, this, this and this and you'll be all set." She told me to bring my husband's orders and I'll get in-state tuition and I had no idea about that either. But no one told me that we had a veteran's part, like, I didn't know that there was this counselor for veterans. I didn't know that there was a whole veteran's lounge, no one told me this stuff, so I only dealt with one person, and they didn't tell me anything so I think they should ask if you're a veteran and give them a list of what the school provides for veterans.

They also spoke of being "scared" to return to college:

Anna: I didn't know how to ask for help. I said I'm kind of scared, maybe of like, the whole, starting the whole system and assessments.

Emi: I was scared to come back to college. I had been away from school for a while. I had been gone from the school environment and I was I guess scared to be reintegrated. It was a little bit difficult but thankfully to the VA office, they really helped out and made things all smoother.

Lisa: When I came in, I felt like I was by myself and it was hard. Maybe if I had somebody else I probably would have more confidence because I didn't know what to do. What we're taught in the military is opposite of what we do here.

College issues. The importance of women sharing their stories with others can help in creating understanding. It was asserted by one woman from the Wounded Warrior project that the VA and the DoD should value talk therapy and counseling, especially for people who have dealt with life and death (Wounded Warrior Project, 2013); several of the participants in this study also conveyed that colleges and personnel need to be more aware and understanding of their situations.

Lisbeth: One of the things I think I would like for people in administration and people in school to understand is, it's easy to say, "well you got out". It took me two years to get my life together and to say it's time, and that I had enough time off. And what is enough time off? You have five years of a certain lifestyle or a relationship, does it take you enough time to get over that person? Does it take two years to get over that person? People take ten years to get over a marriage that lasted five years -- and no children. And you're telling me that a lifetime I lived for five years has a deadline on it? I lost brothers out there in Iraq. I lost a bunch of them. I came back and I was still missing them because they couldn't miss what we went through and they decided to take their own lives over here. I understand a 19-year-old that's being stupid and wants to add and drop because he or she doesn't know what she wants, but I'm a 26-year-old and I'm a woman that has gone through a lot of things and I'm pretty grounded. I have a goal in mind and I want to get it.

Dana: I have learned in having to tell some of my teachers now about, is that they expect us to be a fresh college student coming out of high school or switching from one major four-year college to another. Most of us, in what I'm learning, are still in the workplace and they work a 9-5 job and they have a family that they're supporting. So when they expect a lot of things or when they expect us to just be a college student, they do not understand we don't have a full-time accessibility to being a college student.

Hope: As far as education, I was attending school, but had an opportunity with the military. I had to withdraw from all my classes. I have more Ws than As, Bs, or Cs.

One phenomenon that occurred was that 15/17 of the participants began their education at a community college. This may imply there is an opportunity for community colleges to develop

transition programs given the large numbers of student-veterans returning to their campuses, and especially females.

Gina: I graduated high school and then I went straight to college but I was at a community college. I needed to help out at home so I couldn't afford to go to a four-year and work because I had to help pay for stuff.

Lisbeth: I would go to a four year and say that I would like to start as soon as possible, and they would say, "Well, we only take applications or whatever once a year." Finally, when I got motivated to go to school, you're telling me I have to wait another year? But if you're telling me that I have to deal with my struggles with who I am as a person, and make a deadline. It's not as easy as it sounds. Things I saw. I lost brothers out there in Iraq. I lost a bunch of them. I came back and I was still missing them because they couldn't miss what we went through and they decided to take their own lives over here. You're telling me just to swallow that one for two years? There is no fairness to what we feel sometimes. It's like "Did I make deadlines in the military?" Of course I did. I had people's lives and they were my responsibilities.

Emi: There was just something comforting about having the VA office (at the community college) and knowing that there are other veterans there that you can talk to. If anything does become difficult, even the tutors they provide are veterans. They just made that transition a lot easier.

Another transition issue was the effect of other college students and the disrespectful behavior or immaturity displayed in class or on campus. Participants cannot relate to other students (non-military) or simple don't have similar interests. They did wish there were other female veterans they could turn to for support and presents a need for a sponsor/mentorship program similar to programs and comradery in the military.

Emi: It's a little disappointing because you come back and you know there are all these fresh high school graduates and you have to deal with all that immaturity. You have to deal with them disrespecting your instructor sometimes. You want to say something but you keep your mouth shut because you don't want to start anything.

Rose: As far as social life here in school, I don't socialize with anybody. Of course in the classroom environment I will socialize with them but when it comes outside of school, there's no one I will socialize with. More one-on-one with other females that actually have been through it would be good. When I got out of the military, I felt that I was just really by myself because I didn't know anybody.

Coping

Finding ways to cope with the stress was vital for these women. Lowe and Gayle (2007) presented findings that indicated both coping strategies and social support were vital for college students balancing work, family, and school. Participants in this study cited similar coping mechanisms, including family support:

Fran: The main strategy I have for coping with all this stress and all the things that I have to do right now is having a good family support system. I have a very big Hispanic family. They are willing to help with anything I need. I love it when I have the last baby...the three month old baby, she moved in a month ago but she can help out with school and the daily and taking care of the other one because I'm breastfeeding and I'm up with the baby at night. I need all the help I can get, and like all other families do. A lot of veterans have children, and a lot of them don't have a family like I do. For them, it would be helpful if there was some way or somebody to help them care further for their children or offering ways

Others participants took part in positive self-talk, venting or crying. It is worth mentioning that coping strategies, such as crying, can be attributed to trauma, such as experiences in combat, or experiencing assault or abuse (Thoits, 2010).

Lisbeth: One thing that people need to understand is, we will never be civilians ever, for the rest of our lives. We will never come back. We will never be a normal person. I don't know if somebody told me, but it's accepting that you're never going to be the same. Accept that you're always going to be different from the normal people. I'm never going to stop dealing with it. I'm just going to learn how to cope and deal with it because they don't have that understanding here for us.

Jill: My coping strategy is to constantly work harder. Working out would be a coping strategy. I make myself more busy I guess, probably to avoid the other problems.

Hope: Sometimes I'd cry and say "I don't know what to do. No one is here to tell me what to do." You're alone in a strange place with strangers, people who don't care about your feelings. You don't have support. You don't have that rapport or love with anyone. Ultimately it comes down to being mentally tough.

Lisbeth also concurred: Sometimes I just cry to help me relieve stress.

Still, many spoke of other activities for self-care, such as reading, exercise, listening to music, or playing with their children.

