

Clemson University

**TigerPrints**

---

All Theses

Theses

---

May 2020

## Outdoor Recreation and Female Veteran Identity: An Exploration into Higher Ground's Program and Change in Social Identity

Lauren Fleming

Clemson University, lflemi2@g.clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all\\_theses](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses)

---

### Recommended Citation

Fleming, Lauren, "Outdoor Recreation and Female Veteran Identity: An Exploration into Higher Ground's Program and Change in Social Identity" (2020). *All Theses*. 3301.

[https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all\\_theses/3301](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_theses/3301)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).

OUTDOOR RECREATION AND FEMALE VETERAN IDENTITY:  
AN EXPLORATION INTO HIGHER GROUND'S PROGRAM  
AND CHANGE IN SOCIAL IDENTITY

---

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science  
Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management  
Recreational Therapy

---

by  
Lauren Fleming  
May 2020

---

Accepted by:  
Dr. Brent Hawkins, Committee Chair  
Dr. Jasmine Townsend  
Dr. Brandi Crowe

## ABSTRACT

Female veteran experiences have been underrepresented in the literature, especially in regards to veteran programming and recreational therapy (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Lundberg et al., 2016). This study seeks to explore the female veteran experience, specifically as it pertains to the adjustment and maintenance of military identity after returning home. Military identity is a newer topic in the field, as literature surrounding this idea does not explore the direct impacts of recreational therapy on this particular type of social identity. Due to military identity being a multidimensional concept, conflict in identity can cause significant psychosocial distress (Hall, 2011; Lancaster, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018; Smith & True, 2014). This study measured military identity, using the Warrior Identity Scale with female veterans who participated in Higher Ground's outdoor recreation military programs from 2017-2019. Results demonstrated significant changes in public perception of being in the military and military identity pride in participant's pre to post participation in Higher Ground. Further research is needed to understand the impacts of outdoor recreation and recreational therapy on the different components of military identity, and how identity can change.

**Keywords:** military identity, outdoor recreation, female veterans, Higher Ground, recreational therapy

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, who has been a vital support throughout my time at graduate school. For all the times she listened to phone calls or provided encouragement, I am beyond thankful. I would also like to dedicate this work to all the female veterans who have made the time and effort for their voices to be heard in this study. This research would not be possible without their openness.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Lauren Duffy, who acted as a mentor through the honors research program during my time at Clemson. Her guidance and encouragement through the program prompted me to pursue a graduate degree. Thank you, for sparking that passion and taking the time to break down the research process. I am also extremely grateful for my committee chair Dr. Brent Hawkins for all his continued support and encouragement throughout this program, without which I would not be the professional I am today. Lastly, I would like to express my appreciation for all my committee members, who have been there to provide constructive feedback that has ultimately helped my writing and professional lens grow.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE PAGE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
I.    INTRODUCTION.....	1
Female Veterans.....	1
Veteran Programming.....	3
Use of Nature and Outdoor Recreation in Recreational Therapy.....	4
Justification for the Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Definition of Terms Used.....	6
II.   LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
Returning Home.....	8
Identity Development.....	9
Military Identity as a Social Identity.....	11
Gender Influences on Identity.....	14
Identity in Leisure and Recreation.....	15
Benefits of Nature-based and Outdoor Recreation Programming.....	17
Summary.....	18
III.  METHODS.....	20
Study Design.....	20
Higher Ground.....	21
Participants.....	22
Quantitative Data Collection.....	23
Data Analysis.....	24

Table of Contents (Continued)

	Page
IV. RESULTS.....	27
V. DISCUSSION.....	30
Limitations.....	34
Implications.....	35
Conclusion.....	36
APPENDICES .....	37
A: Warrior Identity Scale.....	38
REFERENCES .....	42

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Demographics .....	27



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Female Veterans**

Female veterans are a continually increasing population, with a report by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) estimating that there are around 18,000 new female veterans every year (Aponte et al., 2015). As per this report on the female veteran population in 2015, around two million or 9.4% of the veteran population is female (Aponte et al., 2015). While female veterans as a population are increasingly growing, resources provided to them are limited, and they are traditionally underrepresented in the literature (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Lundberg et al., 2016). This underrepresentation creates a gap in which the female experience in and transitioning out of the military is not shared with researchers, practitioners, and the public. Yet, the female veteran experience is unique with its own set of challenges and barriers (Strong, Crowe, & Bolton, 2018). With this underrepresentation in literature, practitioners have limited research to base their evidence-based practices for the female veteran population and further develop recreational therapy programs.

One existing challenge unique to female veterans in aspects of both their military career and their veteran life is public perception of the female veteran identity (Street et al., 2009). This challenge can act as a barrier to reintegration in their surrounding community, connection with friends and family in their life, and as a stressor on their personal health domains (Arnhart et al., 2013; Service Women's Action Network, 2017). These perceptions from the civilian public are often misguided and lack knowledge about the responsibilities of female service members,

typically promoting a public belief that female veterans are “not real veterans” (Street et al., 2009, p.692). The Direct Combat Exclusion Rule was removed from legislation in 2013 that led to a decision made in 2015 allowing women to work in any occupation within the military (Service Women’s Action Network, 2017; Swick & Moore, 2018). At the time of this decision, the female population in 2015 accounted for around 1/5 of those in active duty (Aponte et al., 2015; Swick & Moore, 2018). Yet, the general public still believes that female service members have safe military deployments or that the military institution has lower expectations of them compared to their male peers (Service Women’s Action Network, 2017; Street et al., 2009). Female veterans may also encounter stereotyped expectations of gender roles and a push to a certain way of life in civilian society (Demers, 2013; Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a).

This presents challenges to female veterans when they return home as they are likely accustomed to the male-dominated military culture, that traditionally values a lack of emphasis on femininity, and they come home to family and friends who may project different assumptions about what their roles should be in civilian life (Smith & True, 2014; Strong, Crowe, & Bolton, 2018). Additionally, female veterans can experience negative perceptions of their roles from male service members they encounter in their military experience, leading to gender harassment (Street et al., 2009). This harassment, whether short term or chronic, can become significant stressors for this population, as interpersonal trust and support within a unit is vital in the military culture (Street et al., 2009). This breach of trust combined with an environment filled with harassment can negatively affect one’s mental health (Street et al., 2009). While the impacts of public perception of female veteran identity are significant, there is still little empirical literature existing that focuses on this challenge (Street et al., 2009).

## **Veteran Programming**

Further examining the challenges that exist for female veterans, there is a lack of resources in healthcare, recreation, and rehabilitation programs for the female population. The minority status that women hold in a male-dominated military environment also translates to limited programming available for this population in their transition home. According to a 2015 report, over 800,000 female veterans utilized VHA services and programs (Aponte et al., 2015). Yet literature states that female veterans experience numerous barriers to accessing these services (Hawkins et al., 2016; Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b). Some of these barriers include inadequate services provided by the VHA from their healthcare providers and availability of programming (Hawkins et al., 2016; Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b). These inadequate services include lack of healthcare for women, minimal privacy, and limited focus on successful reintegration (Hawkins et al., 2016; Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b). Further, a deficit focused healthcare model promotes stigma and misinformation for female veterans (Hawkins et al., 2016; Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Street et al., 2009; Strong, Crowe, & Lawson, 2018). Regarding availability of programming, various studies with female veterans have identified difficulty in getting appointments as well as limited space for females in physical and mental health programs compared to male veterans (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Street et al., 2009). In rural areas, a lack of awareness of programs results in less access for the veteran population as a whole (Street et al., 2009). A general negative perception and mistrust of VHA care from female veterans does not help in getting the population access to the help they may need (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018; Street et al., 2009).