Kim: I like to go and do the 5k's and I just recently did a half-marathon and I would eventually like to do a full marathon. I run a lot. That does help. I also tend to drink. I do a healthy amount, and I'll drink every other weekend or so. I'll open up a bottle of wine. Between running and the wine, I also try to read something other than school books. Those three things help me in life a lot, and when I can I take my daughter out to something like an amusement park.

Fran: I like to go to the gym and relieve stress. I try to take very, very good care of myself with how I treat my body and what I eat and all that. I rarely watch TV. I read. I like reading. And my kids, I like playing with them.

Rose: I've been exercising because next month we have what's called a PT test, and it's mandatory for everyone to do in the army. I've been just running. It's been really helpful. It's also a stress reliever.

Strategies for College Transition

The research has not produced findings specific to strategies for transition for female student-veterans. The participants were able to develop strategies to help meet the demands of college, family, and work, and reduce stress. Congruent to Guest (2002) and Weber (2011) two participants maintained harmony in the transition to college by separating of school and family:

Rose: I got a good strategy where I was here and after classes I would go to the library and I would literally just stay there for two, three hours straight reading, homework, studying.

Carrie: Whenever I started school, I was actually a brand new mom, it was hard. I was trying to figure out that balance, and my grades were suffering, but now I think I figured it out. Before the class was finished, I would go pick up my boys. Now, I go straight to the library, do my homework and do what I need to do, and then come home.

Nancy: My daughter is angry right now because I'm not spending enough time with her. I say, "There's a phone if you need me. I'm either in class, at the Veterans' Center, or in the library."

However, contrary to these results, other participants sustained an integration of family by setting time aside to study, collaborate, and increase communication with their children.

Mary: I tell my daughters "You go to school while I go to work. Then I pick you up, we are going to sit down and eat, then do homework together. Then you go to bed and I do my homework." They see me and get motivated.

Anna: We (my children and I) have to help out each other as much as we can. Because there is a system we have to follow and sometimes it's not organized and we have to let each other know when we are not doing ok.

Additional Findings

Using NVivo, a data analysis of the findings was generated to review the themes and number of references to provide a greater overall picture of the results. Participants most frequently referenced relationships (219), identity (194), and motivation (141), with all 17 having responses representing those themes. Further, 16 respondents referenced both transition (93) and adaptive style (18), depicting the importance of those elements in their college transition. Only seven of the participants made any reference to health (14), indicating either that health issues had little role in transitioning to college, or there was a diminished rate of disclosure. A summary of the number of respondents and references to themes is presented in Table 6.

Summary of Findings

Findings indicate that the women who participated in this study were impacted by their parents support and environment, aspiring to attain a college education, professional career, independence, and financial security. Their experiences and observations as young adults led them to pursue military careers to assist in attaining education, discipline, and making their families proud. Furthermore, the women with children, as well as those who desire children, are motivated to persist in school to provide a better life and prosperity for their families. They know they are different from civilians in their military experiences, and often have difficulty transitioning to non-military environments. However, due to their strong drive and motivation, they develop strategies to return to college, as well as coping skills to manage their stress.

With the many demands places on these women, they often rely on family support, but sacrifice social interactions and friendships to achieve work-life-school balance in their pursuit of a college education.

Chapter 5 provides a depiction of the women who participated in the research study, summarizes the key findings, and presents opportunities to address the issues faced by female veterans working towards a college education. Using Giele's life story framework (2010), findings will encompass the elements of identity, relationships, motivation, and adaptive style that influenced these women's lives. Moreover, key findings on the role of health, transition, and stress, will help to understand the coping mechanisms and strategies being employed by women in balancing the transitioning to college.

Table 6

NVivo Analysis of the Number of Respondents and References to the Themes

THEME	Number of Respondents	Number of Data References
Adaptive style	16	88
Balance	17	77
Coping	14	39
Health	7	14
Identity	17	194
Motivation	17	141
Relationships	17	219
Strategy	14	31
Stress	10	27
Transition to college	16	93

This exploratory study of the lives of female student-veterans contributed to the overall body of knowledge on female student-veterans, and addressed several gaps in the research. The results produced insight into their needs, issues, goals, and driving forces. The findings helped establish an understanding in to the unique needs of female service personnel, and aim to guide future female veterans in learning how to cope with multiple life demands, develop strategies, and improve balance when returning to obtain a college education.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Courage, discipline, and sacrifice are words associated with the military members serving our country. Congruently, these terms reflect our female student-veterans life stories and their pursuit of education as they strive to balance school, work, and home.

Overview/Summary of the Study

This exploratory study sought to investigate the lives of female student-veterans, and how they balance their personal and family lives while transitioning to college. The study examined demographics and the life experiences of female student-veterans, as well as the impact of health on stress, coping, and strategies utilized during the college transition.

The purpose of this qualitative study was twofold. The first purpose is to explore the life experiences, via narratives, of female student-veterans to understand the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ, in balancing the transition to college. A second purpose of the study is to investigate if health issues (mental, physical, and/or emotional) related to military service impact coping strategies of female student-veterans in college.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

A total of 17 female student-veteran participated in the interviews. The study uses both the life story framework by Giele (2010) and Schlossberg's transition theory (Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg 1984; Schlossberg, Waters, Eilnor & Goodman, 1995) to understand ones origins and life events, as well as how identity, motivation and drive, adaptive, and relational styles (Giele, 2010; Weber, 2011) relates to adult learners returning to school. In addition, the study included self-efficacy, (Bandura, 1993), social learning (Bandura, 1977), and stress process (Pearlin, 1983) as supporting psychosocial theories that influence life story elements and transition.

The research questions that guided the study are:

- 1) What demographic factors (age, ethnicity, socioeconomics, first generation) of female student-veterans are associated with the life story elements (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) that impact the transition to college?
- 2) What experiences (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) shape the life course of female student-veterans balancing the transition to college?
- 3) To what extent, if at all, does the role of health (mental, physical, and emotional) impact stress and coping strategies of female student-veterans transitioning to college?