## **Use of Nature and Outdoor Recreation in Recreational Therapy**

Additionally, it is important to understand why nature and outdoor recreation programs exist as a recreational therapy modality. Nature has played a unique role in existing recreational therapy literature, particularly with research on the veteran population. Studies that examine this concept of nature-based programming claim that these types of programs coincide with veteran's strengths (Hawkins, Townsend, & Garst, 2016). This strengths-based approach is when a participant's strengths and what they can do are the focus, which translates to longer term outcomes beyond the program (Hawkins, Townsend, & Garst, 2016). Part of this strengths focus can come from the staff of the program who strategically work with the participant to build participants skills and self-esteem (Hawkins, Townsend, & Garst, 2016). Outdoor recreation programs for veterans are known to assist in the reintegration process, as individual self-concept and personal growth become common outcomes (Lundberg, Taniguchi, et al., 2011; Rogers, Loy, & Brown-Bochicchio, 2016). In addition to self-concept and personal growth, outdoor recreation programs for veterans have been found to facilitate psychosocial wellbeing, including a decrease in depression, PTSD symptoms, stress, and an increase in moods (Bennet et al., 2014; Caddick et al., 2014; Lundberg, Taniguchi, et al., 2011; Rogers, Loy, & Brown-Bochicchio, 2016; Vella et al., 2013). Existing recreational therapy programs for the veteran population can incorporate numerous modalities and approaches including fly fishing, river running, adaptive sports, and other interventions, however for this thesis the researcher explores a program that combines a nature-based environment with outdoor recreation.

## **Justification for the Study**

As discussed above, female veterans encounter a number of challenges and barriers in their service and in their reintegration. Looking at the transition process from military to civilian society, it is important for practitioners to explore the saliency of military identity for female veterans, as identity can influence veterans' community reintegration and leisure or recreation lifestyle (Strong, Crowe, & Lawson, 2018). Identity conflict has the potential to negatively influence a veteran's holistic health domains, as that conflict of identity becomes a struggle within oneself (Smith & True, 2014). The military is defined as its own culture, an institution that has unique roles, social norms, and structures (Smith & True, 2014). The transition from one culture to another can be affected by saliency of identity, which is defined as the centrality of one's social identity to individual self-concept (Hornsey, 2008). Specifically, female veterans have been found in literature to experience higher distress with the transition to a civilian identity (Strong, Crowe, & Lawson, 2018). Military identity has not been studied intensively and the literature is even more limited for the female experience. In areas where military identity has been studied, the concept is multidimensional. Identity is impacted by differing factors and environmental contexts, such as age at the time of deployment, gender, experience in combat, social disconnect to previous civilian life, changed identity, public perception of military roles, and coping skills (Lancaster, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018; Hall, 2011; Smith & True, 2014). These factors are interrelated aspects of military identity and can have an influence on a veteran's wellbeing upon returning home (Lancaster, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018; Hall, 2011; Smith & True, 2014).

Higher Ground Military Programs (HGMP) is a program that utilizes outdoor recreation as recreational therapy to assist veterans, including female veterans, in the transitioning process. Outdoor recreation provides a unique environment that has the potential to facilitate numerous outcomes, such as identity development and personal growth. While studies have examined the impact of recreational therapy with veterans, outdoor recreation with veterans, and the development of veteran identity, no study has explored these concepts as a whole with the female veteran population. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore whether Higher Ground's outdoor recreation based military programming influences change in female veterans' military identity.

### **Research Questions**

*Overarching Study Multi Methods Research Question (RQ):* How does outdoor recreation programming at HGMP impact community reintegration, military identity, and social support of female veterans who have acquired a combat-related disability?

*RQ 1.1:* How does participating in HGMP influence the salience of military identity in female veterans?

### **Definition of Terms Used**

Identity: a web of mixed internal and external factors that impact an individual's view of themselves (Biernat, 2004)

Identity Salience: The centrality of one's social identity to one's concept of their self (Hornsey, 2008).

Military Identity: The internalization of military values, norms, and culture as an extension of social identity, often viewed as part of one's core self even post-deployment and post reintegration into the civilian community (Lancaster, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018).

Negotiation: A process of conflict between two identities, and the reactions/choices made from that processing (Demers, 2013).

Nature-based programming: Programming that uses the restorative properties of nature to assist in rehabilitation.

Outdoor Recreation: Recreation programming implemented outside.

Recreational Therapy: A systematic process in which recreation and leisure programming are used as a modality to promote outcomes in an individual's psychosocial health domains.

Service Member: A member of the military who has not been discharged from military service.

Social Identity: Defined as "aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which she belongs" (Hornsey, p. 206, 2008).

Stigma: Negative bias of a specific social group (Crocker & Major, 1989).

Veteran: A member of the military who has been discharged from military service.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purposes of this review are to examine six topics within the literature as related to this research study: 1) returning home, 2) identity development, 3) military identity as a social identity, 4) gender influences on identity, 5) identity in leisure and recreation, and 6) nature-based and outdoor recreation programming.

#### **Returning Home**

Female veterans have unique experiences in their process of transitioning home post-deployment. This idea of transitioning home is identified as community reintegration in the literature, and essentially refers to all of the varying factors that a veteran experiences when leaving the military and making a move back into civilian life (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Resnik et al., 2012). Community reintegration is a difficult process, with military culture being vastly different from American civilian society. The military is a collaborative, structured environment, whereas civilian society is an individualized, unstructured environment (Smith & True, 2014). For females, this experience of coming home involves numerous gender-specific challenges, including existing stigma surrounding veterans who are female, navigation of social roles as a woman in civilian society, and a lack of female specific services in VA and other healthcare (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Smith & True, 2014; Street et al., 2009; Strong, Crowe, & Lawson, 2018). These challenges are in addition to the other barriers that many veterans face, such as mental health struggles, connecting with their friends and family again, environmental barriers (e.g. physical structures for those with a physical disability, location



giving more or less access to programming, etc.), and adjusting to “a new normal” (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Resnik et al., 2012; Smith & True, 2014; Street et al., 2009). However, literature has also identified facilitators that can promote more successful reintegration process for veterans, including having a social support system, higher general self-efficacy, and having access to healthcare programs and other resource based programs that can provide assistance (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Hawkins et al., 2015a, 2015b; Resnik et al., 2012; Street et al., 2009). Identity is one of the newer concepts in the veteran research literature, however the connection seems to go both ways. Some literature takes both the perspective of having identity conflict/negotiation can negatively impact one’s reintegration, and the perspective that having unsuccessful reintegration can negatively impact one’s civilian identity, further increasing belonging in their military identity (Smith & True, 2014).

### **Identity Development**

As veterans navigate reintegration into their community, there are personal and social components such as their military identity that influence overall well-being and adjustment into civilian society (Smith & True, 2014). To understand the concept of military identity, it is first essential to examine a few core elements of identity. Looking at the literature, identity is a complex construct that has been extensively studied with a number of differing perspectives. For the purposes of this thesis, identity is viewed as a web of changing internal and external factors that impact an individual’s view of themselves (Biernat, 2004). The external factors that contribute to an individual’s self-concept vary based on surrounding environmental context as well as an individual’s placement of social identities (Biernat, 2004). The concept of social identity originally stems from Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity Theory, which claims that one

element of identity comes from group membership (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). Association with an established group (e.g., race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, country, sports teams) provides a sense of belonging in society, therefore establishing identity in the group (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). This idea further deems that forming connections with members of the established group further centralizes/strengthens the individual in their identity (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). Tajfel and Turner attribute in their Social Identity Theory that this centrality of the identity depends on the context, and is variable based on intersectionality of an individual's group membership. In examining this theoretical framework, it is important to understand the three components the authors identify as part of social identity.