Discussion of Findings

Demographics. The first research question sought to examine if demographics played a role in the life story elements. The findings were clear in that the majority (14/17) of the women who joined the military and returned to college did so to better their lives, find direction, or both. Congruent to findings by Coley (2000), many of the demographics factors that put students at-risk, such as being financially independent, delayed entry, and having children, were similar to the backgrounds of participants in this study. In addition, Schmid and Abell (2003) found similar attributes of students who begin their education at a community college. With the exception of the two graduate students who had enlisted after obtaining some college education, 15 of the participants in this study got their educational start at a community college, regardless of current student status at a two- or four-year institution. Since community colleges provide access to all and provide higher education and training for about one-third of adults (Morest, 2004, as cited by Humphreys & Acker-Hocevar, 2012), female student-veterans in this study expressed it was

simply easier to return due to no application or enrollment requirements. A majority also expressed that beginning college was scary.

Each of the participants in this study is enrolled full-time in a two- or four-year college. Six are single, five are married, four are divorced, and two are separated. Ten have children: four have one child, four have two children, and two have three. Sixteen are supported by the military benefits, three work full-time, and two work part-time. Juggling many roles and responsibilities, especially as a single parent, increases stress and may affect the college transition (Cornwell, 2013).

The women in this study sought to have a different life than their parents, especially their mothers. Nine of the participants are Hispanic, three are Caucasian, one is African American, one is Asian, and three have mixed ethnicities. One woman was born in the 1950s, two in the 70s, 12 in the 80s, and two in the 90s. Sixteen of the women were the first members in their families to enlist in the military, with a strong sense of their identity influenced by family upbringing and lack of family finances to support their college education. Eight served in the Marine Corp., three were in the Army, two were in the Air Force, one was in the Navy, and three are currently enlisted in the Army reserves. Thirteen were the first generation of females to pursue a college education, with five being overall first generation college students. Eight were the oldest in their family and sought to pave the way for education and career pathways. Seven expressed that English was their second language, and 11 are bilingual in Spanish.

These participants were influenced by the relationships with their parents to pursue education, particularly encouragement from their mothers, and played a factor in their need to pursue college for independence and career opportunities. Further, those who remained married had supportive partners for their educational attainment.

While demographic factors may impact motivation, participants were highly motivated to succeed, and conveyed both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons (Giele, 2010) to achieve and help others. Given that three were born outside the U.S., or were the daughters of immigrant parents, the pursuit of the *American Dream* was instilled in them. One also stated she joined specifically to serve her country and give back.

Mary: I always wanted to join because I felt like I owed the country so much.

The participants adapted to the military lifestyle and male-dominated environment, often due to their desire to achieve and need for discipline, although did express the challenge adapting to people from different regions and cultures when they first enlisted. Linked to their motivation, desire to circumvent poverty or acquire direction allowed them to acclimate in these settings. However, ambiguity and individualism prevail in the college atmosphere creating additional challenges, yet these women further developed solutions to accommodate such circumstances. Their perceptions of attaining a better life and positive outlook on the outcomes (Weiner, 1986; Johnson & Taylor, 2006) may have also impacted their behavior and willingness to adapt to the college setting.

Experiences. The second research question aimed to examine the experiences of the participants and the impact of the life story elements. The first findings were on identity, which showed that the participants had a quest to be different than their parents and family members. This reflects Giele's (2010) identity theme of being either conventional or different, and how they are influenced by values and beliefs. These women were encouraged by their parents to obtain an education as their priority. The military also affected their identity through training. De-individualization and de-personalization occur in basic training to enhance discipline, focus, and investment in the good of the group (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). The women identified

with this military culture and male-dominated milieu, yet also identified in their need to be women, either in their individual desires to be mothers, wives, role models, or helps others.

While educational attainment was the ultimate goal for all participants, college transition caused a resynthesis of identity for many of the participants returning to school (Azmita et al., 2013). This for identity battle was further escalated for those who were deployed as they have changed after combat, have reminders of the horrors of war and wounds, and difficulty “fitting in” with their peers and consistent with previous findings (Ackerman et al., 2009). They are not just trying to make sense of the college environment and how they fit in, but also in defining themselves as women. After successfully transitioning to the military, these women suddenly needed to alter who they are and navigate a new situation in a short period of time, not allowing for internal cohesion to take place (Erikson, 1968, as cited by Azmita et al., 2013).

Many of these women struggled with their identity in the college transition due to the difference between military and college culture, networks, and expectations. Moreover, the women needed to develop an identity as learners, balancing both roles and environments including military/civilian, soldier/student, male-dominated/diverse environment, and independent/family member (Women Warriors, 2011). Such adjustments alter future aspirations or affect college persistence (Azmita et al., 2013). As learning is a function of identity (Wenger, 1998 as cited by O’Donnell, 2007), these women had to shift their reflections on past experiences to make meaningful connections to college.

The next findings encompassed the second life story element of relationships. Giele (2010) characterizes this theme in how connections, roles, and the influence of others affect personal development. O’Donnell (2007) found that emotional support from others contributed to adapting to college transition, as well as having a positive impact on learning. Participants

expressed that family support and encouragement was instrumental in returning to college. For 14 of the participants, family finances were the driving force to enlist in the military, as college education was not affordable. Mothers of the participants also had a strong influence in educational attainment as 13 of the participants were the first generation of females to pursue college. Participants often spoke of making their families proud of them, demonstrating the need for parental validation even as adults.

Of the women who remained married, spousal support was vital in returning to college. Emi, Carrie, and Lisa all stated their husbands were their mentors, supporting them and assisting with childcare duties. Military mentors, who were mostly males, also guided many of the women in the study.

Academic counselors were seen as their biggest supporters, while others mentioned professors played a role in easing the return to the classroom. Six of the women at the community college in Los Angeles expressed the importance of the school's veteran center in eliminating their fears, as well as furnishing assistance in both student services and academic areas. In addition, it was also noted how the aforementioned veteran center staff communicate on a regular basis via email, and how grateful they were for the additional assistance with housing opportunities, scholarship information, and reminders for deadlines. Such services are instrumental in enhancing retention and success as the majority of the women were on track to graduate and/or transfer within the academic year.

Fran: I have had a few people that I have come across, mostly teachers in my technical schools and even my nursing schools, people that, I don't know if I would call them mentors or role models, but they have really helped me into taking the path that I'm working on.

Ironically, none of the participants mentioned relationships with college peers, friends or other female veterans. Foster and Vince (2009) stress the importance of such relationships, and

advocate for peer support amongst female veterans. Officials from many campuses confirm few women participate in programs and services for veterans and interactions amongst female student-veterans are low (Sander, 2012). Little social learning exists, which and may either be attributed to the depersonalization experienced in the military, the lack of connection to their younger college peers, or emotional issues that affect social interaction (Ackerman et al., 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Women Warriors, 2011; Wounded Warriors, 2013;). Congruent to findings by Foster and Vince (2009), female student-veteran reported frustrations with the younger, non-veteran peers, who they perceived to be petulant and disrespectful in the classroom. In addition, these factors could have played a role in the reduced sense of belonging and connection to the college milieu, given both parenting roles as well as lack of campus inclusion (O'Donnell, 2007), thus reducing their interactions on campus.

Finally, it has been documented that veterans do not reach out and ask for help (Women Warriors, 2009; Foster & Vince, 2009). This has been attributed to being perceived as weak. However, one participant cited it is also because in their experiences in the military. When asking for help they get shut down and told to figure it out themselves.

Hope: In the military you get shut down. "Figure it out yourself, Marine," or "you do it yourself." So when you go and ask for help, you feel sheepish. You think "I should probably know this, but I don't," and since you've been treated like an animal, you feel like they're not going to tell you, and that happens a whole lot. I still don't ask for help. I'd rather figure things out myself. I held a leadership role in the Marine Corps, so for me, I should know these things. But when you're out here, it's okay to relax and say you don't know something. A lot, if not all, veterans have trouble with that--asking for help.

The findings for the third theme revolved around motivation. Giele (2010) refers to motivation for goal setting and either for the good of the self or others, or the expectations of a reward. Participants in the study were driven, with most stating they wanted a better life than their parents and siblings. Similarly, Ackerman et al. (2009) found other female veterans were

motivated by financial need for college and needed to escape their family circumstances to have such change.

However, they faced challenges in returning to college, such as not knowing anyone, having little to no understanding of their benefits or how to obtain them, how and where to enroll, or whom to speak with to get started. These problems were commonly spoken of by participants, yet still were motivated to persist. Once they established themselves on campus, participants demonstrated high self-efficacy, to achieve academic and career goals. Congruent to findings by Azmita et al. (2013), these women were determined, had clear goals, and wanted to help others.

Lisbeth: My goals are to graduate with a 4.0. I still have a 4.0. And to get my bachelor's, to start working as a recovery care coordinator.

Aside from having recognition of their military service and rank achievement, none reported honors or rewards were the factors in their motivation. The women in the study were motivated to complete their education because they wanted to help their families and impact others. Schlossberg's (1984) concept of mattering was not expressed by these women in terms of their need to be recognized on campus. However, they valued that the personnel at the veterans' center did care about them, as well as the hope this study would benefit others in the future. They also did not express a need for validation, conflicting with research from Women Warriors (2011). Despite the obstacles they faced, there was no victimization.

The fourth theme for the study, adaptation, revealed findings, which demonstrated the female student-veterans, had to adapt to academics to be successful (Azmita et al., 2013). Given the women in the study acclimated to military culture and a male-dominated environment, they made adjustments to the college environment as a result of their motivation to achieve a better

life, career, and be problem solvers. Once they were able to become familiar with entering college, they developed to self-efficacy to sustain their persistence.

However, there were two areas that they did not adapt as well with. The first is their tolerance to younger students. Participants felt students were immature and lacked life experiences. They did not want to associate with them and focused on an individualistic approach to learning. Second, they expressed issues with behavior and language modification. Military service personnel have a distinct culture and expectation, often relying on their own competence (Women Warriors, 2009). It is very fast-paced, direct, team oriented, and often filled with indiscreet language. Leaving that culture and entering into the civilian world, they recognize the lack of urgency and selfish focus of non-military personnel. They also tended to apologize for their crude language, the result of suppressing their femininity to blend with the male-dominated behaviors (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009).

Health. The third question sought to determine if the role of health had an impact on coping strategies of female student-veterans. Holmes and Rahe (1967, as cited by Thoits, 2010) found that major life events that required change and behavior modification triggered increased levels of stress in military personnel.

Few participants stated or implied that health or stress impacted their transition to college, even though they had experienced physical and psychological injury such as PTSD. None of the participants reported TBI, presumably due to the fact they did not partake in combat or have multiple deployments.

It is important to note that the lack of reporting or revealing personal information to the researcher is common if the information was perceived as embarrassing or displaying weakness, or due to the nature of the setting and limited relationship participants had with the research

(Richards & Morse, 2013). In previous studies, only 14% of females reported symptoms resulting from PTSD (Women Warriors, 2011). Three participants stated they had PTSD and one indicated she had experienced MST. Lack of awareness of symptoms, or blocking traumatic experiences from recollection often occurs in military personnel (American Council on Education, 2011) and could have been a factor that limited reports of their true feelings.

Further, the participants' specified numerous types of "disruptive events, hardships and problems" (Pearlin, 2010, p. 208) that increased the number of stressors they faced, yet their perception of stress was relatively low as they developed coping strategies to deal with such strains.

Such things as divorce had an impact on those with children, as there was increase in family conflict. However, participants stated having support or someone to talk with was instrumental in dealing with parenting and family issues. Counselors or school psychologists on campus were important in managing such stressful situations to provide guidance and in helping adjust to balancing the demands of college and family life. One participant shared:

Anna: Maybe advertise what services the counseling department can do for you, not just for like, crazy thoughts. Someone to just talk to for smaller things. To let them know they exist. Just figuring out how to navigate school, how to study, or how to approach a professor would help.

Limitations of the Study

The participants in the study, while inclusive of a broad age range, ethnicities, branch of service, and region of residence, does not fully encompass every female veteran returning to college. Given the qualitative nature and sample size of the study, findings are not representative of everyone's story or experiences. This study explored the meaning behind the phenomena discovered using a one-time interview. It did not seek to explore causal relationships often seen in longitudinal studies (Heath, 2012).

The study required the participants to recall different periods in their life, which is subjective. It is not always possible to have all-encompassing detail and inclusivity when left to recollection. As the researcher had no prior relationships with any of the participants, she had to work to establish trust and build rapport with each individual prior to, and during each interview. Therefore, participants may not either recall details, reveal their personal histories, fear embarrassment, be perceived as weak, or attempt to impress the researcher. The researcher assumes participants were honest in reporting their true feelings and experiences.

Recommendations

The results of this study provide a much needed insight into the lives and stories of our female student-veterans. The study demonstrates a need for additional research, policies, and programs are necessary to support the unique needs of women during the transition from the military to college. As the current study does provide a basis for common needs of female student-veterans, both with and without children, additional assessment tools, support, and civilian trainings are necessary to serve our veterans and improve student success.