Tajfel and Turner identify three components of social identity as social categorization, social identification, and social comparison. The first, social categorization, claims that we place labels in our society that allow us to categorize different groups. These categorizations allow individuals to identify group norms (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). The second component of social identity, social identification, is where the individual begins associating themselves with the group. Here the social identity becomes highly central to that person's self-concept, as they begin to adopt that group's norms and values (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). Lastly, the individual experiences the component of social comparison. Here the individuals compare their social identity group with others, evaluating how they think others perceive their group (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979).

As identity develops and grows throughout an individual's life experiences, different social identities can become more or less salient (Koenig et al., 2014; Lancaster, Kintzle, &

Castro 2018; Smith & True, 2014). Identity salience refers to a particular identity being central to one's self-concept, or overall sense of self (Di Leone, Wang, Kressin, & Vogt, 2016). Therefore, the stronger the salience of an identity in an individual, the more this will play out in their life. Saliency of a social identity can increase or decrease depending on environmental context or a particular stage of an individual's life (Di Leone, Wang, Kressin, & Vogt, 2016).

### **Military Identity as a Social Identity**

The concept of military as a social identity has been often viewed in the literature as multidimensional, meaning that there are multiple elements or intersectionalities to consider (Smith & True, 2014). Like other social identities, military identity centers around being part of the in-group, as Tajfel and Turner identifies (1997). Someone who has a strong salience in their military identity will view their military experience as central to who they are. Some external and internal factors influencing strong salience for a veteran includes viewing the military as family (e.g. creating bonds with other veterans), a commitment to the military community, and taking pride from wearing, carrying, or displaying artifacts from service (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Smith & True, 2014). Other research discusses experiencing exposure to combat as a core component of military identity, and how holding combat roles in one's career can contribute to higher military identity salience (Di Leone et al., 2016). The cultural differences between the military and civilian societies impact the transition to a civilian lifestyle, and veterans may experience stereotypes of their identity in the military, difficulty relating to the culture or people, or feelings of people not understanding military life (Koenig et al., 2014; Smith & True, 2014). However, identity in veterans is not strictly limited to a military vs. civilian identity battle, as the

intersectionalities of multiple salient or non-salient social identities one may have (e.g. gender association, ethnicity, religion, etc.) are likewise significant factors.

As explored in the literature, military identity is socially based, as some veterans and service members place identity in their membership of military culture. Culture is a concept that has been studied extensively, as evidenced by over 160 different definitions that have been created (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Spencer-Oatey introduces one popular British anthropologist in history, Edward Tylor (1870), defining culture as a system that is affected by factors such as “beliefs, morals, laws, customs, and norms from society” (Spencer-Oatey, p. 2, 2012). When examining this perspective of culture, the U.S. military can be seen as its own subculture of America (Weiss & Coll, 2011). The military is an institution that has certain cultural values, norms, customs, and habits that are acquired (Lancaster, Kintzle, & Castro 2018; Smith & True, 2014). As examined in the literature, some of these norms include role centrality, obedience, dissociation from one’s previous life, collectivism, and the existence of a highly structured order through a chain of command (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Lancaster, Kintzle, & Castro 2018, Smith & True, 2014). These values are quite different from the norms of American civilian society, and largely center around a collectivist perspective (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014). In contrast to military culture, America’s civilian society has a low intensity structure, and typically holds value in autonomy, self-advocacy, and being relational (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014). There is little emphasis on collectivism due to the high prevalence of autonomy and individualistic ideals. Roles are also more diverse, as an individual may hold multiple roles in society (e.g., career, family, social) (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014). Due to the high intensity of military culture, becoming a

social member of military culture requires an individual to “assimilate” into the culture and push aside their own existing membership in a civilian identity (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014). Only when this assimilation occurs can a service member truly embrace some of these cultural values listed above. Some research studies have highlighted that this assimilation into military culture results in the developing perspective of the military as family, further strengthening one’s identity in the military (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014). Looking at the high intensity structure that military culture has, it is without question that self-identification in this institution has the potential to become a strong part of one’s identity.

In investigating the perspective of military identity as multidimensional, it is important to explore Ashmore and colleagues’ framework on social identity (Ashmore et al., 2004). Ashmore and colleagues conducted an exploratory analysis of prominent authors, articles, and measures on social identity (also referred to as group membership), compiling ideas into a multidimensional perspective (Ashmore et al., 2004). Their findings state that there are seven elements of group membership, including “self-categorization, evaluation, importance, attachment/interdependence, social embeddedness, behavioral involvement, and content/meaning” (Ashmore et al., 2004, p. 83). While they state that this framework cannot claim to have fully explored the concept, they provide multiple subcategories within each element. Group membership involves placement into the group (self-categorization), examination of stigma, stereotypes, attitudes, and public perception of that group (evaluation), and centrality of that group in one’s life (importance) (Ashmore et al., 2004). Extensive factors come into play including feelings and connection (attachment/interdependence) and the extent to which this identity exists in one’s life (social embeddedness, behavioral involvement, and content/meaning) (Ashmore et al., 2004). Some

military identity literature is based on this framework, including the Warrior Identity Scale, which is used to measure military identity in this thesis (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et al., 2018). Specifically, Lancaster and colleagues build the elements of evaluation and attachment/interdependence into the measure (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et al., 2018).

### **Gender Influences on Identity**

Looking further into the navigation processes that many veterans experience with identity, gender can become an influencing dimension of military identity, acting as a potential stressor for female veterans. Both when transitioning into military culture and when transitioning to civilian life post-deployment, female veterans encounter gender specific social factors that influence association with social identities (Strong, Crowe, & Lawson, 2018). Interestingly, military culture is typically viewed as overly masculine, often supporting characteristics including aggressiveness and power (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013). One study in particular found that female service members' sense of identity grew and developed from experiences in military service, claiming that the women in the study had developed a change in identity (Suter et al., 2006). From this new identity came an increase in self-confidence, as the women felt more like they knew who they were (Suter et al., 2006). From their experiences, the women discussed feelings of strength and self-efficacy from their ability to serve their country and being able to have a highly structured job (Suter et al., 2006, p. 12). Particularly, some women mentioned this feeling from "working a man's job" (Suter et al., 2006, p. 12). While the experience of forming an identity from service for male veterans is also applicable, the reasoning and background behind the female veterans' experiences is what is fascinating from a research perspective.

Some female service members discussed engaging in certain behaviors while in the military, including blending or minimizing femininity in order to be accepted into the masculine culture (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Suter et al., 2006). Military identity became significant for the women studied when they transitioned back to civilian life, as the women encountered barriers of socially influenced gender roles as well as decisions of who they wanted to become in their civilian life (e.g., family roles, career roles, social roles, and professional roles) (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014; Suter et al., 2006). These veterans must decide for themselves what it means on a personal level to be female in a world where they are both a veteran and a civilian, regardless of whether gender is a salient dimension of their identity. The existing gender roles of traditionally feminine behavior combined with a general public misunderstanding of a woman's role in the military can lead to internalization of stigma and fear of authenticity around others (e.g., being one's true self), leading to distress in an individual's overall well-being (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014).

### **Identity in Leisure and Recreation**

Currently, the intersectionality of identity topics and leisure/recreation exists as an ever-growing content area within the literature. However, the concept of leisure/recreation influencing identity centers around specific areas within the field of recreational therapy, mainly youth, adaptive recreation, adventure recreation, athletic identity, and disability identity (Duerden et al., 2012; Groff & Kleiber, 2001; Nagata, 2014; Zabriskie et al., 2005). Often these concepts connect with each other, looking at athletic identity in individuals with disabilities or identity in youth, and using adaptive recreation or adventure recreation as a modality for identity development (Duerden et al., 2012; Groff & Kleiber, 2001; Nagata, 2014; Zabriskie et al., 2005).