Future research. Continuing research on female veterans is still needed and extremely necessary. Given the few studies that have been done, few have identified the female student veteran and their transition to college, including the multiple roles these women must enact.

As there have been few if any studies on female veterans returning to college, opportunities exist. Broadening the scope of the study to further investigate the transition to college amongst female veterans who are balancing school, family, and work life upon exiting military service is necessary. Utilizing the life story method is just one way of obtaining an individual's pathway, and may be expanded to include the transition to the military. Further

research, perhaps specifically looking at transitional stages of preparation, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization (Schlosberg, 1995) should be employed.

Opportunities exist to develop a questionnaire to address specific needs for female veterans to allow for programs to be developed and include a broader number of participants. By creating a quantitative data-gathering tool, a greater number of female student-veterans could be assessed to quantify if the current study is reflective of their unique and specific needs.

The following research recommendations are suggested:

Expansion. Expanding the current study to include additional women would help to obtain a broader view of their needs. Using the current study to compare future results would allow for further knowledge. In addition, the creation of an instrument based on current and future findings could be used to study a larger number of female student-veterans.

Gender identity crisis. Research by Josselson (1987, as cited by Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009) investigated how women developed their identity and chose an occupation to mirror their individualism. Research specific to this concept could explore how the identity of female veterans in the male culture military are impacted, revealing constructs for a new identities to navigate the college environment emerge, and the resources necessary to support them.

Longitudinal studies. Following a population over time may allow for observation of the causal relationships experienced during life transitions. Findings may display patterns or trends that can be helpful in understanding both the life stories and transitions of female student-veterans.

Retention and success. Given the focus on student success rates at colleges, studies encompassing the retention rates of female student-veterans at colleges would also be indicative

of the impact of the life story elements and experiences. This may include assessing the obstacles faced and strategies employed to be successful in college transition as well as completion.

Comparison. Given a large number of the women interviewed had children and were single parents, a comparison of female veterans to non-female veterans may be warranted to determine the differences in coping strategies and stress levels, including financial issues.

Family studies. Surveying families, such as parents, spouses, and siblings of our veterans, may also create better understanding and reveal additional needs for work-life balance issues not represented in this study. Such insight from families can reveal data to inform policy and programs For example, one participant spoke of the value of military wives:

Lisbeth: Wives are “expletive” amazing. I understand them now, because I took the time, instead of just hearing what everyone had to tell me, to talk to them. These women, they don’t go through any training about the lifestyle they are involved in. So I feel like if anybody can really help, it’s military wives-- military spouses, sisters, and mothers.

Inclusion of male-student veterans. Although this study sought to specifically understand the experiences of female student veterans, including the life stories of male veterans would expose their unique needs in transitioning to college, particularly with health needs not experienced by females. As males are often engaged in combat and multiple deployments, there is a significant difference in the occurrence of both PTSD and TBI which affects college transition.

Veterans transitional harmony framework. The development of a framework of how veterans’ find meaning in the college transition based on their experiences and perceptions is necessary to inform those in higher education. Connecting the theories could provide a basis for such a framework shown in Figure 7.

Policy and program evaluation and impact. As policy and programs evolve to support the needs of female veterans, evaluation and research may be done to determine their usefulness

and effectiveness on student success. Thoits (2010) states that developing policy to institute intervention programs such as coping, sense of empowerment, self-esteem, and assisting those at-risk helps with adaptation, and perhaps transition, affords the opportunity for future studies in this area.

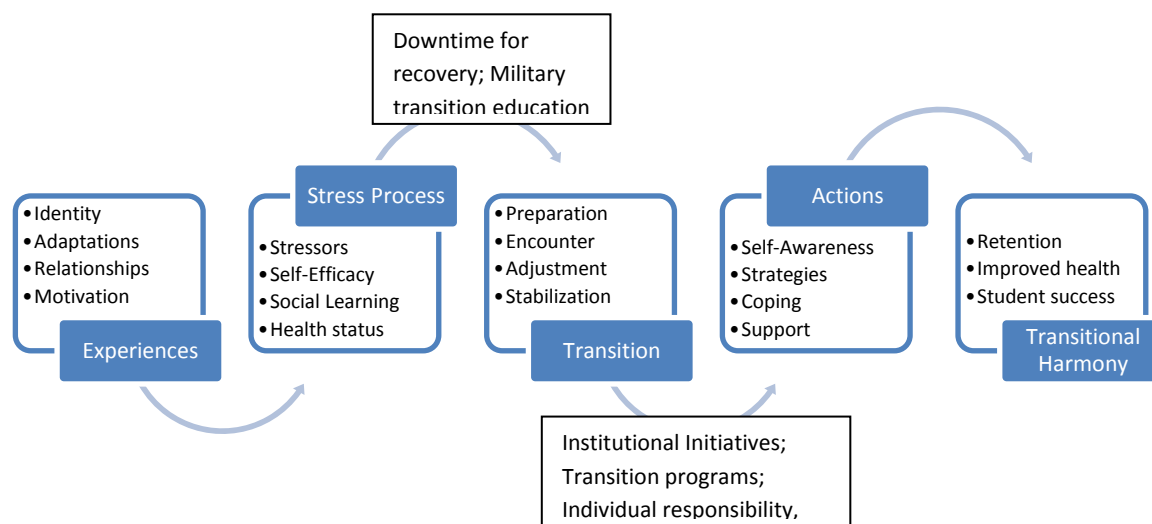


Figure 7. Veterans Transitional Harmony Framework

Practical Applications

Implementing transitional programs. Research is necessary to provide data for scholarly studies, enhance the body of literature, and inform change. However, using the results of studies can be instrumental in program implementation.

Adjusting to academic life can be a difficult process for older students, and particularly difficult for the female student-veterans. Darab (2004, as cited by O'Donnell, 2007) found females adult learners have a more difficult time due to balance issues and limited participation in college life and socialization. Findings have also shown the adjustment to academic life can be

more difficult than the social life (Christie, Munro, & Wagner, 2005, as cited by O'Donnell, 2007).

Increasing communication and collaboration between the military and colleges is vital in developing a partnership to assess transitional needs. Combining the expertise of such entities will enhance the development, design, and implementation of protocols and programs needed to ease the process of transition and provide the necessary support for student-veteran success.

Military. When entering the military, enlisted personnel participate in three months of intensive training to learn behaviors and adapt to the military culture. However, upon completion of their service, they partake in one week of informational classes required to transition out of the military into civilian life. However, the program is vague, and does not provide enough time to understand the realities of civilian life, and opportunities for engaging in new behaviors to assimilate to a new culture. This is particularly significant in the return to college.

Emi: Making it known that it is ok to reach out for help. That needs to start in the military.

Carrie: I think they should kind of start towards their degree while they are in the military because that's four years of your life where you could have been taking one or two classes at the time when you get in. So that's putting you four years behind all your peers.

Colleges. Institutions have the challenge in developing programs, policies, and initiatives for adult transition that create a partnership between the learner and institution to increase a campus connection for the female student-veteran. O'Donnell (2007) found increased transition success when adults participated in campus events, were provided hands-on experiences, and felt a sense of belonging. Not many colleges currently offer dedicated services for female student-veterans, but many are attempting to help them find resources (Sander, 2012). The following suggestions may help college support the transition of female student-veterans:

Counseling/orientations. Allows for insight into college requirements for entry, awareness of benefits, and services offered by the college (such as a campus veteran's office, financial aid, students with disabilities, and health programs on campus). In addition, information on "child care options, gender-specific healthcare, mental and behavioral health, MST, suitable and affordable housing, employment, and training opportunities" could be included (Foster & Vince, 2009, p. 5).

Childcare. As 38% of female student-veterans have children and 11% are single moms, the need for childcare is imminent (Foster & Vince, 2009). Given that 10 women in this study had children, many expressed that childcare was most important. This would allow those who are mothers to feel confident their children are safe and nearby.

Fran: A lot of veterans have children, and a lot of them don't have a family like I do. For them, it would be helpful if there was some way or somebody to help them care further for their children.

Cohorts. Foster and Vince (2009) confirm veterans have had difficult interacting with other peers, often frustrated by younger students with little to no life experience or complaining about petty things. Given the amount of change required to return to college, it would be advantageous for veterans to begin college in cohorts with one another. DiRamiro, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) state that during this moving in process veterans will be working to connect with peers, blend in, and work with faculty. As a large part of learning is affected by relationships, cohorts could provide a venue for social learning as they have a mutual understanding of military culture and process.

Mentors and Sponsorships. Participants said they wish they had a mentor to help in returning to school. The American Council on Education reported that only eight percent of nearly 700 institutions had support groups specifically for female veterans (Sander, 2012).

Female student-veterans desire opportunities to interact with their sister warriors, and need support from other females who have been successful in similar encounters (Foster & Vince, 2009).

Emi: A mentor program would have been very beneficial. Again, it's difficult. You can have a program, but in the end it's going to be up to that person and whether or not they want to reach out and use the program.

Training for college personnel. Female student-veterans have unique needs due to traumatic experiences. As a result, even the way a professor speaks to them could be upsetting (Sander, 2012). Moreover, female student-veterans report feeling unheard in the classroom, and need to understand the thinking of others in their own learning process (Women Warriors, 2011). College campuses could provide training programs to create awareness and understanding of the demands they face, including insight on PTSD, TBI, and MST.

Technology. An additional program recommendation is integrating technology for both informational and social support venues. As institutions lean towards learning management systems for distance and online education, transition workshops can be supported and taught with the aid of technology as a no- to low-cost form. For example, as California Community Colleges proceed with the Online Education Initiative, which is a "catalog of online courses from accredited colleges in California" (California Community College Online Education Initiative, 2014). Perhaps the same model can be utilized to display veterans' centers and programs offered at various colleges. This can assist veterans in making informed choices and increasing awareness of services each school, and provides access to information to help veterans understand their benefits and the college processes. It may also be used to support training for civilians so they can better understand, and assist, veterans in transition.

Integrating technology can also support collaboration and exchange of information between veterans, and develop communities of practice (Gordon, Booth & Bywater, 2010; Jonassen & Land, 2000). Creating such social exchanges supports mentoring, promotes learning, and provides accessibility to obtain knowledge, enhance learning strategies, and have both synchronous and asynchronous options. O'Donnell (2007) found social connections impacted the college transition. Given females veterans lack a campus presence (Sander, 2012), using technology for an e-mentoring exchange may be the avenue to stimulate social exchanges and provide the support system female veterans often need, but do not seek.

Stress management and counseling. Finally, as female veterans return to college, they balance many roles. Having strategies and tools to cope with demands, as well as stress management techniques can assist in the transition to college. Given many female veterans are also mothers, such strategies can contribute to maintaining better work-life-school balance techniques to reduce stress, improve focus, maintain family connections, and enhance student-veteran success.

Researcher Reflections

The researcher would like to reflect upon the process and results that impacted both her professional and personal outlooks. First, data collection was one of the most exciting parts of dissertation, but also one of the scariest times of my life. The ambiguity of not knowing what it would take for these women to have an interest or even be willing to participate made me realize the high risk I took by pursuing this area of study. This helped me relate to their fear in returning to college with trusting others and navigating the unknown. I also needed to trust in them and hoped they that trusted I was there for a purpose; to help others. Their desire to help others, made me realize that they were also there for a purpose of supporting the greater good.

From a professional perspective, I realize that the skills of developing relationships based on reciprocal trust in such a short time and under the given circumstances are vital when working and leading others. Like these female student-veterans, I realized the significance of putting others first, and how much more fulfilling everything then becomes.

And finally, meeting these incredible ladies who are strong, motivated, and courageous has given me complete joy and utter respect for them. Although we may have had a short time together, there is an unspoken feeling of sisterhood in being a part of their lives. I can only express my gratitude to them for sacrificing their lives to fight for the freedom and safety of all of us in this great country. I will be forever grateful to them for their time, insights, and willingness to share their stories. The completion of this study does not represent the end, but the commencement of greater things to be created and serve our military.

Conclusion

In the words of Carl Bard, *though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending*, female student-veterans may be inspired by participants in this study who have been successful in balancing the college transition.

In conclusion, this research project began with inspirational words from Sandberg (2013) for women to help other women. This study sought to identify problems and propose solutions to help female student-veterans during their transition to college. One participant, Hope, best summarized this with her words of wisdom: "Pay it back and pay it forward because people did the same for you. They paved your way, so you pave the way."