One commonality among a number of research studies examining identity has been mention of the environment (i.e., nature, outdoor-based recreation, and adventure recreation) facilitating an opportunity within the individuals to express an “authentic self” or increase awareness of self (Caddick et al., 2014; Groff & Kleiber, 2001; Lundberg et al., 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2016). This facilitation of authenticity through outdoor recreation can be attributed to nature or the challenge of recreation, however few studies examine this idea with veteran identity. This idea of the “authentic self” emerging in nature and outdoor recreation coincides with leisure philosophy and the idea of leisure being a form of self-expression, or a passage to develop authentic identity (Kleiber et al., 2002). One article discusses how leisure is a catalyst for that personal transformation and authentic self for individuals who have experienced trauma or adverse life events (Kleiber et al., 2002). Looking outside of the identity specific content, there have been numerous articles written on nature-based and outdoor recreation programming with the veteran population (Bennet et al., 2014; Caddick et al., 2014; Duvall & Kaplan, 2014; Hawkins et al., 2016).

After examining this information, it remains unknown if similar ideas apply to identity development utilizing recreational therapy, outdoor recreation, or sports with other social groups. Further, much of the literature only examines one identity grouping, which indicates that there needs to be more exploration of the intersectionality of multiple identity groups within an individual, such as gender, race, ability, and sexual orientation. Connections to identity are shown in differing studies mentioned above with nature and outdoor recreation. Literature surrounding nature and outdoor recreation, however, has many benefits and expands beyond only identity.



## **Benefits of Nature-based and Outdoor Recreation Programming**

Outdoor recreation, for the purposes of this thesis, is defined as recreational activities that occur outdoors in nature. These activities are typically sport based but can also be challenge based and adventure-based. Nature-based programming in recreational therapy includes programs that use being outside in nature to its benefit. Nature is a key component in both of these programming styles, as nature is viewed as having restorative values, and provides an environment where healing from adverse life events can occur, a sense of purpose can be found, and a sense of identity can be clarified (Hawkins et al., 2016). Those who have studied outdoor recreation programming have found numerous other benefits surrounding psychosocial health and wellness, including increases in quality of life, improved mood, feelings of catharsis, mental health, and other therapeutic outcomes (Bennett, et al., 2014; Caddick et al., 2014; Lundberg et al. 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2016; Townsend et al., 2018; Vella et al., 2013). Nature-based and outdoor recreation programming are also viewed in the literature as 1) facilitators of a strengths based approach, and 2) an opportunity structure, both of which can help promote the above listed outcomes (Hawkins et al., 2016; Lundberg et al. 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016).

A strengths-based approach occurs when a combination of the practitioner and the programming environment stray from the traditional, deficits focused healthcare approach, and instead focuses on the individual's strengths and skill sets (Hawkins et al., 2016). The program becomes a supportive environment where the participant's values take priority. Facilitators then are able to focus on internal strengths (e.g. motivation, confidence, character strengths, competencies, and personal interests) and external strengths (family and friends, and access to

various resources) (Hawkins et al., 2016). In recreational therapy practice, the use of this approach intends on examining these factors, facilitating interventions that allow the participant to use their strengths, and works towards a goal of wellbeing (Hawkins et al., 2016). Part of why nature is so significant with this approach is the capabilities that nature has to promote the development of strengths-based resources for individuals (Hawkins et al., 2016).

Outdoor recreation also acts as what Lundberg and colleagues call an “opportunity structure” for the veteran population, further explaining that the structure of outdoor recreation provides an opportunity for transformative outcomes (Lundberg et al., 2016, p. 415). . Lundberg and colleagues identify that outdoor recreation is an opportunity structure through three specific therapeutic factors: 1) it provides an opportunity to build strong bonds with others, 2) it provides an opportunity to be in a positive environment with those who share the same social identity, and 3) it provides an authentic sense of freedom (Lundberg et al., 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016). Lundberg and colleagues’ research in this area has identified that outdoor recreation programs for female veteran are applicable operating in an opportunity structure (Lundberg et al., 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016).

## **Summary**

In summary, the literature examined portrays some of the critical elements of the female veteran experience, however many of the articles published also identify a need for more research on this population (Hawkins et al., 2016; Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Street et al., 2009). Female veterans experience unique needs and barriers with reintegration into their community. Part of this reintegration process surrounds the idea of transitioning from military culture to civilian culture (Smith & True, 2014). While limited literature on military identity

exists, especially explored with female veterans, the concept of military identity is explored some in the literature related to experiences, public perception, and psychosocial wellbeing (Caddick et al., 2014; Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et. al, 2018; Lundberg et al. 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2016). However, an even smaller portion of literature examines the complex topic of military identity in outdoor recreation and recreational therapy programs (Lundberg et al. 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2016). This literature does not explore deeply into evidence of why outdoor recreation facilitates identity development but acknowledges that this topic needs more research. This thesis strives to group existing evidence on this complex and under researched topic and attempts to research military identity with female veterans who are participating in an outdoor recreation program through Higher Ground.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### **Study Design**

This study utilized a multi-methods approach, as a part of a larger study (Anguera et al., 2018). Both quantitative (i.e., standardized measure) and qualitative (i.e., semi-structured interviews) data were collected using this approach (Anguera et al., 2018). This study design was chosen by the research team in the larger study as the values of looking at both types of data wanted to be utilized to fully give female veterans the opportunity to share their experience. For the purposes of this thesis, however, only the quantitative data from collection specific to military identity will be examined in this thesis document. The purpose of only identity data being presented is to examine if there is a change in military identity subscales before and after HGMP. The quantitative phase of the study followed a retrospective approach to collecting research. The retrospective design gives the veteran participants time to comprehensively look at how military identity in their life has progressed or changed since their HGMP experience (Sibthorp, Paisley, Gookin, & Ward, 2007). This retrospective design allowed participants to answer before their HGMP experience and after their HGMP experience. By looking back at their experiences retrospectively, the setup prompts participants to think about how something as abstract as identity was reflected in their HG program experience and in their life since the program. This provides research that theoretically is more authentic in the measure of identity, as participant reporting is likely to be unbiased from a recent camp experience and allows for longer term reflection of any change (Sibthorp, Paisley, Gookin, & Ward, 2007).

## **Higher Ground**

HGMP was the setting for data collection, as they focus on outdoor adaptive recreation and recreational therapy programming for individuals with disabilities in an intentionally facilitated environment. Their program targets outcomes such as improving physical activity, self-confidence, independence, positive coping and thinking, stress management, and connection to both recreational activities and other veterans (Gillette, n.d.). HGMP works to achieve these goals through adaptations to activities, facilitating discussion on outcomes, as well as intentionally removing as many barriers as possible from their environments to promote participant independence (Gillette, n.d.). While improving identity is not an established goal of the program, identity change could become a byproduct of these programming components. This could come from their focus on connection with another veteran as well as their intentional environment.

Their veteran-focused camps cater to both combat and non-combat veterans who are diagnosed with “invisible disabilities”, with a number of veterans experiencing polytrauma (Higher Ground, n.d., p. 1). These veteran-focused camps are located strategically across the nation, in Idaho, New York, and Los Angeles. Veterans from all three locations were recruited in this study. The types of programs being offered at these locations vary based on individual or family camps and recreation focus. Camps that are provided in the summer season typically center around outdoor recreation activities that involve water sports, yoga, hiking, and other adventure-based recreation. Camps that are provided in the winter season typically center around outdoor recreation activities that involve winter sports such as skiing (Higher Ground, n.d., p. 1). Examining the programs outside of recreation focus, HGMP offers individual programming,

where the participant can attend a co-ed or a female-only camp, and supporter based programming, where the individual can bring a supporter, spouse, or family members to participate in the camp experience with them.

All of their programs involve staff members who are trained in all outdoor aspects of the camp, and often include staff who hold a CTRS certification (i.e., Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist). Staff undergo training that is both trauma informed and focuses on developing competency in military culture. In addition, HG also hires staff who have had a military background. HG utilizes recreational therapy in their programs, and advocates for how recreational therapy can increase quality of life for individuals with a disability. These recreational therapy “camps” utilize outdoor recreation opportunities with being outside in nature to serve the veterans. Additionally, HGMP staff uphold contact and support for their participants for three years after camp participation. This support can come in the form of emotional/social support or financial resources to continue outdoor recreation pursuits.

## **Participants**

Recruited participants for this study included female veterans who met the requirements for HGMP and have participated in a HGMP camp from June 2017 to May 2019. This range originally included participants from January 2018 to May 2019, however a low response rate prompted the researchers in the larger study to expand this range to more participants. Therefore, eligibility here includes female veterans who went through a camp with HGMP within the last two years. Demographic data collected on participants asked if they had prior participation in a similar program. Individuals who identify in a different gender or were civilian family

members/supporters who attended the camp did not meet the requirements. Looking at statistics from HGMP provided by organizational collaborators, 70 female veterans were originally sent recruitment information in the first wave, and one reminder email was sent to this population after. HGMP's system indicated that 90% of the original recruitment sample opened this email. When the timeline was expanded to June 2017, a recruitment email was sent to an additional 17 potential participants. The recruitment email contained a letter from the research team, and a link to the online Qualtrics survey. Participants completed a consent form prior to filling out the survey. The target sample size for the larger study identified 12 veterans, as the original study combined qualitative and quantitative methods so smaller numbers were considered enough with the amount of data collected. Study design, survey information, demographic questions, and the consent form received IRB approval before collection of the data under exempt category two, file IRB 2019-294.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

The Warrior Identity Scale (WIS) was used to measure military identity. The WIS uses a Likert scale to measure responses, ordering responses from one (strongly disagree) to four (strongly agree). The Likert scale was presented twice because of the retrospective design of this study. Using the Likert scale, participants were asked to rate their feelings of military identity before HGMP and after HGMP. This social identity measure is one of the few valid and reliable measures in the literature (Lancaster & Hart, 2015 p. 85). The WIS measured seven different areas of military identity: (1) military pride, (2) military connection, (3) outsider feelings, (4) military as a family, (5) identity centrality, (6) views of public perception of military identity, and (7) skills in the military (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et. al, 2018). Examples of the

subscale of participant perception of public perception of identity include prompts such as “In general, other groups view veterans in a positive manner” and “Society views veterans as an asset” (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et. al, 2018, p. 39). Examples of the subscale of military pride include prompts such as “I am happy that I am a veteran” and “I am proud of the things that veterans have accomplished” (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et. al, 2018, p. 39).

Since its development, the WIS has been studied as recently as 2018 for validation, with one particular study focusing on factor structure and convergent validity (Lancaster et. al, 2018). This study presented support for the convergent validity of the scales ranging from 0.59-0.92, with a reliability score of 0.76-0.87 using Cronbach’s alpha (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et. al, 2018). Recent revisions have found the modified scale to be valid in comparison to other measurements of identity, leaving the scale with 31 items (Lancaster et. al, 2018). This scale will allow the research team to further dive into previously mentioned concepts of identity, such as negotiation, saliency, and valency, as well as take into perspective Ashmore and colleagues’ identity framework that the measure is built from (Ashmore et al., 2004; Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et. al, 2018). With the WIS, items 5, 7, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23, 24, and 30 were reverse coded, following the procedure of the WIS as a standardized measure sent from the first author. Additionally, demographic information was collected in the Qualtrics survey, asking for VA disability rating, rank in the military, number of deployments, HG camp attended, participation in similar programs, and diagnosis.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was cleaned and analyzed using SPSS version 25.0 (IBM Corp, 2017). The researcher removed four cases from the data set as the surveys were not completed beyond the



demographic questions, yielding a final sample size of 21 participants (n=21). Descriptives were run before and after cleaning to visually explore data. Composite scores were created for the subscales within the WIS, including pre/post military pride, pre/post military connection, pre/post outsider feelings, pre/post military as a family, pre/post identity centrality, pre/post public perception of military identity, and pre/post skills in the military. The date of HGMP attendance was re-coded to separate into three groups by year for exploration purposes (i.e., 2017, 2018, and 2019). The researcher means substituted one missing response. The following tests were re-run with and without the mean replacement to check for consistency.

Cronbach's alpha was conducted with 7 reliability tests, organizing the internal consistency by the items within the subscales for military pride, military connection, outsider feelings, military as a family, identity centrality, evaluation of public perception of military identity, and skills in the military (Lancaster & Hart, 2015; Lancaster et. al, 2018). This procedure was completed to re-test the reliability within the WIS, as it is still a fairly new scale. The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to explore normality in the data. Histograms of each subscale were examined to assess the distribution of the data. As most of the results were non-significant, indicating non-normality, the researcher determined that the data would be analyzed using nonparametric statistical analysis procedures. In order to answer quantitative research questions 1.1 and 2.1, the researcher determined that in analyzing the data, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test would be more suitable to analyze the non-normally distributed data in addition to small sample size. The researcher examined the frequencies of public perception in order to visually understand the results. Lastly, the Spearman's rank order correlation test explored relationships between the differences scores of each subscale from pre to post participation in

HGMP (Laerd Statistics, 2018). The purpose of this test was to examine the strength of any associations between identity subscales (Laerd Statistics, 2018).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

Demographics of the participants were analyzed with the final sample size (see Table I). In examining the 21 final participants, 10 participants identified a VA disability rating of 100%, with other selections being a 90% (n=3), 70% (n=3), and 60% (n=1) disability rating. Between two camp locations, 19 participants attended a camp at Sun Valley and two attended at New York. The programs participants attended included water sports (n=5), rafting (n=8), snow sports (n=1), and fly fishing (n=4). Further, 61.9% of participants have attended similar outdoor recreation programs outside of HGMP. Participants primarily identified PTSD as their diagnosis (95.2%, n=20), with 23.8% identifying diagnosis of brain injury (n = 5), 66.7% diagnosed with GAD (n=14), and 85.7% diagnosed with depression (n=18).

Table I: Demographic Statistics

Demographics-	
Disability Rating	60%= 1 70%= 3 90%= 3 100%= 10 Not answered/Not applicable= 4
Military Rank	E3= 1                      E5= 4 E4= 8                      E6= 2 Other/Not answered= 6 (O3=2, O5 = 1, Petty Officer = 1)
Higher Ground Camp Location	Sun Valley= 19 New York= 2

Higher Ground Camp Year	June 2017= 3 August 2017= 1 October 2017= 3 September 2017 = 2 January 2018=1	June 2018= 1 July 2018= 2 August 2018= 4 December 2018= 2 March 2019= 1	May 2019= 1
Participation in Similar Programs	Yes= 61.9%	No= 38.1%	
Diagnosis	PTSD= 20 Brain Injury= 5 Disorder= 1 Spinal Cord Injury= 2 GAD=14 Hearing Impairment= 4	Depression= 18 Borderline Personality Chronic Pain=1	

Findings for Cronbach's alpha included reliability for military connection ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ), outsider feelings ( $\alpha=0.78$ ), participants' evaluation of public perception ( $\alpha=0.87$ ), and military as a family ( $\alpha=0.70$ ), as they are all above a 0.6-0.7 range (Field, 2017). Measurements of military pride were deemed semi-reliable ( $\alpha=0.51$ ), and identity centrality ( $\alpha=-0.19$ ) and military skills ( $\alpha=0.31$ ) were both deemed unreliable. Results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated a majority of non-normality, with a few of the items presenting as normal.