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APPENDIX A

Instrument

Question #1. [Early adulthood]

About the period in your life immediately after completing your education or...your early twenties. What was the level of your education? Did it include college education or graduate education? What did you think you would like to become in terms of occupation and type of lifestyle or family life. ...What were you thinking then and how did things actually turn out?

Question #2 [Childhood and adolescence]

Thinking of the period in your life before completing your education and the goals that you and your family held for you, what was your family's attitude toward women's education and what you would become? What was the effect of your parents' education, presence of brothers and sisters, family finances, involvement in a faith community, family expectations? How was your education different from or similar to that of your parents and brothers and sisters?

Question #3 [Adulthood – current]

Since completing your education, what kinds of achievement and frustration have you experienced? What type of mentors have you had? What has happened that you didn't expect-in employment, family, faith, further education? Has there been job discrimination, children, separation or divorce, health problems of yourself or a family member? What about moves, membership in the community, faith community, housing problems, racial integration, job loss? And feelings about yourself? Have there been good things such as particular rewards, satisfaction, or recognition?

Question #4 [Adulthood-future]

Looking back at your life from this vantage point, and ahead to the future, what are your main concerns? What are your goals, hopes and dreams for the next few years? What problems do you hope to solve? Looking further out, where do you hope to be a few years from now with respect to work or additional schooling, family, faith, community, mentors, health, finances, etc.?

Question #5 [Strategies for balancing life]

What coping strategies do you use to respond to concerns related to the plurality of roles? Have you ever felt pressured to choose between work and home? What made you think that you could do both successfully? Do you feel that your family life or work life have suffered because of your involvement in work or family? Have you felt any guilt related to either family or work? Are there times that you felt particularly successful at juggling the demands of both work and home? Why? Were you prepared for the demands of work and life balance? Why or why not? What strategies do you implement in your own life in order to remain balanced?

APPENDIX B

Demographic Form

Socio-demographic Questions:**Mother's Maiden Name** _____**Pseudonym** _____

Birth date _____

Place of birth _____

Race/Ethnicity _____

Occupation _____ Full time ___ Part-time ___ # hours/week _____

Employer _____

Branch of Service: _____

Marital Status _____ Year _____

Spouse (partner) birth date _____

Husband's (partner's) education and occupation _____

Children (gender and year of birth) _____

Mother's education and occupation _____

Father's education and occupation _____

Siblings (gender and year of birth) _____

Percentage of total household income that you earn _____

Health, illness, accidents, disability _____

Religious background _____

Second language(s) _____

Lived in foreign country (name of country(ies)) _____

Travel outside of the US (name of country(ies)) _____

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

This research project is being conducted for a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership. This project will consist of a semi-structured interview that will take about an hour. The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of female veterans' lives as they balance their transition to college. It is to understand how women in the military are returning to education, the challenges they face, and the coping strategies they employ.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You should be aware that the foreseeable risks or potential discomfort to you as a result of participating in this study are minimal. There are five big questions that are designed to help you recall several different periods of your life. I would like for you to tell me what stands out as being significant about them. Most people find this an interesting and enjoyable conversation. There is no major risk to you in answering any of the questions. If, however, you are uncomfortable with any question, you may decline to answer it, and you may terminate the interview at any time for any reason.

You are free to decide not to participate, not complete all the research procedures or answer questions, or to withdraw at any time without it affecting your relationship with any other entity. Further, your class standing, grades, or job status will not be affected by refusal to participate or by withdrawal from the study at any time. All information collected will remain anonymous and confidential, except to the researcher, and all relevant data collected will remain private.

In order to use the data from the study, I would like to ask your permission and if you would agree with the following arrangements. Please initial the appropriate line:

_____ I agree to participate in this research and would allow appropriate quotes to be used in publications. These individual responses would not be associated with my name or workplace, and would be referred to only by a pseudonym.

OR

_____ I agree to participate in this research but do not wish for any of my quotes to be used in publications.

In either case, you should be aware that the foreseeable risks or potential discomfort to you as a result of participating in this study are minimal. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without it affecting your relationship with any other entity. Upon your request, I will provide a copy of any published papers that take place as a result of this study.

The researcher plans to use the data collected in this project for subsequent analyses and would like to share the raw data with other researchers. Before doing so, all personally identifying information will be removed from your interview transcript.

_____ please initial if you consent to these plans. If not, please leave the line blank.

With your permission, interviews will be recorded electronically, and then stored electronically. The interview content will then be transcribed. All data collected will remain confidential. We are asking you for your mother's maiden name and will code each interview with that name. All relevant data collected within the jurisdiction of the investigator, including interview notes, recordings, and transcriptions will be placed in a locked cabinet and destroyed after all interviews are transcribed.

Please feel free to ask us to stop or resume taping this discussion at any point in our conversation. Please initial below if you are comfortable with the format of the interview session.

_____ May I record this interview? If no, please rest-assured that no one will be recording any portion of the interview.

_____ May I take notes during the interview?

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Dr. Margaret Weber, faculty advisor at Pepperdine University if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis Chairperson of the Graduate and Professional School Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University via email at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu or at 310-568-5753.

I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.

I understand that in the event of physical injury resulting from the research procedures in which I am to participate, no form of compensation is available. Medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.

I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

At this point, I want to inquire if you fully understand these statements. If so, by signing this form, you agree to participate.

Signature

Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Brief Introduction of the research study

The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of female veterans' lives as they balance their transition to college. It is to understand how women in the military are returning to education, the challenges they face, and the coping strategies they employ. To accomplish this, we are interviewing female veterans returning to college to inform leaders of higher education, policies, and programs.

This interview will take about an hour. We will begin with reading the consent form and obtaining your signature that you wish to participate in the study. The questions at the beginning are very brief to get a snapshot of you, your present work, your education, and your living arrangements. Then I will ask five big questions that are designed to help you recall several different periods of your life. I would like for you to tell me what stands out as being significant about them. Most people find this an interesting and enjoyable conversation. If, however, at any time you would rather not answer, you are free to decline.

Administration of the consent form

In order to continue with the interview, we need your written consent on this form, which has been approved by the IRB at Pepperdine University, and which assures you that there is no major risk to you in answering any of the questions. If you are uncomfortable with any question, you may decline to answer it, and you may terminate the interview at any time for any reason.”

The interviewer goes over the form with the respondent and answers any questions.

Interviewer collects the form and leaves a copy with the interviewee.

Background questions

I would like for you to fill out some basic information about yourself on this form that will accompany the interview. It includes information about occupation, marital status, age, etc.