The Wilcoxon Signed Rank test was run in SPSS 26.0, pairing pre- and post-test results for the seven subscales (Laerd Statistics, 2015). Statistically significant results were observed in two subscales (military pride and participants' evaluation of public perception of the military). Military pride showed a significant median increase ( $z=2.88$ ,  $p=0.00$ ) from pre HGMP to post HGMP (Mdn= 2.71, Mdn = 2.85) (Laerd Statistics, 2015). This change has a medium effect size of 0.63 (Cohen, 1988). Participants' evaluation of public perception of the military also

significantly showed a median increase ( $z= 2.67, p = 0.00$ ) from pre to post (Mdn= 3.00, Mdn = 3.00) (Laerd Statistics, 2015). This change has a medium effect size of 0.58 (Cohen, 1988). Military skills did not produce a statistically significant median change ( $z= 1.89, p = 0.05$ ) from pre HGMP to post HGMP (Mdn= 3.00, Mdn = 3.00), however the p value reaches close to statistical significance, with a medium effect size of 0.41 (Cohen, 1988). Statistically significant results were not observed in the other four subscales (i.e., outsider feelings, military as family, identity centrality, and military connection). On average, outsider feelings decreased by 5.16%, viewing the military as a family decreased by 2.11%, identity centrality increased by 1.04%, and connection to the military increased by 3.97%. Interpretation of the Spearman's correlation results showed a statistically significant and strongly positive correlation between military pride and military connection ( $r= 0.55, p < 0.01$ ) and military pride and military skills ( $r= 0.67, p < 0.01$ ) (Laerd Statistics, 2018). Additionally, there was a statistically significant correlation between participants' evaluation of public perception and military skills ( $r=0.47, p=0.02$ ). Other identity subscales did not correlate significantly or strongly.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how HGMP impacts military identity. The results generally suggest that participants who participated in the HGMP experienced positive changes in their identity. Participants' evaluation of public perception along with pride in one's military service both significantly changed as a result of participation in camp. Further examination of relationships within the identity subscales showed that three groupings (i.e., military pride and connection to the military, military pride and military skills, and participant's evaluation of public perception and military skills) all had a positive correlation. The subscales of outsider feelings, viewing the military as a family, identity centrality, and connection to the military were all statistically non-significant.

These findings provide implications for concepts addressed in identity literature and contribute new information to be considered by recreational therapy practitioners who work with this population. Participants' evaluation of public perception appeared to significantly change following involvement in a HGMP. This result shows that there was a positive change in how veteran participants felt the public viewed their identity and their service. This finding is consistent with existing literature stating that one's view of public perception of one's social identity greatly influences perception of self (Ashmore et al., 2004; Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). This concept of evaluating, or comparing, occurs in both Ashmore and colleague's framework and the Social Identity Theory (Ashmore et al., 2004; Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979). Ashmore and colleague's identity framework that identifies "evaluation" as an important element of social identity explores public perception of the identity,

stigma, and stereotyping as a key concept in a multidimensional identity (Ashmore et al., 2004). This concept of “evaluation” was also built into the foundations of the WIS. Further, the Social Identity Theory addresses this same idea through the social comparison component, which is the third component of social identity. In social comparison, the individual is evaluating how they think others perceive their identity group (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, & Worchel, 1979).

However, literature on military identity development through outdoor recreation programming is limited, and studies have not examined exactly what role outdoor recreation and recreational therapy plays in creating positive change in participants’ evaluation of public perception of one’s identity. The setup of HGMP, as well as the structure of outdoor recreation, has the potential to create an environment where evaluation of others perception of one’s identity is positively influenced. HGMP trains their staff in both trauma informed care and military cultural competency. These program elements may have created an environment where the participants felt supported and valued. Much of literature on the structure of outdoor recreation explores the idea of personal growth, especially with self-confidence, feelings of freedom, and being an authentic self (Caddick et al., 2014; Groff & Kleiber, 2001; Lundberg et al., 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016; Rogers et al., 2016). Feelings of freedom that are facilitated through outdoor recreation could bring a different perspective on feelings of public perception. In particular having a strengths-based environment could facilitate positive growth in participant’s perceptions of public perception.

In examination of correlations, veteran’s evaluation of public perception of military service and military skills showed a significantly positive directional relationship in participant data. This could further support the idea of the impact of a strengths-based environment of an

outdoor recreation program. For individuals with an acquired disability or an invisible injury, the strength-based environment of outdoor recreation programs such as HGMP promotes challenging opportunities to use and build their military skills, further increasing a positive self-concept and belief in ability (Hawkins et al., 2016; Lundberg, Taniguchi, et al., 2011; Rogers, Loy, & Brown-Bochicchio, 2016). These challenging skills, in-part, mimic the high intensity challenges of the military environment (Caddick, Smith, & Phoenix, 2014; Hawkins, Townsend, & Garst, 2016). HGMP utilizes adaptive sports in their outdoor recreation camps to provide opportunities for challenging skills, such as skiing, snowboarding, paddle-boarding, and kayaking (Gillette, n.d.). However, this topic area needs to be explored in future research in order to identify how specifically outdoor recreation can facilitate a positive change in participant evaluation of public perception.

Improvement in pride in one's military service also appeared to significantly change following involvement in a HGMP. A number of elements could have influenced this result, such as bonds formed with fellow veterans at the camp. Participants who perhaps bonded with fellow veterans at camp could have increased feelings of military pride simply from the attachment of group identity through those bonds. Shared experiences both at HGMP and in the military promote group identity and have the potential to facilitate feelings of pride and feelings of emotional involvement in the group identity (Ashmore et al., 2004). Culturally competent staff can also influence feelings of pride in the military, as the veteran enters an environment where others understand their experiences and accomplishments. HGMP is a program that trains their staff to be competent in military culture (Gillette, n.d.). These staff competencies may create an



environment for participants of HGMP where they can have shared experiences with both staff and other participants, as some of the staff even have a military background.

Upon further examination, the concept of military pride was significantly correlated with both connection to the military and military skills. An outdoor recreation program such as HGMP has an environment that influences these two areas, as outdoor recreation aligns with military culture (providing physical challenges that can match military skills) and connection to the military can be influenced by being at HGMP with other veterans and forming that bond. Outdoor recreation aligns with military culture as it is high intensity, time is spent outdoors in nature, and many of the activities are group based, taking on the mindset of “no one left behind” (Caddick, Smith, & Phoenix, 2014; Lundberg, Bennett, & Smith, 2011). This structure in an outdoor recreation program like HGMP combined with bonds formed with other veterans who have shared experiences can facilitate further connection to military identity, leading to pride in group identity.

Lastly, the subscales of outsider feelings, viewing the military as a family, identity centrality, and connection to the military were all non-significant in this study. Much of these results seem accurate, as both identity centrality and connection to the military are both areas that would have already been strongly established in the individual. There is no indication in literature yet that either of these areas would be increased significantly from an outdoor recreation program such as HGMP. Participants' views of outsider feelings decreased by 5.16%, which indicates that their experience at HGMP slightly decreased participants' feelings of being an outsider. This finding should be explored more with community reintegration and group dynamics. However, viewing the military as a family also decreased by 2.11%, which is

unexpected. The researcher is unsure why this small phenomenon occurred in the sample size and recommends more research in this area with HGMP and other outdoor recreation programs to discover if this finding was solely unique to this study.

### **Limitations**

Limitations for this thesis included factors in the methodology as well as the data collection. One criticism of utilizing a retrospective design for a research study centers around the ability of participants to accurately recall and self-report events that occurred at the camp and over the past few years (Sibthorp, Paisley, Gookin, & Ward, 2007). Despite this potential limitation, the researcher hopes that participant experiences in HGMP had enough of an impact, or were transformative enough, to allow for clear reflection. The researcher recommends that the use of research methods other than a retrospective pre-test to further explore changes in identity. Additionally, the data collection process provides limitations to this study. It is important to note that these findings are not generalizable as quantitative data was collected for a small sample size (n=21). Due to a small, non-representative sample, the quantitative data cannot be generalized. This limitation is due to a number of factors, such as limited programs for female veterans, limited access to veteran participants, and small numbers of female veterans who participate in available programs. Of the potential sample of those who did participate in HGMP during the allotted time frame, response rates were low for a quantitative study, and a number of veterans started the survey and did not finish. Additionally, participants had participated in multiple camps since their time at HGMP, which could have impacted accurate recall. Lastly, the possibility of response bias is also a limitation. Individuals who were highly motivated to

participate in a research study, or who had a strong positive or negative experience with HGMP could be more willing to participate in a study.

## **Implications**

Implications for future research include those within the research methods as well as within the field and academics. First, the concepts in this thesis need to be studied more, as evidenced by the lack of literature on outdoor recreation, female veterans, and military identity. Due to the evidence provided by studies that examine military identity (Demers 2013; Lundberg et al., 2011; Lundberg et al., 2016; Smith & True, 2014), future research examining this should incorporate supplemental psychosocial wellbeing measures in with the data collection. Measuring for life satisfaction, readjustment, and stress scales would be intriguing given the literature identifies a connection between identity conflict and distress. Additionally, future researchers should use an approach outside of the retrospective nature, to further examine how the concept of identity is impacted in a direct pre/post setting. Researchers should also consider qualitative methods in future studies on military identity as well as examining programmatic elements of outdoor recreation programs and their impacts on participants. Recommendations that lie outside of research design include those for practitioners in the field of recreational therapy. While this is still a limited topic, practitioners should be aware that identity conflicts can occur in the veteran population and use their awareness of the multidimensionality of military identity as well as other social identities for best practice in their program. Researchers should deeply examine this topic in multiple settings and studies, to further test the WIS as well as explore the intricacies of identity within the field of recreational therapy. In building or evaluating recreational therapy programs that serve veterans through outdoor recreation,

practitioners should consider program structure regarding veteran views of public perception and pride in military identity. More research on the development, training, implementation, and overall structure of HGMP, as well as similar programming, should be conducted through a lens that considers identity and wellbeing. Specifically, practitioners need to explore how recreational therapy programs that utilize outdoor recreation can impact the aforementioned identity elements.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis seeks to identify female veteran outcomes associated with programs intended to assist them with reintegration, as current literature underrepresents this population (Hawkins & Crowe, 2018a, 2018b; Lundberg et al., 2016). Specifically, the researcher wanted to measure military identity for female veterans in interventions related to outdoor recreation or nature-based recreation. The recreational therapy camps at HGMP were used to collect data, measuring specifically for impact on military identity. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how outdoor recreation programming can influence military identity in female veterans. This thesis found through quantitative data collection that participants in the study experienced a significant change in views of public perception and pride in military service after attending HGMP.

## APPENDICES

Appendix A

Warrior Identity Scale (Lancaster & Hart, 2015)

This questionnaire measures people's views on being a veteran (or being in the military). There are no correct answers, please just answer as honestly as possible (Lancaster & Hart, 2015).

This questionnaire is rated on a Likert scale from 1-4:

1= strongly disagree

2= disagree

3 = agree

4 = strongly agree

<b>Warrior Identity Scale:</b>	<b>Pre HGMP</b>	<b>Post HGMP</b>
1. I am happy that I am a veteran.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
2. I feel good about my military service.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
3. I am proud of the things that veterans have accomplished.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
4. I believe that I have many strengths due to my military service.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
5. I often regret my military service.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
6. I am proud to have served in the military.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
7. I am ashamed of my military service.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
8. Only other veterans can truly understand me.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

9. When I meet other veterans I can trust them more quickly than other people.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
10. I become friends with other veterans more quickly than with non-veterans.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
11. My fate and future are bound up with that of veterans.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
12. Regarding other veterans, it is accurate to say, "United we stand, divided we fall."	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
13. The most important things that have happened in my life involve my military service.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
14. When I talk about the military, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they.'	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
15. During my time within my unit in the military I always felt like an outsider.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
16. I never felt emotionally connected to my military unit.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
17. Throughout my time in the military I resisted believing in military rituals and norms.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
18. I miss my military friends.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

19. I wish I could go back into the military.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
20. By leaving the military I lost a family.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
21. Overall, having served in the military has very little to do with how I feel about myself.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
22. In general, being a veteran is an important part of my self-image.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
23. Being a veteran is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
24. Being a veteran is not a major factor in my social relationships.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
25. Overall, veterans are highly thought of.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
26. In general, others respect veterans and members of the military.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
27. In general, other groups view veterans in a positive manner.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
28. Society views veterans as an asset.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
29. I appreciate the skills I learned in the military.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4



30. The work I do at home has more meaning for me than the work I did for the military	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4
31. I miss the job related aspects of my time in the military.	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

## REFERENCES

- Anguera, M. T., Blanco-Villaseñor, A., Losada, J. L., Sánchez-Algarra, P., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2018). Revisiting the difference between mixed methods and multimethods: Is it all in the name? *Quality & Quantity*, *52*(6), 2757-2770.
- Aponte, M., Balfour, F., Garin, T., Glasgow, D., Lee, T., Thomas, E., & Williams, A. (2015). America's Women Veterans: Military Service History and VA Benefit Utilization Statistics.
- Arnhart, L., Jessee, M., Kerekanich, P., Crosswhite, B., Johnson, D., McGrath, A., Williams, B. (2013). Gender Integration Study. *TRADOC Analysis Center*.
- Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K., & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). An organizing framework for collective identity: articulation and significance of multidimensionality. *Psychological bulletin*, *130*(1), 80.
- Bennett, J. L., Van Puymbroeck, M., Piatt, J. A., & Rydell, R. J. (2014). Veterans' perceptions of benefits and important program components of a therapeutic fly-fishing program. *Therapeutic recreation journal*, *48*(2), 169-187.
- Biernat, M. (2004). The Social and Personal Identities Scale: A Measure of the Differential Importance Ascribed to Social and Personal Self-Categorizations. *Self Identity* *3*(2) <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576500342000103>
- Caddick, N., Smith, B., & Phoenix, C. (2014). The effects of surfing and the natural environment on the well-being of combat Veterans. *Qualitative Health Research* *25*(1)
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*. New York, NY: Routledge Academic.

- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological review*, *96*(4), 608.
- Demers, A. (2011). When Veterans return: The role of community in reintegration. *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, *16*(2), 160-179. doi:10.1080/15325024.2010.519281
- Demers, A. L. (2013). From death to life: Female Veterans, identity negotiation, and reintegration into society. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, *53*(4), 489–515.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167812472395>
- Di Leone, B. A. L., Wang, J. M., Kressin, N., & Vogt, D. (2016). Women’s veteran identity and utilization of VA health services. *Psychological Services*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000021>
- Duerden, M. D., Taniguchi, S., & Widmer, M. (2012). Antecedents of identity development in a structured recreation setting: A qualitative inquiry. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *27*(2), 183-202.
- Duvall, J., & Kaplan, R. (2014). Enhancing the well-being of veterans using extended group-based nature recreation experiences.
- Field, A. (2017). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics: North American edition*. Sage.
- Gillette, B. (n.d.). *Military Program Guidelines of Practice*. Higher Ground.
- Groff, D. G., & Kleiber, D. A. (2001). Exploring the identity formation of youth involved in an adapted sports program. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, *35*(4), 318. Retrieved from

- <http://libproxy.clemson.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.clemson.edu/docview/218648498?accountid=6167>
- Hall, L. K. (2011). The importance of understanding military culture. *Social work in health care, 50*(1), 4-18.
- Hawkins, B. L., & Crowe, B. M. (2018a). Contextual facilitators and barriers of community reintegration among injured female military Veterans: A qualitative study. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, 99*(2). doi:10.1016/j.apmr.2017.07.018\.
- Hawkins, B. L., & Crowe, B. M. (2018b). Injured female Veterans' experiences with community reintegration: A qualitative study. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health, 4*(2), 18-27. doi:10.3138/jmvfh.2017-0020
- Hawkins, B.L., McGuire, F.A., Linder S.M., & Britt, T.W. (2015a). Understanding the contextual influences of community reintegration among injured military service members. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development. 52*(5), 527-542.
- Hawkins, B.L., McGuire, F.A., Britt, T.W., & Linder, S.M. (2015b). Identifying contextual influences of community reintegration among injured servicemembers. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development, 52*(2), 235-246.
- Hawkins, B. L., Townsend, J. A., & Garst, B. A. (2016). Nature-based Recreational Therapy for Military Service Members: A strengths approach. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal, 50*(1). <https://doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2016-V50-I1-6793>
- Higher Ground. (n.d.). Programs (p.1). <https://highergroundusa.org/programs/>

- Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social Identity Theory and Self-categorization Theory: A Historical Review. *Social and personality psychology compass*, 2(1), 204-222  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2007.00066.x>
- IBM Corp. (2017). IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.
- Kleiber, D. A., Hutchinson, S. L., & Williams, R. (2002). Leisure as a resource in transcending negative life events: Self-protection, self-restoration, and personal transformation. *Leisure Sciences*, 24(2), 219-235.
- Koenig, C. J., Maguen, S., Monroy, J. D., Mayott, L., Seal, K. H., & Francisco, S. (2014). Facilitating culture-centered communication between health care providers and Veterans transitioning from military deployment to civilian life. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 95(3), 414-420. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2014.03.016>
- Laerd Statistics (2015). Wilcoxon signed-rank test using SPSS Statistics. *Statistical tutorials and software guides*. Retrieved from <https://statistics.laerd.com/>
- Laerd Statistics (2018). Spearman's correlation using SPSS Statistics. *Statistical tutorials and software guides*. Retrieved from <https://statistics.laerd.com/>
- Lancaster, S. L., & P. Hart, R. (2015). Military identity and psychological functioning: A pilot study. *Military Behavioral Health*, 3(1), 83–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2014.995254>
- Lancaster, S. L., Kintzle, S., & Castro, C. A. (2018). Validation of the Warrior Identity Scale in the Chicagoland Veterans study. *Identity*, 18(1), 34-43.
- Lundberg, N., Bennett, J., & Smith, S. (2011). Outcomes of adaptive sports and recreation participation among veterans returning from combat with acquired disability. *Therapeutic*

- Recreation Journal*, 45(2), 105–120. Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.clemson.edu/docview/926550677?accountid=6167>
- Lundberg, N., Taniguchi, S., McGovern, R., & Smith, S. (2016). Female Veterans' involvement in outdoor sports and recreation: A theoretical sample of recreation opportunity structures. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 48(5). <https://doi.org/10.18666/JLR-2016-V48-I5-6897>
- Nagata, S. (2014). A pilot study of exclusivity of athletic identity among wheelchair rugby players. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 43(4), 320-331.
- Resnik, L., Bradford, D. W., Glynn, S. M., Jette, A. M., Hernandez, C. J., & Wills, S. (2012). Issues in defining and measuring veteran community reintegration: Proceedings of the working group on community reintegration, VA Rehabilitation Outcomes Conference, Miami, Florida. *The Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 49(1), 87. doi:10.1682/jrrd.2010.06.0107
- Rogers, S. D., Loy, D., & Brown-Bochicchio, C. (2016). Sharing a new foxhole with friends: The impact of outdoor recreation on injured military. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 50(3). <https://doi.org/10.18666/TRJ-2016-V50-I3-2837>
- Service Women's Action Network. (2017). First Annual Planning Summit (Report No. 1). Retrieved from [https://www.servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/SWANannual2016\\_online.pdf](https://www.servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/SWANannual2016_online.pdf)
- Service Women's Action Network (2018). The Mental Wellness Needs of Military Women:

- Community Driven Solutions (Report No. 1). Retrieved from <https://www.servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018-Annual-Summit-Report-Final.compressed.pdf>
- Sibthorp, J., Paisley, K., Gookin, J., & Ward, P. (2007). Addressing response-shift bias: Retrospective pretests in recreation research and evaluation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 39* (2), 295-315.
- Smith, R. T., & True, G. (2014). Warring identities: Identity conflict and the mental distress of American Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Society and Mental Health, 4*(2), 147–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2156869313512212>
- Spencer-Oatey, H., & Franklin, P. (2012). What is culture. *A compilation of quotations. GlobalPAD Core Concepts, 1-22.*
- Street, A. E., Vogt, D., & Dutra, L. (2009). A new generation of women veterans: Stressors faced by women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. *Clinical psychology review, 29*(8), 685-694.
- Strong, J. D., Crowe, B. M., & Bolton, K. (2018). Gendered: A Qualitative Interpretive Meta-Synthesis of Female Service Members at War. *Military Behavioral Health, 1–10.* <https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2018.1526146>
- Strong, J. D., Crowe, B. M., & Lawson, S. (2018). Female Veterans: Navigating Two Identities. *Clinical Social Work Journal, 46*(2), 92–99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-017-0636-3>
- Suter, E., Lamb, E., Marko, M., & Tye-Williams, S. (2006). Female veterans' identity construction, maintenance, and reproduction. *Women & Language, 29, 10-15.*

- Swick, A., & Moore, E. (2018, April 19). The (Mostly) Good News on Women in Combat. Retrieved from <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/an-update-on-the-status-of-women-in-combat>
- Tajfel, H., Turner, J. C., Austin, W. G., & Worchel, S. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. *Organizational identity: A reader*, 56-65.
- Townsend, J., Hawkins, B.L, Bennett, J.L., Hoffman, J., Martin, T., Sotherden, E., & Bridges, W. (2018). Preliminary long-term health outcomes associated with recreation-based health & wellness programs for injured service members. *Cogent Psychology*, 5(1), 1-17. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2018.1444330>
- Vella, E. J., Milligan, B., & Bennett, J. L. (2013). Participation in outdoor recreation program predicts improved psychosocial well-being among veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder: A pilot study. *Military Medicine*, 178(3), 254-260.
- Weiss, E., & Coll, J. E. (2011). The influence of military culture and veteran worldviews on mental health treatment: Practice implications for combat veteran help-seeking and wellness. *International Journal of Health, Wellness & Society*, 1(2), 75-86.
- Zabriskie, R. B., Lundberg, N. R., & Groff, D. G. (2005). Quality of life and identity: The benefits of a community-based therapeutic recreation and adaptive sports program. *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 39(3), 176-191. Retrieved from <http://libproxy.clemson.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.clemson.edu/docview/218643736?accountid=6167>