The interview instrument [turn on tape]

Conclusion [turn off tape]

Do you have anything to change or add, or any questions or suggestions that you would like to offer? If something comes to mind later on, we would be glad to hear from you. You can find a mailing address, phone number and email address on the initial letter and on your copy of the consent form. Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate very much what you have told me and your valuable contribution to this research.

APPENDIX E

Invitation Letter to Participate

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting with female veterans. The study is entitled “The Life Stories of Women Warriors: Understanding Their Experiences, Challenges, and Coping Strategies in Balancing College Transitions to Inform Leaders of Higher Education, Policy, and Programs.”

I am currently a doctoral student in Organizational Leadership at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I have been working in scholarly areas for learning, neuroscience, technology, mentoring, and leadership, especially for women and veterans. Women are making important strides in education, careers, and influencing the global economy, while at the same time trying to balance multiple roles. This study provides awareness of the needs of female student-veterans transitioning from the military to college, and how they balance school, family, and work responsibilities.

The purpose of this study is threefold:

- 1) What demographic factors (age, ethnicity, socioeconomic, first generation) are associated with the work-life balance issues of female student-veterans returning to community college?
- 2) What experiences (identity, adaptations, motivation, and relationships) shape the life course of female student-veterans transitioning to community college and impact work-life-study balance?
- 3) To what extent, if at all, does the role of health (mental, physical, and emotional) impact coping strategies of female student-veterans in community college?

My research study follows the life story method. We will be conducting personal interviews with female subjects that are enrolled at a Los Angeles area community college. It is anticipated that the interview will require about 60 minutes of your time. Your name will be coded so that your responses will be confidential and anonymous. All individuals that participate in this study will receive a copy of the findings if interested.

I would like to invite you to participate in the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with any other entity.

Thank you in advance for your help. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email at [@pepperdine.edu](mailto:pepperdine.edu).

My warmest regards,

Jodi M. Senk

Graduate Student, Pepperdine University

APPENDIX F

Executive Research Proposal Summary

Jodi Senk

Doctoral Candidate, Pepperdine University

Title: The Life Stories of Women Warriors: An Exploratory Study of Female Student Veterans Balancing the Transition to College.

Problem: While policies and programs exist to assist veterans returning to college, few studies have explored the life experiences and challenges of female veterans in balancing their transition to college. Further, with the emergence of unique health issues, such as PTSD, TBI, and MST, it is important to identify coping strategies employed during this life period of transition.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to explore the life experiences, via narratives, of female student-veterans in understanding the challenges they face and the coping strategies employed in balancing the transition to college. A second purpose of the study is to investigate if unique health issues, related to combat, are affecting female student-veterans transitioning to college.

Research Questions

- 1) What demographic factors (age, ethnicity, socioeconomics, first generation) are associated with the work-life balance issues of female student-veterans returning to college?
- 2) What experiences (adaptations, identity, motivation and relationships) shape the life course of female student-veterans transitioning to college and impact work-life-study balance?
- 3) To what extent, if at all, does the role of health (mental, physical, and emotional) impact coping strategies of female student-veterans in college?

Proposed Methods:

A qualitative, phenomenological study of approximately 20 female student-veterans using one semi-structured interview using questions addressing different stages of life, ranging from past, present, and future (including early childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and adult life), will be used to gather information on the life experiences, events, and journeys. There are five groups of questions in the instrument that look at how identity, motivation, relationships, and adaptive styles impact one's life course.

The researcher has been approved by both Pepperdine University and the College Institution, and will assure the safety of the participants, confidentiality, ethical considerations, and that participants fully understand their rights to withdraw at any time and follow all guidelines of

Pepperdine University for human subjects. Informed consent and socio-demographic forms will be presented to each participant prior to the interview. The interview will be recorded using an audio device. Participants will be assigned a pseudonym to protect confidentiality and anonymity in presenting any results and in the final written product.

Goal:

To inform college leaders of higher institutions, programs, and policy to better understand the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of female student veterans balancing college transitions.

APPENDIX G

Approval for Human Subject Research

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

August 29, 2014

Jodi Senk

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXX, XX 00000

Protocol #: E0614D04

Project Title: The Life Stories of Women Warriors: Understanding Their Experiences, Challenges and Coping Strategies in Balancing College Transitions to Inform Leaders of Higher Education, Policy and Programs

Dear Ms. Senk:

Thank you for submitting your application, *The Life Stories of Women Warriors: Understanding Their Experiences, Challenges and Coping Strategies in Balancing College Transitions to Inform Leaders of Higher Education, Policy and Programs*, for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Weber, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - <http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsr/site/guidelines/45cfr46.html>) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b) (2) states:

(b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human

subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at <http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/>).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at gpsirb@pepperdine.edu. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,



Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.

Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney

Dr. Margaret Weber, Faculty Advisor

APPENDIX H
Pepperdine University Integrated Courses

Term / Course #	Course	Professor
<u>Fall 2011</u>		
EDOL 714	Organizational Behavior, Theory and Design	Dr. June Schmieder
EDOL 724	Ethics and Personal Leadership	Dr. Farzin Majidi
EDOL 755	E-Learning: Theory and Practice	Dr. Elio Spinello
<u>Spring 2012</u>		
EDOL 700	Leadership Theory and Practice	Dr. Farzin Majidi
EDOL 763	Program Learning Design and Evaluation	Dr. Michael Patterson
EDOL 766	Research Design and Analysis	Dr. Doug Leigh
<u>Summer 2012</u>		
EDOL 754A	Economic and Policy Systems	Dr. Farzin Majidi
EDOL 754B	International Policy Experience	Dr. Farzin Majidi
EDOL 758A	Consultancy Project	Dr. Andrew Harvey
<u>Fall 2012</u>		
EDOL 767	Qualitative Research and Analysis	Dr. Kay Davis
EDOL 734	Advanced Data Analysis and Interpretation	Dr. Thomas Granoff
EDOL 764	Consultancy Project	Dr. Andrew Harvey
<u>Spring 2013</u>		
EDOL 759	Law and Dispute Resolution	Judge John Tobin
EDOL 785	Contemporary Topics	Dr. Andrew Harvey
EDOL 765	Strategic Leadership and Management of Global Change	Dr. June Schmieder
<u>Summer 2013</u>		
EDOL 753	Leadership, Advocacy, Policy Development	Dr. Jack McManus
EDOL 757	Entrepreneurship	Dr. Vance Caesar